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No. 6**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 27 May 2015

Chronology of The Parliamentary Debates

The Parliamentary History contains all that can be collected of the Legislative History of this country from the Conquest to the close of the XVIIIth Century (1803), 36 vols. The chief sources whence these Debates are derived are the Constitutional History, 24 vols.; Sir Simonds D'Ewes' Journal; Debates of the Commons in 1620 and 1621; Chandler and Timberland's Debates, 22 vols.; Grey's Debates of the Commons, from 1667 to 1694, 10 vols.; Almons Debates, 24 vols.; Debrett's Debates, 63 vols.; The Hardwicke Papers; Debates in Parliament by Dr. Johnson, &c. &c.

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Afriyie, Adam (Windsor)
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Ashworth, Jonathan Michael Graham (Leicester South)
Atkins, Victoria Mary (Louth and Horncastle)
Austin, Ian (Dudley North)

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Bacon, Richard Michael (South Norfolk)
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Bercow, Rt Hon. John Simon (Buckingham)
Beresford, Alexander Paul (Mole Valley)
Berger, Luciana Clare (Liverpool, Wavertree)
Berry, James Jacob Gilchrist (Rossendale and Darwen)
Berry, Michael James Ellwood (Kingston and Surbiton)
Betts, Clive James Charles (Sheffield South East)
Bingham, Andrew Russell (High Peak)
Black, Mhairi (Paisley and Renfrewshire South)
Blackford, Ian (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)
Blackman, Robert John (Harrow East)
Blackman, Kirsty (Aberdeen North)
Blackman-Woods, Roberta Carol (City of Durham)
Blackwood, Nicola Claire (Oxford West and Abingdon)
Blenkinsop, Thomas Francis (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland)
Blomfield, Paul Christopher (Sheffield Central)
Blunt, Crispin Jeremy Rupert (Reigate)
Boles, Nicholas Edward Coleridge (Grantham and Stamford)
Bone, Peter William (Wellingborough)

Borwick, Victoria Lorne Peta (Kensington)
Boswell, Philip John (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill)
Bottomley, Peter James (Worthing West)
Bradley, Karen Anne (Staffordshire Moorlands)
Bradshaw, Rt Hon. Benjamin Peter James (Exeter)
Brady, Graham Stuart (Altrincham and Sale West)
Brady, Michael (Newry and Armagh)
Brake, Rt Hon. Tom (Carshalton and Wallington)
Brazier, Julian William Hendy (Canterbury)
Brennan, Kevin Denis (Cardiff West)
Bridgen, Andrew James (North West Leicestershire)
Brine, Stephen Charles (Winchester)
Brock, Deidre Leanne (Edinburgh North and Leith)
Brokenshire, James Peter (Old Bexley and Sidcup)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Loudoun)
Brown, Lyn Carol (West Ham)
Brown, Rt Hon. Nicholas Hugh (Newcastle upon Tyne East)
Bruce, Fiona Claire (Congleton)
Bryant, Christopher John (Rhondda)
Buck, Karen Patricia (Westminster North)
Buckland, Robert James (South Swindon)
Burden, Richard Haines (Birmingham, Northfield)
Burgon, Richard (Leeds East)
Burnham, Rt Hon. Andrew Murray (Leigh)
Burns, Conor (Bournemouth West)
Burns, Rt Hon. Simon Hugh McGuigan (Chelmsford)
Burrowes, David John Barrington (Enfield, Southgate)
Burt, Rt Hon. Alistair James Hendrie (North East Bedfordshire)
Butler, Dawn Petula (Brent Central)
Byrne, Rt Hon. Liam Dominic (Birmingham, Hodge Hill)

C

Cadbury, Ruth (Brentford and Isleworth)
Cairns, Alun Hugh (Vale of Glamorgan)
Cameron, Rt Hon. David William Donald (Witney)
Cameron, Lisa (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow)
Campbell, Rt Hon. Alan (Tynemouth)
Campbell, Gregory Lloyd (East Londonderry)
Campbell, Ronald (Blyth Valley)
Carmichael, Rt Hon. Alexander Morrison (Orkney and Shetland)
Carmichael, Neil (Stroud)
Carswell, John Douglas Wilson (Clacton)
Cartlidge, James Roger (South Suffolk)
Cash, William (Stone)
Caulfield, Maria Colette (Lewes)
Chalk, Alex (Cheltenham)
Champion, Sarah Deborah (Rotherham)
Chapman, Douglas (Dunfermline and West Fife)
Chapman, Jennifer (Darlington)
Cherry, Joanna Catherine (Edinburgh South West)
Chishti, Atta-Ur-Rehman (Gillingham and Rainham)
Chope, Christopher Robert (Christchurch)
Churchill, Johanna Peta (Bury St Edmunds)
Clark, Rt Hon. Greg (Tunbridge Wells)
Clarke, Rt Hon. Kenneth Harry (Rushcliffe)

Clegg, Rt Hon. Nicholas William Peter (Sheffield, Hallam)
 Cleverly, James Spencer (Braintree)
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey Robert (The Cotswolds)
 Clwyd, Rt Hon. Ann (Cynon Valley)
 Coaker, Vernon Rodney (Gedling)
 Coffey, Margaret Ann Wishart (Stockport)
 Coffey, Thérèse Anne (Suffolk Coastal)
 Collins, Damian Noel Thomas (Folkestone and Hythe)
 Colville, Oliver Newton (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport)
 Cooper, Julie Elizabeth (Burnley)
 Cooper, Rosemary Elizabeth (West Lancashire)
 Cooper, Rt Hon. Yvette (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford)
 Corbyn, Jeremy Bernard (Islington North)
 Costa, Alberto Castrenze (South Leicestershire)
 Cowan, Ronnie (Inverclyde)
 Cox, Charles Geoffrey (Torrington and West Devon)
 Cox, Helen Joanne (Batley and Spen)
 Coyle, Neil (Bermondsey and Old Southwark)
 Crabb, Rt Hon. Stephen (Preseli Pembrokeshire)
 Crausby, David Anthony (Bolton North East)
 Crawley, Angela (Lanark and Hamilton East)
 Creagh, Mary Helen (Wakefield)
 Creasy, Stella Judith (Walthamstow)
 Crouch, Tracey Elizabeth Anne (Chatham and Aylesford)
 Cruddas, Jonathan (Dagenham and Rainham)
 Cryer, John Robert (Leyton and Wanstead)
 Cummins, Judith Mary (Bradford South)
 Cunningham, Alexander (Stockton North)
 Cunningham, James Dolan (Coventry South)

D

Dakin, Nicholas (Scunthorpe)
 Danczuk, Simon Christopher (Rochdale)
 David, Wayne (Caerphilly)
 Davies, Henry Byron (Gower)
 Davies, Christopher Paul (Brecon and Radnorshire)
 Davies, David Thomas Charles (Monmouth)
 Davies, Geraint Richard (Swansea West)
 Davies, Edward Glyn (Montgomeryshire)
 Davies, James Michael (Vale of Clwyd)
 Davies, Miriam Jane Alice (Eastleigh)
 Davies, Philip Andrew (Shipley)
 Davis, Rt Hon. David Michael (Haltemprice and Howden)
 Day, Martyn (Linlithgow and East Falkirk)
 De Piero, Gloria (Ashfield)
 Debonnaire, Thangam (Bristol West)
 Dinenage, Caroline Julia (Gosport)
 Djanogly, Jonathan Simon (Huntingdon)
 Docherty, Martin John (West Dunbartonshire)
 Dodds, Rt Hon. Nigel Alexander (Belfast North)
 Doherty, Patrick (West Tyrone)
 Donaldson, Rt Hon. Jeffrey Mark (Lagan Valley)
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine)
 Donelan, Michelle Emma May Elizabeth (Chippenham)
 Dorries, Nadine Vanessa (Mid Bedfordshire)
 Double, Stephen Daniel (St Austell and Newquay)
 Doughty, Stephen John (Cardiff South and Penarth)
 Dowd, James Patrick (Lewisham West and Penge)
 Dowd, Peter (Bootle)
 Dowden, Oliver James (Hertsmere)
 Doyle-Price, Jacqueline (Thurrock)
 Dromey, Jack Eugene Joseph (Birmingham, Erdington)
 Drummond, Felicia Jane Beatrix (Portsmouth South)

Duddridge, James Philip (Rochford and Southend East)
 Dugher, Michael Vincent (Barnsley East)
 Duncan, Rt Hon. Alan James Carter (Rutland and Melton)
 Duncan Smith, Rt Hon. George Iain (Chingford and Woodford Green)
 Dunne, Philip Martin (Ludlow)
 Durkan, John Mark (Foyle)

E

Eagle, Angela (Wallasey)
 Eagle, Maria (Garston and Halewood)
 Edwards, David Jonathan (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr)
 Efford, Clive Stanley (Eltham)
 Elliott, Julie (Sunderland Central)
 Elliott, Thomas Beatty (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
 Ellis, Michael Tyrone (Northampton North)
 Ellison, Jane Elizabeth (Battersea)
 Ellman, Louise Joyce (Liverpool, Riverside)
 Ellwood, Tobias Martin (Bournemouth East)
 Elphicke, Charles Brett Anthony (Dover)
 Engel, Natascha (North East Derbyshire)
 Esterson, William Roffen (Sefton Central)
 Eustice, Charles George (Camborne and Redruth)
 Evans, Christopher (Islwyn)
 Evans, Graham (Weaver Vale)
 Evans, Nigel Martin (Ribble Valley)
 Evennett, Rt Hon. David Anthony (Bexleyheath and Crayford)

F

Fabricant, Michael Louis David (Lichfield)
 Fallon, Rt Hon. Michael (Sevenoaks)
 Farrelly, Paul (Newcastle-under-Lyme)
 Farron, Timothy James (Westmorland and Lonsdale)
 Fellows, Marion (Motherwell and Wishaw)
 Fernandes, Sue-Ellen Cassiana (Fareham)
 Ferrier, Margaret (Rutherglen and Hamilton West)
 Field, Rt Hon. Frank (Birkenhead)
 Field, Rt Hon. Mark Christopher (Cities of London and Westminster)
 Fitzpatrick, James (Poplar and Limehouse)
 Ffello, Robert Charles Douglas (Stoke-on-Trent South)
 Fletcher, Colleen Margaret (Coventry North East)
 Flint, Rt Hon. Caroline Louise (Don Valley)
 Flynn, Paul Phillip (Newport West)
 Foster, Kevin John (Torbay)
 Fovargue, Yvonne Helen (Makerfield)
 Fox, Rt Hon. Liam (North Somerset)
 Foxcroft, Victoria Jane (Lewisham, Deptford)
 Francois, Rt Hon. Mark Gino (Rayleigh and Wickford)
 Frazer, Lucy (South East Cambridgeshire)
 Freeman, George William (Mid Norfolk)
 Freer, Mike (Finchley and Golders Green)
 Fuller, Richard Quentin (Bedford)
 Fysh, Marcus John Hudson (Yeovil)

G

Gale, Roger James (North Thanet)
 Gapes, Michael John (Ilford South)
 Gardiner, Barry Strachan (Brent North)
 Garnier, Rt Hon. Edward Henry (Harborough)
 Garnier, Mark Robert Timothy (Wyre Forest)
 Gauke, David Michael (South West Hertfordshire)

Gethins, Stephen Patrick (North East Fife)
 Ghani, Nusrat Munir (Wealden)
 Gibb, Nicolas John (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton)
 Gibson, Patricia (North Ayrshire and Arran)
 Gillan, Rt Hon. Cheryl Elise Kendall (Chesham and Amersham)
 Glass, Patricia Mary (North West Durham)
 Glen, John Philip (Salisbury)
 Glindon, Mary Theresa (North Tyneside)
 Godsiff, Roger Duncan (Birmingham, Hall Green)
 Goldsmith, Frank Zacharias Robin (Richmond Park)
 Goodman, Helen Catherine (Bishop Auckland)
 Goodwill, Robert (Scarborough and Whitby)
 Gove, Rt Hon. Michael Andrew (Surrey Heath)
 Grady, Patrick John (Glasgow North)
 Graham, Richard (Gloucester)
 Grant, Helen (Maidstone and The Weald)
 Grant, Peter (Glenrothes)
 Gray, James Whiteside (North Wiltshire)
 Gray, Neil Charles (Airdrie and Shotts)
 Grayling, Rt Hon. Christopher Stephen (Epsom and Ewell)
 Green, Chris (Bolton West)
 Green, Rt Hon. Damian Howard (Ashford)
 Green, Katherine Anne (Stretford and Urmston)
 Greening, Rt Hon. Justine (Putney)
 Greenwood, Lilian Rachel (Nottingham South)
 Greenwood, Margaret (Wirral West)
 Grieve, Rt Hon Dominic Charles Roberts (Beaconsfield)
 Griffith, Nia Rhiannon (Llanelli)
 Griffiths, Andrew James (Burton)
 Gummer, Benedict Michael (Ipswich)
 Gwynne, Andrew John (Denton and Reddish)
 Gyimah, Samuel Phillip (East Surrey)

H

Haigh, Louise Margaret (Sheffield, Heeley)
 Halfon, Rt Hon. Robert Henry (Harlow)
 Hall, Luke Anthony (Thornbury and Yate)
 Hamilton, Fabian (Leeds North East)
 Hammond, Rt Hon. Philip (Runnymede and Weybridge)
 Hammond, Stephen William (Wimbledon)
 Hancock, Rt Hon. Matthew John David (West Suffolk)
 Hands, Rt Hon. Gregory William (Chelsea and Fulham)
 Hanson, Rt Hon. David George (Delyn)
 Harman, Rt Hon. Harriet (Camberwell and Peckham)
 Harper, Rt Hon. Mark James (Forest of Dean)
 Harpham, Robert Harry (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough)
 Harrington, Richard Irwin (Watford)
 Harris, Carolyn (Swansea East)
 Harris, Elizabeth Rebecca Scott (Castle Point)
 Hart, Simon (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire)
 Haselhurst, Rt Hon. Alan Gordon Barraclough (Saffron Walden)
 Hayes, Helen Elizabeth (Dulwich and West Norwood)
 Hayes, Rt Hon. John Henry (South Holland and The Deepings)
 Hayman, Susan Mary (Workington)
 Heald, Oliver (North East Hertfordshire)
 Healey, Rt Hon. John (Wentworth and Dearne)
 Heapey, James Stephen (Wells)
 Heaton-Harris, Christopher (Davertry)
 Heaton-Jones, Peter (North Devon)
 Henderson, Gordon (Sittingbourne and Sheppey)
 Hendrick, Mark Phillip (Preston)
 Hendry, Andrew Egan Henderson (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey)

Hepburn, Stephen (Jarrow)
 Herbert, Rt Hon. Nick (Arundel and South Downs)
 Hermon, Sylvia Eileen (North Down)
 Hillier, Meg (Hackney South and Shoreditch)
 Hinds, Damian Patrick George (East Hampshire)
 Hoare, Simon James (North Dorset)
 Hodge, Rt Hon. Margaret Eve (Barking)
 Hodgson, Sharon (Washington and Sunderland West)
 Hoey, Kate (Vauxhall)
 Hollern, Catherine Malloy (Blackburn)
 Hollingbery, George Michael Edward (Meon Valley)
 Hollinrake, Kevin Paul (Thirsk and Malton)
 Hollobone, Philip Thomas (Kettering)
 Holloway, Adam James Harold (Gravesham)
 Hopkins, Kelvin Peter (Luton North)
 Hopkins, Kristan Frederick (Keighley)
 Hosie, Stewart (Dundee East)
 Howarth, Rt Hon. George Edward (Knowsley)
 Howarth, James Gerald Douglas (Aldershot)
 Howell, John Michael (Henley)
 Howlett, Benjamin John (Bath)
 Hoyle, Rt Hon. Lindsay Harvey (Chorley)
 Huddleston, Nigel Paul (Mid Worcestershire)
 Hunt, Rt Hon. Jeremy Richard Streynsham (South West Surrey)
 Hunt, Tristram Julian William (Stoke-on-Trent Central)
 Huq, Rupa Asha (Ealing Central and Acton)
 Hurd, Nicholas Richard (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner)
 Hussain, Imran (Bradford East)

I

Irranca-Davies, Ifor Huw (Ogmore)

J

Jackson, Stewart James (Peterborough)
 James, Margot Cathleen (Stourbridge)
 Jarvis, Dan (Barnsley Central)
 Javid, Rt Hon. Sajid (Bromsgrove)
 Jayawardena, Ranil Malcolm (North East Hampshire)
 Jenkin, Bernard Christison (Harwich and North Essex)
 Jenkyns, Andrea Marie (Morley and Outwood)
 Jenrick, Robert Edward (Newark)
 Johnson, Rt Hon. Alan Arthur (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle)
 Johnson, Boris de Pfeffel (Uxbridge and South Ruislip)
 Johnson, Diana Ruth (Kingston upon Hull North)
 Johnson, Gareth Alan (Dartford)
 Johnson, Joseph Edmund (Orpington)
 Jones, Andrew Hanson (Harrogate and Knaresborough)
 Jones, Rt Hon. David Ian (Clwyd West)
 Jones, Gerald (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney)
 Jones, Graham Peter (Hyndburn)
 Jones, Helen Mary (Warrington North)
 Jones, Kevan David (North Durham)
 Jones, Marcus Charles (Nuneaton)
 Jones, Susan Elan (Clwyd South)

K

Kane, Michael Joseph Patrick (Wythenshawe and Sale East)
 Kaufman, Rt Hon. Gerald Bernard (Manchester, Gorton)
 Kawczynski, Daniel Robert (Shrewsbury and Atcham)
 Keeley, Barbara Mary (Worsley and Eccles South)

Kendall, Elizabeth Louise (Leicester West)
 Kennedy, Seema Louise Ghiassi (South Ribble)
 Kerevan, George (East Lothian)
 Kerr, Calum Robert (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and
 Selkirk)
 Khan, Rt Hon. Sadiq Aman (Tooting)
 Kinahan, Daniel De Burgh (South Antrim)
 Kinnock, Stephen Nathan (Aberavon)
 Kirby, Simon Gerard (Brighton, Kemptown)
 Knight, Rt Hon. Sir Gregory (East Yorkshire)
 Knight, Julian (Solihull)
 Kwarteng, Kwasi Alfred Addo (Spelthorne)
 Kyle, Peter John (Hove)

L

Laing, Eleanor Fulton (Epping Forest)
 Lamb, Rt Hon. Norman Peter (North Norfolk)
 Lammy, Rt Hon. David Lindon (Tottenham)
 Lancaster, John Mark (Milton Keynes North)
 Latham, Pauline Elizabeth (Mid Derbyshire)
 Lavery, Ian (Wansbeck)
 Law, Christopher Murray Alexander (Dundee West)
 Leadsom, Andrea (South Northamptonshire)
 Lee, Phillip James (Bracknell)
 Lefroy, Jeremy John Elton (Stafford)
 Leigh, Edward Julian Egerton (Gainsborough)
 Leslie, Charlotte (Bristol North West)
 Leslie, Christopher Michael (Nottingham East)
 Letwin, Rt Hon. Oliver (West Dorset)
 Lewell-Buck, Emma Louise (South Shields)
 Lewis, Brandon Kenneth (Great Yarmouth)
 Lewis, Clive Anthony (Norwich South)
 Lewis, Ivan (Bury South)
 Lewis, Rt Hon. Julian Murray (New Forest East)
 Liddell-Grainger, Ian Richard Peregrine (Bridgwater and
 West Somerset)
 Lidington, Rt Hon. David Roy (Aylesbury)
 Lilley, Rt Hon. Peter Bruce (Hitchin and Harpenden)
 Long-Bailey, Rebecca (Salford and Eccles)
 Lopresti, Giacomo (Filton and Bradley Stoke)
 Lord, Jonathan George Caladine (Woking)
 Loughton, Timothy Paul (East Worthing and Shoreham)
 Lucas, Caroline Patricia (Brighton, Pavilion)
 Lucas, Ian Colin (Wrexham)
 Lumley, Karen Elizabeth (Redditch)

M

McCabe, Stephen James (Birmingham, Selly Oak)
 McCaig, Callum (Aberdeen South)
 McCarthy, Kerry Gillian (Bristol East)
 McCartney, Jason Alexander (Colne Valley)
 McCartney, Karl Ian (Lincoln)
 McDonagh, Siobhain Ann (Mitcham and Morden)
 McDonald, Andrew Joseph (Middlesbrough)
 McDonald, Stewart (Glasgow South)
 McDonald, Stuart Campbell (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and
 Kirkintilloch East)
 McDonnell, Alasdair (Belfast South)
 McDonnell, John Martin (Hayes and Harlington)
 McFadden, Rt Hon. Patrick Bosco (Wolverhampton
 South East)
 McGarry, Natalie (Glasgow East)
 McGinn, Conor Patrick (St Helens North)
 McGovern, Alison (Wirral South)
 McInnes, Elizabeth Anne (Heywood and Middleton)
 Mackinlay, Craig (South Thanet)
 McKinnell, Catherine (Newcastle upon Tyne North)

Mackintosh, David James (Northampton South)
 McLaughlin, Anne (Glasgow North East)
 McLoughlin, Rt Hon. Patrick Allen (Derbyshire Dales)
 Mc Nally, John (Falkirk)
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar)
 McPartland, Stephen Anthony (Stevenage)
 Mactaggart, Rt Hon. Fiona Margaret (Slough)
 Madders, Justin (Ellesmere Port and Neston)
 Mahmood, Khalid (Birmingham, Perry Barr)
 Mahmood, Shabana (Birmingham, Ladywood)
 Main, Anne Margaret (St Albans)
 Mak, Alan (Havant)
 Malhotra, Seema (Feltham and Heston)
 Malthouse, Christopher Laurie (North West Hampshire)
 Mann, John (Bassetlaw)
 Mann, Scott Leslie (North Cornwall)
 Marris, Rob (Wolverhampton South West)
 Marsden, Gordon (Blackpool South)
 Maskell, Rachael Helen (York Central)
 Maskey, Paul John (Belfast West)
 Matheson, Chris (City of Chester)
 Mathias, Tania Wyn (Twickenham)
 May, Rt Hon. Theresa Mary (Maidenhead)
 Maynard, Paul Christopher (Blackpool North and
 Cleveleys)
 Meacher, Rt Hon. Michael Hugh (Oldham West and
 Royton)
 Meale, Joseph Alan (Mansfield)
 Mearns, James Ian (Gateshead)
 Menzies, Mark Andrew (Fylde)
 Mercer, John Luther (Plymouth, Moor View)
 Merriman, Huw William (Bexhill and Battle)
 Metcalfe, Stephen James (South Basildon and East
 Thurrock)
 Miliband, Rt Hon. Edward (Doncaster North)
 Miller, Rt Hon. Maria Frances Lewis (Basingstoke)
 Milling, Amanda Anne (Cannock Chase)
 Mills, Nigel John (Amber Valley)
 Milton, Rt Hon. Anne Frances (Guildford)
 Mitchell, Rt Hon. Andrew John Bower (Sutton
 Coldfield)
 Molloy, Francis Joseph (Mid Ulster)
 Monaghan, Carol (Glasgow North West)
 Monaghan, Paul William (Caithness, Sutherland and
 Easter Ross)
 Moon, Madeleine (Bridgend)
 Mordaunt, Penny Mary (Portsmouth North)
 Morden, Jessica Elizabeth (Newport East)
 Morgan, Rt Hon. Nicola Ann (Loughborough)
 Morris, Anne Marie (Newton Abbot)
 Morris, David Thomas (Morecambe and Lunesdale)
 Morris, Grahame Mark. (Easington)
 Morris, James George (Halesowen and Rowley Regis)
 Morton, Wendy (Aldridge-Brownhills)
 Mowat, David John (Warrington South)
 Mulholland, Greg (Leeds North West)
 Mullin, William Arthur Roger (Kirkcaldy and
 Cowdenbeath)
 Mundell, Rt Hon. David Gordon (Dumfriesshire,
 Clydesdale and Tweeddale)
 Murray, Ian (Edinburgh South)
 Murray, Sheryll (South East Cornwall)
 Murrison, Andrew William (South West Wiltshire)

N

Nandy, Lisa Eva (Wigan)
 Neill, Robert James MacGillivray (Bromley and
 Chislehurst)

Newlands, Gavin Andrew Stuart (Paisley and Renfrewshire North)
 Newton, Sarah Louise (Truro and Falmouth)
 Nicolson, John MacKenzie (East Dunbartonshire)
 Nokes, Caroline Fiona Ellen (Romsey and Southampton North)
 Norman, Alexander Jesse (Hereford and South Herefordshire)
 Nuttall, David John (Bury North)

O

O'Hara, Brendan (Argyll and Bute)
 Offord, Matthew James (Hendon)
 Onn, Melanie (Great Grimsby)
 Onwurah, Chi (Newcastle upon Tyne Central)
 Opperman, Guy (Hexham)
 Osamor, Kate Ofunne (Edmonton)
 Osborne, Rt Hon. George Gideon Oliver (Tatton)
 Oswald, Kirsten Frances (East Renfrewshire)
 Owen, Albert (Ynys Môn)

P

Paisley, Ian Richard Kyle (North Antrim)
 Parish, Neil Quentin Gordon (Tiverton and Honiton)
 Patel, Rt Hon. Priti Sushil (Witham)
 Paterson, Rt Hon. Owen William (North Shropshire)
 Paterson, Steven Alexander (Stirling)
 Pawsey, Mark Julian Francis (Rugby)
 Pearce, Teresa (Erith and Thamesmead)
 Penning, Rt Hon. Michael Alan (Hemel Hempstead)
 Pennycook, Matthew Thomas (Greenwich and Woolwich)
 Penrose, John David (Weston-super-Mare)
 Percy, Andrew Theakstone (Brigg and Goole)
 Perkins, Matthew Toby (Chesterfield)
 Perry, Claire Louise (Devizes)
 Phillips, Jessica Rose (Birmingham, Yardley)
 Phillips, Stephen James (Sleaford and North Hykeham)
 Phillipson, Bridget Maeve (Houghton and Sunderland South)
 Philp, Chris Ian Brian Mynott (Croydon South)
 Pickles, Rt Hon. Eric Jack (Brentwood and Ongar)
 Pincher, Christopher John (Tamworth)
 Plunkett-Ernlé-Drax, Richard Grosvenor (South Dorset)
 Poulter, Daniel Leonard James (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich)
 Pound, Stephen Pelham (Ealing North)
 Pow, Rebecca Faye Clark (Taunton Deane)
 Powell, Lucy Maria (Manchester Central)
 Prentis, Victoria Mary Boswell (Banbury)
 Prisk, Michael Mark (Hertford and Stortford)
 Pritchard, Mark Andrew (The Wrekin)
 Pugh, John David (Southport)
 Pursglove, Thomas Christopher John (Corby)

Q

Quin, Jeremy Mark (Horsham)
 Quince, William James (Colchester)
 Qureshi, Yasmin (Bolton South East)

R

Raab, Dominic Rennie (Esher and Walton)
 Rayner, Angela (Ashton-under-Lyne)

Redwood, Rt Hon. John Alan (Wokingham)
 Reed, Jamieson Ronald (Copeland)
 Reed, Stephen Mark Ward (Croydon North)
 Rees, Christina Elizabeth (Neath)
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob William (North East Somerset)
 Reeves, Rachel Jane (Leeds West)
 Reynolds, Emma Elizabeth (Wolverhampton North East)
 Reynolds, Jonathan Neil (Stalybridge and Hyde)
 Rimmer, Marie Elizabeth (St Helens South and Whiston)
 Ritchie, Margaret (South Down)
 Robertson, Angus Struan Carolus (Moray)
 Robertson, Laurence Anthony (Tewkesbury)
 Robinson, Gavin James (Belfast East)
 Robinson, Geoffrey (Coventry North West)
 Robinson, Mary Josephine (Cheadle)
 Rosindell, Andrew Richard (Romford)
 Rotheram, Steven Philip (Liverpool, Walton)
 Rudd, Rt Hon. Amber (Hastings and Rye)
 Rutley, David Henry (Macclesfield)
 Ryan, Rt Hon. Joan Marie (Enfield North)

S

Salmond, Rt Hon. Alex (Gordon)
 Sandbach, Antoinette (Eddisbury)
 Saville Roberts, Liz (Dwyfor Meirionnydd)
 Scully, Paul Stuart (Sutton and Cheam)
 Selous, Andrew Edmund Armstrong (South West Bedfordshire)
 Shah, Naseem Akhter (Bradford West)
 Shannon, Richard James (Strangford)
 Shapps, Rt Hon. Grant (Welwyn Hatfield)
 Sharma, Alok Kumar (Reading West)
 Sharma, Virendra Kumar (Ealing, Southall)
 Sheerman, Barry John (Huddersfield)
 Shelbrooke, Alec (Elmet and Rothwell)
 Sheppard, Thomas (Edinburgh East)
 Sherriff, Paula Michelle (Dewsbury)
 Shuker, Gavin (Luton South)
 Siddiq, Tulip (Hampstead and Kilburn)
 Simpson, Thomas David (Upper Bann)
 Simpson, Rt Hon. Keith Robert (Broadland)
 Skidmore, Christopher James (Kingswood)
 Skinner, Dennis Edward (Bolsover)
 Slaughter, Andrew Francis (Hammersmith)
 Smeeth, Ruth Lauren (Stoke-on-Trent North)
 Smith, Rt Hon. Andrew David (Oxford East)
 Smith, Angela Christine (Penistone and Stocksbridge)
 Smith, Catherine Jane (Lancaster and Fleetwood)
 Smith, Chloe Rebecca (Norwich North)
 Smith, Henry Edward Millar (Crawley)
 Smith, Jeffrey (Manchester, Withington)
 Smith, Julian Richard (Skipton and Ripon)
 Smith, Nicholas Desmond John (Blaenau Gwent)
 Smith, Owen (Pontypridd)
 Smith, Royston Matthew (Southampton, Itchen)
 Smyth, Karin (Bristol South)
 Soames, Rt Hon. Nicholas (Mid Sussex)
 Solloway, Amanda Jane (Derby North)
 Soubry, Rt Hon. Anna Mary (Broxtowe)
 Spellar, Rt Hon. John Francis (Warley)
 Spelman, Rt Hon. Caroline (Meriden)
 Spencer, Mark Steven (Sherwood)
 Starmer, Keir (Holborn and St Pancras)
 Stephens, Christopher (Glasgow South West)
 Stephenson, Andrew George (Pendle)
 Stevens, Joanna Meriel (Cardiff Central)
 Stevenson, Andrew John (Carlisle)

Stewart, Robert Alexander (Beckenham)
 Stewart, Iain Aitken (Milton Keynes South)
 Stewart, Roderick James Nugent (Penrith and The Border)
 Streeter, Gary Nicholas (South West Devon)
 Streeting, Wesley Paul William (Ilford North)
 Stride, Melvyn John (Central Devon)
 Stringer, Graham Eric (Blackley and Broughton)
 Stuart, Gisela Gschaider (Birmingham, Edgbaston)
 Stuart, Graham (Beverley and Holderness)
 Sturdy, Julian Charles (York Outer)
 Sunak, Rishi (Richmond (Yorks))
 Swayne, Rt Hon. Desmond Angus (New Forest West)
 Swire, Rt Hon. Hugo George William (East Devon)
 Syms, Robert Andrew Raymond (Poole)

T

Tami, Mark Richard (Alyn and Deeside)
 Thewliss, Alison Emily (Glasgow Central)
 Thomas, Derek Gordon (St Ives)
 Thomas, Gareth (Harrow West)
 Thomas-Symonds, Nicklaus (Torfaen)
 Thompson, Owen George (Midlothian)
 Thomson, Michelle Rhonda (Edinburgh West)
 Thornberry, Emily (Islington South and Finsbury)
 Throup, Margaret Ann (Erewash)
 Timms, Rt Hon. Stephen Creswell (East Ham)
 Timpson, Anthony Edward (Crewe and Nantwich)
 Tolhurst, Kelly Jane (Rochester and Strood)
 Tomlinson, Justin Paul (North Swindon)
 Tomlinson-Mynors, Michael James (Mid Dorset and North Poole)
 Tracey, Craig Paul (North Warwickshire)
 Tredinnick, David Arthur Stephen (Bosworth)
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U

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Members' Advice Service and Members' Personnel Advice Service (PAS) —

SENIOR HR MANAGER—Barbara Joy

Information Rights and Information Security Services (IRIS)—

HEAD OF IRIS—Victoria Payne

Safety—

HEAD OF SAFETY—Marianne McDougall
 CONSULTANT OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PHYSICIANS—Dr Ira Madan, Dr Paul Grimes
 SENIOR HEALTH AND SAFETY ADVISER—Carl Foulkes Williams

Health and Wellbeing—

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING MANAGER—Anne Mossop
 WELFARE OFFICER—Tanya Harris
 CLINICAL NURSE ADVISERS—Karen St Cyr, Sally Dow, Sally Nightingale

Trade Union Side—

TRADE UNION SIDE ADMINISTRATORS—Sandra Deakins, Denise Eltringham

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE

DIRECTOR OF FINANCE—Myfanwy Barrett

Pensions and Payroll—

HEAD OF PENSIONS AND PAYROLL—Lucy Tindal

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT DIRECTORATE

CHIEF ACCOUNTANT—Alex Mills
 HEAD OF FINANCIAL PLANNING—Amanda Colledge
 HEAD OF FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING—Debra Shirtcliffe
 HEAD OF FINANCIAL SERVICES—Sam Rao
 SYSTEMS ACCOUNTANT—Colin Lewis

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

HEAD OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT—Martin Trott

DEPARTMENT OF FACILITIES

DIRECTOR GENERAL—John Borley, CB MA CEng MIET
 EXECUTIVE OFFICER—Katie Phelan-Molloy
 DIRECTOR OF FACILITIES FINANCE—Philip Collins
 DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT—Della Herd
 DEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER—Renee Brownsey-Joyce

PARLIAMENTARY ESTATES DIRECTORATE

ACTING PARLIAMENTARY DIRECTOR OF ESTATES—Brian Finnimore
 DEPUTY DIRECTOR OPERATIONS—Lester Benjamin, BEng, CEng, MCIBS
 HEAD OF PROJECTS—Victor Akinbile
 HEAD OF DIRECTORATE BUSINESS SUPPORT—Ann Moghaddami
 DEPUTY HEAD DIRECTORATE BUSINESS SUPPORT AND BUSINESS MANAGER—Deborah Taylor
 HEAD OF MAINTENANCE—Mike McCann
 KEEPER OF THE GREAT CLOCK—Steve Jaggs
 HEAD OF PROGRAMME & PLANNING—Steve Beck
 ACTING HEAD OF FIRE, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENT—Martin Wittekind
 FIRE SAFETY MANAGER—David Kaye, GIFireE
 PRINCIPAL ARCHITECT—Adam Watrobski, BA (Hons), DiplArch, DiplConsAA, RIBA
 PRINCIPAL ESTATES MANAGER—Helen Arkell, BSc (Hons), MRICS
 PRINCIPAL ENGINEER—Donald Grant
 ASSET MANAGER—Andrew Geehan, MSc, BSc, BD
 ESTATES ARCHIVIST AND HISTORIAN—Dr Mark Collins, BA, PhD
 ACTING ENVIRONMENT MANAGER—Glenn Fleetwood

CATERING SERVICES

DIRECTOR OF CATERING—Richard Tapner-Evans, BSc
 EXECUTIVE CHEF—Mark Hill
 OPERATIONS MANAGER—Robert Gibbs
 CATERING MANAGER (TERRACE CAFETERIA, MEMBERS' TEA ROOM AND JUBILEE CAFÉ)—Denise Durkin
 BANQUETING AND EVENTS MANAGER—Lee Holt
 BANQUETING AND EVENTS OFFICE MANAGER—Jason Bonello
 HOSPITALITY AND EVENTS SALES MANAGER—Kay West
 CATERING SERVICES MANAGER, NORTHERN ESTATE (PORTCULLIS HOUSE, 1 PARLIAMENT STREET, 7 MILLBANK, MONCRIEFF'S AND TOTHILL STREET)—Yvonne Sparrow

CATERING MANAGER (PORTCULLIS HOUSE, 7 MILLBANK, 1 PARLIAMENT STREET AND MONCRIEFF'S PRESS COMPLEX AND TOTHILL STREET)—James Ellis

ASSISTANT CATERING MANAGER (PORTCULLIS HOUSE, 7 MILLBANK, 1 PARLIAMENT STREET, MONCRIEFF'S AND TOTHILL STREET)—Katie Elliott

PURCHASING & STORES MANAGER—Antony Avella

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER—Tanith Banks

ACCOMMODATION AND LOGISTICS SERVICES

DIRECTOR OF ACCOMMODATION AND LOGISTICS SERVICES—Fiona Channon

PARLIAMENTARY LOGISTICS MANAGER—Wesley Auvache

MEMBERS' ACCOMMODATION MANAGER—Lis Gerhold

ACCOMMODATION MANAGER—Susanna Lumsden

HEAD OF FACILITIES SERVICE DELIVERY—Brendon Mulvihill

FACILITIES SERVICE DELIVERY MANAGERS—Doreen Irving, Noel Kirby, Simon Mansfield, David O'Nions, Les Stockwell

CLEANING MANAGER—David Ray

POSTMASTER—Mark Morrish

PARLIAMENTARY DIGITAL SERVICE

DIRECTOR OF PARLIAMENTARY DIGITAL SERVICE—Rob Greig

ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR—Matthew Taylor

DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS AND MEMBER SERVICES—Rob Sanders

DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS—Steven Mark

DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES—Tracey Jessup

DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY—Steve O'Connor

HEAD OF THE WEB AND INTRANET SERVICE—Tracy Green

MEMBERS COMPUTING OFFICER—Andrew Morrison

OTHER PRINCIPAL OFFICERS

CLERK OF THE CROWN IN CHANCERY—Dame Ursula Brennan, DCB

COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL—Amyas Morse

PARLIAMENTARY AND HEALTH SERVICE OMBUDSMAN—Dame Julie Mellor, DBE

House of Commons

Wednesday 27 May 2015

*The House met at twenty-nine minutes past
Eleven o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE TO ATTEND HER MAJESTY

Message to attend Her Majesty delivered by the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod.

The Speaker, with the House, went up to attend Her Majesty; on their return, the Speaker suspended the sitting.

Members Sworn

2.15 pm

The following Members took and subscribed the Oath, or made and subscribed the Affirmation required by law:

Right honourable David Michael Davis, *for* Haltemprice and Howden

John Martin McDonnell, Hayes and Harlington

Karl Ian McCartney, Lincoln

Andrew John Stevenson, Carlisle

Emma Elizabeth Reynolds, Wolverhampton North East

Andrew Richard Rosindell, Romford

Speaker's Statement

2.30 pm

Mr Speaker: The House has directed the Speaker to make a statement at the beginning of each Session about the duties and responsibilities of hon. Members, in place of the Sessional Orders.

I begin by reminding Members of their duty to observe the code of conduct agreed by the House and to uphold the seven principles of public life that underpin it: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

The House asserts its privilege of freedom of speech. It is there to ensure that our constituents can be represented by us without fear or favour. It is an obligation on us all to exercise that privilege responsibly. It is enjoyed by Members of Parliament only in their work in this House: as private individuals we are equal under the law with those whom we represent.

In our proceedings every Member should be heard courteously, whatever views he or she is expressing. Members of this House have a duty to behave with civility and fairness in all their dealings.

Parliament should be open to those whom it represents. We should seek to explain its work to those who elect us, and make them welcome here. But the security of this building and those who work and visit here depends upon all of us. We have a duty to be vigilant, and to assist those whose job it is to maintain this place as a safe place to work.

Before moving to the first business of the new Parliament, I would like to express my very best wishes for the forthcoming Session to all hon. Members—the 182 new Members and those returning—and all those who work here. I also send best wishes to those former Members not returned at the election, and thank them for their service to the country and their commitment to the democratic process, which can sometimes be a bruising experience.

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Mr Speaker: In accordance with Standing Order No. 2A, I will now announce the arrangements for the ballot for the election of Deputy Speakers. The ballot will be held in Committee Room 6 from 10 am to 1.30 pm on Wednesday 3 June. Nominations may be submitted in the Lower Table Office from 10 am to 5 pm on Monday 1 June. A briefing note with more details about the election will be published on the intranet. Nomination forms are available in the Lower Table Office and the Vote Office.

I should also inform the House that, in accordance with the Order of the House of 26 March, I have nominated Sir Roger Gale and Mr George Howarth to serve as temporary Deputy Speakers until the House has elected Deputy Speakers.

OUTLAWRIES BILL

A Bill for the more effectual preventing Clandestine Outlawries was read the First time, and ordered to be read a Second time.

Queen's Speech

Mr Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that this House has this day attended Her Majesty in the House of Peers, and that Her Majesty was pleased to make a Most Gracious Speech from the Throne to both Houses of Parliament, of which I have, for greater accuracy, obtained a copy.

I shall direct that the terms of the speech be printed in *Votes and Proceedings*. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government will legislate in the interests of everyone in our country. It will adopt a one nation approach, helping working people get on, supporting aspiration, giving new opportunities to the most disadvantaged and bringing different parts of our country together.

My Government will continue with its long-term plan to provide economic stability and security at every stage of life. They will continue the work of bringing the public finances under control and reducing the deficit, so Britain lives within its means. Measures will be introduced to raise the productive potential of the economy and increase living standards.

Legislation will be brought forward to help achieve full employment and provide more people with the security of a job. New duties will require my ministers to report annually on job creation and apprenticeships. Measures will also be introduced to reduce regulation on small businesses so they can create jobs.

Legislation will be brought forward to ensure people working 30 hours a week on the National Minimum Wage do not pay income tax, and to ensure there are no rises in income tax rates, value-added tax or national insurance for the next five years.

Measures will be brought forward to help working people by greatly increasing the provision of free childcare.

Legislation will be introduced to support home ownership and give housing association tenants the chance to own their own home.

Measures will be introduced to increase energy security and to control immigration. My Government will bring forward legislation to reform trade unions and to protect essential public services against strikes.

To give new opportunities to the most disadvantaged, my Government will expand the Troubled Families Programme and continue to reform welfare, with legislation encouraging employment by capping benefits and requiring young people to earn or learn.

Legislation will be brought forward to improve schools and give every child the best start in life, with new powers to take over failing and coasting schools and create more academies.

In England, my Government will secure the future of the National Health Service by implementing the National Health Service's own five-year plan, by increasing the health budget, integrating healthcare and social care, and ensuring the National Health Service works on a seven day basis. Measures will be introduced to improve access to general practitioners and to mental healthcare.

Measures will also be brought forward to secure the real value of the basic State Pension, so that more people live in dignity and security in retirement. Measures will be brought forward to increase the rights of victims of crime.

To bring different parts of our country together, my Government will work to bring about a balanced economic recovery. Legislation will be introduced to provide for the devolution of powers to cities with elected metro mayors, helping to build a Northern powerhouse.

My Government will continue to legislate for high-speed rail links between the different parts of the country.

My Government will also bring forward legislation to secure a strong and lasting constitutional settlement, devolving wide-ranging powers to Scotland and Wales. Legislation will be taken forward giving effect to the Stormont House Agreement in Northern Ireland.

My Government will continue to work in cooperation with the devolved administrations on the basis of mutual respect.

My Government will bring forward changes to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. These changes will create fairer procedures to ensure that decisions affecting England, or England and Wales, can be taken only with the consent of the majority of Members of Parliament representing constituencies in those parts of our United Kingdom.

My Government will renegotiate the United Kingdom's relationship with the European Union and pursue reform of the European Union for the benefit of all Member States. Alongside this, early legislation will be introduced to provide for an in-out referendum on membership of the European Union before the end of 2017.

Measures will also be brought forward to promote social cohesion and protect people by tackling extremism. New legislation will modernise the law on communications data, improve the law on policing and criminal justice, and ban the new generation of psychoactive drugs.

My Government will bring forward proposals for a British Bill of Rights.

Members of the House of Commons

Estimates for the public services will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government will continue to play a leading role in global affairs, using its presence all over the world to re-engage with and tackle the major international security, economic and humanitarian challenges.

My Ministers will remain at the forefront of the NATO alliance and of international efforts to degrade and ultimately defeat terrorism in the Middle East.

The United Kingdom will continue to seek a political settlement in Syria, and will offer further support to the Iraqi Government's programme for political reform and national reconciliation.

My Government will maintain pressure on Russia to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, and will insist on the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

My Government looks forward to an enhanced partnership with India and China.

Prince Philip and I look forward to our State Visit to Germany next month and to our State Visit to Malta in November, alongside the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. We also look forward to welcoming His Excellency the President of The People's Republic of China and Madame Peng on a State Visit in October.

My Government will seek effective global collaboration to sustain economic recovery and to combat climate change, including at the climate change conference in Paris later this year.

My Government will undertake a full Strategic Defence and Security Review, and do whatever is necessary to ensure that our courageous armed forces can keep Britain safe.

My Government will work to reduce the threat from nuclear weapons, cyber attacks and terrorism.

Other measures will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

Debate on the Address

[1ST DAY]

Mr Speaker: Before I call the mover and seconder, I want to announce the proposed pattern of debate during the remaining days on the Loyal Address: Thursday 28 May—home affairs and justice; Monday 1 June—Britain in the world; Tuesday 2 June—health and social care; Wednesday 3 June—devolution and growth across Britain; and Thursday 4 June—the economy.

2.34 pm

Mr Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg to leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

It is a great honour for me, and for my constituents, to propose the Humble Address, not least as this is the first majority Conservative Government elected since 1992—and one should not lose sight of the historical context of this achievement. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is the first Prime Minister who served a full term to win his second general election with more seats and a higher share of the vote since Lord Palmerston in 1857.

It is a pleasure to be called first in a debate by you, Mr Speaker, though I suspect this will be the last time.

I must confess that I am finding this a nerve-racking experience, because I am not used to addressing such a packed Chamber. In fact, I feel a bit like a very young British diplomat serving in our mission in Beijing in the mid-1960s who at a diplomatic reception found to his horror that he was standing next to Chairman Mao. He was terrified that whatever he said would be inadequate and he desperately racked his brains to try to find something intelligent to say. Finally, he found what he thought was intelligent and asked Mao, "What do you think would have happened if Khrushchev rather than President Kennedy had been killed in Dallas." There was total silence and he felt that he had committed the diplomatic faux pas that he was trying to avoid. What he did not know, as all too often I do not know, but certainly my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister knows, is that wise men always think before they speak. After what seemed like an eternity, Mao turned to the young man and very quietly said, "I don't think that Mr Onassis would have married Mrs Khrushchev."

Talking of diplomats, I would like to pay tribute to our former colleague William Hague. He was a great parliamentarian and an outstanding Foreign Secretary who will be sorely missed. I am personally indebted to him for arranging for me to meet Hillary Clinton at the Foreign Office four years ago. Towards the end of the meeting, William grabbed my arm, pulled up my jacket sleeve and thrust my wrist in front of our distinguished American guest. At first, I was worried William that was wanting to demonstrate his judo skills, but it soon became clear that he was attempting to show Hillary my

[Mr Simon Burns]

watch, which features a picture of her on the face of it. Hillary looked at it and literally screamed with laughter—I knew it was laughter, but her secret service protection officers were not so sure; they immediately stepped forward, and one of them was heard to mutter, “What the hell’s he done to her?” Fortunately, calm was restored before what could easily have been an untimely by-election in Chelmsford.

Despite the security scare, I thought the meeting had gone pretty well. I was therefore taken aback when William called me a few months ago with some unsettling news. Hillary had got wind of my desire to help her 2016 presidential campaign, and it was not good news he had to convey to me. She told William she had heard about my record: “He worked for McGovern’s campaign in ’72, and he lost; he worked for Ted Kennedy’s campaign in 1980, and he lost; he worked for Kathleen Kennedy Townsend’s campaign in 2002, and she lost; and he worked for my campaign in 2008, and I lost. For goodness’ sake”, Hillary pleaded with him, “please find Simon something—anything—else to do, away from the United States in 2016.”

Proposing the Humble Address is a great honour for me. In many ways, this is a kaleidoscope Queen’s Speech—people can twist it as much as they want, but all the patterns are blue, without a hint of yellow, red or purple. I was brought down to earth, however, when I reread the excellent seconding speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) in 1992, when he defined the role of the proposer and seconder. He said a seconder had the opportunity to shine and further advance their career, so I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) has a glittering future ahead of her, but as he explained, the proposer is

“some genial old codger on the way out”.—[*Official Report*, 6 May 1992; Vol. 207, c. 56.]

I now know my role in life. Never again, when the word “reshuffle” permeates Westminster, will I sit anxiously by my telephone, because I now know that old codgers only have a past to look forward to.

In recent years there have been dastardly rumours that you, Mr Speaker, and I do not get on, or even—heaven forbid—that we do not like each other. Just before Dissolution, I read an article by your biographer, who bizarrely suggested that I might be ugly, but, as you know, it is said that politics is show business for ugly people, so, Mr Speaker, I would say that we are all in this together.

It is time, Mr Speaker, that we buried the hatchet—preferably not in my back—so I would like to offer an olive branch by clearing up a rumour about your car. As you will know, in recent years my relationship with cars has not been an altogether happy one, but it has been said that a few years ago my car reversed into yours in Speaker’s Court. You apparently saw the incident through the window of your apartment and hurried out shouting at me, “I’m not happy”, to which I am reputed to have replied, “Then which one are you?” If it is helpful to you, Mr Speaker, I want categorically to confirm that this incident never happened.

It is also said that anyone wanting to keep a secret should mention it in the Chamber of the House of Commons. As I trust all right hon. and hon. Members

here today, I would like to make a confession—[*Interruption.*] When I first came to this House, two MPs a week had to queue overnight in armchairs in a room upstairs for ten-minute rule Bill slots because of the high demand for them. Believe it or not—this is true—the night I chose was with Ann Widdecombe. If Jack Kennedy was the man who accompanied Jackie Kennedy to Paris in 1961, I am the man who spent the night with Ann Widdecombe in 1991!

I am very proud of my constituency, which is set in the heart of Essex. It is the home of “Essex man” and “Essex girls”, who like to work hard and play even harder. It might have caught on only over the last few years, but I have been saying it since 1987—“The only way is Essex!” My constituents fully embrace the work ethic: they are aspirational for themselves and their families, believing that the harder they work, the more they should benefit, without losing sight of helping those who are genuinely in trouble or need assistance.

My constituents understood the scale of the economic mess that we inherited and they accepted the measures my right hon. Friend the Chancellor took to establish the firm foundations of our long-term economic plan. That has meant for my constituents: unemployment down; inflation down; the deficit down; income taxes down—and growth up. They welcomed the income tax cuts through the significant raising of personal allowances each year of the last Parliament. For these reasons, they will warmly welcome the tax lock Bill, which will ensure no tax rise on income, VAT or national insurance contributions throughout the lifetime of this Parliament. They will also welcome the childcare Bill, which will double free childcare for three and four-year-olds to 30 hours a week, as this will help a tremendous number of young mothers in my constituency who would like to get back into work but find it difficult because of the cost of childcare.

My constituents are forthright in their views, and what will impress them about this Queen’s Speech is that we have kept the faith by honouring our election commitments. During the election, the media and the pundits said we would not be able to deliver. This Gracious Speech disproves that fallacy, and I commend it to the House.

2.48 pm

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): It is an honour to be invited to second this Humble Address, which was proposed so eloquently by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns). He has the pleasure of representing an area that differs considerably from my own, although I am sure many of his constituents have had fantastic holidays in the beautiful Duchy of Cornwall.

This honour really belongs to the people who live in South East Cornwall, and I am proud that they have chosen me to represent them in this place for a further term. South East Cornwall is where I have always called home: it is where I was born, where I was schooled, where I have worked and where I am proud to call home. Anyone who has visited my beautiful constituency, who has walked the rugged coastline or explored the wonderful countryside and met the warm, genuine folk of Cornwall will understand why it is where my heart lies.

I think I am right in saying that I am the first Cornish maid to second the Loyal Address, although back in 1971 the proposer was the Member of Parliament for St Ives. I am pleased to welcome the new Conservative representative, my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas), although he did keep us waiting; his constituency was the last to declare.

During the election campaign, the Prime Minister visited Cornwall on a number of occasions. On one occasion, a group of enthusiastic party supporters were summoned to a large cowshed to meet him: that is the way we do things in Cornwall. In his rallying speech, he mentioned how glad he was to be in the county of Poldark. Like Poldark, the Prime Minister rode into Cornwall—not on a horse, but on a bus—where he was introduced to all those who were waiting by my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), who himself has been liked to Aidan Turner, the actor who played Ross Poldark.

On the morning of 8 May, as votes were counted in that same cowshed, it became evident that true-blue representation throughout Cornwall was on course to double when my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) was elected. The Prime Minister can now tell his wife that, like Ross Poldark, he has his own six-pack—six blue constituencies in Poldark's county—and that three new Conservative Members are joining me and my hon. Friends the Members for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) and for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice).

The result of the general election was a surprise to many people. Cornwall is surrounded by blue water, and the blue tide rose, sweeping across the duchy, but it did not stop at the Tamar. It crossed into Plymouth, where a new Member, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), joined my hon. Friends the Members for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colville) and for South West Devon (Mr Streeter). The tide swept across Devon, and halted only when it reached the constituency of the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), where his defences could not quite be penetrated. I know from experience in my own constituency that water does have a way, so he should be warned.

I look forward to working with colleagues from Devon, and with other west country Members, but I want to set a clear ground rule for my right hon. and hon. Friends. Given that I am Cornish born and bred, it will come as no surprise to hear me mention clotted cream. I say to my colleagues, "Please note: the jam must come first on the scone, before the cream." If they agree, I am sure that we shall get along fine. I pay tribute to the Prime Minister for putting his jam and cream on a scone in the proper way. It has been said that the only reason those in Devon prepare their cream teas incorrectly is their wish to hide their use of clotted cream with the jam.

A number of dairy farmers in my constituency and elsewhere have diversified, producing not only cream but cheese. The Gracious Speech supports aspiration and small businesses like those producers, and I am sure that they will welcome it.

Many of my constituents told me that they had been waiting for an EU referendum Bill for a very long time, and were fed up with hearing that it would be provided directly by Opposition Members. I am delighted that the Bill is at last going to happen, and I welcome the

fact that the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) has changed her mind and decided to support it. I shall not dwell on the fact that she has changed her mind; women do.

I cannot end without passing on special thanks to the Prime Minister from the residents of my home villages, Kingsand and Cawsand. Last Saturday, I attended the reopening of the newly repaired clock tower, and the Prime Minister's help in making this historic building survive was acknowledged. The building was reopened by 102-year-old Doll Jago, who is the oldest resident in the village. It was extremely special for me because Doll's late son, Tony, first introduced my late husband Neil to commercial fishing.

It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of Cornwall, to commend the Gracious Speech to the House.

2.56 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I am sure the whole House will want to pay tribute to our armed forces. Since the last Queen's Speech, UK military operations in Afghanistan have come to an end; 453 British servicemen and women lost their lives in that campaign and many more were injured. They served with valour and they deserve our gratitude, and we honour them here today. Our thoughts and deepest sympathies are with their families, to whom we pledge our enduring support.

I congratulate the mover and seconder of the Queen's Speech. Traditionally, as has been said, the seconder is a rising star with a bright future ahead of them and the mover is someone of great distinction with an illustrious career behind them, so it is a pleasure to congratulate the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns) as the mover of this Queen's Speech. He came into the House in 1987, shortly after I did, and I remember it well, because he cut a real dash then. [*Laughter.*] Many of us—well, me actually—thought he looked like a young Robert Redford; I know these days it is a bit more Jeremy Clarkson, but, believe me, back in the day he was real head-turner.

As everyone could hear from the right hon. Gentleman's speech, he is outspoken and engaging, and irrepressible. He was public health Minister, but he did not let that stop him smoking—it was the red box in one hand and the fag in the other—and the fact that he is a Tory has, as we have heard, never stopped him being a passionate supporter of the US Democrats and Hillary Clinton's No. 1 fan. His good humour did not desert him even when he was rail Minister dealing with the vexed issue of HS2. Nothing will stop him speaking his mind, except possibly you, Mr Speaker, and at a time when we politicians are thought of as all the same—too cautious, too guarded—no one could ever say that about him. He made a good speech today, and I congratulate him on it.

I also congratulate the seconder of the motion, the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray). She was elected in 2010, the first woman to represent her constituency and only the sixth woman ever elected in Cornwall. We are here to bring the issues of concern of our constituents to the heart of Parliament, and she is a fine example of that when she speaks about her beloved county of Cornwall—or as we know it, the county of Poldark. She does not just speak up for them; she gets things done for them. It is hard to believe that

[Ms Harriet Harman]

someone who was elected for the first time only in 2010 has already got two Bills put into law—the Marine Navigation (No. 2) Act 2013 and the Deep Sea Mining Act 2014. She comes from those Cornish fishing communities and shares not only their joys, but their sorrows. When only one year after she was elected her husband was killed in a fishing accident, we all admired the tremendous courage she showed in the face of such a tragic loss. Her speech showed her as she is—brave, determined and human—and at a time when people are sceptical about politicians, she is a credit to this House.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr Cameron): he returns to the House as Prime Minister. [Interruption.] Although he and I have many differences, people have pointed out that in some ways we are quite alike. One of the things that we have in common is that we are both, by our own admission, interim leaders. [Interruption.] So, from one interim leader to another, can I give him some advice? I am sure he will understand what I mean when I say: beware the blond on the zip-wire.

Speaking of interim leaders, I turn to the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson). Let me give him some friendly advice about the thorny issue of seating arrangements in this House. The lion might be roaring in Scotland, but don't mess with the beast of Bolsover!

We have come through a general election. We applied for the job but the right hon. Member for Witney got it. Even though we did not get the job we wanted, we have an important job to do for this country: holding the Government to account. Where he acts in the interests of the country, we will support the Government. When he does not, we will not hesitate to be a determined, forensic and vocal Opposition, and that is what every one of our 232 Labour MPs will do. The Chief Whip, the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) is looking somewhat smug, sitting there on the Government Front Bench, but I remind him that the Prime Minister has only a slender majority, so he will not have it all his own way.

Britain faces a fragile future for our economy, our constitution and our public services. Although we are seeing economic growth returning, its benefits are not being shared and the economy remains fragile. Compared with other countries, Britain's productivity lags behind. Tax revenues have fallen short of where the Government said in 2010 that they would now be, meaning that it is taking longer to reduce the deficit. Britain cannot succeed with low-skilled, low-wage, insecure employment and a race to the bottom. The path to economic prosperity and recovery must involve a high-skilled, long-term approach.

Our productivity is being held back by a lack of investment in training, infrastructure and industry. We will support investment in the skills that people need for the future. We will support measures that genuinely help to get people into work. We will support measures that help small businesses, the vital drivers of the economy. We will support investment in our infrastructure, particularly in affordable green transport systems. All of that will help productivity, but what we will not support are more arbitrary measures to undermine people's rights at work. The Government have already made it so

expensive that it is virtually impossible to go to an employment tribunal. That is not about better productivity; it is divisive, it is posturing and it is unfair.

The Government are bringing forward legislation on tax. We want a fair tax system. We do not want to see taxes going up for those on lower or middle incomes, but the Government must not repeat what they did in the last Parliament, which saw those on the very highest incomes prioritised for a tax cut. This legislation must not block off the possibility of the Government being able to raise taxes on the very highest earners, if that is necessary to protect public services. We believe that it is a matter of basic principle that those with the broadest shoulders must bear the biggest burden.

Our political and constitutional system is fragile, too. Big changes are under way, and no one should be in any doubt that there needs to be further reform. The Prime Minister must keep the promises on further devolution to Scotland, to Wales and to Northern Ireland, and there will need to be change in England and in this House, but to get change that is fair and lasting, it must be done in a way that builds the broadest possible consensus. The Prime Minister must seek agreement and he must break his habit of divisiveness. Of course the Scottish National party wants to break up the Union—it wants people to have to choose between being Scottish and being British—but it would be utterly irresponsible for the Prime Minister to continue what he did so shamefully in the general election, which was to set the English against the Scots. [Interruption.] We saw him do that. No party, especially one that claims to be “one nation” should set the interests of a family in Gloucester against the interests of a family in Glasgow or Glamorgan. Let us be in no doubt: the worst possible outcome for Scotland would be the SNP demanding full fiscal autonomy, which they know does not add up, and a Tory Prime Minister giving it to them.

Let us continue with the much-needed process of constitutional evolution, but whether on the Prime Minister's proposals for English votes for English laws or on constituency boundary changes, he must proceed in a way that is absolutely in the interests of the country, and not just in the interests of his party. If there are to be any changes on party funding, they must be made on a fair, cross-party basis, not just rigged in favour of the Tory party. When it comes to devolution to the English regions, with local councils facing unprecedented cuts, especially in the north and some of the most deprived areas of the country, local government cannot be empowered by being impoverished.

On Europe, we will support the Government's Bill for a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union. [Interruption.] We believe that it will be better for Britain if we stay in the European Union. It is important for the future of this country, which is why 16 and 17-year-olds should have the right to vote in the referendum—it is their future, too. Our continued membership is important for our economic prosperity, but that prosperity has to be more widely shared across this country, and a crucial part of that includes stopping unscrupulous employers exploiting migrant workers and undercutting wages. Our membership is also important for our place in the world. Europe does need to change, and we want reforms, so we wish the Prime Minister well with his new best friend, President Juncker.

Turning to human rights, there is normally a degree of unravelling of the Government's legislative programme after any Queen's Speech, but this is the first time I have known it to start unravelling before Her Majesty has even spoken. Leaving aside a woman changing her mind, this looks like its a classic "Gove special". On the Human Rights Act, the Government are clearly still working on the back of that envelope. We have heard the grandiose rhetoric; we are yet to see the proposals. Let me make this clear: if they seek to undermine basic human rights, take us out of the European convention or undermine our ability to stand up for human rights abroad, we will oppose them all the way. In the meantime, we will be keeping an eye out for another group that might need their own rights—the poor foxes.

We have a fragile economy, a fragile constitution and, sadly, fragile public services too—top of that list is the national health service. The Government should be straining every sinew to protect and improve our health service, but where is the effective action so that people can get to see their GP, so that patients in accident and emergency are seen promptly and so that people, especially those needing cancer treatment, do not get stuck on waiting lists? The Prime Minister has got form on this: he has made promises before on the NHS and he has broken them. Whatever is in this Queen's Speech, we know that you cannot trust the Tories on the national health service. [*Interruption.*] We will see.

Turning to education, we will hold the Prime Minister to account for his latest promises on childcare. The rhetoric might be promising, but the reality is that children's centres have closed and the cost of childcare has soared. The average family are now paying £1,500 more per year for nursery fees than they would have been in 2010. Parents do not need more empty promises; they need childcare they can afford.

On welfare, we back measures to get people into work to achieve full employment and thereby get the social security bill down. That is why we put in our manifesto a commitment to a compulsory jobs guarantee for young people and the long-term unemployed. We support a cap on household benefit entitlement. The Government are now planning to reduce it and we are sympathetic to that, but that makes it even more important that the jobs are there for people to move into, that childcare is there, particularly for lone parents, and that there are adequate funds for discretionary housing payments. All that is necessary to ensure that this measure does not put children into poverty, increase homelessness or end up costing more than it saves.

On housing, we want more people to be able to own their own home and more affordable housing that people can afford to rent, but the Prime Minister has a poor record on this, too. The percentage of people who own their own homes is at its lowest for 30 years and now the age at which people can afford their first home has risen to 33. In the last Parliament, when the Government increased the discount for people buying their own council homes, they promised that for every council home bought another would be built. They did not keep that promise. For every 10 council homes bought, only one replacement council home has begun to be built. Now the Government plan to extend the right to buy to housing association tenants and are making more promises, but they have not said how it will be paid for. It will

clearly lead to fewer affordable homes and there is an emerging view that, because it is uncosted and unfunded, it is unworkable.

A fundamental priority for every Government is to protect our security, never more so than from the threat of violent extremism. We await David Anderson's review and will look at the detail of the Government's wider proposals. If the Government bring forward extra powers, we will want greater accountability for the use of those powers and we will want to see the strengthening, not the watering down, of community-based counter-radicalisation programmes.

The rhetoric at the beginning of this Queen's Speech is well honed. Indeed, the best lines look uncannily like we wrote them. [*Interruption.*] Actually, we did not just write them, we engraved them on a tablet of stone, but that is another story and we will perhaps not go there. We fear that the reality of this Queen's Speech will be very different from the rhetoric. The Queen's Speech talks of one nation, yet the Prime Minister sets the nations of the country against each other. The Queen's Speech talks of working people, yet he threatens basic rights at work. At a time when our economy, our constitution and our public services are fragile, we fear that this Tory Government will make things worse. As the dust settles, the real question is whether this Queen's Speech will improve our country, our communities and people's lives. That is the test that will be set for this Government and that is the standard to which we, as the Opposition, will hold them to account.

3.13 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): As we meet today, we should start, as the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) did, by thinking of our incredible servicemen and women and all they are doing for our country around the world. Our sailors on HMS Bulwark are saving hundreds of lives in the Mediterranean. Pilots in our jets are serving over the skies of Iraq. In Ukraine, we are training local forces to help counter Russian-backed aggression. Our submarines, at sea for months on end, are maintaining our continuous nuclear deterrent. Our troops are helping aid workers with disaster relief in Nepal and running treatment centres against Ebola in Sierra Leone. As we consider this vast range of tasks that these brave people are undertaking, and many more, so we should recognise the extent of our reach and role in the world, and as the right hon. and learned Lady did, we should remember all those who lost their lives and those who were wounded in the campaign in Afghanistan. Our servicemen and women are the best of British, and so above all today we should thank them for what they do.

This Queen's Speech is building on strong foundations. In the last Parliament we cut the deficit in half as a proportion of our GDP; we grew our economy by almost 10%; we created 1,000 jobs a day; we cut taxes for more than 27 million people; we helped more than a million people off out-of-work benefits; and we cut the youth claimant count to its lowest level since the 1970s. If the last Parliament was about a repair job, this Parliament must be about renewal. Behind this Queen's Speech is a clear vision of what our country can be—a country of security and opportunity for everyone, at every stage of life. That is our ambition: to build a

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country where, whoever and you are and wherever you live, you can have the chance of a good education, a decent job, a home of your own, and the peace of mind that comes from being able to raise a family and enjoy a secure retirement—a country that backs those who work hard and do the right thing.

This is the Queen's Speech for working people, from a one nation Government that will bring our country together. We have a clear mandate from the British people, a long-term economic plan that is working, a detailed and compelling manifesto, and we will not waste a single moment in getting on with the task.

Let me welcome the right hon. and learned Lady back to her place once again. She said that we had something in common. I was wondering whatever it could be, because of course she is far posher than I am. But it is certainly true that we have faced each other before. She told us last week that she is now the Mother of the House. I am not entirely sure what that role involves, but if she is the Mother and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) is the Father, I think we may be in need of one aspect of the Queen's Speech, which is the troubled families programme. Whatever our differences, she has always been a great parliamentarian, and if politics is about never giving up and always fighting for the things that you believe in, then the right hon. and learned Lady is a tribute to the best traditions of this House. From increasing maternity leave and maternity pay to ensuring more prosecutions for domestic violence through her Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act, she has made an outstanding contribution in advancing women's rights, and as she stands down as deputy leader of the Labour party this year, she should be proud of all that she has achieved.

Let me also welcome the new Scottish National party Members of Parliament. It is good to see that the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) is back with us. For someone who has fought so hard to break away from Westminster, he seems remarkably keen on coming back to the place. I notice that he is now the foreign affairs spokesman for his party—for which I assume he speaks on issues relating to England, Wales and Northern Ireland. There is a serious point, however. The right hon. Gentleman has broken new ground. It is the first time that someone who has served as a First Minister of one of our nations has come back to the House of Commons, and whatever our differences—and there will be many differences—he will bring great experience to this House and to our debates.

The Humble Address welcoming Her Majesty's Gracious Speech was brilliantly proposed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns). He described himself as a man with his future behind him, but I think after that great rapprochement, perhaps a future in the diplomatic service—or even, who knows, as Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons—awaits him. There are all sorts of possibilities. I am very grateful for the reference to the record I have set and the reference he made to Lord Palmerston. Given that I think I am right in saying that Lord Palmerston died in the arms of his mistress, I do not want to emulate all his achievements in the rest of his life.

As my right hon. Friend said, as well as being a strong Conservative, when it comes to American politics, as he explained, he is a devout Democrat. He named his son after Bobby Kennedy, he regularly goes to America to pray with President Carter, and as he told us, he keeps his daily schedule on track by wearing a Hillary Clinton wristwatch. I have met Mrs Clinton on many occasions, but I have never yet had the courage to ask whether she wears a Simon Burns wristwatch.

Many of us have had experience of exceptionally demanding constituents over the years, but my right hon. Friend may be able to lay claim to the most demanding constituent of all. This is a story he told me in the Tea Room many years ago, so I am sure that it is true. A constituent came to his office, looked at him longingly and said, "Simon, you are my Member of Parliament and I have my needs and wants." History does not relate how he handled this, but I know that he has increased his majority over the years from 7,700 to more than 18,000. I can observe only that he is a very good and decidedly active constituency Member of Parliament.

My right hon. Friend's other great addiction is nicotine. As Minister with responsibility for trains, he was criticised for travelling by car, but the real reason for that was not that he was a bad Minister, but that he was gasping for a fog. We may all wonder how we will be remembered in this place after we have gone. In my right hon. Friend's case, I can confirm that there will be a permanent memorial in the Palace of Westminster. I refer, of course, to the smoking shelter that he established. He goes there on a daily basis, and it is said that when he has gone a plaque will be placed there, dedicated to the former health Minister.

My right hon. Friend has achieved some remarkable things in this House. His private Member's Bill on tackling football hooliganism made important changes in giving courts greater powers to stop hooligans travelling to games and gave police vital powers to deal with racist chanting. He served as a health Minister in Sir John Major's Administration, as well as being a health and transport Minister in mine. Over three decades, he has become loved in most parts of the Chamber, and his speech was in the finest traditions of the House.

The Loyal Address was brilliantly seconded by another Member who can also sometimes be found under the Commons smoking shelter—my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray). We hear a lot about identikit professional politicians who all look and sound the same and do not have any real experience of real life. Well, people certainly cannot say that about my hon. Friend. She came into politics because she believed that fishermen needed a voice when they were away at sea, and she has given them that voice. No one in the House knows better what to do with skate, hake, bass and bream, so I hope that she will give me some tips on how to deal with Salmond and Sturgeon—[*Laughter.*] Who says puns do not work in the House of Commons?

My hon. Friend has the distinction of being the only Member in the last 20 years to get two private Members' Bills through the House in her first term. One of them, the Deep Sea Mining Act 2014, will position Britain to make the most of an industry that has the potential to be worth £40 billion in the next 30 years. Most exceptionally, my hon. Friend has played a pivotal role in championing

the safety of fishermen. No one knows more just how important that is, and my hon. Friend's courage and resolve in the face of the greatest tragedy have been an inspiration to us all. She has the admiration and support of everyone in the Chamber, and her speech was in the finest traditions of the House.

The first priority of the Queen's Speech is to help working people, and we are clear about what that means—more jobs, more apprenticeships, more tax cuts, more help with childcare and more opportunity to get a home of their own. That is the agenda for this Parliament. The last Parliament created 2 million jobs, and the Queen's Speech will help to create 2 million more. The last Parliament saw more than 2.2 million new apprenticeships start, and the Queen's Speech will help to create 3 million more. The last Parliament cut taxes, and the Queen's Speech sets out plans for cutting them further. For the first time, we will legislate for a tax lock and a minimum wage tax guarantee. That means no increases in income tax, VAT or national insurance, and no income tax at all for those working up to 30 hours a week on the minimum wage. We have made the choice that we will make savings in public spending in order to keep taxes down. That is the right choice and it was backed by the British people in the election.

The last Parliament increased free childcare, and the childcare Bill in the Queen's Speech will double free childcare for three and four-year-olds to 30 hours a week from 2017, which should save families £5,000 a year on average. The last Parliament helped more than 200,000 people buy or reserve a property, and the housing Bill in the Queen's Speech will extend the right to buy to housing association tenants, so that more people have the security of owning their own home.

In recent days I have noticed that some of the candidates for the Labour leadership seem to have discovered a new word—"aspiration". Apparently that has upset John Prescott, who went on television to explain that he does not know what it means. Well, I am happy that we will spend the next five years explaining what it means and how vital it is to everyone in our country. If Labour Members truly believe in aspiration, they will vote with us to cut people's taxes so people can spend more of their own money as they choose. If they truly believe in aspiration, they will vote with us to cap welfare and use the savings to fund more apprenticeships.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman is talking about "one nation" and the rest of it. How does he justify what is now being proposed, namely—this has been widely reported—the £12 billion cuts in so-called welfare, which will hit the disabled and the most vulnerable people in our society? It is shameful. The Prime Minister should recognise that if that were to go ahead, it would create a battlefield situation in many parts of our country, and the responsibility would be on him.

The Prime Minister: What I say to the hon. Gentleman is that in the last Parliament, we found £20 billion of savings in welfare. We should be doing this, because the alternatives are to put up taxes for working people or to make deeper cuts in public spending programmes such as health or education. The right answer is to get the country back to work, find the savings in welfare and

make sure that we keep people's taxes down. That is the choice we made at the election and that is what we will deliver in government.

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way and for the election result that he has delivered to those on this side of the House. He will share my pleasure at this month's employment figures, which show some of the lowest youth unemployment rates locally on record. Will he ensure that this Government keep going further?

The Prime Minister: One of the most important things we can do is give young people the chance of an apprenticeship and the chance of work. What we have done is expand apprenticeships and uncapped university places, so that there is no cap on aspiration in our country. We now want to go further by saying that every young person should be either earning or learning. Leaving school, signing on, getting unemployment benefit, getting housing benefit and opting for a life out of work—that is no choice at all, and that is why we will legislate accordingly.

If Labour Members believe in aspiration, they will vote with us to allow housing association tenants the right to buy their own home. That will be the test of aspiration for the Opposition: are they going to talk about aspiration, or are they actually going to vote for it?

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): The best way out of poverty is through employment. What can the Prime Minister do to help small and medium-sized businesses to create more jobs—more than the 2 million he created in the last Parliament?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right: we have to recognise that the jobs growth in this country is likely to come from small and medium-sized enterprises, rather than big firms. What we have to do is continue the drive of deregulation and keeping taxes down for those vital businesses. In the end, it is not Governments that create jobs; it is businesses, and that is why we will continue to be a business-friendly Government.

Delivering for working people also means controlling immigration. Members right across the House will have heard that issue raised on doorstep after doorstep during the election campaign, and I am determined that we should deliver. Our new immigration Bill takes action right across the board, including extending our approach of rapid deportation. People who have no right to be here should not be able to launch appeal after appeal after appeal. Under our plans, they will be deported first and can only appeal later.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): An issue of immediate concern is the situation in the Mediterranean. The proposal of the EU to initiate quotas is, in my view, not the answer. Does the Prime Minister agree with me that the solution to the problem is to deal directly with the countries of the Maghreb, so that they can deal with the people traffickers and the criminal gangs who are forcing people to their deaths?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman, who led the Select Committee on Home Affairs in such an accomplished way in the last Parliament, is absolutely right about this. My fear is that if we have repatriation

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programme that distributes migrants across the European Union, all it will do is act as a new draw for the criminal gangs and for people to get on those unsafe boats and head off into the Mediterranean. What we need to do is focus on the two things that will make the biggest difference: one is trying to get a competent Government in Libya—a Government that have authority and that we can deal with—and the second is to break the link between people getting on a boat and getting settlement rights in Europe. We need to return people to the continent of Africa. There is a clear model that worked well. When the Spanish Government faced this problem, with people arriving in the Canary Islands, they worked with the relevant countries and invested in their security, and they were able to deal with the problem. That is the approach we should take.

We should also be using our significant aid budget. It is to this country's great credit that we have kept our promises to the poorest in the world and achieved that 0.7% target. Together with European partners, we should be using that budget and trying to stabilise and improve conditions in the countries from which these people are coming. They are not by any means all Libyans. In fact, very, very few of them are Libyans—they are Eritreans, Somalis and Nigerians. We need to stabilise those countries to take away the cause. We also need to go after the criminal gangs because they are the ones who are profiting from this evil trade.

The second set of Bills in this Queen's Speech is about spreading opportunity more widely by helping people out of poverty. The best way to do this is not by spending money that we do not have, but by helping people to get a job and a good education. Again, we are building on a strong platform: in the last Parliament inequality fell and relative poverty reached its lowest level in over a quarter of a century. By the end of the Parliament over a million more children were being taught in good or outstanding schools. Over a million people came off the main out-of-work benefits and over 2 million got into work, but the challenge for this Parliament is how we go further.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one of the challenges is to address the fact that two thirds of children in poverty have one parent who is in work?

The Prime Minister: I agree that we need to help people who are out of work into work, and for those people in work, we want to see their living standards rise. We will do that by seeing the welcome increase in the minimum wage that is taking place this year, and also by taking people on low pay out of tax altogether. That is the choice we made in the last Parliament, and we pledged to continue it in this Parliament by saying that people can earn £12,500 before they start paying income tax. That is one of the best ways in which we can encourage work in our country.

The greatest driver of opportunity is education. Some argued in the election that school reform had gone too far. I disagree. I think it is time to increase the pace of reform in education. Every child we leave in a coasting or failing school is an opportunity wasted and potentially a life wasted, so our schools Bill will crack down on

coasting schools and force them to accept new leadership, so that every child has the opportunity to go to a great school.

At the heart of our education reforms will be our commitment to create a further 500 new free schools at least, creating an additional 270,000 extra places. We should be clear about the facts about free schools. Almost half of free schools so far have been set up in the most deprived communities in our country, and most important of all, almost a quarter are rated as outstanding compared with a fifth of other schools. Considering the short time that free schools have been going, for a quarter of them to be outstanding is truly remarkable. It is the fastest growing and most successful schools programme in recent British history, and it is opening up the education system and giving new opportunities to children who in the past would not have had them. Anyone who cares about equality of opportunity should support the free schools programme.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Prime Minister see the fact that 60,000 people used food banks in 2010 as opposed to a million last year as a sign of the success or failure of his Government?

The Prime Minister: I do not want to see anyone having to rely on food from a food bank. That is why we need to take more people out of poverty, get more people into employment, cut more people's taxes, and continue with the long-term economic plan that is working.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Prime Minister: I will give way to hon. Members in a moment. I will get to all of them, but let me say something about free schools. The right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) has had some things to say about free schools, and I thought that in the spirit of encouraging the Opposition leadership debate, I would offer some thoughts. He supports the Everton free school. He supports the Atherton community free school, which is the first-ever free school in Manchester, yet he says, "I don't think free schools are the answer." If free schools are good enough for his constituents, why are they not good enough for everyone else?

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): On food banks, the Prime Minister will be aware that recent research from Oxford University has said that the £12 billion cuts in welfare will double the number of people using food banks to 2 million. Is that a sign of success?

The Prime Minister: This debate about whether it is right to try and drive down the costs of welfare to keep people's taxes down and make sure we are a successful country getting people back to work—that is the debate we had at the election. If the Labour party wants to spend all of this Parliament arguing for more welfare, more debt, more taxes and more spending, it will be making an historic mistake. The Labour party needs to decide whose side it is on. This Government and this Queen's Speech are on the side of working people who want their children to have the best start in life, wherever they live in the country, and that means more academy schools, more free schools, more rigour in the curriculum and more of the brightest graduates going into teaching. That is our programme and we are stepping up the pace.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend also pay tribute to our noble Friend Lord Baker, the former Secretary of State for Education, who has launched a fantastic campaign to promote university technical colleges? They offer a fantastic opportunity to young people who are not necessarily the most academic but who have technical skills, tapping into that resource, which this nation has, and providing skills.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I pay tribute to Lord Baker of Dorking. He was a huge enthusiast for education reform when he was Secretary of State, and he has kept that going all his life. The university technical colleges are a great success—indeed, we launched our election campaign in one in Swindon. They help to complete our education system by providing what was missing: a high-quality technical education for children who would benefit from it.

Giving people opportunity and security means investing in our national health service. That is why this Government will back the NHS's own plan—the Simon Stevens plan—and deliver the extra £8 billion a year needed by the end of this Parliament. We started the previous Parliament by making a big decision to increase spending on the NHS every year. The Labour party told us at the time that we were irresponsible to do so—from what I have seen, it has learnt very little. At the election we promised to make the investment needed for the Simon Stevens plan, and again the Labour party opposed it. It just goes to show that the best way to protect the NHS is to make sure that the Conservatives are in government.

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): May I ask the Prime Minister about another area of the public services: funding for the police? Can he confirm that the Metropolitan Police Service faces further significant cuts in its funding, potentially leading to the loss of between 5,000 and 10,000 police officer positions?

The Prime Minister: What I say to the hon. Gentleman is that the police did a brilliant job in the previous Parliament, taking spending reductions and cutting crime at the same time, and actually increasing the percentage of police officers on the front line. That is a remarkable achievement, and we believe that further savings can be made. Again, if Members do not agree that we need to make some welfare reductions, the police would have to be cut even more deeply. That is the problem that the Labour party will eventually have to confront.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): The Prime Minister says that we have to decide whose side we are on. The Opposition are on the side of this country's 6 million carers—carers who were hit by the bedroom tax and by many of his welfare reforms, and who are now worrying about where those £12 billion of cuts will be made. Can he confirm that there will not be a move to cut eligibility for carer's allowance, because at least 1 million carers are worrying about that?

The Prime Minister: What the previous Government did for carers was pass a landmark piece of legislation that gave them rights for the first time, as well as the people they care for, and it made sure that they had breaks from caring, because the Conservative party supports Britain's carers.

The third set of Bills in the Queen's Speech addresses the great challenges we face as a nation, and we are starting with our place in Europe. We have seen treaty after treaty pass through this House. The EU has changed a great deal since 1975, and it is time the British people once again had their say. We have a very clear strategy of renegotiation, reform and referendum. The Bill in this Queen's Speech makes it clear that the referendum must take place at the latest by the end of 2017. It builds on the excellent work done by my hon. Friends the Members for Stockton South (James Wharton) and for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), who introduced similar Bills in the previous Parliament. I am delighted that the Bill now has all-party support, so I look forward to seeing it make its way through both Houses in extra quick time.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): We are told that the EU referendum Bill will be introduced after the Prime Minister has negotiated reforms. Will members of his Cabinet be allowed to vote against staying in the EU? Will they be allowed to vote no and stay in his Cabinet?

The Prime Minister: First of all, the hon. Gentleman has the order slightly the wrong way round. We are going to introduce this Bill straight away. I want us to legislate straight away to get the Bill in place, so that everyone knows that there will be that referendum. But the Government have a very clear view, which is that we believe that the right answer is reform, renegotiation and referendum. We go into that believing that Britain will be successful. That is the view of all the Government and every Government Minister.

As well as the challenge of Europe, we will continue to work with our international partners on securing a proper replacement for the millennium development goals in September. We will confront the challenge of climate change, not least with the build-up to the vital Paris summit in December, and we will meet the challenge of combating extremism, including through a new Bill in front of this House. We want to take on the poisonous narrative of extremism—not just violent extremism, but all extremism—in a much more aggressive way, standing up for the liberal and tolerant values that make this country great.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I am grateful that there was at least one reference to climate change in the Gracious Speech. However, the speech was devoid of detail on climate change. Can the Prime Minister tell us whether he will reverse his reckless policies that are deepening our dependence on oil and gas and instead put our resources into renewable energies and energy efficiency? Those are what we need if we are serious about climate change, jobs and energy security.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady, whom I welcome back to her place, is being a bit churlish; the last Government grew the economy and cut our carbon emissions and this Government will do the same. We saw a massive increase in investment in renewable energy, including the largest offshore wind market anywhere in the world. The difference between me and the hon. Lady is that I believe in a green environment on the street corner as well as in the stratosphere. I hope that she will have a word with her Green colleagues in

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Brighton and make sure that they begin to empty the dustbins, because that matters as well when it comes to a green environment.

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con): The Prime Minister said a little while ago that he was pleased that the EU referendum Bill now has all-party support. As he takes that Bill through the Commons, will he remind the Opposition that they cannot dump their policies overnight and hope that people will not notice?

The Prime Minister: I am all for encouraging as many U-turns as possible from the Labour party; that will mean that our majority of 10 or 12 will be far, far bigger. We should encourage them to join us in the Lobbies—[*Interruption.*] I can hear the Chief Whip enthusiastically endorsing that. I am not sure that the British people will forget. If we had listened to the Labour party, there would be no renegotiation and there would be no referendum—there would be no choice.

This Queen's Speech will also modernise and strengthen our United Kingdom. It includes Bills on devolution for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These Bills will deliver on all the promises made to people in each of those countries in our United Kingdom. We will also ensure fairness for English voters, through English votes for English laws.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP) *rose*—

The Prime Minister: I am happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Pete Wishart: I am very grateful to the Prime Minister for giving way. Can he confirm that there will be a piece of legislation—a Bill—for English votes for English laws? Surely he is not even contemplating bringing something so significant constitutionally under the Standing Orders of the House?

The Prime Minister: What we will do, in terms of English votes and English laws, is exactly what is set out in our manifesto—copies available from all good bookshops. That will involve a vote here in the House of Commons, and I think that is right.

I look forward to taking on the arguments from those who want to break up our country. Frankly, they have received little scrutiny until now. Devolution is not just about getting new powers; it is also about the responsibility of how those powers are used. I would say to the Scottish National party that if it is not happy with decisions made here in Westminster and if it wants more taxes, spending and borrowing, it can now introduce those measures in Scotland. It is time for the SNP to stop talking and start acting.

Let me respond very directly to something important that the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham said, which was that in this Parliament there will also be the opportunity for the SNP to set out what it means by full fiscal autonomy. I am clear about what that means: it means raising 100% of what it spends. That means asking Scottish people to pay almost an extra £10 billion in taxes or making almost an extra

£10 billion in additional cuts by the end of this Parliament. That is £5,000 of higher taxes or additional cuts for every single family in Scotland. That is the true price of the SNP. It is ironic that the party in this House that claims to represent Scotland advocates a worse deal for Scotland than the rest of us do. People who want the best for every nation of our United Kingdom should fight for a Union with solidarity at its heart. That is something that I will always do because I am proud to lead the Conservative and Unionist party.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): On dumping policies overnight, how many of the Prime Minister's right hon. and hon. Friends came to tell him that they would not support him over the proposed repeal of the Human Rights Act?

The Prime Minister: Let me put the hon. Gentleman out of his misery. Be in no doubt: we will be introducing legislation and legislating on this issue because I want these decisions made by British judges in British courts, not in Strasbourg.

This Queen's Speech provides a clear programme for this Government, delivering for working people: more jobs, more apprenticeships, more tax cuts, more help with childcare, and more opportunity to get a home of your own. The best education for every child, a strong and properly funded NHS, and the chance to raise your family and enjoy a decent and secure retirement: that is what this Queen's Speech is about, and that is why I am fighting for it in this Parliament. It is a Queen's Speech for working people from a one-nation Government who will bring our country together, and I commend it to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Before I call Mr Angus Robertson, I should warn other right hon. and hon. Members hoping to catch my eye that on the conclusion of his speech a time limit of 12 minutes on Back-Bench speeches will take effect.

3.46 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): I begin by adding my voice to those of the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) and the Prime Minister in paying tribute to members of the armed forces who have died on operations, not least in Afghanistan. The biggest single loss of life from the UK was my constituents aboard Nimrod XV230 who died in the skies above Afghanistan. Regardless of the right hon. and learned Lady's views of the conflicts in which our servicemen and women take part, we pay tribute to all of them and our thoughts are with their families, especially those who have lost loved ones.

It is a real pleasure to join in the praise for the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns). Before considering what I should say about him, I decided to review the back copies of the *Essex Chronicle*—a very well-read newspaper in the north of Scotland. It highlighted his praiseworthy record as being in the top 10 of most responsive MPs in dealing with the queries that are brought to his office. That is a reminder to all of us that our first responsibility is to represent and assist our constituents, and I praise him for the example that he has set.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray), who is a doughty representative of her constituency with a very strong maritime interest. She has shown the way that a Back-Bench MP can effect change in successfully piloting two private Members' Bills through this House—most notably, I believe, a marine navigation Bill.

The example that both Members have shown neatly complements the next role of parliamentarians, which is to hold the Government to account. It is an honour to reply to the Queen's Speech on behalf of the third party in the House of Commons—the Scottish National party. [*Applause.*] It is our intention to be the effective opposition to this Government, who seek to govern Scotland with only one out of 59 seats. I will spare the Prime Minister further panda jokes, but he knows that he has a democratic legitimacy problem in Scotland—and if he does not, he should by now. Having said that, I congratulate the Prime Minister on his election success—in England.

I extend genuine commiserations to colleagues in all corners of the House who wished for better, or different, results. I also pay compliments, as the Speaker did at the beginning, to all those Members who were not re-elected, and to those who are often not mentioned—their staff. I think that many people do not understand that when Members of this House, on both sides, lose, their staff also lose their jobs. We all rely on our staff, who do a remarkable job on behalf of all our constituents. With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to wish our very talented chief of staff, Luke Skipper, well as he moves on to pastures new.

In the general election the SNP won half the vote—something not achieved by any party in Scotland for 60 years. The SNP won more votes than all three UK parties combined, and 56 out of 59 seats. It was a remarkable result and an amazing achievement for our leader and First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, for all SNP candidates, almost all of whom are here, our volunteers and our dedicated headquarters staff. We will do our best to stand up for Scotland, but let me be absolutely clear: we did not win the votes of all voters in Scotland, and we are mindful of that. We still remain supporters of electoral reform and proportional representation.

It is no secret that we in the Scottish National party wish Scotland to become an independent country again, but the referendum last year determined that we remain governed by Westminster in many areas. The Queen's Speech, drafted by the Prime Minister, talks of a one nation approach, without acknowledging that the UK is a multinational state, or that the four nations of the UK elected different parties to lead in England, in Scotland, in Wales and in Northern Ireland. I genuinely hope that Government Members understand what that actually means.

At the start of a new Parliament, it is right to reflect on the challenges and opportunities we all face over this term, and then ask ourselves whether the proposals in the Queen's Speech match those challenges and opportunities. I am sure that we all acknowledge the scale and challenge of sustaining economic recovery while managing public spending. Balancing the finances is hugely important, and no party should underestimate the importance of not beggaring the next generation. The UK already has unsustainable debt and unsustainable deficits, and all of us are paying a price for an era of

debt-fuelled expansion. However, I respectfully suggest that too few alternative views are heard about how we go about fixing the problem. It is not a zero-sum game, or simply cuts versus tax-raising. Already built into the forecasts of the Office for Budget Responsibility are some very big assumptions about what happens to productivity levels. We would like the Government to take a more active role in channelling spending to areas where it can boost growth and competitiveness.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): In the last Parliament, the Scottish National party Members took a principled stand—that they would not vote on English-only business. Are they going to stick to that?

Angus Robertson: The SNP has had a consistent position in this House—that we will review every single piece of legislation brought forward and, on the basis of an evaluation of whether it directly or indirectly has a significant impact on Scotland, then decide on the measures on which we vote and those on which we do not vote—and that position has not changed.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Angus Robertson: I will make some progress, and then I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

What we need, and have not had thus far, is honesty about the scale of the accelerated austerity cuts that the Government are planning. The 2015 Budget showed that the cuts are set to grow. As the Institute for Fiscal Studies highlighted, the cuts will be

“twice the size of any year's cuts”

in the last Parliament. The mammoth cumulative cuts to public services in the UK are estimated at about £146 billion. These decisions have a very real and devastating impact, most often on those vulnerable people and families who have the least. The IFS has found that the coalition's tax and benefit changes have seen the poorest endure the largest proportionate losses. The IFS also estimates that by 2020 relative child poverty across the UK will increase to over 30%, affecting 4.3 million children—I repeat, 4.3 million children—and that would be a scandal. All of this comes at a time of widening wealth disparity, with the top 10% of society owning 44% of the wealth, while the bottom half owns just 9%.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Many of us on the Opposition Benches are wondering what exactly the hon. Gentleman is complaining about, given that he and his colleagues spent the entire election campaign undermining the only party that had a chance of beating the Conservatives. Is it not actually the case that they wanted a Conservative victory, because they know that that is the best chance of getting another referendum and the best chance of the Scottish people voting for independence? What they should do is go and sit on the Conservative Benches with the Government they wanted to get elected.

Angus Robertson: Obviously, the hon. Gentleman has difficulty reconciling the conscience of him and his colleagues who trooped through the Lobbies shamefully unaware that support for the austerity agenda—[*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. May I say at the start of the Parliament that the convention that we do not clap in this Chamber is very, very long established and widely respected, and it would be appreciated if Members showed some respect for that convention? They will get their speaking rights from this Chair—of that they can be assured. They will be respected, but I would invite them to show some respect for the traditions of this Chamber of the House of Commons.

Angus Robertson: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The UK is the only G7 country to experience rising wealth inequality since the turn of the century. Wealth inequality has risen four times faster in the seven years since the crash compared with the seven years before, and the super-rich in the UK are becoming richer faster than ever. Wealth inequality rose under Labour, and it rose faster under the coalition. Inequality is felt acutely in particular regions of the UK, with regional economic performance the most unequal in the whole of the EU. What is happening to remedy this meaningfully rather than symbolically?

Given those challenges, we need honesty from the Government on their plans for austerity cuts. Where will the £12 billion of cuts to welfare and benefits fall?

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con) *rose—*

Angus Robertson: Who will be affected? Will it be the disabled, like the many impacted by the bedroom tax, or will it be people working on low incomes and in receipt of tax credits? We also need honesty about the Government's plans to cut above and beyond the fiscal mandate. On the specific legislative proposals in the Queen's Speech, may I welcome the early unravelling of Conservative plans?

John Redwood *rose—*

Angus Robertson: I am happy to give way on the unravelling of Conservative Government plans.

John Redwood: I wanted the hon. Gentleman to give way on the money. He said there were going to be massive cuts, but he will see from the Red Book that the Government plan to spend £60 billion a year more in the last year of this Parliament than at the beginning. By how much more does he want to increase public spending, and which taxes would he put up to pay for it?

Angus Robertson: The right hon. Gentleman obviously was not following the general election in Scotland, where the Scottish National party unveiled its proposals for increasing public spending modestly, and where the electorate then took a view on whose plans they would put their trust in—and as he can see, 56 of the 59 MPs returned from Scotland are from the SNP.

I return to the specific legislative proposals in the Queen's Speech and the unravelling of the Prime Minister's plans, beginning with the Human Rights Act. It is now clear that the Government cannot secure the majority they were seeking and are kicking the issue into the longer grass. I say to right hon. and hon. Members across the House who, like us, want to protect the Human Rights Act that we will work with them to do so. The Act is enshrined in the devolved legislative framework of both Northern Ireland and Scotland, and although the Government have delayed the Bill, the Queen's Speech makes it clear that they are still committed

to it. However, we will not stand for any diminution of human rights—or indeed, in respect of other measures, of workers' rights.

The Prime Minister is no doubt delighted—and presumably surprised—that he achieved a majority and does not need to continue in coalition with the Liberal Democrats, but he will be less happy when considering that a 12-seat majority is small in historical terms. With 56 Members, the SNP will co-operate with progressive colleagues to secure positive changes or block bad proposals.

I hope that the early Government unravelling will continue on the EU referendum Bill, for which, incidentally, there is not support among all parties in the House.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con) *rose—*

Angus Robertson: I would like to make some progress, if the hon. Gentleman will allow.

The SNP supports our continuing membership of the EU. We recognise the importance of the single European market and the ability to influence EU legislation. We look forward to making the case for EU membership and for reform, not just of institutions in Brussels, but of the approach of member states, such as the UK, that regularly deny Ministers from devolved Governments a direct say at the top table. It cannot be right that the most experienced and longest-serving Fisheries Minister in the whole EU cannot speak at EU Fisheries Council meetings and that instead the UK sends an unelected Member of the House of Lords. We will seek to amend the Bill to ensure that the four nations of the UK cannot be taken out of the EU against the will of their electorates. During the Scottish referendum campaign last year, the Prime Minister and his allies in the Labour party made great play of the UK's being a family of nations based on mutual respect. The Prime Minister is nodding in agreement. If that is true, how could it be that in this family of nations, one country—the largest—can dictate to everybody else that we have to leave the European Union, and plough on regardless? That is not mutual respect.

Still on the subject of referendums, we in Scotland have had experience of fair participation based on residency. It was fair and right that 16 and 17-year-olds could vote, and I am delighted that the Labour party has changed its position on that to support the SNP. It is right for European Union citizens to vote on that basis, too. Incidentally, this was supported by the Conservative party, by the Labour party and by the Liberal Democrats in respect of the referendum in Scotland, so it beggars belief that the UK Government plan to disfranchise these voters, for whom this is a critical issue. We will seek to amend the legislation to try to put this right.

We support the further devolution of powers to the nations and, indeed, to English regions and cities.

Geraint Davies *rose—*

Angus Robertson: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I want to make further progress.

It is in the interests of everyone that better decisions reflecting local priorities should be taken closer to communities—including with respect to the “northern

powerhouse”, much vaunted by the Government side, although there might be differing perspectives on what constitutes “the north”.

Big decisions will be taken in this Parliament about transport and infrastructure, including high-speed rail and airport expansion for London. There is going to have to be much more serious consideration of the advantages for the whole of the UK, and not just part of it.

With specific regard to the Scotland Bill, we welcome the commitment to deliver the powers agreed across the parties in the Smith Commission. These measures are aimed at boosting economic growth, social fairness and financial responsibility. We will, however, look at the detail of the Bill. It already seems likely that the Government have not fully taken into account the proposals of the Scottish Government, which were endorsed by the electorate in the UK general elections. During his recent meeting with the First Minister, the Prime Minister committed to considering improvements—and we welcome that. If those improvements have not been included, however, we will seek to amend the Bill.

On the NHS, Members understand that decisions about it in England have an impact on the NHS budgets of the devolved nations. We have supported the recommendation to increase NHS spending, and I urge the Prime Minister to carry this out urgently so that people and the NHS can benefit sooner rather than later. The Government can, of course, do this in the July Budget, so that will be an early test for the Prime Minister.

SNP Members welcome the commitment in the Queen’s Speech to support peace and security and to “work to reduce the threat from nuclear weapons”—

the exact words in the Queen’s Speech. We fear, however, that what the Government actually have in mind is to spend a whopping £100 billion on a new generation of nuclear weapons. These weapons of mass destruction can never, ever be used. Meanwhile, the Government have cut back on conventional forces and have consigned the UK to being in the ridiculous position of having the only armed forces of a maritime state in northern Europe without a single maritime patrol aircraft.

The SNP will present a constructive, but tough opposition. The problem with the Queen’s Speech is that there is no recognition in it of the fact that Scotland completely rejected the Tory agenda. Instead, we are to be led by the Tories’ wrong priorities. At a time when people are suffering from the impact of austerity, the Tories are focused on the wrong issues. On the vow given to the people of Scotland, we will judge the Scotland Bill on its content. The legislation that is introduced must live up to the Smith Commission in full. Anything less would be a breach of faith.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. The 12-minute limit now applies.

4.3 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I rise to speak for prosperity, not austerity; I speak for England as well as for more powers for Scotland; and I speak for greater democracy as we seek to wrestle power back from the bureaucratic tentacles of Brussels.

Austerity is what was given to this country in 2008–09. Then we had desperate austerity. We had deep recession and the biggest loss of national income than at any time since the second world war. We had families losing jobs, families losing bonuses, families having to take pay cuts. We saw austerity rampant. Since 2010, first the coalition and now the Government, led ably by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, are about restoring prosperity for the many, growth to our economy, the extra jobs we need, the higher pay and the better living standards that come from creating that world of opportunity.

We speak not just for prosperity but, yes, for aspiration. We speak for aspiration just as surely as some Opposition Members spoke for envy at the time of the general election. The electors told them that they did not want envy; they wanted aspiration. They do not mind other people doing well, as long as they too have a chance to do well. They are not jealous of people who go to good schools, but they want to go to a good school themselves, or send their children to one. They are not jealous of people who work hard and earn a lot of money, and want to keep a large amount of that money to spend on themselves, but they want the opportunity to do the same. I urge my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his colleague the Chancellor of the Exchequer to press on in supporting those very aims. Spreading prosperity ever more widely is what lifts us from austerity and banishes austerity from our land.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Before the banking crisis hit in 2008, the right hon. Gentleman was calling for less regulation of the banking system. Does he still hold that position?

John Redwood: If the hon. Gentleman cares to read the economic policy review that I submitted to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he will see that it clearly warned of a banking crash. It said that Labour’s regulatory system—introduced by the hon. Gentleman’s party after the 1997 general election—was not requiring enough cash and capital to be held by the banks, and that that was causing enormous strains, which would go wrong. I saw it coming; he took it down. The Labour party changed the regulatory system, the regulators made a huge mistake, and the banking system powered the recession, which was also furthered by the mistaken budgetary policies pursued by Labour. I am very pleased to see that those who now wish to represent the Labour party as its leader have said sorry for the economic and regulatory mistakes that are made by the hon. Gentleman’s party.

Clive Efford *rose*—

John Redwood: If the hon. Gentleman wants to have another go, by all means let him do so.

Clive Efford: One of the myths that were put around was that the Labour Government maxed out on their credit card. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that before the banking crisis hit in 2008, debt as a proportion of the country’s GDP was lower than the level that we inherited in 1997?

John Redwood: What matters is the rate of change. The Labour Government were borrowing too much at a time when the economy was overheating and collecting a lot of tax revenue, and we have been trying to right that mistake ever since.

[John Redwood]

I think it would be helpful if, in this Parliament, we could have a more grown-up discussion about public spending and tax revenues than we were allowed in the last Parliament, because the meaning of austerity has shifted. It now has a narrower definition than the disaster that hit living standards and individual families in 2008. To the so-called progressive parties, austerity now means not increasing public spending as quickly as they think that it should be increased.

Let me remind the House what successive Red Books—Budget books—have told us about what happened between 2010 and 2015, and what they tell us will happen between 2015 and 2020, subject to the Chancellor's Budget. It is very easy to remember. Between 2010 and 2015, the coalition Government increased total public spending by £1,000 per person per year, if the final year of those five years is compared with the starting point. The recently elected Conservative Government plan to do exactly the same: they wish to increase total public spending per head by £1,000 per person a year by the end of the current Parliament. That is not a huge rate of growth, but it is not an overall decline or a cut.

Because we inherited such an enormous deficit and could not continue to borrow on such a scale, we were—as a result of VAT increases and the general increase in revenue from some economic growth—charging people £2,000 a head more per year at the end of the last Parliament than the Labour Government did in their last year. This Parliament requires exactly the same increase, without any rate rises but coming from faster growth in the economy. The Red Book's aim is that we should charge everyone £2,000 extra a year by the end of the Parliament than at the beginning. I think that that is a measured and sensible proposal to rescue us from enormous borrowing and a big debt hole, and I think it can work. I especially welcome the fact that, this time, it will require no tax rises.

Geraint Davies: The right hon. Gentleman may know that the number of people earning over £20,000 is now 800,000 lower than it was in 2010, and those higher-paying jobs have been chopped up into little part-time, low-wage, zero-hours jobs. That is why the tax revenues are not coming in and that is why debt as a share of GDP has gone from 55% to 80%. Admit it: you have failed.

John Redwood: That is a bit rich from the party that crashed the car and did all the damage to living standards in 2008. Would I like it to be going faster? You bet I would like it to be going faster, and so I am sure would the Prime Minister, but it has to go at a pace that can be achievable without taking risks and making it worse in the way that Labour did.

My party is not the party of low pay. We want people to be better paid. It is just that we have an economic policy that may deliver better pay; the Labour Government's policy clearly did not, because they drove people out of work. They abolished the bonuses and they drove wages down by their dreadful recession, and that recession was caused by a combination of their mistaken economic policy and, above all, their mistaken misregulation of the banks. They should have stuck with the regulation of the banks we had before '97. We never did anything like that with the banking system. We never had a run on a major bank under the Conservatives. We never had

a big recession created by a banking crash. Labour needs to understand the history and understand that in future we have to follow different policies to try to avoid that.

I also wish to speak for England. I am very pleased that the Gracious Speech says that there will be early progress in making sure that those MPs elected for England can make more of the decisions that relate only to England. I hear that the SNP are already saying that that should be in legislation. I think it is entirely right that in the first instance it should be done by amending the Standing Orders of this House of Commons. It can be done simply and quickly, and it is judge-proof and it is proof against challenges from outside this place. If we want a sovereign Parliament, sometimes this Parliament has to act in a sovereign way, and surely we can be sovereign over our own votes and procedures.

Pete Wishart: The right hon. Gentleman is, I think, a champion of Parliament and parliamentary procedures, so surely he agrees that we have to debate this issue? There has to be a Bill; there has to be legislation. It is not good enough just to change the Standing Orders of the House for something so constitutionally important.

John Redwood: Of course there will be a debate, and the SNP can use all the parliamentary procedures, which some of its Members know well, to make sure that the issue is properly scrutinised and debated, but we do not need a great piece of legislation. We just need an agreement on who votes on what. It is not that complicated, it is extremely popular outside this House, and it was clearly offered to the British people by the Conservative party. It was one of several policies in our manifesto which were about twice as popular as the Conservative party itself, and we were the most popular party when people did not really like any of the parties in the election very much. They backed us, but they backed some of our policies rather more.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): I rise to support my right hon. Friend's extremely relevant comments. The legislation has of course already been passed, in the form of the devolution Act in 1998. That is what devolved the functions. That is why it is necessary and fair to make sure that, through our Standing Orders, the English people know that they get exclusive rights over their own legislation.

John Redwood: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. To those who say we have not thought through this issue I would point out that we wrote many papers on it in opposition and that we thought it through over a 15-year period—it was in the 2001 Conservative manifesto—so the proposals should come as no surprise to anyone who is interested in the subject or who has been following the debates.

The third point I strongly support in the Gracious Speech is that at last we will get a referendum on our relationship with the European Union. Any honest Government picking up the task today should say to the British people that we need a new relationship because now the euro is driving so many of the changes in the EU. Those in the euro need much closer and stronger centralised government; they need to stand behind each other rather more. They are going to need common

benefit systems and common cash transfer systems, and they are going to need to send support from the richer to the poorer areas, just as we do within our Union of the United Kingdom—if one part falls on hard times, the other parts pay more tax and send it the money. There is a mutual insurance or solidarity system which should appeal to all those of a socialist mind; it even appeals to me, because I think when some are down on their luck within such a union, they should be supported by others in the union. The United Kingdom has very clearly, and quite rightly, never elected a party that wanted to join the euro. The public have no appetite to join it; they have no wish to start raising more taxes in Britain in order to send financial assistance to Greece, Portugal or Spain, although those countries desperately need it.

Of course we need to define a new relationship with the emerging, closely centralised political union of which our colleagues in the EU now speak all too often, and I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is taking on this difficult and tricky task. There will be a range of views within and among the parties on this issue, so a referendum would be a good way of making the final decision. I urge my right hon. Friend to bear in mind that what the British people, and many in this Parliament, want is to restore the British people's right to make up their mind and their MPs' right to ensure that the British people's views are reflected in what happens here. At the moment, it is all about borders, immigration and welfare systems, and at the general election the British people expressed a strong wish for change on those matters. We need Ministers who can deliver those changes, but some of them are neither legal nor possible under our current EU arrangements.

In the future, the British people might want to see changes in other areas. They might want cheaper energy, for example, but they would discover that their politicians were not entirely able to deliver it because energy is hedged by many European rules, laws and requirements. Britain therefore needs some way of dealing with a situation in which, because of European rules, elected Ministers are unable to act on a matter of consummate importance to the British people. We might be able to do certain things, because we can get a special deal through not being in the euro—that relates to how much centralised government the countries in the eurozone, which we must keep out of, are going to take to themselves. Adopting that more widely might help with their other problems, because at the moment we are seeing a series of collisions between the will of the people following the elections in countries such as Greece and perhaps Spain, and what the European establishment is dishing out by way of policy.

If Opposition Members dislike austerity, they should study what has happened in Greece. It has seen very large public expenditure cuts, of a kind that I would not have supported, at a time when its economy was imploding and its banking system was broken, and its GDP has fallen by 25% since 2008. Let us imagine how we would feel if that had been inflicted on us by policies from Brussels. Thank heavens that those of us who made the case against the euro persuaded others to keep us out, because there but for the grace of God would have gone Britain into a euro-scheme that can deliver untold damage and austerity. Who would want 50% youth unemployment? That is what they have in several parts of southern

Europe now, thanks to the devastating austerity machine that is the euro. I urge my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to take advantage of our non-membership of the euro to negotiate a democratic settlement for us, so that if we need something for our prosperity, this House will be able to deliver it.

4.18 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood). He has had a long and distinguished career, and he has a reputation as a deep thinker, but I really disagree with practically everything he says.

I should like to begin my remarks by thanking my constituents in Islington South and Finsbury for returning me to this place with such a convincing majority. I took my seat 10 years ago with a majority of 484. In this election, more people voted Labour in my constituency than had been the case for 50 years, and I now have a majority that is larger than the total number of people who voted for me in 2005. I am grateful to my constituents, although of course it could have been a better night. We were all very disappointed indeed that we did not come back as part of the Government, but I pledge now that I will not let my constituents down and that I will do everything I can to ensure that their lives are made better, not worse, over the next five years.

Many bread-and-butter issues are causing great concern, and it might well be the case that the Tories did not really expect to win the election—certainly not with a majority. They certainly expected to be able to knock a few rough edges off that manifesto by going into coalition discussions. How are they going to pay for the £7 billion-worth of tax cuts? Where are the £12 billion of unidentified welfare cuts going to come from? We hear various leaks: disability benefits, carers allowance and statutory maternity pay are all facing the chop, but that still does not amount to £12 billion, so where are the cuts going to come from?

The Conservatives say that a benefit cap of £23,000 will reward hard work, but we know from the past two years that such a cap does nothing of the kind. In my constituency, it pushes people out of Islington; children from established families in Islington have to leave their primary school and move out—not because £23,000 is not enough for the family to live on, but because it is not enough for their landlords to live on. The rents are so high and these people are expected to pay ridiculous amounts. Neither the Conservative manifesto, nor the Queen's Speech contains any answer to the housing crisis in inner London, across the south of England and, indeed, across the country. It is no answer to the housing crisis to say, "We will allow people who have secure tenancies in good affordable housing to buy those properties at a huge discount and local authorities can then pay the housing associations compensation by selling more affordable housing." The only answer to our housing crisis is to build more homes.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on her re-election as my parliamentary neighbour. She has made points about building more council housing and stopping the sale of housing association and council housing. Does she agree that it is also important to devolve powers to London, so that we can

[Jeremy Corbyn]

have full regulation of the private rented sector? We would, thus, be able to make the exorbitant, extravagant and appalling rents charged in the private rented sector a thing of the past and end the social cleansing of central London, which is happening because of the strategy she describes.

Emily Thornberry: My hon. Friend speaks from his constituents' experiences, which are similar to those of my constituents, and of many people who have lived in central London for generations and want to continue to do so but find that the current private market is completely unaffordable. Other capital cities across the world have some form of regulation of rents, but ours does not. Merely allowing capitalism, red in tooth and claw, without any form of regulation will not be enough to solve the central London housing crisis. I agree with him on that point.

I suspect there will be extensive debate on those issues throughout this Parliament—I will return to them again and again—but today I most wish to ask how we answer a question asked of me last week. At a dinner, I was sitting next to an artillery officer who has the same first name and age as my eldest son. When he said he had not met an MP before, I asked him what his one question to an MP would be. This lad, who is prepared to put his life on the line for us, said, "What are we fighting for?" I said that I did not know. A few years ago I would have said, "You are fighting for Britain, which has reached a time in its maturity when it is coming to terms with its colonial past. It has a place on the Security Council, is close to America and is part of the European Union. We have close relationships with the Commonwealth and friends across the world. We feel that our role is to promote human rights and international law. We have definitely made mistakes but we are a force for good internationally and we have a strong national identity." I would have said that then, but I do not think we can say it now, and I really do not know where we are going.

The growth of petty nationalism is profoundly worrying to us all, and I do not want to see the break-up of Britain. I am Anglo-Irish, British and a Londoner, and I am part of Europe. I am a European and an internationalist. That very identity is being challenged at the moment and we are slipping down a slope, but nobody seemingly has the true will to stop this.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Emily Thornberry: I will in a moment, because I wish to challenge something else first. I am deeply concerned that the Conservative party has won the election by playing on this petty nationalism, putting the Scots against the English, fighting off the Welsh and so on. The Conservatives have played on this petty nationalism by saying things such as, "We don't want to be answerable to Europe." That is very worrying, and they are playing with fire.

Mr MacNeil: I, too, am half-Irish. I hope that the hon. Lady agrees that we do not wish to see the ending of the Republic of Ireland's independence and that she

respects the independence of the Republic of Ireland from this House obtained about a century ago.

Emily Thornberry: Of course I do, but I still feel British and as part of being British I want our country to remain united with Scotland. I want us to be British and I do not want to see the fracturing of our nation. The irresponsible way in which the Government have played those cards in the past few weeks and months has put at risk our very Union. I do not want to be pompous about this, but I am profoundly worried.

It has not been enough for the Government simply to do that. They have also been playing to their Back Benches, playing the Eurosceptic card and playing for good headlines in the *Daily Mail*, but they are also playing with the future of our country. The Conservative party seems to me to have moved far away from the Conservative party of Churchill that tried after the second world war to have a future for us in Europe, bound together by common ideals and principles. Those ideals, expressed in the treaty, have been looked after by the European Court of Human Rights over the past few decades. British Conservative lawyers wrote the European convention on human rights, which we have imported into this country.

Over the past few decades the Foreign Office has promoted human rights around the world; I am proud of that and want it to continue. The idea that we will pass a British Bill of privileges—under which certain people will be given rights and others will not, under which certain people will be more important than others, under which we will not have rights simply because we are human and under which we will not all be equal—and that we will not have legislation that fights for the weak against the strong is disgraceful. It is disgraceful that we are travelling down this road. How can we hold our head up high internationally if we are going to pull the rug from under a system of international treaties through which we have promoted human rights? Our legislation, written by us, is essentially part of a form of legal imperialism sent around the world to set a series of minimum standards of which I am very proud.

John Redwood: The hon. Lady might like to note that Churchill, in his Zurich and Fulton, Missouri speeches, made it very clear that the European Union would not have the UK as a member but that we would join a union of the English-speaking peoples. That was also the conclusion of his "History of the English-Speaking Peoples". He did not write a history of the European peoples.

Emily Thornberry: I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that 67 years ago, Churchill said:

"The Movement for Europe... must be a positive force, deriving its strength from our sense of common spiritual values. It is a dynamic expression of democratic faith based upon moral conceptions and inspired by a sense of mission. In the centre of our movement stands the idea of a Charter of Human Rights, guarded by freedom and sustained by law."

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): The hon. Lady is talking about my party in terms that I certainly do not recognise and she has accused us of being a divisive party as far as the Union is concerned. I thought that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it perfectly

clear that we are a Conservative and Unionist party and that we intend to retain the Union and to do what we can to do so.

Emily Thornberry: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says and if he is satisfied with some of the rhetoric from those on the Front Benches, let him be satisfied. It is important to look beyond the rhetoric and see with our very own eyes the real damage being done by what is happening to this country. This is a matter of huge concern and I asked the hon. Gentleman not to be complacent about where we might go if we start to pull apart our Human Rights Act and our place in Europe.

Let me explain to the hon. Gentleman. In Strasbourg, European judges make judgments all the time that essentially quote at length what happens in our Supreme Court. Our Supreme Court applies our Human Rights Act and does so across the board. If the hon. Gentleman were unfortunate enough to be arrested in Europe, he would have the right to a lawyer, which he would not have had if it had not been for the British system, which understands that people have a right to access a lawyer in order for there to be a fair trial. That was an interpretation of human rights that we exported to Strasbourg, and has now been exported right across Europe. It is a two-way street. Of the tens of thousands of cases that went before the Court at Strasbourg, does the hon. Gentleman know how many judgments there were against Britain last year? There were three.

David Tredinnick: The hon. Lady tempts me and I crave your indulgence, Mr Speaker. The point is that we are trying to deal with an Act that has proved to be inadequate in dealing with the terrorists that we are trying to get rid of, and we want to bring those decisions back to this country. That is a very laudable objective. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has not set it out in any detail because he wants to give it further thought, but it is widely supported in this country.

Emily Thornberry: Will the hon. Gentleman give me a moment in which to answer, because I only have two minutes left? The fact is that within our constitution—our unwritten constitution, which we play with at our jeopardy, if we do not think through what we are doing—we have different pillars. We have the Executive, the legislature and the judiciary, and of course there will always be tension between them. If we all agreed all the time, what would be the point? In what way would we be a democracy? There will be times when we disagree and, in the end, human rights is about protecting minorities. It is about protecting the weak against the strong. Yes, there will be times when people whom we wish to have no truck with at all will rely on basic rights and we must give them to them. That is the British way, and it is one that we are proud of and should remain proud of, and we should never allow it to be undermined.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), the Prime Minister hinted, and then the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) blurted out, that there might be afoot an attempt to change the Standing Orders of this House to restrict the voting rights of some Members of this House. Surely such a change would fundamentally breach the principle

that all Members of this House are equal before the Chair, and would such a change, if conceived itself as an Order, have to be considered by you or the Procedure Committee, or undergo some thorough investigation? Otherwise, as you will understand with your experience, Mr Speaker, any majority Government could change Standing Orders to restrict the voting rights of any Member without so much as a by-your-leave.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving me a few minutes' advance notice of his intention to raise this point of order. He has raised an extremely important point, on which I shall take appropriate advice, and which, as he would expect, I will give the most serious thought. I hope he will understand that it would not be appropriate for me to say anything beyond that this afternoon. Perfectly legitimately, he has raised it, and that is my response today.

John Redwood: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. If the right hon. Gentleman cares to read the Gracious Speech, it does very clearly say that the Standing Orders will be amended.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for putting that on the record.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. If we go back to the Bradlaugh case, it is well established that this House is entitled to limit the voting rights of individual Members. The House refused to let Bradlaugh take the Oath, and it was upheld by the courts that that could not be interfered with outside this Chamber, and that is in our Bill of Rights.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, on whom we can always depend for his historical exegesis, but I think that does rather underline why it would be imprudent of me to say anything beyond what I have said today. I note what has been said by other Members, and I think it sensible and wise to leave it there for today.

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Well, if Mr Allen feels that no series of exchanges cannot be improved—

Mr Allen: I am very content.

Mr Speaker: I think he has relented. We will leave it there for now. Perhaps the House can now hear Mrs Cheryl Gillan.

4.33 pm

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry). Although I may not agree with some of the sentiments expressed in her speech, I am sure she would agree with me that it is delightful to return to Parliament with so many women elected to this place, irrespective of their parties or which part of the United Kingdom they come from.

It is very sobering to remember that every Member who is elected to this House has equal voting rights over one matter, and that is the power of life and death over our citizens in this country in the shape of our armed forces. So I should like to echo the tributes that have

[Mrs Cheryl Gillan]

been paid, from the Front Benches and by others, to our armed forces and the way in which they keep this country safe, and carry out their duties without fear or favour.

May I also congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your re-election? In Buckinghamshire, we had a clean slate of Conservative MPs—I count you as one of them, although I do not question your impartiality in the Chair. It is good to see you returned to your rightful place. It may be that, from time to time, your unique skills will be called on to create order out of chaos and disrespect in this place, as we have already seen so early in the Session.

I also offer my congratulations to the proposer and seconder of the Gracious Speech. The good looks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns), as identified by the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), have always escaped me, but no doubt he will now expect a starring role in “The Only Way is Essex”, rather than just talking about it in the House. I was particularly touched by the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) seconded the Gracious Speech. She truly is a great champion, and her husband Neil would have been very proud of her today as she took centre stage in the House.

It is a great pleasure to welcome the Gracious Speech. It is doubly welcome to me because, as part of the class of 1992, I was never quite sure—especially after 1997—that I would live to see another Conservative majority Government. It is all credit to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and our formidable Conservative team up and down the country that we now have the opportunity to continue to steer the country and the economy in the right direction. However, the joys of implementing the manifesto with a majority Government will not be lost on Conservative Members, as we have a tight majority, to say the least. Already, the manifesto has caused controversy, and we have seen opponents trying to make mileage out of the absence of a British Bill of rights and responsibilities. But I am pleased that we are taking a deep breath before jumping in with such legislation. Having sat for the last two years on the Council of Europe, I want to ensure that we remain within the ambit of the European Court of Human Rights, but finesse those elements that have extended the power of the Court and hampered British justice in some cases. A period of consultation and reflection is right, and is the responsible route. I hope that it will lead to better legislation, drafted with precision.

Mr Graham Allen: I thank the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) for giving way as it gives me the opportunity to make the point that Mr Speaker wisely advised me not to make on a point of order earlier. Is not there now a perfect opportunity to look at this matter in some detail within the Select Committee structure, rather than rushing to judgment on whether we should abolish, amend or reform the Human Rights Act? Would not that prove that Parliament has a serious role to play on that issue and many others on the democratic agenda before us?

Mrs Gillan: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman, who has done an awful lot of work in this area. I notice that his Committee was time-limited and has now been

rolled in to the Public Administration Committee, which now again covers the constitution. I had the pleasure of serving on the latter Committee in the last Parliament. If I have the pleasure of serving on it again, I can assure him that we will scrutinise this area very carefully, and I believe that that would show the House at its best. We do not want to throw out the baby with the bathwater in this instance.

After the election, I sensed great relief at the result among many of the people I talked to, and—as we would expect from a Conservative Government—the Queen’s speech proposes many important measures to ensure greater accountability and people’s security and safety. We are also offering people the opportunity to improve their lives. Job creation, job security and tax certainty lie at the heart of much of our legislative programme, but the Queen’s Speech also pays attention to the whole picture, relaxing and relieving the burdens on the lowest paid and the smallest businesses, widening home ownership and securing retirement prospects. There is no area that the Queen’s Speech does not touch.

The Gracious Speech also recognises our place on the world stage, and specifically our responsibilities to Ukraine and Iraq. The challenges that we face from extremism and increasing population movement will continue to occupy Government and the House for the whole of the next five years, not just this Session. I appreciate that some of our new neighbours will always be looking for opportunities to find the differences between us, but I hope that they will also look for opportunities to find common purpose, as we face a common enemy and protect the interests of the whole of this country.

I was a fresh starter, in both senses of the word, back in the 1990s, when the Maastricht treaty was debated in this House and the EU had only 12 members. The European Union referendum Bill will give new Members the opportunity early in their careers to reflect on our relationship with the now 27 other countries of the EU. In truth, every country would like to see some reforms, and like many of my constituents I look forward to seeing what the Prime Minister can achieve before putting the question to a public UK-wide vote. I hope the Government will resist the attempts to dilute the opinion of the UK electorate by introducing a four-country hurdle, as suggested by the SNP. It is the UK as a whole that is the member state, not the individual nations. I hope also that the Prime Minister will resist the temptation substantially to change the franchise in any way for the referendum.

I think every Government starts with an education Bill, and the present Government are no different. We have excellent schools in Chesham and Amersham, as we do in the rest of Buckinghamshire, and I share the Government’s determination to drive up standards and declare war on mediocrity and failure; but our schools in Buckinghamshire are not funded as well as those in other parts of the country and we do not receive the same level of grant from the Government. The national average per pupil is now £4,611 and we receive only £4,297, so I hope the Government will revisit what amounts to unfair funding. In our case, the unfairness is exacerbated by the fact that of the three elements that make up the funding in Buckinghamshire—the schools block, the early years block and the high needs block—we received no increase in early years or high needs funding, although there are increasing demands.

During the election, it became even more obvious to me that we are not engaging our young people in politics, no matter where they live. I want a new civic studies course or element to be introduced in the national curriculum, so that students can learn about the structures and relevance of our administrative systems and governance. As some parties are keen to change the franchise to include 16-year-olds, I would have expected universal support across the House for some real education in this area. It would also help me to explain to some of my constituents why they cannot vote for Nicola Sturgeon or Leanne Wood.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a very cogent speech. May I say how much I agree with her that we need more constitutional studies in our schools? Many of the youngsters I came across during the election said they were not going to vote, and when I asked why, they replied, "Because we don't know enough about this political system—how it works in this country." We need our youngsters to be better informed.

Mrs Gillan: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. I know how much you have done, Mr Speaker, to improve the education of young people across the country, and I hope that this would be a natural sequitur to the work we do here in Parliament.

In Buckinghamshire, we have seen close-up the ongoing fallout from the terrible activities of one Jimmy Savile in child sexual grooming in cases such as the successful prosecution of the former head of Caldicott school. I hope the Government will now look again at securing mandatory reporting in regulated activities, so that we can increase the safeguarding surrounding our young people and schoolchildren.

I have had my brush with devolution, and devolution features quite strongly in this Queen's Speech. I, like many others with shire constituencies, will study the city devolution Bill very carefully. It is all very well to hand more power to the city regions and I am supportive of the principle of putting decisions closer to people, provided that the consequences for other parts of the country are carefully considered. For example, I have a democratic deficit in Chesham and Amersham as a consequence of the governance of London, because Transport for London and London Underground own my stations, and to try to get step-free access at Amersham station involves an almighty battle, because the money is usually wanted elsewhere in London and not in my area, which does not have a vote in the London Assembly. In addition, we need to ensure that in implementing the new policy, the shire counties and other areas of the country not directly within or in the area of a city region do not have their funding squeezed or get forced into alliances that take decisions further away from their electorate.

Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that her constituents get a superb service from Transport for London, without which they would be much the poorer? It is thanks to the continued investment by this Government in London transport that we have been able to deliver record improvements in the underground generally.

Mrs Gillan: My hon. Friend has an impeccable record of providing services, but if he could provide me with my step-free access, I would be even happier.

I was pleased to see that the valuable work of the Silk commission is being taken forward in this Session, but I hope that the long overdue boundary changes and reduction in the number of MPs will also be taken forward. The Labour Government reduced the number of Scottish MPs when the Parliament received primary law-making powers, and that should have happened also for Wales when the National Assembly received its law-making changes. We are keen to rebalance the economy between north and south and east and west, but we also need to rebalance the representation in this House. An English MP's work remit is arguably considerably different from that of the MPs for Scotland and Wales, who have Assembly Members and Members of the Scottish Parliament to carry out a proportion of the work that we do as English MPs. I very much hope that the changes to Standing Orders will deal with the perennial problem of the West Lothian question, which has still not been answered.

I could not speak in the debate without mentioning my pet project, of which I am a great fan—HS2—as high-speed rail is mentioned in the Queen's Speech. In the previous Parliament the final compensation scheme was announced, but after five years the current scheme is still falling short of the fair and generous settlement that the Prime Minister promised. Constituents are having their lives and finances dissected and investigated in the sort of detail that could be said to be normally associated with bankruptcy or criminal proceedings. Even decisions on whether the Government should purchase their properties sometimes seem to be subject to lifestyle judgments being made by officials. In addition, the residents commissioner who was appointed last January has yet to agree to a meeting with me and has not published her quarterly report that was promised.

However, hope springs eternal. I was delighted that in our manifesto the Government will be maintaining the national protections for areas of outstanding natural beauty, national parks and sites of special scientific interest. As only 45% of the Chilterns AONB is currently fully tunnelled, leaving 11.4 km of the widest area of the AONB destroyed by shallow cuttings and so-called green tunnels, I feel sure that the fully bored tunnel which will protect the entire AONB must now be firmly on the Government's agenda. In my view, this is the only way of mitigating damage to our rare habitat and fulfilling this vital commitment in the Conservative manifesto.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mrs Gillan: Forgive me—I have only a short time.

If there is to be more legislation on high-speed rail, I hope this Government will learn from their mistakes, many of which have been made in our constituencies in Buckinghamshire.

I, like many real Conservatives, am delighted with this Gracious Speech, so I am proud to give it a warm welcome. It is just the entrée for what is coming. We will have the Budget, and I know that many of our votes in this House will be close and hard fought, so our attention will always be demanded in this House. Lord Prescott may not have understood the meaning of aspiration, but perhaps I can help him. I feel that this is a Queen's Speech of high hopes—high hopes for individuals, families, businesses and this United Kingdom. It gives me great pleasure to give it a warm welcome.

4.48 pm

Mr Nick Clegg (Sheffield, Hallam) (LD): I add my warmest congratulations to the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns) and the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) on their excellent speeches as proposer and seconder of the Queen's Speech. Their speeches were by turn witty, warm hearted and, certainly in the case of the right hon. Gentleman, quite surprising in places.

I add my tribute and that of my party to the tributes paid by all those who have spoken about the courage and professionalism of the men and women who serve in our armed services. We as a country owe them an eternal debt of gratitude.

Given that I used to encounter a disobliging wall of noise when I spoke from the Government Benches, and as this is the last occasion on which I will speak as leader of the Liberal Democrats from the Opposition Benches, it is an accustomed surprise to be able to hear myself think in the Chamber for once.

The Liberal Democrats worked hard to ensure that the coalition Government's agenda had a clear thread of liberalism running through it, from the priority we gave to mental health to the green agenda, the introduction of the pupil premium and the protection of our civil liberties. It is therefore dispiriting for us, if pretty unsurprising, to see how quickly the new Conservative Government, instead of building on those achievements, are turning their back on that liberal stance. The human rights we hold dear, our right to privacy in an online age and our future as an open-minded, outward-looking country are all hanging in the balance once again because of the measures announced today.

It is also clear that the coalition Government's commitment to fairness is weakened. There was little in today's Speech to help the poorest and most vulnerable; not enough to support social care properly, and no plan to build the garden cities or the 300,000 new homes a year that our young people need for their future. We will see in a few short weeks, when the Chancellor unveils his emergency Budget, whether he intends to follow through with the £12 billion of hitherto unspecified welfare cuts that he has promised, which will hit the poorest and weakest in our society. I argue that it is that Budget, rather than this Queen's Speech, that will be the moment when we can judge whether the Conservative belief in "one nation" is for real.

My party's parliamentary presence may be much reduced in size, but our mission is clearer than ever. As we did in the coalition Government, we will fight any attempt to weaken the fundamental rights of our citizens, whether those enshrined in the European convention on human rights and the Human Rights Act, or those threatened by what sounds, from what I have heard today, to be a turbo-charged snoopers' charter.

Rehman Chishti: The right hon. Gentleman talks about fundamental rights, but does he not agree with the proposals put forward in the Queen's Speech for tackling radicalisation and extremism, for example with hate speech—this was a problem for the previous Government—when individuals do not cross the line, as happened with Anjem Choudary? Their vile views have to be addressed, and the Bill will go a long way in doing that.

Mr Clegg: Where free speech is exploited to incite hatred and violence, of course the law must be applied and people must be prosecuted, and prosecuted hard. The problem with starting on this slippery slope always arises when we start defining what kind of speech we do and do not like, or what we do and do not find offensive. The very definition—the heart—of a free, liberal society is that we should be free to offend each other, and that is what is at stake in this new debate.

Mr David Davis: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Clegg: I will make some progress, because I have only 12 minutes.

We will stand up for the poorest and most vulnerable, and we will always defend a Britain that is at its best when it is open-hearted, open-minded and outward-looking. Of course, it would be churlish of me not to welcome those measures that build on the work that the coalition Government did. The expansion of childcare was of course a good thing, although the Government will have to do a lot more to help parents facing crippling childcare costs after their parental leave ends but before the Government's help for three-year-olds starts. Of course I welcome the Government's continued commitment to raising the personal allowance, which was started by the Liberal Democrats in the previous Government, although I am not sure what kind of a comment it is on this Government's confidence in themselves that they seem now to want to pass a law on tax policy when they could introduce it of their own accord.

Let me turn to the issue that will devour the Government's energy and time in the coming months: Europe. With so much at stake, the United Kingdom needs a Prime Minister who is absolutely clear about what he wants and why he wants it. Instead, this must be the first time in living memory that a country's citizens are being asked to support the outcome of a renegotiation on a matter of such fundamental importance to its place in the world without the Government of the day setting out exactly what they want to achieve. Because we do not know what the Government consider to be a successful renegotiation, we do not even know for sure which side the Prime Minister will be on when the referendum is finally held. That is a precarious position—to put it mildly—from which to persuade millions of people who are indifferent or sceptical about the European Union. Just imagine the circumstances in which the referendum is likely to be held: years of denigration of everything the EU does, followed by months of mind-numbing, interminable wrangling over the renegotiation, with a divided Cabinet and a Prime Minister who still appears ambivalent about our role in Europe.

In recent days, I have sensed a slight swagger in the Government's confidence that they will secure a good deal in the European Union and then go on to win the referendum. But having witnessed two referendums spin off in entirely unpredicted directions in recent years, I would strongly counsel against any complacency. My advice to the Government, if they wish to hear it, is simply this: they should pursue their renegotiation with the European Union but spell out exactly what they hope to achieve so that people understand the choice in front of them. They should be careful not to string out the renegotiation for so long that there is not enough time to make the wider case to the British public. Above

all, they should remember that the referendum will be won through conviction, not ambivalence. Ambivalence will not succeed in this negotiation and it will absolutely not win a referendum.

One thing that we already know is that whatever deal the Prime Minister agrees and brings back from Europe, it will not satisfy significant parts of his own party. That is why he must not overstate what he can deliver. When that moment of truth comes and the Prime Minister presents his deal to this House and the country, I hope that he will advocate it with real conviction and make a clear and unambiguous argument in favour of our membership of the European Union, warts and all. In the end, there is no surrogate for a full-throated and sustained advocacy of Britain's continued membership of a European club that, although undoubtedly imperfect, allows us to tackle crime, address climate change and provide jobs and economic security in a globalised world in a way we never can or will be able to on our own.

The European question is not the only pressing constitutional issue that the Government face. It is clear that the Government have been elected, above all else, because English voters did not believe that a combination of Labour and the SNP would be good for our country or our economy. It was a divisive campaign—a victory of fear over hope. The greatest risk now is that the rise of nationalism and the politics of grievance may cause the fractures in our United Kingdom to grow until we splinter entirely. The warning lights of a full-blown constitutional crisis are flashing. Yet it is telling that this Queen's Speech contains a plan to weaken our human rights, but not to strengthen our constitution.

The Conservatives are understandably cock-a-hoop at their victory, yet they achieved a parliamentary majority with just 37% of the vote. The SNP has very nearly turned Scotland into a one-party state on 50% of the vote—a position of disproportionate power that it will no doubt use to further the case for the break-up of our Union. Four million people cast a vote for UKIP and more than a million voted for the Greens, yet those parties return to Parliament with just one MP each. My party has just eight MPs, when under a proportional system we would have 51.

I learned the hard way about the difficulties of reforming our creaking political system, but surely no one needs any more evidence that our British constitution is well past its sell-by date. The general election may have delivered the Conservatives a majority in Parliament, but it has left them in charge at a time of great political fragility. The Prime Minister is rightly proud that five years ago, after an uncertain election result in 2010, he was able to swallow his pride, act boldly and put the national interest first. He has an opportunity to do that again now. If the Government want to keep our country united and to act truly in the interests of one nation, now is the time for him to act in a big and bold way to reform our constitution and institutions and to address the rising tide of nationalism. Yet all we have heard today is a self-absorbed plan to replace one Bill of Rights with another weaker one, some fiddling with parliamentary Standing Orders and a welcome but insufficient commitment to devolution to the north. This sort of piecemeal tinkering does not go nearly far enough.

In my view, the time has come for a major, cross-party constitutional convention to find a new federal settlement in which power is devolved to our nations, our regions, our cities and our people. This Parliament could be the one that creates a new settlement for our country. This Parliament could be the one that saves our Union and renews our democracy. That should be the legacy enshrined in this Queen's Speech.

4.59 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg). I much enjoyed serving with him in Cabinet and on the National Security Council. I feel that history is likely to treat his time as our Deputy Prime Minister rather more kindly than the electorate did on what he must regard, but we do not, as a very dark night for his party and for him—but that is the awesome power of democracy.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns) and my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) on brilliantly proposing and seconding the Loyal Address. Some 23 years ago, I had the privilege of seconding the Address, and I know what a terrifying ordeal it is. They both did it with great grace, good sense and humour.

I am obviously delighted to have been returned by the citizens of the royal town of Sutton Coldfield with an increased vote—and, indeed, an increased percentage of the vote. They are, after all, the jury that I trust and respect, and I am delighted with their verdict. Throughout the election on the doorstep—thank goodness the doorstep was right and the polls were wrong—I heard about many important issues, some of which are in the Queen's Speech and some of which are not, that I intend to champion during the course of this Parliament. I will mention just two. The first is mental health, which was referred to briefly by Her Majesty. The second is individual and collective liberty, which this House has sometimes neglected in the past and to which, during this Parliament, we will undoubtedly return.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD) *rose*—

Mr Mitchell: Those liberties must be defended—often, I suspect, with a cross-party approach, and I therefore give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Tom Brake: I am pleased that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned civil liberties. Does he agree that the snoopers' charter is a disproportionate response that puts at risk our civil liberties; a crippling expensive response, at £1.8 billion; and a rushed response, because David Anderson handed in his review of RIPA—the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000—only on 6 May, and therefore the Prime Minister cannot possibly have taken it into account?

Mr Mitchell: We shall return to these issues during the course of this Parliament.

I want to say at the outset that this is an excellent Queen's Speech. It is a one-nation Queen's Speech, and as secretary of the One Nation Group, on and off, since 1992, I am obviously delighted to see its content.

Thanks to the referendum pledge that the Prime Minister has championed, the Government are in a very good place on an extremely difficult and contentious

[Mr Mitchell]

issue. I got all this grey hair in whipping the party during the Maastricht debates between 1992 and 1994, much of that time spent with my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin), who is not in his place. There is a clear road map: renegotiation followed by a referendum when everyone will be able to decide. It will not be politicians in what used to be called smoke-filled rooms making those decisions; it will be up to everyone to decide. The United Kingdom can clearly survive inside or outside the European Union—not because of the whims of politicians but because we are a great trading nation—but I am absolutely certain that the always edgy relationship that we have had with the EU since we joined in the early 1970s can now be rectified by this renegotiation, and I very much hope that it will be. My advice to those on the Government Front Bench is not to fetter Ministers with regard to the referendum but to let this momentous decision be guided by individual conviction and allow all Ministers, including Cabinet Ministers, to vote as they see fit.

I want to express strong support for the Government's proposals to tackle the deficit. The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) said that the deficit and the debt in Britain were unsustainable, and in the long term he is absolutely right. Our generation of politicians has been too willing to throw money at problems and has forgotten that it is not Government money—the Government do not have any money—but the money of our constituents and those hard-working people who pay all their taxes. It is the money of the people, whose servants we are as politicians, that we are spending.

If we do not repay this enormous debt and attack all the deficit very thoroughly now, it will be the next generation—our children and grandchildren—who will have to pay it off. It will be an intergenerational transfer of debt and deficit, and a blight on young people, who face many challenges which my generation certainly did not face. For example, those leaving university now pay fees—correctly in my view, although my generation received a grant. They have no idea when they will be able to retire or whether they will receive a pension, whereas my generation expected to retire at the age of 65, quite often on a pension linked to earnings. There are many difficulties to be faced in tackling the deficit, but the Government are right to do that now and to do so urgently to stop it becoming an endemic intergenerational transfer of debt.

But the hard truth is that it is incredibly difficult, as I learned as a Social Security Minister in 1995, to tackle and to cut welfare spending. People argue that cutting £1 billion off the huge welfare budget—less than 1%—is easy, but it is not: £1 billion is £100 from 10 million people, or more than 15,000 people per constituency. The lesson is: do not remove cash, but cut future increased expenditure. That is the sensible, one nation way to do it, and it will make it much easier for the Government to take these extremely difficult and complex decisions.

I want to say that the Government are absolutely right to proceed with caution on human rights legislation, as outlined today. I must say that I never thought a British Government, let alone a Conservative one, would ever consider withdrawing from the European convention on human rights, for which our party was responsible.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): May I tell my right hon. Friend that I am rather surprised to hear a former Government deputy Chief Whip speaking up for human rights? Is he telling the House that he has suffered a damascene conversion?

Mr Mitchell: My right hon. Friend forgets that it was he who was a Government deputy Chief Whip and that I, albeit briefly, was the Government Chief Whip!

Human rights are not British; nor are they just for nice middle-class people. They are universal. In the past, Britain has been a beacon of light on human rights in some very dark places indeed. However, the Government have rightly decided to delay and to think this legislation through. I cannot think of anyone better than my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor to negotiate the Government's passage on it, and I look forward to his doing so during the coming months.

Mr Graham Allen: I suggest that as well as the good offices of the Lord Chancellor, there should be proper parliamentary scrutiny. Given that we have five years of a Parliament and that reform may well take place, does it not make sense to do this carefully, listening to all parties and all views, rather than to take the advice of the Lord Chancellor solely? We should consult Parliament.

Mr Mitchell: It is not the Lord Chancellor's advice that I am looking for, but his skills in engaging everyone, including Parliament, in the extremely important debate that we must have before the Government come forward with legislation.

I was talking about tackling dark places. I should say that four newly re-elected Members of this House spent last week in Washington seeking the release of the United Kingdom's last detainee in Guantanamo. It has to be said that a more unlikely group of political bedfellows would be extremely hard to find—me, the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) and the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter). Although it was clear from the beginning of the visit that we agreed on nothing else at all, the one thing we absolutely agreed on was that Shaker Aamer should be released for transfer to the United Kingdom. I am confident that we made some progress on our visit, but it is the most extraordinary injustice. On his visit to the United States earlier this year, the Prime Minister asked that Shaker Aamer be released for transfer to the United Kingdom, and the President promised to prioritise the matter, but since then virtually nothing has happened.

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments and for his company on that important visit. Will he use this opportunity to put as much pressure as possible on the Government to speak up for what was the decision of the last House of Commons and what I am confident will be the decision of this House of Commons? We want Shaker Aamer released. He has twice been cleared for release and held illegally—in my view—for 13 years. He deserves his freedom and his family deserve to see him back.

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and he is right, too, that this is a thorn in the side of the US-UK relationship. There is a huge online petition, and this has all the appearances of a slap in the face for

the United States' closest ally. I cannot think of any time since the second world war when a UK Prime Minister could have been treated so badly in his request to a President and the reaction to it. The House resolved unanimously on 17 March that Shaker Aamer should be transferred back to the United Kingdom. The message from Britain to the United States is to send Shaker Aamer back to Britain now.

Finally, in the five years since the last opening Queen's Speech of a new Parliament, the world has become a much less safe and more challenged place, with serious difficulties facing us and our neighbours. One thinks of the threats spelt out by the Prime Minister on Ukraine, the Baltic states and the actions of President Putin, ISIL and the enormous humanitarian disaster that has engulfed Syria and Iraq, where a generation of children will be unlikely to get an education and, in many cases, do not even have a roof over their heads. At this time, however, Europe is facing largely inwards, dealing, quite rightly, with the problems of migrants coming across the sea from north Africa—some of the bravest people in the world—Ukraine, Greece and the euro.

There is precious little leadership from America either. We face this appalling catastrophe in the middle east and this grave threat from ISIL, which might soon have a port on the Mediterranean, but what strategy are the United Nations, America and Europe putting together to tackle this serious threat? There seems to be very little international leadership. Anyone who believes that the solution is to drop weapons worth £30,000 on cars worth less than £500 is living in cloud cuckoo land. It will require long-term, smart policies, political leadership and a political solution, but, in my view, we are nowhere near achieving that.

Tackling the alienation and deep poverty in our world—how right the Government are to stand by their commitment on international development and the 0.7% promise to the poorest people in the world—and making sure that better governance takes hold are the long-term policies that will start to make a difference, but for the moment the House must accept that there is precious little international leadership on tackling this grave problem facing all our constituents and many neighbouring counties.

5.13 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate and to follow the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell). None of us knows what the next five years has in store for us as Members of Parliament. He had a difficult time—on occasions unfairly—in the last Parliament, and I wish him the very best for this one.

I, too, recall being the seconder of the Humble Address, although I cannot believe it was 14 years ago, when I looked like a young Denzel Washington—of course, today I look far more like Forest Whitaker. Fourteen years have passed, I am a little older, my hair is growing white and, interestingly, I am now described as a senior Member of the House of Commons.

I am very grateful to the people of Tottenham for returning me. I was unusual in this general election in saying to my electorate that I wanted to be the MP for Tottenham, but only for a year, because I hope to follow the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) as the Mayor of London. He went into the

election seeking to be the MP for Uxbridge and South Ruislip, while also wanting to continue as Mayor. I wish him the very best over the coming years as he endeavours, I suspect, to secure another job. I was returned with the biggest majority of any MP that has stood for Tottenham, and I am very grateful for that.

Let me speak to all Members about an issue I know my hon. Friends will recognise. On the Sunday after the election, I took my eight-year-old to his Sunday football league, and I was approached by parents living in Edmonton in north London. Many such parents are on the minimum wage. They might be cleaners, dinner ladies, minicab drivers, hospital porters and so forth. They remind me of my family and me in 1992 when we fully expected Neil Kinnock to become Prime Minister. Those people were pleased that I had won my constituency, but they were bewildered at the scale of the defeat for the Labour party, and they were genuinely worried about what was in store for them. When the issue of the £12 billion-worth of cuts to come is raised, I hope that the Government will remain true to their pledge to be one nation, but I expect that it will be down to all of us in the official Opposition to make sure that we hold them to that over the coming months.

Let me deal first with the issue of devolution. As a member of an ethnic minority, I have always feared the prospect of nationalism. I understand the motives of SNP Members, but I believe powerfully in the Union and in the ability of all of us to take our place in that Union as British citizens. It is quite right to move towards the further devolution of powers to Scotland, but it is important to recognise the balance across our nation as a whole.

Let me remind Members of the important contribution of London to our economy, as it is providing a bigger share of our economy than at any time since 1911. The powers of a London Mayor in partnership with the local authorities in the 33 boroughs of London are, frankly, quite pathetic in comparison with the situation in other major cities across our planet. As we devolve greater powers to other cities and mayors and look to devolve further powers to Scotland, it is a matter of great concern that we are not seeing commensurate powers passed on to the Mayor of London or to those who lead the London boroughs. [*Interruption.*] My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Rob Marris) urges me to declare my interest. Of course I have an interest, but I believe that it is in the interests of London as a whole that the Mayor should have a greater say in the health and education of Londoners. We compete not only with other parts of the country, but with young people in Shanghai and Bangalore, so the Mayor should have more powers to convene and co-ordinate in order to drive up standards in this city.

Above all, we need to see implementation of the Travers review so that further fiscal responsibility can be passed to the Mayor. We need a much deeper relationship with respect, for example, to stamp duty, business tax and the ability to drive the infrastructure investment that London needs. There will be much debate about HS2, but, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Crossrail 2, I hope to see that gather pace during this Parliament, and I hope to see devolution to London.

Boris Johnson: I wish the right hon. Gentleman every good fortune in his efforts to replace me. I commend what he is saying about devolution, but may I advise

[Boris Johnson]

him to couch it less in terms of more powers for the mayoralty than in terms of more powers for Londoners to set their own priorities, and to ensure that they have the necessary funds to invest in Crossrail 2, as well as in the housing that they need?

Mr Lammy: The hon. Gentleman is right: the powers must sit somewhere. As he knows, however, I also referred to the 33 London boroughs. It is of huge concern that local government was stripped of so much during the last Parliament, and that the ability to deliver local services properly, with power where it should be—closest to the people—does not exist to the extent that most borough leaders would wish. Both the Mayor and those who lead our local authorities need to have that power and ability in the future.

Let me also remind the hon. Gentleman that he was involved in a report by Gerard Lyons which concluded that it would be a huge mistake for this country to exit Europe, and that London alone would lose £210 billion in revenue. The hon. Gentleman is known for his wit, but I hope that he is also known for his detail. The report concluded that it would be a disaster for us to go down that road. There is real concern about the fact that, as we head towards the referendum, big decisions in the City are effectively on hold because of the risk to our national economy. I hope that we reach a decisive conclusion as soon as possible, and that we opt to stay in Europe, because it seems to me that that must be in the interests of all of us.

Mr Graham Allen: Before my right hon. Friend moves on to all things mayoral, will he return to the core of the principles involved in devolution? Is it not contradictory that a Government that wish to devolve power should insist, from the centre, on the form of leadership that is to apply in the localities in question? Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should offer devolution options to the cities, regions, counties and other localities of the Union? If they wish to choose the mayoral model, by all means let them go ahead, but they may prefer another leadership model, or perhaps a committee model. Surely the decision should be made by those to whom powers are being devolved, rather than from the centre.

Mr Lammy: That is a very good point. Some people are using the phrase “hyper-devolution”, which means devolution to communities as they negotiate the power that must rightly lie with them.

Let me now deal with what I consider to be a major issue in the Queen’s Speech. Our country faces a huge structural economic problem in its housing market. We are failing badly the people beyond the House who are young and want to get on to the housing ladder, but who are also the working poor, unable to secure social housing or to buy affordable housing. It is of huge concern that the average age of a buyer in London was 39 this year, and that if we continue on the same trajectory, it will be 52 in a generation. It is also embarrassing and shocking that we built only 40 council houses in London last year. There is much talk about affordable housing, but all hon. Members will understand that rents at 80% of market value are not affordable for most Londoners, who on average earn £32,000 a year. It beggars belief that the Government should propose to

extend the right to buy to the 1.3 million people in housing associations. We can look at the matter from a Thatcherite point of view. There is no other area of public policy where someone can get as much as £100,000 from the taxpayer for buying their council home. We are to extend that to people in housing associations. What will that do to supply? How will that contribute to the huge problem of affordable housing? What is our vision for social housing? It appears that there is no vision for social housing and that we are effectively saying we no longer believe in council homes and we no longer believe in social housing in housing associations.

Mr David Davis: Because it is low-cost, high-security accommodation, people never move out of it, so how is it the answer to the problem that someone in a housing association flat or house monopolises it for life and it never becomes available to other people who properly want social housing?

Mr Lammy: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point in relation to the escalator that should be fundamental to the welfare system, but with respect that is not the point I am making. We are reducing the supply of social housing, and many people on a decent wage simply do not have the assets to reduce the demand for social housing. That seems wrong-headed. In the previous Parliament, we heard much about a council house being built for every one that came off the market. That has not happened and it will not happen with housing association properties either.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept, if the properties are not coming on to the market because tenants have security and stay in them all their lives, that if a mechanism could be found whereby the capital receipts had to be put into new housing, that would increase the supply of housing available for social tenants?

Mr Lammy: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. That is related to the ability of local authorities to borrow in order to build. However, even if they were given powers to borrow in order to build, they would want the security that the house they had built would not come off the market three years later. We have therefore created a terrible vicious circle that will lead to tremendous hardship, I suspect, in the next five years.

There are real concerns about asking the Metropolitan police to find another £700 million-worth of cuts. It took 2,500 officers to restore order to many of the streets of this country during the 2011 riots. That is exactly the number of officers we have lost over this last period. It is true that response times are good, but neighbourhood policing is disappearing and the crime that bedevils deprived areas is rampant. We should think again.

5.28 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I thank local residents in Southend West for re-electing me as their Member of Parliament. I have always regarded it as a great privilege to be an MP, not a right, and I am absolutely delighted to be returned again.

I congratulate the mover and the seconder of the motion on the Gracious Speech. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns) is a well known

wag. On this occasion he did not disappoint the House. The one issue on which I disagreed with him—and will always disagree with him—is the Democratic party in the United States of America and Mrs Clinton. I am afraid that I put the Clintons in exactly the same bracket as the Blairs—but, never mind, my right hon. Friend made a splendid speech.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray). She was a contributor to my pamphlet on working-class Conservatives, “The Party of Opportunity”, and she made a magnificent speech today. As we all know, she suffered a terrible tragedy shortly after her election to this place and her family and friends can be very proud of her.

Before getting into the bones of the Gracious Speech, I want to make a few remarks about the general election campaign. I say this in a friendly way to all Members: we only had the general election this month and I do think it is slightly arrogant if we dismiss the verdict of the electorate. I think it is a little early to start rubbishing the decisions the electorate made.

I thought the coverage of the general election campaign was an absolute disgrace for all sorts of reasons. Day in and day out, no big issues were covered by the radio or television media. I do not want to fall out with the SNP and its Members at this stage because I hope they will become my friends—I might even need their support in various matters in months and years to come—but I would say that when canvassing on the doorstep I found that the residents of Southend West were irritated by the fact that every time they went into the lounge and turned on their TV there was the leader of the SNP constantly talking about locking the Prime Minister out of No. 10 Downing Street. I would have thought the only person entitled to lock the Prime Minister out of No. 10 was the Prime Minister’s wife if he had been misbehaving. I do think that the tone was very unfortunate. The only other thing the media covered was their endless obsession with the idea that no party would get overall control. So I think the six weeks of the campaign—I was totally against fixed-term Parliaments, by the way—were very disappointing indeed.

I was elected to this place in June 1983. I am not an old boy yet, but I see from looking at the list that I am No. 5 in length of service on the Conservative Benches and No. 15 in the House. I have not lost my marbles yet, however, and I can remember what it was like to be elected as a new Member of Parliament. I wish to congratulate all colleagues—those who were re-elected and particularly those of all parties elected here for the first time.

I was going to address some remarks to Members on my own side of the Chamber, but for one moment I thought there were no newly elected Members on the Conservative Benches—they all seem to have got bored pretty quickly—then my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (James Cleverly) decided to join us. There are, however, many newly elected Members sitting on the Opposition Benches. This place has changed beyond all recognition from when you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I joined it in June 1983, but I think that everyone will welcome colleagues and be as helpful as possible to ensure that everyone feels at home here.

The result that gave me the greatest pleasure was that of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price). She epitomises everything that is good

about Essex woman. She was not just in a two-way fight, she was in a three-way marginal and, thinking about my own circumstances in 1992, I know that the pressure she was under was absolutely extraordinary. Those dreadful opinion polls—every day, every week, every month, every year—telling her she was going to come third must have dispirited her greatly, yet she triumphed.

Mr David Davis: I agree with my hon. Friend about our hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price)—she is a magnificent lady. Does he agree that there is an argument for doing away with opinion polls for the duration of a general election?

Sir David Amess: My right hon. Friend has stolen part of my speech. The Gracious Speech says:

“Other measures will be laid before you.”

I absolutely think that we should now ban opinion polls during the three weeks of an election. We must never have a six-week campaign again. We had those ridiculous opinion polls day in and day out, and there has been no humility from the media; they are just carrying on as though they got it right. And let us never forget what the BBC told us about the exit polls. At 10 o’clock, it told us that the Conservatives would be the largest party with, I think, 316 seats.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): The problem is that we cannot ban private opinion polls; there would simply be rumour and speculation. It is far better to let the press and the pollsters get on with it, in the hope that they will accept the criticism and that that will help them to get it right more often.

Sir David Amess: I was my hon. Friend’s Parliamentary Private Secretary for a little while. I am not going to fall out with him over this matter, but I do not agree with him.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Does my hon. Friend not agree that it would be better to reform the BBC—

Mr Winnick: Privatised it?

Ian Paisley: I did not say we should privatise it; that is your suggestion. The BBC’s coverage of the election was biased and unfair to a number of the parties in this House, and that is where the Government should put their efforts in the years ahead.

Sir David Amess: The hon. Gentleman’s father—from heaven—would agree with him; I was also going to make that point in my speech.

Returning to the opinion polls, it is absolutely ridiculous that the exit poll from the BBC said that the Conservatives would be the largest party, with, I think, 289 seats. It even got that wrong, yet all the people who commented on the general election are carrying on as though nothing has happened. That is absolutely ridiculous, and elected parliamentarians need to do something about that.

I agree with the point that the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) has just made. We have a new Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale). When he was chairing the Select Committee, he seemed to have an awful lot to say about

[*Sir David Amess*]

the British Broadcasting Corporation, and in each Parliament we talk about doing something about it. Now is the time for us to take action.

Sir William Cash: On the last day of the last Parliament, the European Scrutiny Committee submitted a unanimous all-party report on the manner in which the BBC has treated the European issue over the years. Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be a good idea, in the present circumstances, for everyone to have a good read of it?

Sir David Amess: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Incidentally, I do not seem to be getting any injury time for the interventions that I have been taking.

There is no secret about why the Conservatives were returned to government. The Gracious Speech stated that the Government

“will legislate in the interests of everyone in our country.”

The British people believe that. The speech went on to state that the Government would

“provide economic stability and security at every stage of life.”

The British people believe that. The speech also says that we should help to

“achieve full employment and provide more people with the security of a job.”

The British people believe that that is what the Conservative party is going to do. We have also stated:

“Legislation will be introduced to support home ownership”, which is something that the British people very much want, as I recall from my days in Basildon.

I have to say that if any Member did not find that immigration was an issue on the doorstep, I do not know what they were doing. Of course, enormous benefits are brought to this country by immigration, but it is an issue and it needs dealing with. In particular, I look forward to the Government’s proposals on benefit allocation. The British people are also attracted by our proposal to

“secure the future of the National Health Service by implementing the National Health Service’s own five-year plan”,

which we will watch very carefully. They are also impressed by our commitment to

“secure the real value of the basic State Pension”.

Constituents in Southend West are getting increasingly angered by another issue. I am not going to get involved in the Scottish measure, but when we are dealing with England-only issues, there must be a way of ensuring that only English Members of Parliament vote on them.

I am delighted that we are going to renegotiate the UK’s relationship with the European Union—if Opposition parties had not stopped it in the previous Parliament, we would have had the referendum before 2017. I am old enough to have had the opportunity to vote in the ‘70s, and I voted no. Good luck to the Prime Minister if he thinks he can renegotiate things successfully—I will make my judgment at the time. I can tell hon. Members that the comments made to me on the doorstep give me the impression that in the referendum, regardless of how things are renegotiated, young people will vote to stay in the European Union.

I very much support the proposal for a British Bill of Rights, and I was also glad not to see anything in the Gracious Speech on foxhunting. I have always voted

against foxhunting, not because of class issues—people may want to dress up in their red uniforms and it all looks marvellous—but because being torn apart by a couple of dogs cannot be a lot of fun for the fox. Human beings would not want that to happen to them, so I am glad there is nothing about foxhunting in the Gracious Speech.

On foreign affairs, I am glad that I was one of the 30 Conservative Members of Parliament who voted against this country getting involved in the conflict in Syria and that we are going to try to get a political settlement there. I am glad that we are going to put pressure on Russia to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, and that we are going to try to defeat terrorism in the middle east. I would have liked the Gracious Speech to have contained some sort of commitment that public inquiries will actually report. It is crazy that we still have not got the Chilcot report—the sooner that is published, the better, because I want to see whether or not I was misled over the Iraq war.

I say again that I am grateful to my constituents for re-electing me. I congratulate all the new Ministers, but I put them on this warning: I want them to read carefully the letters they send to me and not just sign off what the civil servant has plonked in front of them. I want Southend to have city status. Following our magnificent victory in the football contest at the weekend and our promotion to league one, we are entitled to become a city.

I want fair funding for grammar schools. I very much want something to be done about cliff slippage in Southend. I want the senior management of Southend’s hospital and the South Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust—SEPT—sorted out. I very much intend to ensure that the voice of Southend is heard loudly and firmly in this Parliament. My final thought, which I wrote down as I was listening earlier, is that I hope we will all show humility in victory and in defeat.

5.43 pm

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) and to hear him speak so passionately on behalf of his constituents. Many comparisons have been made with 1992 when a Tory majority Government were elected despite the odds and the predictions. Of course, the hon. Gentleman was the 1992 election personified—on that night, his election was the indication that the Conservatives would be returned.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns) and the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) on proposing and seconding the Gracious Speech so appropriately and well.

Alex Salmond: I am trying to recall Basildon man and the 1992 election. What on earth happened to that 1992 Tory Government? How did they get on?

Mr Dodds: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, and I join others in congratulating and welcoming him on his return to the House. I remember him here before he went back to Scotland to serve as First Minister. I will leave it to others to judge the record of the 1992 Government. In this Queen’s Speech debate, we will look to the future.

Sir William Cash: As the right hon. Gentleman will know, we campaigned for a Maastricht referendum. Now we have a referendum, so there you are.

Mr Dodds: The hon. Gentleman has spoken many words of wisdom over the years with which I agree. He is certainly proof that if we work at and fight for an issue that we believe in, we will get there in the end, especially if the cause is right. As he knows, I have been a long-term advocate of giving the people of the United Kingdom their say, in a referendum, on whether we should be in or out of the European Union. I was delighted to see that in the Gracious Speech.

Before I go into further detail on the speech, may I, on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, join others in commending our armed forces on the work they continue to do across so many theatres, and in so many other ways, to protect and defend the people of this country? Some 20% of United Kingdom reservists are Northern Ireland people, even though we make up only 3% of the population. That is testament to how committed the people of Northern Ireland are to the armed forces, which we feel strongly about.

Sammy Wilson: As so many of the armed forces reservists come from Northern Ireland and serve gallantly across the world, does my right hon. Friend accept that one of this Government's priorities ought to be to ensure that the terms of the military covenant are fully available to soldiers from Northern Ireland who need such services after they leave the forces?

Mr Dodds: My hon. Friend raises an important issue, which is one of those that arise out of the Belfast agreement. As he knows, equality provisions under section 75 work against giving our armed forces veterans the same status as those in the rest of the United Kingdom. That issue needs to be addressed, and it was covered in our manifesto and our Northern Ireland plan. No doubt we will have negotiations and discussions with the Government about the issue. I am sure that the Defence Secretary will take it on board and that the Government will want to see progress on it.

Before I get into any more detail on the Gracious Speech, may I also thank all right hon. and hon. Members and members of the staff of the House who have very kindly passed on their best wishes to our party leader, the First Minister of Northern Ireland, Peter Robinson, who has suffered problems with his health this week and has been hospitalised as a result? I know that Peter, Iris and his family are deeply encouraged and comforted by the expressions of good wishes from both sides of the House. I am glad to report that Peter is doing well. He has worked extremely hard, probably to the detriment of his health, to try to make progress in Northern Ireland. His record of deal making, negotiation and fighting and standing up for Northern Ireland is one of which we should all be proud and that should continue. We wish him a speedy recovery and hope that he will soon be back to his position as First Minister in Northern Ireland, where he is much needed.

I congratulate the Government on the victory they have achieved—it would be churlish not to—as well as all those who have been elected to this House. At the election of the Speaker, I made the point that everybody elected to this House—as regards the constituents they

represent and the parties that are here—is equal. We must consider very carefully any suggestion that Members should not be treated equally in this House.

Coming as I do from a small party from Northern Ireland, I think that it is important that all parties should be respected, that their voices should be heard and that there should be equality. This is the Parliament of the United Kingdom and a House of Commons to which everybody has been elected on an equal franchise. Having said that, I recognise that there is an issue for many people with English voters and that must be addressed in the context of the devolution of greater powers to countries. I do not say that there is an easy answer; everybody recognises that the issue has been debated for many decades. The questions have been posed, but the answers have not so readily come forth. On this issue, on greater devolution and on the devolution of powers to the cities and regions of the United Kingdom more generally, we need to take time, to take things carefully and to move forward in a consensual way. That is why I have advocated in the past the idea of a constitutional convention. We should not tamper with our constitutional arrangements ad hoc or quickly or for party political advantage, with possible unintended consequences; we must look at these things very carefully indeed, and I think we will want to consider a constitutional convention in due course as these matters come before the House.

We give a warm welcome to those new Members from Northern Ireland who have been elected to this House. I want to give a welcome to the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott). He is not a member of my party; he is a member of the Ulster Unionist party, but he was elected because there was a pact between the DUP and the Ulster Unionists, so that for the first time since 2001, Fermanagh and South Tyrone, the most westerly constituency of the United Kingdom, a constituency where I was brought up and went to school, is once again represented in the House of Commons; and so that the people of that great constituency have again a voice in this Parliament, and will have someone to represent them, instead of a Sinn Féin Member who refused to take their seat in this House of Commons. It is a good day for all the people of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, because they will have a representative who will represent them all—and I know he will. I wish him well, and I hope that he will be long spared to continue to represent that constituency.

I also welcome, of course, the new hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan). Again, he is not a member of our party, and I am very sorry at the loss of our previous Member, William McCrea, but I do wish the hon. Gentleman well and I hope we can work together in the best interests of Northern Ireland.

Most of all, of course, I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), a member of our party who has retaken that seat once again for Unionism. We warmly look forward to his continuing to represent that seat for many years to come.

This has been a good election in Northern Ireland for the Unionist cause. We may look at other parts of the United Kingdom and other countries. We did not put up any candidates in Scotland. [HON. MEMBERS: "This time."] We might do a better job! But I am glad to say that in Northern Ireland, Unionist representation in this House has gone up from 10 to 12 seats out of 18.

[Mr Dodds]

That is a good advance in terms of Northern Ireland, and we look forward to ensuring that the voice of Unionists in Northern Ireland is heard loudly and clearly in the coming years in Parliament.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): One issue that was mentioned in the most Gracious Speech was that of psychoactive drugs—legal highs—on which the people of my constituency, my party and, I believe, many parties in this Chamber wish to see legislation introduced. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister, in his address to the House, did not give us a time scale for that. On behalf of my constituents in Newtonards, especially the family of young Adam Owens, who died six weeks ago as a result of taking legal highs, I say that we need to see this legislation coming through quickly. Do my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds) and my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) think that should happen right away?

Mr Dodds: I agree with what my hon. Friend has said and he knows that that was in our manifesto and that we are pursuing it very strongly in the Northern Ireland Assembly as well.

A few weeks ago, the idea of a majority Government of any hue was regarded as ludicrous and out of the question. Pollsters and the political class have been rightly criticised. Speculation about the role of some of the smaller parties was rife at that time; people were predicting that they would have enormous influence. Now the same pundits who got it so wrong are predicting that some of the smaller parties will have absolutely no power at all. I read newspaper headlines just after the election saying, “That’s it—no role, no influence.”

Just as the pundits were wrong previously, they are wrong now, because in a Parliament where the Government have a majority of only 12, it will be increasingly important that the views of other parties are taken into account. Certainly we will adopt a constructive approach to legislation and measures that come before the House. We set out before the election some of the principles that would guide us in the House. We are Northern Ireland MPs, so we will always stand up for the best interests of Northern Ireland. We have proved that in running the Executive alongside others. We have proved it in the House in terms of delivering for Northern Ireland, and we will continue to do that strongly, and be a robust voice for all the people of Northern Ireland in this Parliament.

We are also Unionists, so we will always stand up for the Union, strengthening the relationship between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, ensuring that the symbols of British identity are strengthened, not weakened, in Northern Ireland. But we are also committed to making the United Kingdom stronger and better, not just in narrow Northern Ireland terms, but across the piece—throughout the United Kingdom. That is why we have emphasised the need to ensure that we have strong defences—the point that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) about the armed forces covenant was very important—in terms of our commitment to NATO, our commitment to ensuring that 2% of GDP is spent on defence. That is an important way of ensuring that

the United Kingdom is able to play its full and proper role on the world stage. We look forward to the outworking of the full strategic defence and security review.

We of course welcome very strongly the commitment to the EU referendum. I remember that one of the first things I did in a previous Parliament was to bring in a private Member’s Bill to seek a referendum on the Lisbon treaty. At that time, the Prime Minister had previously given a cast-iron guarantee that there would be such a referendum, which he did not pursue. I remember the vote on the night when 81 Conservatives rebelled in relation to an EU referendum, and we were castigated—we joined with those Conservative rebels—and were told that it would not happen.

I am glad that now everybody in this House—apart from the SNP, of course—agrees that there needs to be a referendum on our relationship with the European Union. We will certainly support that legislation. We need to deal with the main issues that concern voters: the amount of money that goes to Europe, and the fact that the EU has an adverse effect in terms of immigration and border controls and in terms of the sovereignty of this House—our ability, as peoples of the United Kingdom, to make laws governing ourselves.

In terms of building a stronger United Kingdom, a stronger Union, we note the plans to devolve more powers to the towns and counties, the elected mayors, the English votes for English laws, and the plans to introduce the Scotland Bill, the Wales Bill and the Northern Ireland Bill. We will look at all of those in great detail.

I want to finish by pointing to the crisis that now envelops the Northern Ireland Assembly because of the failure to agree the welfare reform legislation. We have engineered a situation in which we have the best possible welfare reform compared with any other part of the United Kingdom—we have got rid of the bedroom tax—and yet it has been vetoed by Sinn Féin because they will not contemplate any change at all to welfare. As a result, there is a £600 million deficit in the Northern Ireland budget. That will lead to the collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly by 31 July unless the Government step in and enact welfare reform. It is clear that Sinn Féin are not up to doing the job. If they will not act, then this sovereign Parliament must act.

5.57 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): I believe that this is a watershed Parliament for a watershed election. The question that will predominate throughout this Parliament will be the question of who governs us and how. That applies not only to the European issue, to which I will return in a moment, but to the Scottish question and the human rights issue, because each contains seminal questions—constitutional issues of a kind that have not been addressed properly for far, far too long. Now we have a Conservative Government who will address them.

I pay tribute to the Prime Minister for his victory, and I pay tribute to the small C conservatives of this country, from every home and every part of the regions of this land, who not only decided that they wanted the security and the stability with which the Conservative party with a big C was able to provide them, but whose common sense led to the pulverisation of the Liberal Democrats and at the same time the rejection of the

potential alliance of the SNP and the Labour party, which, certainly from what I saw on the doorstep, scared people witless.

The bottom line is this: we now face very big challenges. I look at the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond); he will present us with a challenge, I have no doubt, and so will Members around him. He would be under a misapprehension, however, if he thought, as I did, in the light of a potential coalition, that it would be like the days of Parnell, because the House of Commons has changed very substantially since then. We have a solid phalanx of a majority of 12—[*Interruption.*] Yes, we do, and it will prevail in relation to the matters that the right hon. Gentleman has in mind.

On the Scottish question, we also have the issue of the Standing Orders. As I said earlier in an intervention, the legislation that devolved the functions has already been passed, so it is a matter not for legislation but for the Standing Orders of the House. I believe strongly that we will get that through. I know that we will have points of order and all sorts of shenanigans from the SNP, but this is an internal matter reflecting the legislative change that was made in 1997—

Alex Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir William Cash: I will certainly give way to the right hon. Gentleman, but he may not remember that in the debate in 1997—when the Labour party held the majority of the seats in Scotland—I actually proposed the idea of solving the West Lothian question by making changes to the Standing Orders.

Alex Salmond: If in that 1997 Parliament some nefarious members of the Labour Government had decided to restrict the hon. Gentleman's voting rights by means of amending the Standing Orders, would that have been legitimate?

Sir William Cash: The question has been dealt with by legislation and the functions have been devolved. I was intrigued by the nuanced approach taken by the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds), but it must be conceded that because the Scottish Parliament has control over health and education it is unfair for Scottish Members of Parliament—it cannot be denied that they won a great victory in Scotland—to interfere in matters that belong properly and exclusively to English Members of Parliament.

Mr Graham Allen: I caution the hon. Gentleman, whom I have known for many years, against basing his case on legislation that was passed in 1997 in entirely different circumstances. If major democratic reforms are to be made, that should be done openly and honestly and with the full and knowing consent of the House. No device should be used. These are important matters and, if necessary, they should be achieved through winning a majority in the House, not by using a technical device from 1997.

Sir William Cash: I have made my point and I stand by what I have said. We will debate that question later, but I believe strongly that we need to do it by way of amending the Standing Orders.

David Tredinnick: The Queen's Speech states:

“My Government will bring forward changes to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons.”

It would not be done on a whim: that is what the Queen's Speech says.

Sir William Cash: Well said. I entirely concur with my hon. Friend.

On the repeal of the Human Rights Act, when I was shadow Attorney General, I pushed that policy with the help of colleagues in the shadow Cabinet. It remained as a commitment in our manifesto until the coalition of 2010. It was abandoned because of the Liberal Democrats, and now it is to be revived. I offer a word of caution, however, because it is a very important issue. In many respects, it is part of the “who governs?” issue and I strongly suggest adhering to the proposals in the Queen's Speech. We need a proper discussion. I am clear in my mind, as is Lord Judge and many other distinguished judges, that there are serious problems with the manner of interpretation in the Strasbourg Court and with the use of right to family life as a principle, and how certain people manage to exploit the system, well funded by the human rights lobby, to carry on when they should have packed up a long time ago.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. Does he agree that we need to reacquaint our friends at the other end of the Palace with the concept of the Salisbury convention? They are seeking to undermine the legitimacy and sovereignty of this House, which has a fresh mandate on issues such as the Human Rights Act.

Sir William Cash: I agree with my hon. Friend's point about the Salisbury convention, but we need to respect the fact that some very powerful views are held by some very distinguished people who disagree with us. We do not want to drive change through with a sledgehammer: we need some pre-legislative scrutiny so that the analysis can be properly conducted. I believe that we will win the argument, but it needs to be done openly, transparently and with a proper degree of scrutiny.

As I said in reply to the intervention from the right hon. Member for Gordon, the Maastricht referendum campaign—on which we got hundreds of thousands of signatures—should have resulted in a referendum back then. As the right hon. Member for Belfast North said, there has been no referendum since 1975, and some 40 million people have never had a chance to look at the question and have their say. That is despite the fact that since 1975 we have moved from a common market, which I have always preferred, to a new arrangement with vast accumulations of power concentrated in the European Union. The point is not made clearly enough, in my opinion, that whatever the circumstances may be of the eurozone—and the desire of the French and the Germans to get together—it is not an entity in itself. It is part of the European Union and it affects us directly. Therefore, if we do not make the kind of changes to which the Prime Minister referred in his last European Council statement on 23 March, we could end up nibbling at the treaties in minimalist negotiations and failing to deal with the political, economic and constitutional structures that need to be tackled. This is a question of fundamental change, and I believe strongly that if we

[Sir William Cash]

do not make those changes the British people will end up in the second tier of a two-tier Europe that is increasingly dominated by Germany. That is not something that the British people should countenance.

I hear it said that we can ask only for that which is not impossible, but we should put that the other way round and say that it is impossible for us to contemplate the idea of a two-tier Europe. That is unacceptable. I call in aid the Prime Minister, who said—in his statement and not in response to a question that he might have misinterpreted—on 23 March:

“In the coming two years, we have the opportunity to reform the EU”—

good—

“and fundamentally change Britain’s relationship with it.”—[*Official Report*, 23 March 2015; Vol. 594, c. 1122.]

He separated the idea of reform from fundamental change because he knows—as do the Foreign Office, the establishment and the European Union—that this is not just a question of reform of policy or individual laws, such as on immigration, however important they may be. This is a fundamental constitutional issue in which we have been locked by the treaties and under the European Communities Act 1972, raising such questions as the nature of the manner in which are governed.

In addition to that, there is the charter of fundamental rights, which I mentioned. Despite the fact that Tony Blair himself did not want us to be affected by the charter—he wanted to exclude us and Peter Goldsmith was sent over to do a protocol, but it was a botched job—the net result is that we are now subject to the ECJ in relation to the charter of fundamental rights, quite apart from any matter relating to human rights. In that respect, I recommend that hon. Members read the report of the European Scrutiny Committee, which I organised and commissioned. We examined the question for more than a year, and we concluded that the only way we could get out of that situation was by using the notwithstanding formula to bypass the European Communities Act.

The Prime Minister has rightly used the expression “one nation”. Where did that phrase come from? Disraeli. What did Disraeli also say? He said that the Tory party is a national party, or it is nothing. He did not say nationalistic; he said national. That is why this question of fundamental change is so important. I too am a believer in one nation. I pay tribute to the Democratic Unionists for their firm affirmation in this important Queen’s Speech on that very matter. I understand of course that the SNP takes a different view, but one nation has served this country proud, not merely for decades or generations but for centuries, and we must adhere to it at all costs.

The phrase “one nation” came from Disraeli’s book “Sybil, or The Two Nations”, which was about his awareness of the necessity of helping the working people of the 19th century. That was his great mission and he achieved it. Let us go forward with one nation, as one nation, and at the same time make certain that we are not governed by other nations through the majority voting system in such a way as to prevent the people who voted in this general election from having what they want and what they deserve.

6.12 pm

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash). I am sure that his interesting insights will lead to much discussion in the coming Session.

I thank the people of Liverpool, Riverside for returning me to this House with an increased majority and on a much-increased turnout. I value both of those achievements.

Today’s Gracious Speech has focused on jobs and opportunities, and the important task of rebalancing the economy. I want to draw attention to some aspects of that, particularly transport. I am pleased that transport featured in the Gracious Speech, but a little disappointed that it did not take a higher profile. It is essential that we remember that transport is integral to having a successful economy, and to the mobility and movement across the whole of the United Kingdom that is required to achieve that.

Transport must be affordable. People have to be able to afford to get to the jobs if they are to be able to take up job opportunities. It is important that transport is accessible, including by disabled people. That has been ignored too much in the past. There has to be sufficient capacity for both passengers and freight, so that businesses can develop and goods can get to their destinations efficiently and effectively.

The Gracious Speech contained some proposals for devolution, and I note in particular the proposal on devolution to cities. I welcome the proposal in the cities Bill to give local authorities in devolved city areas more control over bus services. Buses are the form of transport used by most people, although they are too often ignored in discussions about transport. I hope that my city of Liverpool will, in due course, benefit from that devolution Bill.

The financial provisions in that Bill must be adequate. Cities receiving important devolved powers must have a proper financial settlement, so that those powers are meaningful and able to bring greater prosperity to people in their area. Certainly in the case of Liverpool, I hope that the strong, incessant and unacceptable cuts in funding for local services will cease. Although devolution is very much to be welcomed, the constant cutting of funding for essential local services such as social care is doing deep damage and is unacceptable. I hope that that will end.

I note too the mention in the Gracious Speech of the important proposal for the northern powerhouse—an interesting concept that draws attention to the north. It is an interesting combination of proposals for transport and business development.

Sammy Wilson: Before the hon. Lady moves away from the subject of transport, may I ask whether she agrees that, especially for regions such as Northern Ireland and for connectivity with the rest of the world, the development of Heathrow airport, or at least the expansion of a hub airport, is very important?

Mrs Ellman: I agree that connectivity with the rest of the world is extremely important. I note that that was omitted from the Gracious Speech—perhaps it is the question that dare not be asked, even in this Chamber. However, when the day comes that the Davies commission reports, that will be decision time, and it will be a decision that cannot be shirked any longer. Essentially, I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

The proposals for the northern powerhouse are very important, but it is essential that the northern powerhouse is indeed about the north. In the last Parliament, Ministers talking about the northern powerhouse constantly spoke about Manchester and Leeds. It is equally important that places such as Liverpool, Sheffield, Newcastle and Hull benefit from the northern powerhouse. When I raised that point, I was told that the reference to Manchester and Leeds was shorthand for the northern powerhouse, which I found rather disconcerting. I hope that that will be corrected in this Parliament. The northern powerhouse is an important concept, but it must be backed up by resources and it must apply to “the north”, not just to some cities of the north.

Although devolution is important, it should not be confined to cities. The whole of the United Kingdom is not concentrated solely on cities. There are towns that are on the fringes of cities; there are county areas. If we want economic prosperity for all and to rebalance the economy, all those areas have to be considered. Let us consider one example of disparity between regions. Rail investment per head in London is £294; I am sure it is greatly needed and the case is constantly being made for more investment, but let us look at the amount of rail investment per head in other regions. The figure for the east of England is £58; for south-west England, £41; for the east midlands, £37; for the west midlands, £50; for the north-west, £89; for Yorkshire and Humberside, £101; and for the south-east, £69. Surely that cannot reflect needs and opportunities. If the Government are seriously interested in rebalancing the economy, they have to look at where investment goes and where investment in transport goes, so that opportunities are opened up in all part of the United Kingdom.

I was pleased to see reference in the Gracious Speech to High Speed 2 and confirmation that proposals for High Speed 2 will continue. I welcome that. The extra capacity that will come with High Speed 2 is essential and is much needed, particularly in relation to the economy. It is needed for freight as well as for passenger services. The high-speed line will not be designed for freight, but it is essential that as the high-speed lines develop, the capacity left on the existing line is used for additional passenger services and also for freight services. That means that this development must be planned as part of an integrated approach to rail.

There must be more connectivity with High Speed 2, and High Speed 2 investment must be seen as part of regeneration, with support for business and enterprise alongside those lines so that the regions served by High Speed 2 benefit, and also to ensure that as many other parts of the country as possible benefit. During the previous Parliament I was pleased to see how the High Speed 2 proposals changed from proposals simply for a new line to proposals for a new line backed by regeneration and as part of improved connectivity with the entire country.

It is important, too, that the development is seen as an opportunity for people to acquire new skills and additional jobs. That must be part of the concept of taking the line further. Development in high speed must not be at the expense of investing in the existing classic line. I am pleased that we made some progress on this in the previous Parliament and it is essential that this is taken forward. It is about capacity, regeneration and opportunities.

I listened carefully to the comments of the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) on compensation. When such a scheme goes forward, there will inevitably be people who lose out. Compensation should be given fairly. I agree with the right hon. Lady's comments in that respect.

I make these remarks today to draw the attention of the House to the importance of transport in the context of the key objectives of supporting jobs and opening up opportunity, as set out in the Gracious Speech. Transport is rarely a high-profile issue, but it is essential to making our society work, so I hope that as this Parliament proceeds, the measures set out in relation to further transport investment proceed and other important measures are considered too. Transport must be accessible, it must have sufficient investment, and it must be closely linked to business, enterprise, skills and opportunities. It must be approached in that light.

6.22 pm

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman), and also to follow the introduction to this debate by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns) and my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray).

I approach this debate with some slight misgivings—I realised that the last time I participated in a debate on the Gracious Speech from the Back Benches was my maiden speech in 1997, and worse still, the themes of that maiden speech were devolution for Scotland, the future of the Union of the United Kingdom, and human rights. Despite my best endeavours, I seem to be unable to escape any of them this evening. However, some issues which arise were not present then. The economic crisis that has beset the western world and this country particularly in the past few years was not present when I made that maiden speech in 1997. The state of the world as it existed then was nothing like as fragile and dangerous as the world seems to be today. We face dramatic challenges, to which I shall return briefly at the end of my remarks.

I greatly welcome the continuation of the Government's economic policy, as laid out in the Gracious Speech. I have no doubt that the reason why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was returned and the Conservative party was elected to office was the public's appreciation of the difficult decisions that had been made in putting the economic recovery of this country on a reasonable footing. In saying that, I am mindful of the fact that there will be some pretty dramatic challenges ahead. Having served in government and having watched the difficulties, for example, of reducing the budget of the small Department over which I presided for four years and the Crown Prosecution Service being reduced by one third, I recognise that there will be some complex issues of prioritisation as we take matters forward.

In that context, I welcome the remarks of the Lord Chancellor who, I understand, when he first went to address the staff at the Ministry of Justice, pointed out his awareness of the importance of access to justice and of maintaining an adequate justice system as one of the key priorities of Government. I entirely endorse that.

I welcome the fact that we are to have a referendum on European Union membership. In my view, this is an area where there is a substantial democratic deficit that

[*Mr Dominic Grieve*]

has beset our politics for far too long. It is fairly well known that nobody has yet succeeded in persuading me of good arguments why we should leave the European Union, but I recognise from my time as Attorney General that there are many aspects of the EU which are seriously dysfunctional. If my right hon. Friend can, in the conduct of his negotiations, succeed in improving the way in which the EU functions not just for ourselves, but for the other member states, he will have performed a signal public service, and I believe he will then be in a position to come to the electorate of this country and ask them to endorse it.

Sir William Cash: Does my right hon. and learned Friend therefore agree with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in his statement of 23 March that apart from reform, we need a fundamental change in our relationship with the EU?

Mr Grieve: It seems to me that the key will be providing the necessary reassurance that the United Kingdom, which will remain outside the eurozone, has the necessary guarantees that that will not be to its disadvantage. That is the key issue and the one on which we should concentrate, although there are other aspects which will need to be looked at.

Geraint Davies: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr Grieve: I shall make progress, if I may.

On matters concerning the Union of the United Kingdom, I am a Unionist to my fingertips. I could not be otherwise, with my family's Scottish heritage. It has always seemed to me that the key to the Union of the United Kingdom is that the interests of an elector, be it in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow or indeed where my family comes from, in Hawick, must be of equal importance to me as that of my own electorate in Beaconsfield, but the forms which the Union can take may be diverse. To that extent, I entirely welcome the fact that further devolution to Scotland and to Wales will take place, and I look forward to participating actively in the debates on that.

I listened carefully to what was said from the Scottish National party Benches about SNP Members' concerns that constitutional change might take place by changing the Standing Orders of the House. This is a somewhat esoteric constitutional law point, but there are arguments that that is probably the only adequate way in which it can be done. If I can provide some reassurance, it seems to me to be central to any such change—the point was well made—that the interests of Scotland, both directly and indirectly, have to be respected, and it can apply only to those matters which pertain strictly to England, England and Wales or other parts of the United Kingdom. I look forward to having that debate, listening carefully to hon. Members' participation and trying to make sure that we can put together a structure which is durable and, above all, fair—fair to them, but also fair to my constituents, for whom this is an issue which matters quite a lot as well.

I note the Government's enthusiasm for continuing with high-speed rail. I am mindful that the House has expressed a determined view on this point. It is not one

which commends itself much to my constituents, and the cost-benefit analysis of it has always eluded me. Nevertheless, I shall try to ensure, on their behalf, that the mitigation that they seek is provided, and in particular that there is a rigorous analysis of the costs of tunnelling under the River Colne, as opposed to the viaduct—a difference in value which seems to be narrowing by the day. I hope I may be able to interest the House in that.

Before moving on to my main topic, I want to touch briefly on the communications data Bill. In my view it is absolutely required. During my time as Attorney General I had a great deal to do with the agencies, and I am satisfied that they try to operate to high ethical standards. I am also satisfied that the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 is inadequate to meet the needs of the modern age. However, I am also mindful of the fact that the public require reassurance in relation to civil liberties. I believe that it will be possible to do those two things during the Bill's passage.

Mr David Davis: How does my right hon. and learned Friend reconcile that with the fact that our primary ally, the United States, with its National Security Agency, which entirely mirrors GCHQ, is as we speak moving away from the block collection of data and treating that as wholly unconstitutional?

Mr Grieve: I have to say to my right hon. Friend that I do not believe that GCHQ has been engaging in the block collection and retention of data for the purpose of subjecting it to examination at a level that intrudes upon privacy. If he reads the comments made by Sir Iain Lobban when he gave evidence, he will see that it is clear what they were about. That said, my right hon. Friend makes an important point, and one that we will have to address. If there are other ways in which it can be better addressed, I for one would be only too happy to see those being looked at. However, I am also mindful, from my own experience in government, that some of the comments made in that regard seem rather far-fetched.

Let me turn to one of the key issues in the Gracious Speech: the suggestion that we will replace the Human Rights Act with a British Bill of Rights. At this stage I will simply make two or three points. First, I welcome the fact that the proposal has not been set in stone, fortunately, and that it appears we will be having a consultation. The proposal will be very difficult to implement in practice, and the reputational damage for this country could be disastrous. Let us start with the first and most obvious point, which is the fact that the devolution settlements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are underpinned by the Human Rights Act—it might be an inconvenient truth for some, but it is still a truth—and, in the case of Northern Ireland, by an international treaty with the Irish republic. I do not see how we can effect a change without first achieving a consensus that involves those parts of the United Kingdom, even if we have the power to do so, because it seems to me that to proceed without it would threaten the Union, which I was sent to this House to uphold.

Secondly, if we are to proceed down this route, the EU dimension needs to be considered. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) has waxed eloquently against the charter of fundamental rights. I cannot think of anything more calculated to see the intervention of the European Court of Justice—not the

European Court of Human Rights—than if we end up being non-compatible with the convention and EU citizens end up bringing claims against the United Kingdom Government that cannot be adjudicated under the convention in our own courts or in Strasbourg.

Thirdly, the United Kingdom has been at the forefront of the development of human rights on our planet; it is one of the things of which we can be most proud. If we are going to dilute those rights and present the British public with something that is, in fact, the convention shorn of some of the protections it affords citizens, the consequences for the convention will be catastrophic. But other countries that have previously been willing to improve their human rights records, as a result of our leverage, will cease to do so, and one of the most powerful tools for improving human rights on our planet will have been irrevocably damaged. I find it impossible to see how that can be in our national interest.

Having said those things, I also recognise that there are flaws in the way in which the Court in Strasbourg has operated. I have many criticisms of some of its jurisprudence, and there was a period in recent years when it was quite seriously off the rails. However, one point that needs to be borne in mind is that we have recently carried out a major reform of the way the Court operates, thanks to the efforts of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). Our judiciary has changed its stance and approach to the Court, so there is now a much more robust dialogue. Consequently, the Court has substantially changed many areas of its approach. The ultimate irony is that we might be in danger of fighting yesterday's battle, or indeed of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. I therefore very much hope that there can be a full consultation so that all these matters can be aired.

Mr Graham Allen: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman, with all his history in this field, tell us what he believes is the best way that Parliament can engage in that consultation? We have been told that we are not going to have a political and constitutional reform Select Committee, which would have looked at this, so would he suggest a special Committee created by the House to look at this at some length so that we avoid some of the pitfalls he has outlined?

Mr Grieve: The hon. Gentleman's suggestion sounds like a very good one, and I certainly intend to engage in the debate as and when proposals are brought before the House.

I mentioned at the start of my remarks that we are living in a much more dangerous and difficult world than we were in 1997. Of course, one of the challenges facing the Government is prioritising what really matters. I have made the point that human rights matter because their promotion is so important, particularly in view of Russia's behaviour in Ukraine and Crimea, so that ought to be a top priority. In the same way, I think that defence will have to be looked at again, and I am pleased that we are going to have a strategic defence review. Ultimately, some hard choices might have to be made, because at the moment I am left with the sensation not that the previous Government did things wrong over defence, but that it might need to be given a greater priority than it has at the moment.

Finally, the one thing that I picked up on the doorstep during the election was the sense that the electorate are fed up with presentational politics—the politics of the gimmick and the soundbite. They want debate, and they want debate here. One of my experiences is that if a Member is prepared to sit through a debate in this place, they will understand a lot more at the end than they did at the beginning. As I am now free of the constraints of office, I commit myself to doing just that. I look forward to debating with other Members of this honourable House, in so far as I can, on what I think are some of the major issues and challenges that face us all.

6.37 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate and to respond to the Gracious Speech on behalf of Plaid Cymru. It is also a pleasure to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), whose speech I will refer to later in my contribution, especially his very valid points on the Human Rights Act. I would like to begin by congratulating the Conservative party on its victory—it is probably the only positive thing I am going to say about the Government over the next five years, so I thought I had better get it out of the way now.

It is fair to say that not many political commentators were expecting a Conservative majority Government, and therefore the legislative landscape announced today is significantly different from what had been anticipated. Before commentating on the content of the Gracious Speech, I would like to say that this Government seem to me, despite being a single-party majority Government, to be far weaker than the previous coalition Government. A majority of 12 can disappear very quickly, especially knowing the independent inclinations of many Tories.

The Gracious Speech includes many potential pitfalls for the new Government, not least the Achilles heel of the Conservative party—Europe. I often felt during the previous Parliament that the Liberal Democrats served a very useful function for the Prime Minister, not only in terms of voting fodder, but primarily by allowing him to tame the Eurosceptic, right-wing element on his Back Benches by saying that he was being held back by his junior coalition partner. That buffer has now gone, and the new Administration could well find themselves at the mercy of restless and troublesome Back Benchers very soon.

Turning to the Gracious Speech, I would like to concentrate on a few of the most important aspects as far as Wales is concerned. On becoming parliamentary leader of the Plaid Cymru group, I highlighted three key immediate aims for my party, based on the new Government's likely legislative programme. The first is to ensure that Wales gets more than crumbs from the Westminster table. Faced with an electoral revolution in Scotland, there is little doubt that Westminster will have to concede significant powers to the Scottish Parliament. The recommendations of the Smith Commission are not likely to prove enough, as we will discover when the proposed Scotland Bill progresses. In Northern Ireland, even Unionists are demanding further powers from Westminster. Most recently, the UK Government conceded full corporation tax powers. With that in mind, I remind them of the findings of their own commission on further

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powers for Wales: it recommended that if corporation tax powers were given to Northern Ireland, they should also be given to Wales.

In England, it is reported that the cities and local government devolution Bill will fully devolve powers over transport, planning, housing and—critically—policing. That means that some cities in England will have more powers than the sovereign national Parliament of Wales. What is more, those powers are being handed out across the UK without any requirement for referendums, while both the Labour and Conservative parties conspire to put as many stumbling blocks as possible in the way of further progress for Wales.

My country will not be left behind. I warn the UK Government that the most powerful message in Welsh politics is about equality with Scotland. There will be a heavy price to pay at the ballot box at next year's National Assembly elections if the Westminster parties continue to treat Wales like a second-class nation.

Unionists have one chance left to save the Union. The situation is crying out for a statesman with a vision to create a sustainable framework for the future. It is clear to me that the asymmetric nature of constitutional developments within the UK is unstable. Far be it from me to offer advice; as a Welsh nationalist, I am committed to campaigning for the political independence of my country. However, if the UK is to survive it is clear to me that only a genuine partnership of equals, based on confederal principles, will work. As I said in my acceptance speech earlier this month, the old Union is now dead and during this Parliament a new one will have to be forged if the British state is to survive. My colleagues and I will be fighting for the best possible deal for our country.

Geraint Davies: The Tories have said that they will legislate to stop income tax going up in England. Would the hon. Gentleman support the devolution of income tax to Wales? Does he think that that is a clever Conservative trick that says to Wales, “Instead of getting your fair share, raise your own tax on the back of your own people”?

Jonathan Edwards: The hon. Gentleman is conflating two separate issues. There is the issue of fair funding for Wales, and we have a proud record of fighting for a better deal for Wales; we get a bad deal from the Barnett formula as it is currently constructed. Given that the Unionist parties have conceded that the Barnett formula will remain in stone, we believe that Wales will have the same amount of money as Scotland, which is around £1.4 billion extra for our devolved services.

Direct Westminster control has clearly completely failed the Welsh economy; the latest Eurostat figures put the communities that the hon. Gentleman and I represent at the bottom of the European Union pack, while inner London is by far the most prosperous. The only solution is for us to have control of the levers for job creation so that we can intervene in our economy.

Our second major aim as a parliamentary group will be to ensure that the Westminster Government do not steamroller legislation through this place against the wishes of the National Assembly for Wales. Although it has been reported that the Government are rowing back from their intention to scrap the Human Rights Act, it is difficult to see how they might introduce a so-called

British Bill of Rights without repealing the Act first. Any attempt to scrap the Human Rights Act will therefore be of significant concern. The issue will be pressing in Scotland and Northern Ireland, where justice responsibilities are, of course, devolved; the Human Rights Act is a vital part of the Good Friday agreement. In Wales, the Human Rights Act is written into the Government of Wales Act.

I have called on the National Assembly to hold an urgent vote on a motion indicating its support for the Human Rights Act. If the Westminster Government were to ignore the sovereign will of the National Assembly for Wales, the matter would more than likely end up in the Supreme Court. That would have significant constitutional implications. I urge the new Secretary of State for Justice to listen to the advice of the former Attorney General, the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who said that the Human Rights Act underpins devolved powers to Wales and that it is embedded in the constitutional settlement of devolution. The Westminster Government would find it extremely hard to scrap the Act without the express consent of the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish Governments.

Our other major concern is the proposed legislation to enact a referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union. I often think that the Prime Minister is tactically very clever but strategically not as astute. His posturing on Europe is a case in point. Tactically, committing to a referendum brilliantly protected his party from the UKIP insurgency and has managed to placate his restless Back Benchers—and, indeed, some of his Front Benchers. Strategically, that posturing was deficient, as it now blatantly endangers the UK's economic future with an out vote, while also exposing his party's major Achilles heel.

The Welsh national interest is best served by being a part of the European Union. The EU's redistributive mechanisms have led to billions of pounds of investment in regional aid and support for the agricultural sector in Wales, in addition to access to the single market—vital for an exporting nation such as mine. Needless to say, the two main policy fields that the Westminster parties have wanted to renegotiate are the two that benefit my country the most: regional policy and agricultural support. We will seek to amend the proposed referendum Bill to ensure that the national interest of Wales is protected. If the UK is a genuine partnership of equals, Wales must not be forced out of the European Union against its will. We will seek to ensure that the constituent parts of the UK have a veto that protects their national interests when it comes to any proposed referendum. Diolch yn fawr iawn.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): Order. Interventions have taken their toll on injury time. To accommodate all hon. Members who wish to speak, I find it necessary to reduce the time limit to 10 minutes, as of now.

6.45 pm

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker; I will try to be disciplined in my taking of interventions. It is a pleasure to follow

the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards). I shall not follow him down the route of devolution for Wales, despite the fact that my name is Davis.

The House will be unsurprised that I find a great deal to approve of in this Queen's Speech; it is, after all, the first to be delivered by a solely Conservative Government for nearly 20 years. I particularly welcome the European Union referendum Bill. Contrary to what has been said, it is asking the people's permission to do something—stay in or leave. It is not anything else beyond that and it is long overdue.

I also welcome the education and adoption Bill, which involves two sets of moves in the right direction. I would do more myself, but the moves are, at least, beneficial. I welcome the enterprise Bill, which will build on the economic success of the past few years. It will create jobs so it will probably do more to reduce poverty in this country than any other social measure. I welcome the childcare Bill, which doubles free childcare to 30 hours a week—indeed, I would again go further and reduce some of the restrictions on that childcare provision. That would help underpin the lives of ordinary people in a beneficial way.

I also welcome the right-to-buy Bill. It is controversial, but done properly—that point matters—it will improve ordinary working people's ability to get on to the property ladder. The failure to do that has been decried on both sides of the House. At the same time, it will release money to allow new social housing, which every Government in the past 20 years have failed to provide on a sufficient scale. Indeed, the last Labour Government failed in 13 years to provide as much social housing as was built in one year under Margaret Thatcher. We all have to face that fact.

I want to talk about three areas of concern, many of which have been mentioned, especially by my right hon. and learned Friend the erstwhile Attorney General. The first is the Scotland Bill. I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) is not here, because he would have some views on this. Despite my being a firm Unionist, I have long been an advocate—since 1998, in fact—of more fiscal autonomy for the Scottish Parliament. When I was the Public Accounts Committee Chairman in 1998-99, I went to see Gordon Brown to tell him that the mechanism that he had chosen, of having Holyrood dependent on an opaque, virtually incomprehensible subvention formula, was a grievance machine: it would create grievances in Scotland and England. As such it was a destabilising measure, not a stabilising one.

We need to grip this issue. We need to enable the Scottish Parliament to pay its own way from funding that it raises and controls, both in policy and Executive terms, and to ensure that subventions provided from the rest of the United Kingdom, in the form of pensions and other welfare costs, are properly costed, as are all the other taxes raised in Scotland that do not go to the Scottish Parliament. We should make our judgments in future on the basis of knowledge, not of assertion and counter-assertion from the two sides of Hadrian's Wall. That is one issue, and we will come back to it in detail no doubt during the debate on the various measures relating to both Scotland and England.

Like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), the aspect of this Queen's Speech that worries me most is the whole

question of Human Rights Act repeal, and, with that, the introduction of the counter-terrorism Bill and the communications data Bill—the so-called snoopers charter. I am very pleased that the Government have decided to step back from an immediate rush into repealing the Human Rights Act. That seems very sensible. With only 19 days to go until the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, it at least shows some sensitivity to the history of our country and what we stand for—something to which my right hon. and learned Friend referred. We should remember that the biggest lesson of Magna Carta is that the acquisition of liberty and loss of liberty in our history has often happened by accident as much as by plan. We must think about the unintended consequences of what we do when we set about changing these major constitutional issues.

Before this debate I spent a little time looking through the list of adverse judgments against the United Kingdom by the European Court of Human Rights since we joined, but mainly since 2001, when the HRA came into effect. Bearing in mind that I was the person, along with Jack Straw, who brought to this House the motion that stopped the imposition of prisoner votes on this country, I have a very sceptical view of the ECHR, yet I found that I agreed with some 90% of the judgments, on such diverse things as taking away from the Government the right to keep the DNA of innocent people for years, through to preserving the right of British citizens to wear a crucifix while at work. That is the level of diversity that we are talking about. The number of things I did not like was quite small, and that came about largely as a result of the nature of the Court as a body without any feeling for the history and tradition of Britain, with a lot of people from different countries who have no reason to know about our history.

Ideally, therefore, I would like us to keep the main thrust of the HRA but bring the Court judgments back to our own Supreme Court. Unfortunately this produces for us a serious conundrum to which I have not yet heard any Government Minister give an answer. As it stands, the European convention on human rights, in the hands of Strasbourg, is entrenched; no British Government could change it. If we bring its provisions back to the United Kingdom, then it is no longer entrenched. Looking at the history of the past 20 years, I ask myself how Governments would have responded when, let us say, 90 days' detention without charge went across this set of tramlines, or control orders, or DNA, or anything else. What the Government would do, of course, is change the constitutional measure that was put in place to uphold the Court.

Mr Rees-Mogg: On the point about entrenchment, my right hon. Friend referred to Magna Carta. Three clauses of Magna Carta still remain the law today, 800 years later. Entrenchment is not needed for the law to survive if it is good law.

Mr Davis: That was my view 20 years ago. Since then, I have lived through three sets of Governments, none of whom I would trust with the protection of liberty in this country. Three clauses are left out of how many? I have forgotten; a very large number have disappeared. The harsh truth is that in the modern world Governments are very quick to modify things that are inconvenient to them. When the Blair Government were in power, they

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were very happy to do things that were just procedural issues that the public did not pay any attention to, even though their effects were enormous.

The only way to deal with this is to undertake a written constitution for the United Kingdom. That could not be done on a partisan basis—it would have to be bipartisan—and it would take years, more than a single Parliament. I am afraid that at the moment, as it stands, I am unwilling to support Human Rights Act abolition unless I hear an answer to that conundrum, as well as the others put to the House by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield.

I have concerns about the counter-terrorism Bill, which intends to move us from stopping people making speeches that incite violence to stopping ones that incite hatred. I suspect that many people in this House have made speeches that incite hatred, sometimes deliberately, sometimes not. How on earth we are going to make the judgment as to what crosses this line and what does not without massively impeding our freedom of speech, I do not know. Let us remember that Voltaire's comment, accurately, was this: "I despise what you say but I will fight to the death for your right to say it." I repeat: "despise what you say". We must remember that freedom of speech is the right of people to say things we do not like and are not comfortable with.

On the communications data Bill, I differ dramatically from the previous Attorney General, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield. I have watched over many years the operation of our agencies and the foreign agencies. Most of them, pretty much all the time, behave honourably in collecting data, but they take the view that collecting data is not wrong; only looking at it is wrong. I am afraid that is semantic nonsense. If one holds the data, one has the power of the Stasi even if one does not behave like the Stasi—the power of a totalitarian state even if one does not behave like a totalitarian state. All those of us who have been here for many years have seen Governments, from time to time, misuse the data they have in front of them. I would be very unwilling for us to move further down that route, particularly because the Americans, as we speak, have passed the USA Freedom Bill—Act, as it will be—by some 330 votes to 88 votes in Congress. That will reverse exactly the sort of mass collection of data that is being proposed here. It is implausible to argue that the Americans do not need it but somehow we do.

I welcome the main parts of the Queen's Speech, but some are incredibly difficult in terms of liberty and justice in this country. We are in a small-majority Parliament. I do not want a return to the trials and tribulations of the '92-'97 Parliament, but I do want a Government who do not just try to solve everything in Whitehall or in a specially selected Committee with specially selected Members. I want these problems to be solved on the Floor of this House, and I hope that they give us the time to do it.

6.56 pm

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): I congratulate the Conservative party on its victory at the general election and the Scottish National party on its victory in the election in Scotland. Two main rules have

always been in my head about democracy and the outcome of an election: first, the majority shall prevail; and secondly, the rights of the minorities must always be respected. Winning an election outright, wonderful achievement though it is for the Conservative party, is not a licence to ride roughshod over those who disagree with it—or with us, were we to be in power.

I fear that having gone from a situation of great political volatility, we may now try to assume that it is back to business as usual and that, because there is a majority, this place is a sausage machine that is here just to ram through legislation. That would be a disaster for the nation at any time, but particularly when fundamental issues impacting on our democracy are going to come before us over the next five years. "Back to normal working" is a bad philosophy. We need to respect those who have different views and, through our processes and procedures in this House, to accommodate these debates. If we fail to do that, we will be putting a lid on things that will explode off our democracy in the not too distant future.

We have a very long Parliament ahead. I can understand the new Members, in particular, being very enthusiastic about coming to this place—the pomp and the finery and the rest of it, and what an experience it is—but there is going to be five years' worth, and the edge will go off that feeling. There will be a lot of drudgery and a lot of routine, and there will be a full five-year Parliament. On the previous occasion, we did not pass the Bill that became the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 until about a year into the Parliament, so it did not feel like a full five years, but that is what we are now facing.

I am a Fixed-term Parliaments Act person, and one of the good things about the Act is that it allows a Government to plan their legislative programme: not to ride roughshod over people with whom they disagree, but to have proper process. From the Floor, we have heard repeated calls—from the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), the former Attorney General the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), and the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), as well as from Opposition Members—for the need to understand the issues, to listen and to work stuff through. I agree with the leader of the Plaid Cymru Members, the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards), that when we are recreating a democracy, there is a moment when those of us who believe in the Union will need to work very hard to work out how to save it. That is not a problem that my friends in the Scottish National party need worry about too much, but those of us who do care about it, need to work at it very carefully. Pushing stuff through is not the answer, and using—or abusing—this Parliament is not the way to do it. That is a long-term matter.

Mr David Davis: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we in this Parliament should return to the old tradition of having multi-day debates on matters of constitutional importance, such as human rights?

Mr Allen: There are many ways to skin a cat, and given that we have five years and are not thinking that maybe there will be a general election next year or maybe the Government will fall—maybe, maybe—we can use all such devices. I referred earlier to the possibility, under Standing Orders, of having a special Committee.

I would argue very strongly—as Chairman of the Select Committee on Political and Constitutional Reform, I would, wouldn't I?—that there should be a serious pre-legislative stage and a post-legislative stage in our Select Committees. That is the role of Parliament, and my worry is that the Government may seek to ride roughshod over us. That is not a partisan point.

If I make any point today, I want to make the simple one—I make it to GCSE students, let alone Members of Parliament—that Government and Parliament are two separate and distinct entities. We tend to conflate them, which makes life a lot easier; when we do not know what the business of the day is and the bell rings, it is easier to be told what to do. They are two distinct institutions, and the legislature and Executive have a different view of life—not always.

If I may be so bold, one thing that new Members will learn is that there is a permanent conflict in this place, particularly if they support a party or a Government view, because they will be torn on a daily basis. If they have two brain cells, it is a difficult role to fulfil: working for their constituents and for democracy while following their party line, particularly when it is laid down by the Prime Minister or their party leader. That permanent conflict—the eternal battle, as it were, between the Government and the legislature—is one with which we need to engage.

The Government currently control Parliament and our daily agenda. Many years ago when I was a new Member, before the House had even met I sought out the doyen of Parliament at that time, a guy called Chris Price, the Member of Parliament for Lewisham West, who has sadly passed away. I asked, “Where do I go and who do I talk to to understand this place?” He said, “You go to see a guy called Murdo Maclean.” No one had heard of him.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): Oh, yes we had.

Mr Allen: They have now. The current Murdo Maclean is a guy called Roy Stone—I am sure he is very happy at my naming him on the Floor of the House—who is the private secretary to the Chief Whip. He has a buddy on the other side called Mike Winter, who is the head of the Leader of the House's office. They are the two most powerful people in Parliament. New Members do not know who they are or where they live, but I suggest that they go round, seek them out, knock on their door and ask their advice. I am sure that they would be absolutely delighted if 40, 50 or 100 new Members came round to understanding how Parliament and Government really work.

It is essential to make sure that we are equipped for the task of scrutiny, but we are still to set up a House business Committee. Before the last election, the Wright Committee reported to the House on a whole series of reforms, including things we now take for granted, such as that our Select Committee Chairs should be elected by secret ballot, not gifted to us by the Whips, and that members of Select Committees should be elected by party in a secret ballot, rather than appointed by the Whips. Many other reforms went through at that point. One of the key things that we missed and was sidestepped, but to which the previous Government and no doubt the Labour Opposition agreed, was a House business Committee. It would have meant that when we have an

issue such as how to deal with the Human Rights Act or whether it is right that some order from 1997 determines whether or not we can elect the people who decide on everything in this House—of course that was never intended to be the case—we had a mechanism to debate those issues. If they are not debated, we may be trying to be fair, but people outside Parliament will not understand it, and some people may even exaggerate the importance of such matters for their own political gain. I am sure that that would not happen, but it could do so.

We need to have such mechanisms so that our democracy can function effectively. My worry is that now a majority Government have been returned, the instincts of various officials around the place is to ask not what we should now do to renew our democracy, but how to push their laws through the House of Commons. That contradiction could be very divisive and explode in our faces if we do not do our job properly.

Many of these things were covered in the reports of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, which might have covered them again. Briefly, the reports have talked about the crisis in the Union, our relations with Europe, devolution in Scotland and England, the role of this Parliament, improving the legislative process, the role of the second Chamber—a quiet moment in the Queen's Speech, I noticed—and the need, as many colleagues have said, for a proper constitutional convention that goes beyond the bubble to bring people from outside Parliament alongside on how we can recreate a new democracy within the Union. Our boundaries are a matter of great concern to people in this place. Where will that issue be decided, and where will the pre-legislative scrutiny of it take place, asking whether there should be 600 or 650 Members and so on?

We have a crisis of legitimacy in our democracy. Either the House steps up and devises means by which we can debate that crisis effectively and make our institutions more legitimate—with parliamentarians deciding to support Parliament, rather than just the Government or an alternative Government—or, just as the people of Scotland faced a very different morning after the general election, we could wake up on a morning in 2020 to find our Union not only in jeopardy, but destroyed. That is something that some people would approve of, but if we do not want it, we need to act on that now.

7.8 pm

Sir Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my east midlands colleague, the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen). Not for the first time, he has made a very thoughtful and interesting speech. I hope that those who did not have the opportunity to listen to it will read it in *Hansard* tomorrow. I dare say that the good people of Nottinghamshire will set it to music.

I agree with the general thrust of the hon. Gentleman's point that to be a Member of Parliament on the Government Benches does not absolve us from holding the Government to account. It is important for all of us, from whichever part of the country and party we come, to remember that our job as a Member of Parliament is, first, to represent our constituents, but secondly, to hold the Government to account. During discussions on the Queen's Speech, it is important to remember that

[*Sir Edward Garnier*]

constitutional point. Even though we have a largely unwritten constitution—it is written down in several different documents, not in one compendious constitutional document—the Executive sit in Parliament, but should not be allowed to sit on Parliament. That distinction tends to be forgotten by those of us who get more or less enthusiastic about ambition, promotion or whatever it may be. The hon. Gentleman's speech was a timely reminder, at the start of this Parliament, that individual Members have a special role to perform.

I want briefly to complain about the yet further delay to the development of St Luke's hospital in Market Harborough—I weave this in because the Queen's Speech referred to the NHS—which means that this farce has continued into another year. The delay has now lasted for more or less the entire 23 years of my membership of the House. The waste of taxpayers' money has been compounded year on year, under the coalition Government, under the Labour Governments prior to 2010 and under the Conservative Governments in the 1990s. It is a disgrace, and I hope that the Secretary of State for Health and his Ministers will get a grip of the throats of the management of the scheme and make sure that something is done.

On another quick point, unlike the hon. Member for Nottingham North, I regret the Fixed-term Parliaments Act and had rather hoped we would see measures to repeal it. I have not yet given up hope, but who knows? I simply put that down for later consideration.

I want to talk most about the provision in the Queen's Speech where the Queen said:

“My Government will bring forward proposals for a British Bill of Rights”.

It seems to me that too many politicians have not read the law and do not understand the human rights regime in this jurisdiction, but it is equally fair to say that far too many lawyers do not understand the politics—I plead guilty as a lawyer. There is therefore a tension between the desire of a Government full of politicians to do something that is politically attractive and the desire among stuffy old lawyers to inhibit the political will of the Government, either because they are legally illiterate or just inconvenient.

If I am delighted about anything relating to human rights legislation that the Queen's Speech deals with, I am delighted that there appears to be a delay, or some proposal to allow the matter to be thought about. I refer hon. Members to pages 60 and 73 of the Conservative party manifesto, which I confess I only read the other day, some days after the general election. Page 73 states:

“We will scrap the Human Rights Act”,

and page 60 states:

“We will reform human rights law and our legal system”.

I will not amuse the House with the paragraphs underneath those two headlines. The proposals in the manifesto are confused, and because they are confused they are confusing, thereby fuelling the tension between the politicians in a hurry and the lawyers who do not like politics.

I have identified seven points that need to be thought about carefully as we consider what to do about the human rights story. There are seven political and legal difficulties to overcome if we are to replace the Human Rights Act with a British Bill of Rights. First, as

discussed, there is the impact on Scottish devolution, and secondly there is the impact on the Good Friday agreement—in addition, there is the effect on the Welsh devolution settlement. Thirdly, there is the need to deal with Conservative supporters of the Human Rights Act and the European convention on human rights. That is a straightforward piece of political management that the Government will have to sort out. Fourthly, again on a matter of political management, they will have to think about what to do when an amendment to, or repeal of, the human rights regime gets to the other place. They do not have a majority there, so some acute minds—political, legal, intellectual and otherwise—will have to be deployed to get the matter through the House of Lords. Fifthly, we will have to work out which rights are to be protected, and sixthly, we will have to work out how those rights will be enforced and the legal form the Bill of Rights will take. Seventhly, and perhaps most importantly, somebody has to explain why any of this exercise is necessary in the first place.

It is a hugely complicated subject and not something that will be dealt with between now and Thursday week, when the final votes on the Queen's Speech are taken, but there is the question that my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) frequently brings up and which formed the subject of his European Scrutiny Committee's 43rd report, during the 2013-14 Session. I refer to the charter of fundamental rights—an EU instrument that broadly replicates the convention—which article 6 of the treaty on European Union appears to bring within British domestic law. If we repeal the Human Rights Act, we will not disengage ourselves from the convention. We can do what the hell we like with the Act—repeal it, turn it upside down, put it through a mincer—but it will not affect our international treaty obligations under the convention, of which we have been a member since the 1950s. Ministers and others who are keen to see the Act repealed need to think very carefully about what they are doing.

There are complaints that the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg has become too political and been staffed by unqualified or inadequate judicial minds. That is for others to say. However, the lack of self-confidence that we have in our own institutions is not borne out by the evidence. Section 2 of the Human Rights Act does not state that the British courts have to kowtow to Strasbourg; it simply states that they have to take account of its judgments. Frequently our courts take account of its judgments and come to a different conclusion, and there is nothing wrong with that. I therefore urge the Government and Members of a different persuasion from me to read the documents and think carefully about the consequences of what they are doing, and not to tilt at the wrong windmill, because it will end in tears.

That said, in the last few seconds available to me, I want to assure my hon. Friend on the Treasury Bench that the rest of the Queen's Speech is utterly wonderful.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): Order. I remind the House that maiden speeches are by convention heard with appreciation, if appropriate, but without intervention. It is a pleasure to call the first maiden speaker of the 2015 Parliament, Mr Brendan O'Hara.

7.18 pm

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to the debate, and I am grateful to have caught your eye so early in the new Parliament. It is an honour to be the first of the new intake of 182 MPs to make my maiden speech in this Parliament.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I begin by extending my thanks to you and your staff for the welcome and help you have given to all of us new Members since our arrival in this place a couple of weeks ago. Indeed, it has not just been you and your staff; it has been everyone, from the Doorkeepers, Tea Room staff and Library staff to the police and security personnel, as well as other hon. Members, who have made us feel extremely welcome. I am sure I speak for all 50 of my new colleagues behind me when I say how enormously grateful we are.

I believe that that is extremely important because, despite the great political differences that exist between us—differences that will be fiercely debated over the next five years—it is essential to recognise from the outset that we come to this place in a spirit of mutual respect and co-operation. Each of us comes with that most important qualification—public support. I sincerely hope that that will be the hallmark of our time in this place.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) and the right hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier) for their wise words. I am reminded that in 1886, the great R.B. Cunninghame Graham, the MP for North West Lanarkshire said in this Chamber that there was no better time to lose one's parliamentary virginity than during the Queen's Speech. I remain, however, to be convinced.

R.B. Cunninghame Graham was a man ahead of his time. Elected as a Liberal in 1888 he, along with Keir Hardie, founded the Scottish Labour party—one of two venerable Scottish institutions founded in 1888. I am delighted to report that at least one of them remains in robust health to this day. As I say, Cunninghame Graham was a man ahead of his time: a Liberal who founded the Labour party and ended his political career as president of the Scottish National party. His was a political journey with which we in Scotland have become very familiar in recent years—and never more so than in May's general election when 56 of the 59 Scottish constituencies returned SNP Members to this place.

For the first time ever, the four constituent parts of this United Kingdom delivered four very different verdicts on how this country should progress. This may seem like a circle that cannot be squared, but our constituents expect us to find a way of working together constructively—and that we must do. We were therefore disappointed at the content of the Queen's Speech. Despite having very different visions of the future of these islands, I can guarantee that we will continue to work constructively with other hon. Members, and we will never lose sight of why we were elected in the first place, which is to win substantial new powers for the Scottish Parliament, to bring an end to the failed and divisive policy of austerity, and to oppose the plan to renew the Trident missile system at a cost of £100,000,000,000 to the public purse. These are missiles, incidentally, that will be situated in my constituency of Argyll and Bute.

Before continuing, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my predecessor, Mr Alan Reid, who represented the constituency for 14 years. Mr Reid was a hard-working, affable and popular Member of Parliament whose defeat in May was no reflection on him as an individual, but was rather a verdict by the Scottish people on the Liberal Democrats' decision to go into coalition with the Conservatives in 2010, coupled with a burning desire on the part of the people of Scotland for radical change. I take this opportunity to wish Mr Reid all the best for his future.

I am certain that during his 14 years as MP, Mr. Reid would have worn through many a set of tyres and consumed many a box of sea-sickness tablets—and I look forward to doing the same. At 7,000 sq km, Argyll and Bute represents no less than one tenth of the landmass of Scotland. With 26 inhabited islands, our aggregated coastline is, I believe, longer than that of France. So while travel across this vast and beautiful constituency may be challenging, it is more than compensated for by the staggering beauty on offer. Having spoken to many hon. Members, I know that many of them have enjoyed many a visit and holiday to Argyll and Bute in the past, and I urge them to return soon. To those who have not yet visited my constituency, I say please come to Argyll and Bute, because I can guarantee that the scenery, the mountains, the beaches, the rivers, our islands and our people will be among the most welcoming that they will experience anywhere in the world.

Argyll and Bute is famous for many things, perhaps none more than for the quality of our water—particularly when it has been distilled with malt and a little peat. To let Members into a secret, we have even taken to bottling this concoction. If hon. Members have yet to sample it, I suggest that they do so at the earliest opportunity. Not only will they find it refreshing and invigorating, but with 56 of us now occupying these Benches, it may well assist in their understanding of what we are actually saying.

Despite everything Argyll and Bute has to offer, we face real challenges. We have an ageing and a declining population, as too many of our young people leave and do not return, while too few people from other parts of these islands are moving into the constituency to set up businesses and raise families. One reason for that is the lack of reliable, high-speed broadband and 4G communications across much of the constituency. It is unacceptable that in 2015 the economic development of such a large part of Scotland is inhibited by slow internet connections and poor mobile phone coverage. How can we expect to attract ambitious, young entrepreneurs to Argyll and Bute without the basic infrastructure that can be enjoyed in nearly every other part of the United Kingdom? We cannot wait any longer for this, and I very much welcome the Scottish Government's £400 million investment in rolling out high-speed broadband across rural Scotland. For us, it cannot come quickly enough. Before I was elected, I promised the people of Argyll and Bute that this would be one of my main priorities. I am happy to repeat that promise in this place today.

I am the first nationalist MP to represent the people of Argyll and Bute since the late Iain MacCormick was elected in 1974. Iain lived long enough to vote in September's independence referendum, managing—despite

[*Brendan O'Hara*]

being gravely ill—to get to the polling station to vote yes on 18 September. Iain sadly died the following day, without living long enough to see an independent Scotland. I like to think that he would view my presence in this place as a reasonable second prize, and I shall raise a glass of Argyll and Bute's finest “special water” in his memory tonight.

As I said at the start of my speech, we come to this place in a spirit of mutual respect and co-operation, but Members should be in no doubt that we are determined to achieve what the people of Scotland elected us to do. I am sure that the Government will recognise the mandate that we have from the people of Scotland, and will act accordingly. There can be no more one-size-fits-all policies covering everything and everyone from Truro to Thurso; and there can be no return to “business as usual” for Scotland.

7.27 pm

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): May I welcome you to the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker? It is a real pleasure to see such a distinguished member of the Procedure Committee looking after our affairs this evening.

I really want to congratulate the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (*Brendan O'Hara*) on his superb maiden speech. It was the ideal maiden speech, containing everything that a good maiden speech should have. It was serious minded, enormously respectful of the House of Commons, generous to his predecessor—against whom I imagine the hon. Gentleman had quite a good campaign to have won so successfully—while also having a little bit of steel that good maiden speeches need so that we know that he means business in this House. I congratulate him most sincerely on a brilliant speech, supported by so many of his compatriots and fellow Members of the Scottish National party. Looking at my own Benches, I fear it rather puts us to shame.

Speaking as a parliamentarian, the Scottish Nationalists have shown us how to behave today. They have come here more smartly dressed than the Conservatives; they have sat through the debate in greater numbers than those of my own party; and they have even let the hon. Member for Bolsover (*Mr Skinner*) have his usual seat. Their good manners and respect for the House of Commons is something that those on the Government Benches will look forward to taking very seriously over the next five years, because those of us who are Unionists recognise that their right to be here is just as great as those of us from England, Wales or Northern Ireland. That will be an important part of how this Parliament develops.

Let me turn to the Queen's Speech. The Gracious Speech divides, I think, into two parts. There is the natural business of government—the important and urgent business of government, starting, of course, with the economy. What the coalition managed is beginning to yield considerable fruit. The latest monthly deficit figure was much ahead of forecasts, with a significant increase in tax revenues coming through. That is what it would have been reasonable to expect.

Tax revenues are a lagging indicator of economic performance, and the fact that they are now coming through more quickly probably means that the deficit

will decline faster than it is currently forecast to do. That will give us a strong background ensuring that we can live within our means, and that the legislation to prohibit an increase in national insurance, income tax or value-added tax will be a type of legislation to which we can commit ourselves very easily. Nothing particularly difficult will be involved, because, in my view, the revenues have now been boosted, but also because any increase in VAT would probably reduce the tax take for the Government. It is already clear that businesses reaching the VAT threshold are deciding not to grow and not to take on extra customers, because as soon as they do, their costs will become 20% higher. I think that 20% is as high as VAT can reasonably be.

We saw that the 50p income tax rate raised less money than the 45p rate is raising now, and we all know the lesson of the Laffer curve: higher rates do not produce more income for the Exchequer. When we consider national insurance and income tax together, we see that the Government are, among other things, taking lower earners out of tax. If those people were put back into tax, they would merely have to be paid more in benefits, thus increasing the deficit.

On that side of things—the fiscal, or tax, side of things—the Queen's Speech is admirable. Given that it is a continuation of the work done by the coalition, I suppose that it would be mean-minded not to pay tribute to the Liberal Democrats, who, although now reduced in number, played an important part in that work. I think that the nation should be grateful for the big decision that they made in 2010, at considerable cost to their party's fortunes, to ensure that the country could get out of the mess that had been left.

Beyond that, however, there are the constitutional matters, which, to my mind, are of a piece, whether they concern English votes for English issues, more devolution, the European referendum or human rights. I say that because, between 1997 and 2010, the Government started a whole process of constitutional reform which they did not complete or round off. One example is devolution. It began in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but nothing was done for England. That is because it is very complicated to come up with a solution for England that meets the requirements of constitutional propriety, while also recognising that England contains 85% of the population. If England demands exact parity with Scotland, we shall probably have broken up the United Kingdom anyway. If the English want the Union, the onus is on them to recognise that, and to be generous to the other constituent parts of the United Kingdom.

That is why I support—although I note that there is opposition to it—the use of Standing Orders at some point during the progress of a Bill to allow English votes. Standing Orders are easy to suspend. A Standing Order could be suspended if, for example, a future Government were dependent on Scottish votes for their continuation. There might be a political cost, but the Government of the country could continue, and Members of Parliament from Scotland would remain exactly the same Members of Parliament. It would be like an extension of a Grand Committee. There would be an issue in which some Members of Parliament were not involved, but ultimately it would once more be in the power of the whole House to decide on it.

That is a much more flexible system than a legislative system that would create a Parliament within a Parliament. A legislative system would mean that the franchise

would change, and the ability of MPs from other countries in the Union to vote on issues would be permanently reduced, whereas a Standing Order is essentially a self-denying ordinance that could be overturned for a single vote. Standing Orders are suspended fairly routinely when it suits the Government for business to run a bit late, or when they want Second and Third Readings to take place on the same day. That cannot be done with legislation. Standing Orders are not a means of playing some wretched trick on Scottish MPs, but a way of ensuring that the system in the House of Commons can work and can be fluid. However, I should prefer that to be a fairly limited aspect of our law-making, involving issues that are so clearly and unequivocally English—or English and Welsh—that no reasonable person would think otherwise. I do not want the standing of individual Members to be determined by the nation from which they come.

The other issues that we face—the European issues—stem, in a way, from the same source. They involve a loss of power from the House of Commons to the continent and to continental courts, or even to judges in our own country. I worry about that, not because I think that out of nowhere has come a common sovereignty that we must fight to the death to protect, but because we hold that sovereignty in trust for our electors, and we must and ought to have returned it to them every five years. Instead, we have given it away to judges in Strasbourg, and to some of our own judges across the road in the Middlesex Guildhall. That has made it easy for legislation to be overturned, and hard for it to be reinstated by the House of Commons.

I do not deny that there are some very clever judges. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier), the former Solicitor General, said that there were judges who understood the law better than us mere politicians, and that may well be true. Nevertheless, we make the law, on behalf of our constituents, for the judges to interpret, and if we do not like the judges' interpretation, it is for us to change the law. If we give away that power so that the judges become the final arbiter, we shall have given away something that does not actually belong to us, but belongs to our electors and to the British people.

The reform that I want is a reform that reasserts the principle of the sovereignty of Parliament, not as an end in itself, but because it supports democracy. That is where I think all the constitutional issues become involved. They are about respecting the will of the people, including the will of Scottish people to have more devolution, which I cannot deny, however much I want to. I stood in Scotland once; I got 9% of the vote. I did at least hold my deposit in Glenrothes, which is a fine town, and I very much enjoyed the experience. It is that level of democracy that we need to retain, be it in respect of devolution, Europe, or human rights.

7.37 pm

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): It is, as ever, a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), who is a provocative parliamentarian in the best of senses. I join him in congratulating the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) on his excellent maiden speech. Given its quality, I suspect that he will prove to be a shrewd ally on one or two issues on which the Scottish Nationalist and Labour parties will make common cause in the House, but a difficult opponent on many others.

I believe that Britain's future is as a federal Britain, and I believe that we are heading for that destiny now. The journey is happening in a very British way, by means of evolution, and it will look very different in different parts of the United Kingdom; but we must master the route to a federal state, rather than being buffeted by events along the way. I believe strongly that London must be part of that journey, that it must have its own compass, and that Londoners' voices must be heard. I welcome the plans in the Queen's Speech for the devolution of more powers to Scotland, and also the plans to give Britain's northern cities stronger powers to shape their citizens' own destiny.

We have traditionally seen the Union as consisting of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. It is time that we recognised that London is a very specific part of that Union. Yes, there are England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but there is the city state of London as well. London is the centre of wealth creation in the United Kingdom. I recognise that Britain's wealth has many sources, but London makes proportionally bigger contributions to the UK's economy than any other UK region or nation.

Much of the wealth that is created in London is rightly redistributed to other regions and nations. I agree with that in principle, but I also believe that London deserves more in return, and that Londoners deserve a better quality of life. We have the highest cost of living in the UK. The housing crisis is at its most acute in London. We have the highest rents and the most expensive homes to buy. In 2005, the average home in London cost £274,000. Ten years on, it is £465,000. Earnings have not doubled, but costs almost have. That is the reality for Londoners. The ratio of rents to earnings is higher in London than in any other region or nation of the UK. Owning property is now out of reach for most Londoners.

In the next decade, London will see an additional 1 million citizens needing somewhere to live, needing to use public services—schools, GPs and hospitals—and looking for work. Our transport system needs significant investment now, never mind in future years. Those pressures demand increased public investment and of course private sector investment, too. Inequality and poverty are starker in London than in any other region or nation of the UK. I say that not to diminish the scale of both in other parts of the UK, but merely to underline the seriousness of the challenges in London.

I supported the recommendations of the London Finance Commission. It concluded that London needs fewer borrowing constraints and greater devolved tax powers. At the moment, London retains little more than 7% of all the tax paid by London residents and businesses. In New York, more than 50% is retained by New York's mayor. Other cities of comparable size to London can set their own taxes, yet London cannot. Madrid, Paris, Tokyo, Berlin, Frankfurt and New York can all set property taxes. Paris, for example, can set a property tax on developed and undeveloped land. New York can determine land taxes, a hotel occupancy tax and a commercial business tax. The London Finance Commission made the powerful point that, if London has more control over its taxes and the ability to borrow, it will be better able to tackle impediments to further economic growth, never mind to tackle other key issues in our city.

[*Mr Gareth Thomas*]

Crossrail was first suggested in the 1940s. It was first formally proposed after an inquiry in 1974, but it has taken more than 40 years since then to start serious building work. We simply cannot take that length of time to decide whether Crossrail 2 should go ahead. London needs to be able to respond more quickly to the infrastructure challenges our city faces if we are to secure its continued prosperity and status as the greatest city on earth.

I share the view that London's property taxes should be devolved to London's government. Indeed, London generates a higher percentage of total income from property taxes than any other region of the UK. The House will be aware that London would still be making a greater than proportionate contribution to the Exchequer via corporation tax revenues, VAT revenues and other crucial areas of national income. Devolving property taxes would be a first step towards what should be a radical devolution package for London.

Geraint Davies: Given that Camden has greater asset value than Wales, the idea of devolving property tax, air passenger duty from Heathrow and all these other taxes to London would be a threat to the coherence of the Union.

Mr Thomas: I say gently to my hon. Friend, for whom I have considerable respect, that I profoundly disagree. Never mind the Scottish question, the Welsh question or indeed the English question, there is a London question that demands an answer: when will London be able to shape its destiny without always having to go to the man in Whitehall and the man in Downing Street to sort out our great city's challenges?

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I was the last chair of finance at the Greater London Council. London did have control of its business rates. It did have an element of property tax in the sense that it could borrow against its own assets. In addition, it had its own capital fund. It was certainly not a threat to the nation then.

Mr Thomas: I welcome my hon. Friend's intervention. I hope that he will agree with me on this, too: there is now a democratic deficit in this capital city. London did not vote for austerity on the scale we can expect. London did not vote for cuts in the NHS. London did not vote for cuts—to our police, our schools or the services our councils provide—on the scale that is set to befall our great city. I gently say again to the House that London deserves better. It is time to start a proper debate about the devolution of further responsibilities and about income tax being devolved to London.

Many international cities derive income from a local income tax, including, I am told, New York, Berlin and Madrid. In the UK, there is already a precedent with Scotland having the power to set income tax. Given the huge contribution that London makes to the rest of Britain, it is not identity politics that drives the case for further devolution; it is economic and social imperatives.

The London Finance Commission argued that property taxes should be devolved first and that is right, but it also concluded that, if greater powers, for example, in

welfare, health or education were devolved to London, the option of devolving or assigning income tax in London should be revisited. I believe that moment is now. If Greater Manchester is being invited to shape the future of its health and social care, I believe London should be invited to do so, too.

The London Challenge helped to drive up standards in education. I believe that it should be re-established and London given more collective responsibility to champion stronger standards and higher achievement in our schools. Skills and employment training budgets should be devolved, too.

These are, I recognise, big judgment calls for London itself and for the country as a whole. I disagree with many of the current Mayor's choices, but the Mayorality throughout the terms of its two incumbents has demonstrated generally sound management of major public services, notwithstanding the current garden bridge plans. I believe that it is time to establish a cross-party, cross-government inquiry, with business and other key stakeholders closely involved, and with the remit to explore both the case for devolution of further responsibilities to London and the case for devolving further taxation powers. The next Mayor, even if they serve for two full terms, may not be the Mayor who sees responsibility for income tax devolved to them, but I believe profoundly that it is time for London to accelerate its path to proper devolution. We should, for example, consider the case for more local control of London's NHS. I want the NHS to continue to be a truly national service. I think there is a need for national targets—cancer and waiting times being two key yardsticks by which to judge quality of service—but it is surely right that Londoners have more control themselves over services we value so highly.

Why should London not have responsibility for the decision on whether to introduce a London living wage, of course after consultation, not least with business? Why does that power need to rest with Ministers instead of Londoners? Why cannot we in London decide whether to control the cost of renting? Londoners together should be able to make these decisions, not have them dictated to us.

Any further devolution of tax powers and extra responsibilities will inevitably require scrutiny over how London is governed and whether the current divide in powers between Mayor and local boroughs and the Assembly are correct. Instinctively, I believe more power should be devolved to London's boroughs. City Hall has often felt remote from outer-London suburbs, but I suspect it has not always felt terribly helpful to some inner-London boroughs either. A root and branch review of the powers and effectiveness of City Hall and the Greater London Assembly ought to be part of the work of a commission looking at future devolution. I say that recognising the skill, hard work and powerful contributions of many in the Greater London Assembly, not least many of my own colleagues.

London is a great city, the envy of many worldwide, but we face huge challenges as our city grows even bigger. Certainly we look to this great House to help, but in London we have the imagination, the talent and the wealth to confront head on the issues that hold our city back or hold back the ambitions of our neighbours and fellow citizens. If others in this great country have succeeded in securing greater powers to control and

shape the response to their problems, why should not Londoners expect their Mayor to have the powers to be able to act?

I want London to continue to play a leading role in the UK. Indeed, I want London to lead the UK. But for that to happen, Londoners need to be able to lead London's future.

7.49 pm

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye in this important Gracious Speech debate. May I welcome you back to your Chair, may I thank the people of The Cotswolds for electing me in ever greater numbers, and may I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on succeeding for the first time in almost 20 years in getting an overall majority? I suspect he will have to play his cards carefully, because although he will have a honeymoon period for a month, even a year, after that time impediments will no doubt get in his way. I suggest that he get on and do the controversial legislation first.

It is almost *déjà vu* for me, because in 1992 I was immediately pitched into the all-night Maastricht debates, and today we are likely to be pitched into debates on the European Union. I suspect it will be a very different experience from 1992, because one thing I have learned on the many thousands of doorsteps I stood on in the last five weeks is that there is a huge division of opinion on Europe. Some people are radically in favour of remaining in the EU, while others are violently opposed to remaining in the EU. For that reason I believe a referendum on Europe is absolutely essential, so that we can have the arguments and the debates and then a vote, and live with that verdict, whatever it happens to be—and I think at the moment it is very close.

I congratulate the Scottish nationalists but I hope that they, as good democrats, will respect the result of their referendum in Scotland. They are going to get major devolutionary powers over tax raising and a host of other matters in this Parliament. I hope they will equally respect my constituents who want some form of English votes for English laws. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg): whatever solution we put in place—and I quite like the standing order solution because it is simple to enact and simple to get rid of—I hope it will only be operated in sparse and few circumstances.

There are two parts to this Queen's Speech in my view: constitutional and financial. I am absolutely delighted that we are building in this Queen's Speech on the financial improvements we made to this country in the last Parliament. Members have not mentioned jobs much so far in this debate. For me, jobs and public services are the two things we were really elected here for. If we do not have a sound economy, we cannot keep creating new jobs. I am particularly pleased that we are creating ever more jobs for youngsters, and ever more apprenticeships—2.2 million in the last Parliament and 3 million in this Parliament—as that is an admirable route for those who do not want, or are not able for one reason or another, to go to university.

I do not want to dwell on domestic matters this evening, however, and I have cover in the Queen's Speech as Her Gracious Majesty did refer to Ukraine and other

matters foreign. It is to those matters that I wish to devote my remaining time in this speech. I want to talk about Ukraine, ISIS in Iraq, Syria and, above all, stabilisation of the African countries so that we begin to solve the real problems we have got with migration into this country.

About two months ago I went to Ukraine and met its Prime Minister, Arseniy Yatsenyuk. I discovered a very sad state of affairs: the country is bankrupt, almost devoid of all necessities, and certainly does not need a fighting war with Russia. I discussed this matter at a conference this weekend, and I met some very bitter Ukrainians who said to me in very stark terms, "The Americans, yourselves and the Russians signed the Budapest agreement in 1994." That was not a military agreement, but it was an agreement that prevented aggression towards Ukraine in return for her giving up nuclear weapons. They felt very bitterly that we had not given them sufficient help to deter the Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine. There is no doubt that the Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine is going on at a pace. Every Minsk agreement has been broken almost to the day: the agreement in February was broken the day after by Russia reinforcing its troops within eastern Ukraine, and there have been instances of Russian artillery shelling Ukrainian positions from within Russia itself. We desperately need a strategy on Ukraine. We need, along with the EU and the Americans, to come up with a cohesive strategy that works and that deters the Russians. We have degraded their economy a bit through the sanctions, but we have not deterred their ambitions to take over the whole of eastern Ukraine. I put it to this House that if we do not deter the Russians in their ambitions in this respect, we will continue to have problems with Russian ambitions elsewhere.

Jim Shannon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I have very little time left and an awful lot to get through.

I want to move on to Iraq, and talk about ISIS. ISIS is one of the most vile terrorist organisations humanity has ever seen, yet, again, we do not have a concerted strategy to deal with it. We started with the Cyprus talks involving the Americans, the Germans, the French, ourselves, and the Russians. Wrongly, in my view, we did not include the Iranians, but that is another point. Unless we have a concerted strategy to deal with ISIS, it will undoubtedly take over more parts of the world than just Iraq. What worries me most about Iraq is that Iran, with its Shi'a militias, is doing our bidding against ISIS. If we are not careful we will come to a point where Iran—with its emerging nuclear ambitions, despite the agreement with the Americans—will simply take over Iraq. When I close my speech with the figures on oil production, the House will see how dangerous that is.

On Syria, I did a social action project in Gaziantep in south-east Turkey and was able to meet many Syrians in one of the refugee towns. They all—to a man, woman and child—told me they wanted to go back to a country that was at peace with itself. They wanted the international community to intervene and sort out the problems and restore their country to what it had been. It appears to me that the world does not have a concerted policy on Syria. It looks increasingly unlikely that the Free Syrian Army will be able to defeat the President's regime, and it

[Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

looks ever more likely that ISIS will play an ever bigger part—again, ISIS is only likely to be defeated by Iran in some form or another, probably backed by the Russians. The Syrian situation is extremely dangerous, and it is extremely bad for the poor people of Syria; 300,000 people have been killed in Syria, and over 2 million people have been displaced. What a human tragedy.

Finally, I want to talk about the Maghreb and the Sahel—north Africa. We are dealing with an unprecedented situation of migrants trying to leave Africa, mostly via Libya—the migrants are mostly not Libyans, but come from other countries—and to cross the Mediterranean to come to Europe. Ultimately this is unsustainable. However Europe decides to deal with the problem, we have to try to keep these people in their own countries, and in doing so we have to redirect our foreign aid. I was delighted to be able to argue during the election that we had kept to our 0.7% of GNI pledge, as that is absolutely right, and I am delighted to be saying this with the Minister of State, Department for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Mr Swayne), on the Front Bench. We need to redirect that aid now to north Africa, to try and stabilise some of those countries: give them the help they need; stabilise their Governments and civil service; stabilise, and make sure we have, the infrastructure so that companies want to go into those countries and invest and provide jobs, so that the people are content to remain in those countries and do not have a desperate desire to leave them and come to better climes. These are very important matters that my right hon. Friend needs to deal with.

The trouble with the world today is that where we have very weak Governments, the forces of evil tend to move in. We are seeing it in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we are certainly seeing it in some of the north African countries, in Libya, in Chad and in the Central African Republic. We are seeing it in those very weakly governed countries. We are seeing it in Nigeria, too, for goodness' sake, with the activities of Boko Haram. I believe our aid must go towards trying to strengthen those countries, so that we can defeat and deter some of the dreadful human rights abuses.

I promised the House that I would give the world oil production figures: Iraq has 12% of the world's oil reserves and Iran has 13%. If we allow Iran to take over Iraq, who would be happy with an emerging superpower, and a nuclear superpower at that, controlling a quarter—that is more than Saudi Arabia and more than Venezuela—of all the world's oil reserves? I think that could lead to a very big danger for the world.

7.59 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): Earlier in the debate, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) suggested that we should have serious discussions in this Parliament about the future of our economy, and I agree with him. In the debate so far, I have found remarkable complacency about the situation that we are facing. In fact, all the structural weaknesses and other factors that were present before the last crash are now reappearing, and many economic forecasts suggest that there is a prospect of precipitating another crash over the next two years. Consumer debt is rising,

as are costs. There has been no sustained pick-up in wages, productivity is stagnating and living costs are vulnerable to rises in interest rates and inflation. If the Budget on 8 July cuts £30 billion as predicted, that could push us back into recession as a result of reducing demand so dramatically.

The fundamentals of our economy remain completely unaddressed: we have an unbalanced economy; production, manufacturing and construction have still to recover to their 2008 levels; and the finance sector is oversized and unregulated. At the last estimate, 60% of the big five banks' profits since 2011 have been lost as a result of scandals. There is now a current account deficit of 5.5%, and a massive outflow of capital from this country. We have a debt of 80% of GDP, the bond markets are extremely volatile and the eurozone is unstable. These are all the ingredients for another crash, yet we do not seem to be debating that at the moment, despite the continuous warnings from the Office for National Statistics and the Office for Budget Responsibility in recent months.

The Prime Minister wants us to believe that economic recovery is under way and that the crisis is behind us. At the micro level, for my constituents, the economic crisis appears every payday. Many of them are experiencing economic crises, hardship and insecurity on a regular basis. As a London constituency representative, I believe that housing market failure is at the heart of our economic crisis. We knocked on every door in my constituency during the election, and I know that we are now facing the worst housing crisis since the second world war. I have 4,000 people on the housing waiting list. There were 10,000 last year, but a manoeuvre by the Conservative council simply wiped 6,000 of them off and denied them eligibility to be on the list. Tonight, I have 200 families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. I have families living in appalling housing conditions, with overcrowding, damp and insanitary conditions. I have families living in sheds. Shanties are now being built in my constituency to house families.

Rents in the private sector are between £1,200 and £1,600 a month for a little house. We have reinvented the back-to-back in my constituency, with some families living in the front of a property and others living in the back. The landlords of those properties are reaping something like £3,000 a month in rent. The buy-to-let landlords are making a fortune out of exploitative rents in my constituency. They fail to maintain their properties, but if the tenants complain, revenge evictions take place on a regular basis. This week, however, we have discovered that buy-to-let landlords have been given a £14 billion tax concession each year in recent years. Why? It is because, as the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) said, successive Governments have failed to build council houses. It is also because they have sold off council houses. The sell-off of council houses in my area has resulted in the bizarre situation of a Conservative council now having to rent back some of the council houses that it sold off 30 years ago, in order to house families in desperate need.

Affordable properties are being built at a minimal level. At the same time, affordability has now been redefined as 80% of the market rent, so "affordable" properties are now unaffordable to most of the population in my area. We were told that there would be a cap on benefits, and that that would reduce rent

levels as the message went out to landlords, but it has had no effect whatsoever because supply is not matching demand.

The legislation proposed in today's Queen's Speech on selling off housing association properties will simply exacerbate the problem. I fully agree with the housing associations' view that it will simply deplete their stock. Worse, it will undermine the asset base against which they can borrow to build new properties. We are told that this proposal will be funded by the sell-off of councils' higher-value properties, but that is absolutely unrealistic. The sell-off of more council properties will mean a greater depletion of council stock. In addition, the record of reinvestment and rebuilding following the sell-off of council properties has been abysmal: it is a record of non-delivery over decades.

The Government's legislation announced today will permanently embed the crisis in our housing market for future generations. We are storing up a greater crisis for the future. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), who is no longer in his place, said that these policies are socially cleansing whole areas of our city. Properties are being sold off, then sold on again to speculators and overseas property developers. Even those in the professions—the teachers, the firefighters, the police officers—can no longer afford to keep a roof over their head in London. As a result, working-class people and what could be described as middle-class professionals are being forced to move out. Alternatively, they live in an asset that they cannot sell because they are trapped and cannot find an alternative. Their sons and daughters are unable even to get on to the property ladder.

This all adds to the precarious nature of living in London at the moment, as incomes fail to match basic living costs. Professor Guy Standing defined the "precarariat" as people on zero-hours contracts or on the minimum wage, but many people on middle-range incomes—teachers, firefighters, the police, middle managers and small businesspeople—are now cascading into the precariat because they cannot afford the housing costs in our city. They are also faced with unstable employment, threatened by outsourcing or privatisation. They are no longer able to find a voice for their frustrations, either at work as a result of the undermining of trade union rights or, to be frank, within the political system itself at times.

We need to remind Governments to have an element of humility. This Government were elected by 25% of the electorate; 75% of the electorate failed to support them. That is why I issue this warning. There are real frustrations within our political system. People whom we represent are angry because successive Governments have not delivered the basics to them—new Labour and Conservative Governments alike. They have not provided people with decent jobs, decent wages or the ability to live in a decent home with a roof over their head and in a decent environment. Unless Governments acknowledge those frustrations and they are reflected in this House, they will be ventilated elsewhere.

If the Government fail to listen, opposition will surface on picket lines no matter what the legislation states. We will go back to the days of wildcat strikes, whether or not union members comply with the legislation proposed in this Queen's Speech. These problems will be seen on the streets, just as we have seen tonight in Parliament Square, which has been blocked by people

who are angry at not being listened to and angry at the production of this Queen's Speech. We will also see more occupations, particularly among the people in our capital city who are desperate to have a roof over their head and are forced to squat. We saw an example last year, when a young man was evicted from a squat and froze to death on its doorstep later that night.

The Government have said that this is a one-nation Queen's Speech, but I fear that this country has now been divided geographically and that people will be riven by division as a result. This is about inequality. The Government are not listening to the people who are suffering as a result of the recession and who are not seeing the sunlit uplands of the supposed recovery. If we in this House are not very careful, we are going to witness a population driven by anger losing faith in politics altogether. Yes of course we must have a rational debate on the Queen's Speech, but there needs to be room for some compromises in the legislation. I urge the Government to take a common-sense approach to a situation that could, if we are not careful, develop into an elective dictatorship.

8.9 pm

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): Mr Speaker, I am fairly confident that, whatever the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) might think, under you we will never be an elective dictatorship or any other kind. Instead, we shall enjoy the freedoms of this great place. Leaving dark humour aside, thank you for giving me my first chance to speak in this new Parliament. As many other hon. Members have done, I wish to put on the record my thanks to my constituents, in the beautiful areas of Norwich North, for again putting their trust in me to represent them here. I intend to speak up for them here and to gain results for them again, on the economy, on jobs coming to our city, on transport, on housing and in all the other areas where I have worked hard for solutions and will do so again.

I am delighted with the election result and I am pleased to be able to take my place on a majority Government Bench. That may be a novel feeling for the first few days, but I have no doubt that our majority will allow us to deliver the economic stability requested of us in the course of the election. It will allow us to increase living standards up and down the country, from Norwich to Newcastle, Newquay and everywhere in between. It will allow us to support real aspirations and create new opportunities.

I wish to make my few remarks tonight on the topic of younger people—the new generation for whom we hope to secure a better future. First, I wish to discuss turnout, which, as hon. Members will know, in the 2010 general election was 65% overall. However, three quarters of pensioners voted, whereas fewer than half of those aged 18 to 24 did, with the figures for the other age groups ranged neatly between those extremes. We do not yet have, and may not have, accurate data on this election from our new favourites, the pollsters, but recent figures published by Ipsos MORI suggested that turnout at the election among that youngest age group may have got worse, at 43%. Once again, the gentle range appears true, with those data showing older voters neatly and gradually turning out more than younger people.

[Chloe Smith]

Some people may find it reassuring to think that youngsters are just going to bounce into behaving in the same way as their parents or grandparents did when they hit a certain point in their life cycle, but I do not believe they will. A number of things have changed with this generation—I will call it my generation, although I am no longer the baby of the House. I pay tribute to our new colleague, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Ms Black), who has taken on that mantle. My generation reports less belief in voting as a civic duty; less interest in traditional politics, when asked about that per se; and less affiliation with parties. Today's 18 to 24-year-olds will not settle down to voting once they get married and get a mortgage. If democracy were banking on that happening, we would be waiting a long time for it, as marriage occurs later, if at all, and house prices crush many twenty-somethings' hopes of owning a home. So I welcome the announcement of a housing Bill in this Gracious Speech, and I shall discuss that a little later.

Voting is a habit that must be formed and, like many habits, it sticks if it is formed early. If individuals are not doing that any longer and are choosing no longer to exercise their vote, as a low turnout rate suggests, we have a barometer of broader patterns of change. Some have also argued that we also have

“a window into the future behaviour of Western citizens.”

The UK is the sick man of Europe for turnout among 18 to 24-year-olds, with participation rates in the UK and Ireland disturbingly low—Britain's are worst of all. Work by the Pew Research Centre suggests that although turnout among younger voters has always been lower in the United States than in the UK, with US younger voters always turning out in lower numbers than US older voters, the turnout rates there have been comparatively solid. In other words, the gap between American youth turnout and overall turnout has changed little in 40 years, whereas in Britain that gap has worsened dramatically. Young people vote less than their elders everywhere, but Britain's problem is worse and has worsened. That is something broken in our system. There is no one silver bullet answer to this problem, although we might talk about a number of campaigning, policy and franchise aspects. The point is that this is not about young people being young like they have always been; something has changed and has broken.

This Gracious Speech shows that it is the Conservative party that can be the home of young voters, with action on the issues that matter to them—housing, jobs, education and so on. We have a chance to serve the whole country in those terms. The youngest generation is least in favour of redistribution and high welfare spending, and we know that this group look to themselves to take action and look to business, charities and other action groups to achieve things with them for their chosen community; actions that the state can take come a long way down the list, according to some research. Even *The Guardian* has been forced to admit that generation Y may back the Conservatives.

I want politics in Britain to work for generation Y. I want to show clearly that the principles of the small state, responsible economics, freedom, enterprise and social liberalism matter for this generation as they have always mattered, and that people can have them through

a Conservative vote. In government, we Conservatives have had a good record of action and delivery. We have spoken honestly about the public finances and have tackled the deficit; we have brought about more jobs, with the most recent figures showing record levels of youth employment—that is important; we have set out our stall on house building; we have reformed welfare; we have set out ambitious standards for quality in education and put universities on a freer and more stable financial footing; and we also delivered a successful large-scale programme for young people, through the National Citizen Service.

The No. 1 thing the Government can do—we can do it more through this Queen's Speech—is mend the economy. If the economy improves, there will, of course, be more good jobs. This generation wishes for the Government to be able to cut red tape further and foster a business-friendly environment, because 80% of 16 to 30-year-olds believe they will start their own business in the next five years. So I welcome the Bill to increase the tax-free allowance to ensure that people working 30 hours a week on the minimum wage will pay no income tax. I welcome measures to deliver more childcare and 3 million more apprenticeships. That is why we shall be the party of young working people.

Let us also consider what is happening on housing. Obviously, building more homes, and thereby bringing down prices, will benefit the young people who are locked out of those prices at the moment. Like all hon. Members, in my constituency I have had to balance the needs and desires of older residents, perhaps for tranquillity and green spaces, with younger residents' needs for homes they can afford. By its very nature, the planning process divides people in that way.

Jim Shannon: I have noted in the hon. Lady's contribution a negative view of how young people are responding to the political process. I want to ask her about something I have seen in my constituency: the number of people who took the time to come to vote, feeling that they wanted to be part of the process for the first time. Does she think we can learn from those people and use their example to encourage others to come along, too? Is that not the way forward?

Chloe Smith: Yes, I see no reason to disagree with what the hon. Gentleman sets out.

What we see among this generation is that they have a different way of doing their politics. It is less about the traditional forms, as the turnout figures might suggest, and increasingly more about different techniques and methods. One such technique, which I was going to discuss, as I know it is of detailed interest to you, Mr Speaker, is the use of the internet and the facets of digital democracy. Your Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy was absolutely right to look into that, and into the ways in which our lives are enabled—they are sometimes just sped up—by the internet and the ways in which politics must keep up as those things change generationally. It is extremely unusual for this generation not to be able to do something online and for that reason I have argued, as others have done, that we ought to consider moving voting online. Such a project will take 10 years to get right, given where our starting point would be, but it would signal our intention to move democracy to where people rightly are. It would

say, "There is every type of welcome here for you, however you choose to do your community activity." We ought to be able to say that proudly about this place.

Let me draw to a conclusion. I began with the economy, I have mentioned housing and I will throw in one more policy area, which is transport. By its very nature, transport deeply interests those who want to get about and who want to begin their lives. As a 16-year-old in rural Norfolk, transport was what got me interested in politics, because I could not get from my village to anywhere where I could see friends or do anything else that would help me live my life as I chose. Transport is crucial from a social point of view, from a growth point of view and from an economic perspective. I am delighted that in the Conservative party manifesto we have committed to completing the Norwich in 90 project, a piece of work that I and others have led locally. Transport, jobs and housing will secure the economy for a future generation. I am proud and pleased to support this Gracious Speech.

8.20 pm

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) who gave the first maiden speech of this Parliament. I look forward to working with him to tackle the scourge of poor broadband services. It is certainly a scourge in rural areas, as I am aware from my work on the Public Accounts Committee, but it happens in my area of Shoreditch too. I will not detain the House on a topic that I have spoken about many times before, but I look forward to working with the hon. Gentleman to tackle that.

I also endorse the comments made by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), the right hon. and learned Members for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier) and for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), and the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) about the Human Rights Act. They spoke very well and as they are four of the 12 Member majority, it is quite right that the Government are looking to rethink the question. It might be that a sensible alliance is already arising in the very first day of this Parliament that will ensure that sense is seen and that irrevocable steps are not taken in that direction.

I cast my mind back to the morning of 8 May at 4 am, when my result was declared in Hackney South and Shoreditch. Celebration was far from the minds of the people I represent in one of the poorest communities in Britain. For them, there is now and was then a sense of trepidation and fear about what the next five years might bring. I thank them for returning me, as I did in the early morning of 8 May, but I stand here with some fear and trepidation about what might affect them.

My constituency borders the Square Mile, where vast fortunes are made and millions are traded every second. In Shoreditch, we are also home, of course, to some of the fastest growing tech companies in Britain, the household names of tomorrow. That is the tech hub of Shoreditch and the Silicon roundabout. Hundreds of entrepreneurs and start-ups from around the world come to a borough bustling with ingenuity and innovation, radical thinking and a willingness to take risks. Amid all the buzz and excitement, however, there is a dark heart of poverty and social exclusion, with poor families struggling to make ends meet, poor pensioners shivering under blankets

and poor young people without the connections to join that tech revolution on their doorstep. Hackney might be achingly hip but parts of it are also achingly poor.

The Prime Minister spoke earlier about his one nation vision for Britain, and I hope that when he next visits Tech City he will also take the time to visit the Wenlock Barn Estate or other estates in my constituency and see the face of poverty, so that he really means what he says about one nation. In Hackney, 47% of children live in poverty. One local housing association recently told me that it has more working tenants on benefits than tenants who are not working. In many of the excellent secondary schools in Hackney, which are doing a great job, headteachers have a supply of clothing because so many children cannot afford to replace school uniforms. Only recently, one headteacher told me how she had had to buy a pair of shoes for a child after much cajoling to get the new shoes they had been promised but could not afford.

Let me share with the House the story of a local teenage boy who was missing school. He received detentions and when he was still repeatedly absent was excluded. Eventually, the school arranged for a home visit by the education welfare team, which discovered that mum was an alcoholic and that the young man and his brother had a single pair of school trousers to share between them. They shared the trousers and attended school on alternate days. If it sounds Dickensian, that is because it is. The young man overcame that and went on to university, which is a remarkable sign of resilience.

The people of Hackney are asking the Government: "What about us? How do we fit into the Government's plans for the next five years?" How will Ministers help my constituents make their dreams come true and how will opportunity spread through society instead of being hoarded at the top? How will wealth, power and opportunity be enjoyed by all? We are asking the questions, but we will search in vain for answers as we consider this Queen's Speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) spoke just now about the challenges of housing. Rather than repeating his points, I endorse what he said about the challenges he faces. There are many in Hackney too. More people rent social housing in Hackney than own or rent privately combined and more people rent privately than own their own home. Londoners are crying out for decent affordable housing. The average price of a home in Hackney is £606,000, but that masks the fact that a family house is now typically more than £1 million. House price inflation has sent prices rocketing and the effect is brutal. Young couples cannot afford to buy their first flat, let alone move up from the first flat to their first home. Unless they are millionaires, they might as well not bother.

In 2010, the Government proposed a constituency boundary review, which we note was not mentioned today in the Gracious Speech. According to the figures cited then, my constituency was one of the smallest in Britain. Today, it is one of the largest with a 40% rise since 2005 to 84,000 people on the electoral register. That is a sure sign that we need a radical house building programme to ease the pressure, particularly in London but also nationally.

The Government have done nothing to ease the pressure on the housing market. They have built a pitiful number of houses for affordable rent. The hon. Member for

[Meg Hillier]

Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), who is not in his place at the moment, although I mentioned that I was going to say this, has sold the fire station in my area for £28 million, which can only mean luxury flats. That is a scandal and not only because the fire response time is now more than six minutes. If it had to be sold at all, why not for affordable local housing? The dividend for the taxpayer would have been much greater over time.

In Bishopsgate in Shoreditch, an area that has not had a single social housing unit built in 10 years, the part-time Mayor of London and part-time Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip is again on the drive for a 48-storey tower block with luxury flats. In contrast, Hackney council is one of the top councils in the country when it comes to building more affordable homes for rent. In its pipeline of 3,000 new homes, half will be for affordable rent—a laudable achievement—but not enough given the scale of the crisis. The word affordable has become meaningless. The new definition of 80% of local private rents has no connection with the money that shop workers, nurses or teachers earn. Without a strict definition of “affordable” based on real incomes and real prices, we cannot have a proper debate about how to put affordable roofs over people’s heads. We need urgent action, and I have not seen enough in this Queen’s Speech about how that will happen. Right to buy will not work in my area. Even if the discount meant that my constituents could afford a home—which would be unlikely because homes are so expensive—it would further denude the stock in London and reduce the opportunities for housing associations to develop.

The Gracious Speech also mentioned childcare. I welcome the move to provide 30 hours a week of childcare for three and four-year-olds free from 2017. It sounds good but the devil will be in the detail, because unless it is properly funded, it is unsustainable. I shall be watching that very closely.

The Gracious Speech mentioned job creation, and it is obvious to me that there is work to be done on that, both in helping young people reach the jobs on their doorstep and providing encouragement and support to the businesses that create those jobs. Although many of my constituents are poor, they have no poverty of ambition, but many of the jobs that the Government say they have been creating—the Prime Minister spoke today about creating 2 million more—have been in low-paid, part-time work. I think of Julie, in one of the local supermarkets. She came off jobseeker’s allowance and was very excited to get a job working 15 hours a week. She hoped that over time she would get more hours and work up to a full-time position. Two years on, she is seeing more part-time staff recruited in her supermarket—no chance of a full-time job for herself. She is just one of many people locally who have raised that issue with me—stuck having to claim in-work benefits but itching, desirous, to work more and earn more.

The Government have only unveiled around £6 billion-worth of cuts to welfare; they are pledged to make £12 billion. We need honesty very quickly from the Government about where that axe will fall, because my constituents are very scared. If they fall out of work, or cannot work as many hours as they want, what happens to them? We are seeing the rungs of the ladder of

opportunity pulled away. For the poorest, opportunities to study are costing more, and many of them want to study and improve their skills. Parents, especially, who want to improve their life chances are frightened of getting into debt by taking out loans to go into further education.

This Gracious Speech is a missed opportunity for devolution of real powers from Whitehall. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas) laid out a great manifesto. I hope that whoever becomes Mayor of London in May 2016 takes that up and challenges the Government to devolve to local level powers to make decisions on health matters, and the responsibilities for job creation that currently lie with the Department for Work and Pensions. Only that will really help my constituents, who are living in great need but have huge ambition to be part of the one nation that the Prime Minister has promised them. I will be challenging him not to let them down on his vision of a one nation Britain.

8.30 pm

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): Thank you for calling me, Mr Speaker. It is my first task to congratulate the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O’Hara) on a very thoughtful and entertaining maiden speech. He reminded us that his constituency occupies one tenth of the land space of Scotland. I thought I had a large constituency, but that is enormous. I think I met him outside the Table Office this morning, and I wish him well. As he—not me—put it, he has broken his political virginity today, or something to that effect, and there is no better way, as he also put it, to do it than in the Queen’s Speech debate. Many congratulations to the hon. Ladies and Gentlemen from the SNP on their stunning victory, and on being present in such numbers this afternoon to support colleagues.

I wanted to comment on the tribal warfare that seems to have broken out in the Chamber at prayer time at 8 o’clock in the morning, when we come in to put prayer cards on seats. I do not know whether I am breaking confidences in telling you this, Mr Speaker, but this morning there was a wild dash to get the seats on the Opposition Front Bench below the gangway and there was some deep unhappiness. Indeed, there were members of the Scottish nationalist party whose seats had hardly touched the green benches at the back before they were clambering to the front.

In case hon. Gentlemen and Ladies think that they have set a precedent, I can assure them that they have not. When we went into opposition in 1997, the Liberals came up with the same scheme. Instead of the embattled hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner), it was the embattled former Prime Minister, the then right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, Sir Edward Heath, who found himself being monstered by the newly enlarged Liberal party. You may not be aware of this, Mr Speaker, but I can tell you that it was resolved when Speaker Boothroyd decreed that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup would retain that seat—you are nodding—and no doubt you are thinking carefully about whether it is necessary to have a protection order on the hon. Member for Bolsover in these extraordinary circumstances.

This has been a wide-ranging Queen’s Speech. It was a great occasion for Conservative colleagues to be back

in power with a majority, and to hear Her Majesty the Queen give a speech that was straight out of our manifesto instead of being one that had been adulterated by the Liberal party. I absolutely support the set-in-stone blocks on increases in income tax, VAT and national insurance, which make it absolutely clear where we are for business—hon. Ladies and Gentlemen from north of the border may like to mark that. I welcome the referendum on Europe, and the powers to take over failing schools and to create more academies.

I am also delighted with our commitment of £8 billion to the NHS, meeting the NHS five-year plan. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) spoke about foxes earlier. I welcome the fact that we really shot the Labour fox during the campaign. It is very important politically that we did that. However, I am concerned, having served on the Health Committee in the previous Parliament, and having been involved in health for so long in this House, that we are not really addressing the issue of reducing demand for the health service. If I may advertise the fact, I have tabled early-day motion No. 1, encouraging the Government to tackle the obesity crisis in this country, and early-day motion No. 2 asks the Government to look at the quality of food in hospitals, some of which is really not up to standard.

It may surprise the hon. Ladies and Gentlemen from the Scottish nationalist party that I have been, in this House, passionate about healthcare in Scotland. I was in the House before devolution. I flew, at my own expense, to Glasgow for the opening of the Homeopathic hospital—the Glasgow Centre for Integrative Care as it is now—in 1999. I feel passionately about a wider choice in healthcare in Scotland, but since devolution I cannot table a question on Scottish healthcare. Scottish Members, on the other hand, are able to comment on our affairs in England. I offer that as an illustration of the frustration felt by English Members about the imbalance and why we have to tackle the West Lothian question, as it has been called for years.

In the last Parliament, the Health Committee produced a report called “Managing the care of people with long-term conditions”, which was published when I was acting Chair of the Committee. I commend it to the Scottish National Members, because it deals with the issues of multimorbidity polypharmacy, when people suffering from many diseases are prescribed many medications. That is a particular problem for people in Glasgow and other parts of Scotland. So we do take an interest in Scottish affairs.

I represent a seat in the middle of England. It is not a traditional shire seat and it was held by Labour until 1974. It was won for the Conservatives by my predecessor, Sir Adam Butler, a very distinguished man. It is extraordinary how we have transformed the economy in my constituency. I was saddened by the speech from the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), because in my area I see thousands of new jobs. We cut unemployment—that is those on jobseeker’s allowance and universal credit—by 40% generally and by 45% for 18 to 25-year-olds in one year, so there is something stirring in the heart of England.

I am delighted that the Queen’s Speech contains measures to push High Speed 2 north. I served on the Committee that considered the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act 1996—High Speed 1—which enabled the building

of the line from St Pancras to the Dover portal. It took as long as it would take to walk, at a leisurely pace, from London to Madrid and back to complete the consideration of that Bill. We sat for three days a week for over a year, and it was the last railway Bill. I am sure that extending High Speed 2 north is the right thing to do, as is bringing the northern cities together to create this great hub. The fact that our Chancellor—the man with the moneybags—represents Tatton is very helpful to those in the north.

As I have said, I take an interest in Scotland. I am related by marriage to a family in Scotland, one of whose members made the last speech in the Scottish Parliament against the Union some time ago—not the current Parliament, but the one that finished in about 1704. Scottish Members face a huge problem. Scotland already has some tax-raising and fiscal powers that it has not used. If we are to give it a whole lot more, which is part of the agreement, that is fair enough, but if they are used there will be the equivalent of a white flight of resources—businesses and clever people—south of the border. I predict that if the Scottish nationalist party—*[Interruption.]* Forgive me, I mean the Scottish National party. I am in the flow of my speech and I am trying to be polite, not insulting. If the SNP increases taxes dramatically, I predict that in 10 years’ time it will lose to the Conservative party in Scotland because a Labour recovery is not likely. If Scotland increases taxes and its economy is completely out of line with that in England, the SNP will lose to our party. I just issue that word of warning.

I am not keen on the proposed reduction in the number of Members of Parliament from 650 to 600. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) has already said that Parliament has changed dramatically. He has served here for more than 30 years and I have served for 28 years. That was before we had computers and mobile phones, and we used to have to stop on the motorway to make calls. Our job has become more complicated and we are more like social workers. I do not relish the idea of representing more people. The current number is about right and we should think very carefully about any change.

I have been thinking about the points my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) made on foreign affairs. At the end of the cold war, in the 1987 and 1992 Parliaments, some of us spent a lot of time building relations with Russia. Judging by what I hear, I do not think we have any understanding of how closely aligned Russia feels with Ukraine, which was always administered by Moscow. However difficult it appears, it is not sensible to have Russia offside.

8.40 pm

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you for calling me, Mr Speaker, and may I say what a pleasure it is to see you back in your place? Those of us who were Members of this House on the last day of the last Parliament remember how shabbily you were treated by some Members on the Government Benches. It is indeed fortunate that you are back as Speaker of the House of Commons. No one has been a greater champion of Back Benchers and no one has done more to promote this place and demystify it to the public, and for that service I thank you, sir.

[Chris Evans]

Five years ago this very day, Mr Speaker, you called me to make my own maiden speech. I still remember the terror and chill running up my spine as I watched the then hon. Member for Argyll and Bute make his speech. As I watched him, I remember thinking how bad my speech was, how I wanted to bury it forever and forget it ever happened. What we have seen today is the emergence of someone who I believe will be a great parliamentarian and will make a great contribution to this House. I for one welcome the new hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) and his colleagues to this place.

Like other Members, I pay tribute to the proposer of the Humble Address—it seems like a long time ago now. As one whose political awakening began with a book on President Kennedy, it was good to hear so many references to the great man by Parliament's greatest Kennedy devotee, the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns). The seconder of the Humble Address, the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) demonstrated an abiding love for her home village and a passion for the fishing industry. No one in this House has a greater understanding of the tragedies that fishing communities often face, and I am sure that her husband would have been rightly proud of her contribution today.

Like other Members, I pay tribute to the brave members of our armed forces. The job they do should be rightly honoured and celebrated. However—coming to the Gracious Speech—we cannot talk about jobs, growth or indeed the economy without mentioning what I believe is the elephant in the room: welfare reform. Whatever their political persuasion, the question any Government face is this: how can society move forward when human talent, potential and resources are wasted through worklessness and a lifetime on benefits?

My attention was immediately drawn to the full employment and welfare benefits Bill. It is important that Ministers report to this House annually on job creation and apprenticeships, and I support the annual household welfare cap being reduced from £26,000 to £23,000. Work should always pay more than benefits. That, I believe, is a cornerstone of the benefits system. However, I am concerned that measures such as the full employment and welfare benefits Bill only pay lip service to the problems, treating the symptoms and not addressing the causes. The present welfare system teaches the wrong values, rewards the wrong choices and, worst of all, hurts those it should be helping.

In recent years, there has been a trend of jobs being created only in the highest-paid and the lowest-paid industries; those in between are hollowed out. Too many young people leave university only to find no job opportunities in their field of expertise. People in their 50s and 60s find themselves redundant and are unable to return to work, and those who want to retrain to secure a better life find little or no support. To put it bluntly, our system is letting them down. That, to me, is not just a Government failure; it is a moral one.

Since the early 1970s, the UK Government have tried 34 different schemes to get long-term unemployed and young unemployed people into work. Since 1983, more than £13 billion has been allocated in Government funding to tackle youth unemployment. Flagship programmes have inevitably resulted in failure. In 1983,

the Thatcher Government launched the youth training scheme, which included two years of training and planned work experience for 16 and 17-year-old school leavers. There was an allowance of £29.50 a week for participants in the first year, and £35 a week in the second year. However, research by the University of Newcastle in 2004 found that women who participated in the scheme saw little or no impact on future job prospects. For men, those who were on YTS spent more time unemployed later in life than those who did not participate in the scheme.

Successor schemes such as the Labour Government's new deal for young people created a mandatory employment programme for all young people aged 18 to 24. However, the 2007 National Audit Office report, "Helping people from workless households into work", found that the net cost to the Exchequer in 2005-06 was £390 per participant. This means that the Government spent £390 more per participant than they got back in benefit savings, increased tax revenue and reduced tax credit costs payable to people who move into work. The Institute for Fiscal Studies found that for all this cost, the new deal for young people increased employability by only 7% or 8%.

The problem persists, even with the Work programme. Long-term unemployment remains stubbornly high at 32% of the unemployment rate. At present nearly 200,000 young people have been unemployed for over a year. Between 2010 and 2015 there was a 50% increase in the number of young ethnic minority people out of work. We can move forward only by understanding that throwing billions and billions at the problem has not worked. The figures speak for themselves.

But it is no good standing here and setting out the catalogue of failure, for which both major parties must take their share of the blame. Anyone who cares about the future of our country and the lives of our constituents must seek solutions to this problem. To me, welfare reform regardless of political consequences is morally the right thing to do. Welfare dependency tears apart the ties that bind communities. Joblessness damages families for generations. It sets people and groups against each other. It divides people into tribes with no common purpose. Reversing this will take a generational effort. We cannot and should not accept that some people will be trapped on welfare for life. We cannot and should not accept that a certain number of people will be unemployed. We cannot and should not accept that long-term unemployment is here to stay.

We can solve this problem, but there needs to be a new approach to the worlds of welfare and work. It requires a fundamental shift to a system based on the principle of something for something, as William Beveridge wrote years ago. We cannot forget that the tension in the welfare system is that people in work like the insurance of the safety net that the welfare system gives them, but they do not want that insurance to be abused by people who are not really seeking work. People who lose their jobs should have a fund available to keep them going while they find work. They will get out what they have paid in. We must remember that the money paid in taxes belongs not to the Government, but to the people, and it should be there for them when they need it.

Based on the contributory principle, we need to see individual top-up welfare accounts running alongside universal benefit, providing people with a fund that is

there for them if they lose their job. Also, we need a new approach to people who are searching for work. Jobcentre Plus, which was originally founded as a labour exchange under Winston Churchill when he was a Liberal, is not fit for purpose. Although 75% of jobseeker's allowance claimants move off benefits within six months, only about half of them are still in work eight months later, while a third are claiming benefits again.

The goal should be to support claimants into sustainable long-term employment, and that should be delivered by providing targeted, local, individual support for jobseekers, not after six months, but from day one. If someone loses their job on Friday, their first appointment on Monday should be with a personal adviser from Jobcentre Plus. Unfortunately, as we have seen today, the OECD report found that the UK has the worst skills gap in the developed world between NEETs and young people in employment. Even with job creation, the skills gap is too great to get young people into long-term employment. The current one-size-fits-all model is wrong. People are leaving university or further education, increasing their skills in childcare, engineering and so on while they are working, and coming to jobcentres for help but not finding the jobs they need.

It has been shown that locally based schemes work best. What is needed in future is a partnership between local business, people and charities which put together personalised plans that can overcome the barriers for people coming back into work. It is time to change the terms of the welfare reform debate. What has gone before has not worked. We now need a new approach, and I hope we can debate that when the Bill comes before the House.

8.49 pm

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) and an honour to have been able to hear at least part of the maiden speech by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara)—I congratulate him on having the courage to make it so early in the Parliament. All of us who entered the House in the previous Parliament realise how big a challenge that can be. I congratulate the Scottish National party on the support it has provided him with today, and also on its election victories.

I would also like to welcome new Members on the Government Benches, because we had a good election. I would like to pay tribute to many of them, but particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes), whom I have known for many years. When we first met she was a little smaller than she is today—*[Interruption.]* I should explain that she was about five at the time; I am not commenting on any other dimension of her being. She was much shorter, smaller and a child—I think I had better stop there and move on. I welcome her to the House and am sure that she will do a fantastic job.

It is wonderful to see so many new Members. I think that it inspires us to realise why we are here: to represent our constituents. It is an honour to have been re-elected in Macclesfield with an increased majority and an increased share of the vote. I will do everything I can to honour my commitment to the people of Macclesfield. Like all other Members, I will do it with complete conviction regardless of the political affiliations of those I represent.

There was also an excellent vote of trust in the Conservative party in local government, as was true in many parts of the country. I am excited to work with local councillors in Macclesfield as we move into a new era of devolution, with the transfer of power to Manchester and increased demand, as today's debate has shown, to see a greater transfer of powers to the counties as well. Government Members are absolutely committed to ensuring that the northern powerhouse is a real success. Macclesfield is famous for being a powerhouse for silk back in the Victorian days, and now we want to weave new economic threads in the life sciences and various other fields to help take the northern powerhouse further forward. I am pleased that the cities and local government devolution Bill provides us with a vehicle to help that succeed and flourish in the years ahead.

I am an optimist. In fact, in the previous Parliament the former Member for Edinburgh East, Sheila Gilmore, accused me of being over-optimistic—Panglossian, even—in my approach. Well, I have to say that it was Conservative optimism what won it on 7 May. The positive agenda that we took forward appealed to large swathes of the country and helped us win an outright majority. I am pleased that the Queen's Speech today set out more reasons to be positive as we take our important agenda further forward. The Eeyores and sirens we heard in the previous Parliament, and whom we have heard today, have been proved wrong.

I think that it is really important that the Labour party takes time to reflect on why the electorate did not give it the support that it hoped and expected to get. The Labour party was not trusted with the economy. Moreover, it was not trusted with the task of spreading opportunity to other people and improving social mobility. It goes beyond economic credibility into those other areas. Of course, we have since heard several Labour Members talk about aspiration. It is sad that that is focused on their own leadership aspirations, when in fact they should be thinking about the aspirations of the people they represent. That accusation could not be made against the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), or indeed the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound), but there are others who I think should be looking at their own agenda and at what they should be doing as a party.

I welcome the Government's commitment to backing those people who want to work hard and get on in life. That is what our election campaign was about. As the Prime Minister tweeted on 30 April:

"We're the party of the first chance, the first job, first pay cheque, the first home".

He could have gone even further; I am sure that the issue was the restriction to 140 characters. We are the Government of the first-time entrepreneur, the first-time employer and the first-time exporter. During the last Parliament, I held a debate on encouraging more entrepreneurs to become first-time employers. Like other Members in the free enterprise group and elsewhere, I have written about the importance of social mobility, which Conservatives feel absolutely passionately about. We need to break down the barriers to first-time businesses, first-time employers and first-time jobs. I am delighted that the Prime Minister has given that issue such a clear focus in the Queen's Speech.

[David Rutley]

I hope that when the Bills on enterprise and schools are published and debated, we will see more detail on what can be done to make it easier for those with no family history in enterprise.

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): What are my hon. Friend's views about the job creation in his constituency and across Britain that we have seen in the past five years and that, hopefully, we will continue to see in the course of this Government?

David Rutley: In Macclesfield alone, unemployment dropped by 50% in the past year, which is a huge step. That has come from an unrelenting focus on what I call the four "e"s in an enterprise economy. The first is entrepreneurs; we have a massive over-index of entrepreneurs and the self-employed in Macclesfield. Then there are employers, exporters and, of course, employees—we must help each of them take the first step on their journey, encouraging them so that they see real success in their careers.

It is important to focus on the fact that more people are moving into self-employment. That tremendous change has taken place in just the past 12 or 14 years. Some 4.5 million people are now involved in self-employment: 14.5% of the total workforce, up from 12% at the start of this century. Anybody who has read the work of the Royal Society of Arts and Demos recently will realise that the trend is here to stay.

The pull of self-employment—the flexibility, freedom and dignity—helps make it an attractive option. In the past, some might have said that the push factors, such as redundancy under Labour's great recession, were decisive. That has changed now; the issue is about the pull factors. We need to encourage more people to take the step. We should give them the information and support that they need, so that they want to become not only self-employed but first-time employers, helping out with first-time apprenticeships as well. I hope that under the enterprise Bill and other legislation more work will be done to support the self-employed in this country.

We need to ensure that enterprise is about what happens not only in this country, but Europe—particularly the European Union. Reform of the EU is not simply in the UK's national interest, although that is our first concern, but in the interests of the EU as a whole. The world is changing and the EU must change to embrace it. There are clear opportunities and real challenges in the global economy in the 21st century. There are also compelling organic reasons for the need for reform. Many more eurozone countries want to pull together in ever closer union; I would not want to countenance that, but they are moving in that direction. States such as the UK that are rightly very much outside the eurozone need to make sure that the relationship between countries in and outside the eurozone is better defined. This is an important time for the debate about the renegotiation.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman has raised an important issue. One thing I would like to see in this Parliament—the response has been negative so far—is a reduction in VAT on tourism. That would be an advantage for Northern Ireland, as we could be competitive with

the Republic of Ireland. When it comes to creating employment opportunities in tourism, Northern Ireland especially but the whole UK would benefit from a reduction in VAT. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

David Rutley: Obviously VAT can be quite complex and there are EU rules relating to it. I am not fully aware of what is going on in Northern Ireland in that regard, but I know that the devolution of corporation tax powers to Northern Ireland will create huge opportunities. Let us see how that goes and then there might be further opportunities, but VAT is more complicated.

Let me come back to the importance of reform and renegotiation. Having worked as a Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister for Europe in the previous Parliament, I know from working with MPs in other Parliaments and with senior civil servants in other countries that there is now an appetite for reform in Europe—there is no doubt about that. We need to tap into that appetite and make sure that we move things on in the interests of our own country and the EU as a whole. I know that the Foreign Secretary, the Minister for Europe and, indeed, the Prime Minister are working hard to ensure that we bring about those changes. The unambitious 20th-century model of a fortress Europe sheltering from the world and rigid in its quest for centralisation cannot survive.

The Government believe that it is absolutely right to focus on reducing the bureaucratic burden and cutting the red tape that needs action both in this country and at European level. Last week, when further details were beginning to emerge about what would be included in the enterprise Bill, it was noticeable that those who represent businesses in the UK came forward to say that it was time for change not only in the UK but, particularly, in Brussels. John Longworth of the British Chambers of Commerce said:

"It is great to see the Government start the Parliament with a real drive to support businesses...To further free companies up from red tape and focus on growth, businesses will now expect to see a similar commitment from Brussels."

That is absolutely the case. Katja Hall of the CBI said:

"Businesses will welcome the Government getting out of the blocks early by following through on its commitment to cut red tape"—

something that I have been talking about for many years. She went on to say:

"Moving forward, it should use its influence in Brussels to combat...regulation that impacts unfairly on British businesses".

Our ambition for Britain and for Europe is to ensure that we get in place the fundamental foundations of social stability and economic opportunity on which we can rest a ladder of social mobility that will help to push forward ambition and aspiration so that people can thrive, making sure that the wealth we want gets generated so that those in genuine need can get the support they have so desperately needed. The Queen's Speech shows a clear direction towards building more opportunities not just in enterprise but in helping to improve educational standards. That is critical, because we want to make sure that there are real opportunities for all children across all economic strata to enable them to get the skills that they need to take forward their talents and ambitions.

The Queen's Speech sets out a very exciting opportunity for many in this country. It will help the self-employed, help our businesses, help to set out an agenda for young people, and help to reform Europe—all in one go.

9.2 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley), my co-chair of the all-party mountaineering group in the previous Parliament. Every member of the group, in all parts of the House, was re-elected. We heard a stunning speech by the new hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara), who beat a Liberal, so he will be particularly welcome to come and join the group. In the past we have had good contacts with the Mountaineering Council of Scotland in his constituency, which would be a fine place for us to consider visiting at some stage for our non-parliamentary pastimes. I congratulate his colleagues, who have bothered to turn up here. I am always a little astonished when people seem to spend half their lives fighting selection battles to become parliamentary candidates and fighting elections, and then, when they get here, do not turn up.

That lot over there on the Government Benches have won and there are hardly any of them here. Having seen what their legislative programme actually is, that does not surprise me. The main part of this dismal programme is a Bill that says what we are not going to do. Is that how good it gets when you have been out of power for 23 years and then get back in? I know that the Front Benchers present at the moment are hugely embarrassed. I hope that a few Government Members with a bit of ingenuity will come up with some ideas, and if they are good ones we will be able to back them on a cross-party basis.

But what about my own party? We have just been knackered in an election. We have got some new MPs, and our Whips cannot be bothered to get them in on the first day to listen to the debate. I will tell you what—

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): I'm here.

John Mann: You're a retread. There are a few here and great credit to them and others who have been in, but our Whips need to learn a lesson. This lot beat us in Scotland. One of the reasons they beat us, in my view, is that they were better organised. They thought through how to win elections, and they are thinking through how to get in and use this place. If we are going to do anything as an Opposition, we are going to have to get off our knees and start fighting, and that means having Labour Members—I hope some are watching on the telly at the moment—in here arguing the case, asking questions and challenging these useless Tories and their invisible programme of nothingness. I do not know why SNP Members are wearing the Yorkshire rose. It is like the Geoffrey Boycott fan club, all on the way to the test match at Headingley to support England who are taking on New Zealand on Friday. I will be happy to welcome them there.

What should be in the programme? Two things should be there. Everyone seems to be saying—London is joining in now—it is all ours: we want this, we want that. Hon. Members should hope that Bassetlaw does not do that, because we have the coal power stations,

and if we tax coal for the coal power stations, everyone would be paying a lot of money because we keep this country heated. But we are generous. We see this as a socialist country. Therefore, we are happy to share the energy that pollutes our lungs as we are making it. We are not asking for extra things.

I tell you what we do want though: we want to see power localised. The stupidest thing that the Tory party has not done—it would have been hugely popular among their voters, our voters, the SNP's voters, everyone's voters—would have been to say, with planning powers on housing, wind farms and fracking, "We're going to give the power back to local communities. We're not going to have the man from the Ministry, the Department for Communities and Local Government, overruling local communities on what they want."

When people talk about housing—every party seems to want to have hundreds of thousands of houses—let me say that my constituency don't need any more new houses. We have got new housing plans in every field going. Everyone wants to put them there because we have got the land, but we have not got the people to go in the houses. The houses should be in the cities, such as in London, where there is a shortage; not more in my area. We will have a few—we have got plenty planned—but we do not need more and more. London needs them, Birmingham needs them, loads of cities need them. That is what localism should be about, and the Tories have abandoned localism for some reason—more fool the Tory party. We need to get our act together on that.

Localism ain't just about saying, "Here you are, let's give the NHS to a bunch of councillors. We were bad as MPs running it. Let councillors run it." I would not put my councillors in charge of the national health service, any more than I want politicians in charge. The Government have got some more meddling stuff with schools and the NHS. Well, get your hands off it! That's what I'm trying to say. Get your mitts off the health service and education.

We want a vision in the Labour party. I have got a good vision. How about we let those in education run education, and we let those in the health service run the health service, so that local communities have a proper say? I do not want this Government trying to shut my ambulance stations like they did last time, or trying to shut my accident and emergency, and trying to shut my maternity department. I did not want it, my community did not want it, and we fought back. We stopped it, and the cuts went somewhere else, because somewhere else did not do the job and fight it hard enough. In Tory Newark, they do not have a hospital any more. In Tory Grantham, it is 80 miles to the nearest maternity unit. That is what happens if you do not have localism—it is not a good idea.

There is one other issue that new Members need to be aware of, because it is going to haunt this Parliament. Yesterday on Sky television, Esther outlined it bravely. I have been in touch with her today. She has gone to the police with the name of an MP who she and others allege abused her as a child, but I am expecting other people with other names to come forward from other parts of the country in the near future. Others have already gone to the police. The scandal of historical child abuse in this country will be one of the defining issues of the next five years. It is going to corrode everything during this Parliament because it is so huge

[John Mann]

and involves so many people. Just in my area, I have had people come to me. One man was kept as a slave, forced to work in a foundry, aged 11 to 16, and that is nice compared to what happened to the rest of his family. I have 26 victims of child abuse just in my constituency who have been to see me—and who am I for them to come to? That is how big this scandal across the country is.

The last Government were right to set up the Goddard inquiry. I have tabled an early-day motion—for those who do not know, an early-day motion is usually a bit of nonsense we sign so we can send letters to people telling them how good we are—calling on the Government to lift the restrictions of the Official Secrets Act, because a lot of people, including former members of special branch, want to speak out to answer the basic question I pose to anyone who wants to know: why was Cyril Smith allowed to get away with prolific child abuse for so many years? But it was not just Smith. There were far more, and what was revealed in Staffordshire yesterday was just one other aspect.

My constituency is no worse than anywhere else in the country. This is nationwide and touches every aspect of society. The number of people, on top of the 26, who have been to see me who do not want the police involved, never want to go public and never actually want to say anything is phenomenal. That is how they have dealt with that childhood trauma—and it is their right to do so. A man flew back from Canada, having not visited my constituency in 30 years because of what happened to him, to spend 20 minutes in the library of my surgery, just to tell me about it, knowing nothing could be done, before flying back again. That is the impact of historical child abuse, and this Parliament is going to have to deal with it.

9.12 pm

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, Mr Speaker, and an honour to follow the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), who made an impassioned speech. It is good to see him returned. I notice that not many of his colleagues were returned, which is good for Conservative Members.

The general election result was extraordinary, and every Member will be aware of the dramatic events on 7 May—we all have our personal stories. To secure a Conservative majority after 23 years was a great victory, and there is no doubt that the Prime Minister and those around him deserve all credit for securing that resounding victory, in a spirit of one-nation Toryism and openness, and for coming up with a Queen's Speech that I think—I am not sure about Opposition Members—was very exciting. It represents a big opportunity to deal with our economic problems in a way that carries the whole country with us—the governing party—and reaches a better outcome for all the people of Great Britain.

One thing that was talked about a lot in the run-up to the general election—but not in this debate—is the size of the deficit. Members will remember that, when the coalition Government were formed in 2010, the deficit stood at £160 billion. It was clear to me as an MP campaigning in the election that only one party was believed and had any credibility when it came to dealing with this huge deficit. The Labour party was simply not

credible, as can be seen in the election numbers: Labour now has 232 MPs, having started the previous Parliament with 258 MPs. It does not take the brains of an archbishop to work out that Labour lost a net 26 seats—an extraordinary result for anyone who felt that Labour had any credibility on the economy. It did not, and this Queen's Speech has focused our minds on the fact that the economic questions—those relating to the deficit, job creation and how this country can make its own living and pay its way in the world—are the fundamental ones.

Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): Has my hon. Friend noticed the economic improvements in his own constituency of Spelthorne over the last few years?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who will not be surprised to know that I have noticed the difference that the Government's policies have made. I proud that the unemployment rate in my constituency is now less than 1%, having been about 3% at the beginning of the last Parliament. That is a signal improvement about which everyone in my constituency is pleased. The idea of aspiration can sometimes sound woolly, but in my constituency people really understand what it means. There are huge numbers of people in employment; there is a burgeoning private sector; and there are many who successfully aspire to be entrepreneurs. I am grateful to the Government and the people of Spelthorne for that. All the Government have done is to allow people to realise their own ambitions and to unlock their spirit of enterprise. I have certainly found that to be the case in my constituency.

I am pleased to follow on from my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) who spoke eloquently about the need for more entrepreneurialism and for a Government that interfere less in the workings of the private sector and of people who want to better themselves, go into small business and set up their own businesses. That should absolutely be commended and applauded. Frankly, it was depressing and disappointing during the campaign to note that Opposition Members—not SNP Members, but Labour Members—failed to mention wealth creation. They never talked about how this country was supposed to pay its way. They were deficit deniers, and I hope that they will come to appreciate that in the course of this Parliament.

I was struck by the fact that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw still refers to Britain as a socialist country—even after this crushing defeat. In returning a majority Conservative Government, the general election was surely an extraordinary way of showing that Britain was socialist. The result was unexpected, but it belies the hon. Gentleman's attempts to characterise this country in that way.

More broadly, the Government have not only delivered on job creation, but have focused on distributing wealth and the spirit of wealth creation across the country. In that context, I am particularly happy that the Government will push ahead with HS2 and the northern powerhouse. That is exciting, and Conservative Members will look on it with approval. We are enthused by the broad plan for economic development, which will not be concentrated solely on the south-east.

Clearly, the Labour party has deep-seated problems, and I am surprised to see so many Labour Members here today. It is a tribute to their resilience and fortitude

that they are here to participate in the debate. I am particularly impressed by the number of Scottish nationalists who are present. It is great that they are coming into the Chamber and making an impact. I am not sure what the flower is about, but I am sure that I will get to the bottom of that before long. Perhaps one of them will enlighten me. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is royalist!"]

Mr MacNeil: It is the "white rose of Scotland" that is mentioned in a poem by Hugh MacDiarmid. I encourage the hon. Gentleman and others to Google it, because it is a very beautiful poem.

Kwasi Kwarteng: I am very pleased to have been enlightened. I thought that it might have something to do with Yorkshire, but, although my knowledge of British geography is poor, I understand that Scotland is slightly further to the north.

I welcome the Scottish nationalists. The election result has clearly been fantastic for them, and it has done a signal service to us, because it has severely depleted the number of Labour Members of Parliament. I look forward to hearing the contributions of members of the other "party opposite" during the current Parliament.

I think that, during this Parliament, we should focus on the economic question. The deficit, to which I referred at the beginning of my speech, is still £90 billion. That is an awful lot of money, and it means that we, as a country, are borrowing nearly £2 billion a week. What was said by some of the other parties during the election period was an exercise in complete fantasy. It was as if the deficit did not exist. None of the Opposition parties addressed the fact that we must reduce Government spending over a Parliament, and I think that, ultimately, that was responsible for the Conservative majority and victory. As I said earlier, it was clear that one party was going to adopt a mature and balanced approach to deficit reduction. As far as I could see, all the other parties had their heads firmly in the sand, and were not addressing the big question.

David Rutley: My hon. Friend is making an impassioned speech. Did he find on the doorstep, as I did in Macclesfield, that people were genuinely anxious for debt to be reduced because they believed that, if we did not get to grips with it, the debt would be passed on to future generations—to their children and grandchildren? I think that that is what helped us. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I found many things on the doorsteps in Spelthorne, where people spoke passionately about a range of matters. However, my hon. Friend is right. The issue of the deficit—the fact that, if we continue to build up debts, our children and grandchildren will have to pay them off, or at least service them by paying interest through taxation—was widely understood in my constituency, and I think that it contributed largely to the increased majority that I, along with many other colleagues, won in the election. It was remarkable to see Conservative majorities of, in some cases, 20,000 or 25,000, not only in the south-east but throughout the west country—where the Conservatives performed very well—and even in the midlands, where a number of incumbent Labour MPs lost their seats. I am sure that pollsters, historians, and other academics and experts

will view that as an extraordinary result, and I think that it marks a shift in the political dynamics of the country. Of course, Scotland had its own result, which was remarkable by any standards.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I may be rescuing the hon. Gentleman, but perhaps it is worth pointing out that the Conservative party had its worst result in Scotland for nearly 100 years. That was because we said, very simply, that we should not balance the books on the back of our most disadvantaged citizens, but should balance them over a slightly longer period, and in a way that would not put people at a disadvantage.

Kwasi Kwarteng: I think that we are balancing the books over a longer period. We have not run a balanced budget since 2001. There have been 15 years of deficits, and, in my view, that is too many. Anyone who has heard anything that I have said in the House about the economy will know that I am a balanced-budget Conservative, and I think that we should be balancing the books every year. When I was on the Transport Committee, we went to Switzerland, where we were told, "We have a simple rule: we just balance the budget every year." That seems a sensible way of proceeding. We are balancing the books over a period of time. At some point, the books have to balance and one is not going to get that by running a deficit year after year, as the parties on the Opposition Benches prescribe.

I am very confident that the Chancellor and the governing team will be able to balance the books or get to some near balance, barring any wider economic upheavals. We should be able to do that in the course of this Parliament. That should be the principal aim of the Government. I am confident that we will achieve that goal.

9.25 pm

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak this evening. This is the second maiden speech today, following the excellent contribution by my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara). May I take a moment to thank you, Mr Speaker, and your colleagues across the parliamentary estate for all the help and co-operation that have been afforded to all the new SNP MPs since we were elected? The SNP group has grown more than ninefold since the election, causing something of a logistical headache for your colleagues. Their efforts are hugely appreciated, not least by those of us who have got lost around the parliamentary estate, rather than politically. As we have proudly pointed out, we are wearing the white rose of Scotland—we have no plans on Yorkshire just yet. Members will be glad to learn that well over 40 of us are still in the Chamber. As far as I am aware, the Whips have not told me that we have any plans for a snap vote this evening, so Members can all rest easy.

I would like to take the opportunity to refer to my predecessor, the right honourable Sir Menzies Campbell, who served the people of North East Fife with such enormous distinction over many years. He is held in fond affection by people there; I know that from my own experience. I also know that he is held in fond affection by Members from across the Chamber, not

[Stephen Gethins]

least of course the Liberal Members. I know that Members across this House, like my constituents and me, will want to wish him every happiness and a fulfilling retirement. He richly deserves it.

I am sure that Sir Menzies will not mind me saying that we do not agree on everything. However, we do agree that it is a huge privilege to serve the constituency of North East Fife. It is a wonderful constituency and a diverse one, running from the coast of Leven all the way to the old borough of Newburgh. Within that wide and diverse constituency lies Scotland's oldest university, founded in 1413 and still a centre of educational excellence. In fact, I know that there are Members from across the Chamber who have benefited from that education. St Andrews remains an outstanding and ground-breaking institution. Indeed, since the last Parliament was dissolved, the university has announced it will be building a clean biomass facility in Guardbridge, which will make it Europe's first carbon-neutral university—so it is still ground-breaking, 600 years on.

North East Fife is also home to some of our finest industries, such as tourism. As Members will be aware, it is the home of golf. It is also home to some of our finest food and drink industries. In recent years, the food and drink industry in Scotland has gone from strength to strength and credit should be given to Richard Lochhead and to the Scottish Government for their work on promoting that industry. More importantly, credit should also go to the entrepreneurs. Food and drink from North East Fife is now a byword for excellence and quality. It also provides, the Chancellor will be pleased to learn, significant exports and revenues. Among other fine small businesses, I have distilleries, Members will all be pleased to learn, at Kingsbarns, Daftmill and Eden Mill. I can assure Members of the excellence of those products. Actually I hope that the House will consider stocking some of the produce from my constituency over the coming months and years.

There are plans for another distillery on the site of Lindores Abbey. In fact one of the first references to whisky came in 1494. The Chancellor will again be pleased to learn that that was for an Exchequer roll. I will keep Members informed of the quality of that product, too. It would be remiss of me not to mention the Queen's Speech—after all, that is what this debate is about. I want to mention something that is important to communities across North East Fife: the relationship with our European partners. Today in the Queen's Speech we heard proposals about a referendum on our membership of the EU. We on these Benches fully intend to make a positive case for Scotland's and the UK's continued membership of the EU, and you will be pleased to learn, Mr Speaker, that we have some experience with referendums on these Benches. The Scottish referendum—regardless of whether people voted yes or no—illustrated what happens when we have an open and positive debate. It was an enriching experience for our democracy and everybody in Scotland.

That is why we want to look at a positive case, and even look at some areas where we could deepen our relationship with our European partners. Should we, for instance, be looking at greater co-operation on foreign and security issues, as has been mentioned by a number of Members? The refugee crisis in the

Mediterranean is an issue not just for Malta or Italy, or Libya or Syria for that matter; it is an issue for us all, and I am delighted that Members from every party across this House have mentioned that.

We also need to build relationships with other countries, not least on how we deal with the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union—where I personally have a little professional background. We should also be looking at working with our European partners in considering the challenges of, and opportunities provided by, tackling climate change and the benefits that a social Europe and a Europe that promotes a living wage and other benefits to its citizens can provide.

None of us on the SNP Benches is saying Europe does not need reforms. The common fisheries policy has had a devastating impact on communities across my constituency in the East Neuk of Fife and elsewhere across Scotland, as my colleagues will testify. Similarly, the expensive practice of moving the Parliament from Brussels to Strasbourg every month defies any logic in these times of straitened budgets.

The Scottish referendum provided many lessons, most notably the case for making a positive budget and including as many of our citizens as possible in the debate about the future of our respective nations. That leads me on to the important point of the franchise. I think everyone would agree that extending the franchise in the Scottish referendum to 16 and 17-year-olds and EU nationals living in Scotland was a good thing. We are currently in a situation where nationals of Cyprus or Malta can vote in the upcoming referendum, but not an MSP called Christian Allard who is a French national and who makes a significant contribution to our country.

A short time ago, the hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) made a fine contribution in which she referred to low turnout among young people. All Members have a responsibility to think about how we can engage young people in the political process. I think a good place to start is votes for 16-year-olds, particularly in this referendum. Why should those with the greatest investment in the future not have a say in that future? We should be broadening things to include EU nationals and 16-year-olds. I strongly believe that it is the electorate who should make the decisions about the politicians and not the other way round, with the politicians choosing the electorate.

A vibrant democracy should also be reflected in this House. My colleagues' comments have reflected the SNP's willingness to work with Members from all parties in furthering the aims on which we stood and in furthering democracy across the United Kingdom. The Government may have a majority, but we must remember that they returned only one MP from Scotland, whereas the SNP returned 56, and I think they should be looking to work with us.

In Holyrood the SNP worked with parties across the Chamber and there is always scope to learn. During the period of minority Administration from 2007 to 2011 the SNP worked well, and nobody in this Chamber has greater experience of building alliances than my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond). No party, not least our own, has a monopoly on wisdom or good practice. We would be the first party to recognise that. The SNP recognised that fact during its time in government, and we will recognise it during our time on

these Benches as well. Mr Speaker, I should like to thank you for this opportunity to make my maiden speech, but most of all I should like to thank the voters of North East Fife for giving me the enormous privilege of representing them for the next five years.

9.35 pm

Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the maiden speech of the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins). He spoke with great passion and eloquence, and he is no doubt already a credit to his constituents. I am sure that we all wish him well here. He spoke with passion about his constituency and its people, and about his predecessor, who was a long-standing Member of the House. Many of us did not always agree with Sir Menzies, but we respected him for his longevity here and for his wise words on many occasions. The hon. Gentleman is following in those footsteps; he spoke with considerable passion and clarity about what matters to him. That is why we are sent here, and it does not matter if we are sent from the furthest north, south, east or west. I should like to extend my welcome to the hon. Gentleman now.

The hon. Gentleman made some accomplished remarks and will be a credit to his constituents. I think he also mentioned the House stocking certain products from his constituency. If I heard him correctly, he made a request about alcoholic beverages. That could actually be arranged. I am sure that he will not yet have found the Strangers Bar. It is quite a difficult location to find, and I know that the Scottish Members might need some assistance from others to find it. When the hon. Gentleman does so, he will see that it occasionally has guest alcohols. Perhaps he could arrange for products from his constituency to be among them.

I welcome the new Members from all the parties, but I particularly welcome the 76 new Conservative Members. We have not been wearing a rose today. I thought at first that the Scottish Members were wearing a Tudor rose as a mark of royalist endeavour, but I might have been mistaken. I am particularly honoured to have been re-elected as the Member for Northampton North. It is the town where I was born and brought up, and I have lived and worked there my whole life. My family live there, and my parents still live there. Coming back to this place with a substantially increased majority is a great honour for me.

I am not, however, going to follow in the footsteps of all my predecessors. One of them had the distinction of being the only Prime Minister of this country to be assassinated while in office, albeit in May 1812—

Stephen Pound: He lived in Ealing.

Michael Ellis: From what I hear, the hon. Gentleman recalls the incident quite well.

Stephen Pound: I was not actually present in the House in 1812, but Spencer Perceval was happy to live in the glorious and ancient borough of Ealing.

Mr Speaker: Order. I must gently point out that two other hon. Members are seeking to contribute to the debate, and we do not want unduly to curtail their opportunities.

Michael Ellis: No we do not, Mr Speaker, and I would not want to annoy you so far as other historical figures are concerned, but I shall just point out that one of my other predecessors was Charles Bradlaugh, who was the last Member to be imprisoned in the Clock Tower. That happened only in the 1880s.

Turning to the Gracious Speech, this majority Conservative Government now have an opportunity to help the ordinary working people in my constituency and up and down the country through measures that will continue to reduce the level of unemployment. Under the previous Labour Government, unemployment was allowed to spiral out of control at an unprecedented level. The facts speak for themselves. From whatever angle we look at this, unemployment is down. In my constituency, it is down by more than 50% on the level of five years ago, and youth unemployment is down by more than 63%.

The Gracious Speech referred to measures that will further reduce unemployment, and I look forward to seeing millions more jobs and more apprenticeships created. I also look forward to the welfare reforms, which are, of course, designed to incentivise work and have already gone some way towards doing that. We will see further reductions in the maximums, so that there will be a greater incentive for people who can and wish to work to do so. I want and am encouraged to see further funding for the national health service, as there is no better example of our one nation philosophy than the NHS. Northampton general hospital, where I was born—I will not say what year, but it was some time ago—

Stephen Pound: 1812!

Michael Ellis: It was not quite that long ago, but it was a few years ago. I want to see more funding for that hospital and because, as we have heard, £8 billion a year more will be going into the NHS, I will be able to campaign for some of it to come to my local hospital.

On decent schooling for all, there are 29% more children in my constituency, and 1 million more children overall, now in schools classified by Ofsted as “good” or “outstanding” than was the case five years ago. Further improvements can be seen in that area, too.

We have heard about the in/out referendum. The reference to that has been controversial, but I do not see why, because it is clearly necessary and desirable to give people the opportunity to have a say on something that is crucial to their own futures—to our future. We have not had an opportunity to have a vote on Europe for decades. One would have to be over 65 to have had a vote on this subject, and this majority Conservative Government are now going to be able to push through a referendum on it. Whether one is in favour of being in Europe or outside it, the case for having a referendum on this subject is unarguable and irrepressible—this referendum has to be given.

The Gracious Speech is optimistic, looking forward to a one-nation Conservatism and to prosperity in our country, and it will have my support.

9.42 pm

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): First, I should apologise to you, Mr Speaker. I stepped out of the Chamber but got a bit interrupted and my return to

[Rob Marris]

my place was delayed by five years. I am pleased to be back and in a moment I will remind hon. Members of what I was speaking about five years ago, when I was rudely interrupted—by democracy, of course—because it has a curious echo. A Conservative Member, whom I shall name in a moment because he is still a Member, had said:

“Cabinet Ministers, including the Schools Secretary, have been tripping over themselves to claim that they have to cut only x hundred million or y hundred million pounds from their budgets. The truth is that they do not know how much they will have to cut, because they do not know what their budgets will be as the Chancellor has not told them and he has not told the electorate.”

That sounds a bit familiar. My response was:

“The hon. Gentleman decries the Chancellor for lacking credibility, vision, energy and new ideas”.

—[*Official Report*, 30 March 2010; Vol. 508, c. 732-733.]

Plus ça change. The Member in question, the right hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond), was in opposition at the time.

We still have huge problems with the economy. In a moment, I will deal with the two big myths about the economy, but first I should briefly like to pay the tribute due to my predecessor, Paul Uppal. I acknowledge, as do many of my constituents, the amount of work he did in the constituency, how honest he was and how frequently he visited the constituency. I thank the voters of Wolverhampton South West for electing me this year for the third time, and I have to say that it was a lot easier than it was five years ago, when I had the millstone of Gordon Brown around my neck.

The first myth of the two that I shall delineate is the Labour myth on the economy, which is that there was no problem with the economy when the world economic meltdown occurred in 2008 and that all our economic problems thereafter were due solely to world factors. That is a myth and it goes back to 2001. Some of my colleagues may recall the Labour slogan for the 2001 general election, which was “an end to boom and bust”. That was brought forward by Messrs Brown and Balls. It was economic nonsense. I am a Keynesian, but whether we are talking about Kondratiev long waves or whatever, for 300 years capitalism has been cyclical, and that nonsense about an end to boom and bust was on none of my election material. It continued with the nonsense of the private finance initiative, which was a sleight of hand to disguise Government borrowing and, sadly, a sleight of hand that continued under the coalition Government.

The Labour Government continued with the nonsense of light-touch regulation and a Treasury Minister, one Ed Balls, boasting that Labour had become the financial capital of the world because we did not have the millstone of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, which was introduced in 2002 in the United States of America after the problems caused by WorldCom and Enron. The nonsense continued, as has been adverted to tonight, with the fact that we ran a deficit in seven of the 10 years in which Labour was in office before the meltdown in 2008. We should not have done. By the time we got to the world economic meltdown in 2008, our structural deficit just before it, according to the OECD, was 3.1%. That meant that when the wave came in from across the ocean it overtopped our defences much more than it should have done

because our economic defences were not as high as they should have been. I have to say to the House, to make it clear, that before the world economic meltdown I made all the points I have just made to my then Labour colleagues.

The second myth paraded tonight is the wonderful economic performance of the coalition Government. Most of that is complete nonsense. Let us start with the deficit. The deficit is still £90 billion and still 5% of GDP. In the past five years, the national debt has gone up by 55%. We have a balance of trade crisis because we are not exporting enough. GDP per capita is still below what it was in 2008, productivity is down, we have rising personal debt, soaring house prices, jobs that people are forced into or forced into in a sense—such as bogus self-employment jobs, minimum wage jobs and jobs on zero-hours contracts—and falling living standards. Much of the economic growth we have seen in the past six months has not been prompted by anything the coalition Government did but by something the SNP Members will know about—that is, falling oil prices.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) talked earlier about the problems of a deficit because of the intergenerational transmission of debt. What the coalition Government have done and what this new Government have proposed to do is carry on privatising intergenerational debt in two main ways: through soaring house prices so that young people cannot afford a house; and through a huge rise in student debt for the half of young people who go to university. That is simply privatising the transmission of debt to the next generation and it totally undercuts what the coalition Government and the new Government have said about needing to get the deficit down to protect the next generation. I agree with that aim, but all they are doing is privatising it.

This Government will either have to borrow money, as the last Government did, to meet their promises, such as an £8 billion rabbit out of a hat for the NHS, or they will have to put up taxes. However, they have restricted themselves in the Gracious Speech so that they cannot put up income tax, VAT or national insurance contributions. Growth will not get them out of the hole, so I therefore suspect that they will cut even more than they have said that they will.

What we need in our economy is Government borrowing to invest in infrastructure and training and to stimulate economic growth, and Government borrowing for house building so that we have bricks and mortar to show for it. Let us face it, when most people in this country buy a house—although perhaps not some Conservatives, with their inherited wealth—they borrow money to do so. It is what we all do. To drive productivity, we need to drive up the minimum wage and to get rid of zero-hours contracts, which are exploitative. We need restored rights for employees at work, because that will drive investors to substitute capital for labour, which will drive productivity. We also need a bit more compassion, frankly, in our society and in our Government.

What we need from the Labour side is not only a recognition that economic faults were made before 2008, not just by Brown and Balls but by a lot of them. We need to challenge the power structure of this country. Yes, I support devolution, whether it is the northern powerhouse or something from my own west midlands or wherever, but I want a Government who intervene in

markets and break up the big banks, which are too big to fail and will land us with another crisis all over again. Capitalism is cyclical. I do not know when that might happen; if I did, I could make a lot of money. We need to break up those big banks. We need to regulate the energy companies a whole lot more. They are ripping off all our constituents. We need to raise the tax on the richest. We need to abolish phoney non-dom status. Above all—this is one of the key lessons from the electorate both for the Conservative party, which has its majority, and for the Labour party—we have to recognise that one of the appeals of UKIP is that it represents itself as not part of the London-centric political élite. Believe me, we in Wolverhampton do not like that élite. I do not want to see any more of it, but I see nothing whatever in the Queen's Speech to address the imbalance of power in our country.

9.50 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): It is a great pleasure to follow my colleague and friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Rob Marris), although I confess that I do not completely concur with his economic analysis. I will come to that later.

I congratulate the hon. Members for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) and for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) on their excellent speeches, which I greatly enjoyed. Moreover, I compliment the SNP on being here in such large numbers. I feared that no one would be listening to my speech, and now I have a very large audience. I remember that when I made my maiden speech, I had the great pleasure and privilege of following the Speaker, who spoke only for a very short time—less than Winston Churchill, who spoke for one and a half hours, I think. [*Interruption.*] To be fair, it was a short speech—less than 40 minutes, I seem to remember.

Moving swiftly on, the key tests for the Queen's Speech are these. Does it promote freedom? Does it promote equality? Does it bring unity to Britain? Does it bring strength? I would say—I will run through the arguments—that on all those counts it fails. The reality is that the Britain we are living in today is more divided than it was five years ago. It is more divided economically. I represent part of Wales. That is where the whole series of cuts has taken effect, be it in welfare, be it in the public services that many of our regions and nations depend on. Where has the investment been? It has been in London and the south-east. So we have seen imbalances. We have seen disproportionate attacks, with the bedroom tax and other severe cuts. Now, as I mentioned earlier, some Oxford University research is basically saying that, with £12 billion of welfare cuts in the pipeline, we will see another 1 million people relying on food banks. Already 1 million people do so. That is not the sort of country that many Opposition Members want to live in.

Nationally, we are seeing division. We are seeing division over Scotland. Scotland has risen and voted the way that it has for reasons that we can understand and need to discuss and debate and appreciate and respect.

There are also divisions over Europe. We are now talking about severing ourselves from Europe, and even renouncing the human rights and other great values that came from these proud islands. I think the Queen,

in uttering her Speech today, will have thought that she has given much better speeches in the past, if I may put it that way.

There has been some suggestion that the economy is in great shape, but there are 20,000 fewer people earning over £20,000 now than there were five years ago, because the Conservatives have chopped up full-time jobs into zero-hours jobs, part-time jobs and low-paid jobs. They can say, "Look, we have created all these jobs," but when we look at the overall amount of production, which is also indicated in productivity, we see that they have dismally failed because they have not invested in skills and they have flattened consumer demand. It is a complete nightmare.

I do not agree with the analysis of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West. I would point to the fact that, in the 10 years to 2008, the British economy grew by 40%. In 2008 we had a banking crisis, not of our making—[HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] Look at Iceland; look at Greece; look at the United States—are Conservatives Members blind or just plain stupid? We had a global crisis. [*Interruption.*] Please be quiet. We had a global crisis, and Obama and Brown intervened with the fiscal stimulus. They stopped a world depression and they got Britain growing by 2010.

In 2010, the Tory Chancellor arrived and he announced that 500,000 people in the public services would be sacked. Those people stopped spending and started saving. Consumer demand flatlined and we have had a flatlining economy since. Debt, as a share of the economy, has grown from 55% in 2010 to 80% now. The Tories have borrowed more in five years than Labour did in 13—and we had to bail out the banks. Is that success? No, it is absolute failure. So why did the Labour party do so badly in the election? We should put our hands up: we did not explain the economic narrative effectively enough, but that does not change the fact that we are in an appalling mess thanks to what the Tories have done.

What would be the prospects for future growth if we did not stay in the EU? The EU is a platform for international companies from India, China and elsewhere to enter the biggest economy in the world—Europe. We will have a referendum. The Labour party has now said that it wants a referendum, because the nation has decided we should have one, but international businesses are thinking, "Hold on, all bets are off. We are not going to invest in British production. We will go to France or Germany because we do not know whether Britain will stay in the EU." Tata Steel, Airbus and Ford—in Bridgend in my constituency—are saying, "Hold on, we do not want to face tariffs of between 5% and 100%." The Conservatives say that we will renegotiate and then we will have a vote, but the reality is that the Prime Minister will support staying in Europe without reform. To a certain extent, he is dithering around to pacify right-wing Tories and UKIP, putting the tactical interests of the Conservative party before the strategic interests of Britain, and that is disgraceful.

We see the same pattern of disgraceful short-termist political activity with human rights. We are part of the human rights convention, and we have a proud record on human rights, democracy and freedom as a beacon of hope in an uncertain world. Now we are saying, "We don't like those human rights, so we will have our own." If we do not agree with universal human rights, how do we think Vladimir Putin feels? He passed a law on

[Geraint Davies]

Saturday that stops people saying things that might undermine the values of Russia. He is focusing on foreign-funded organisations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and saying they are dodgy people saying unhelpful things. Their workers could face imprisonment for up to six years. Putin is looking at us and saying that Britain appears to think that human rights are not universal, but culture-relative. We can have one set of human rights, Putin can have another and China yet another. Is that what we want? Of course not, and it is outrageous to suggest it.

In any case, learned lawyers have pointed out that the human rights changes will not happen because the Human Rights Act underpins the constitutional settlement in the devolved nations. It is also underpinned by international treaties, so the proposal is ridiculous and has been kicked into the long grass. But it says a lot about the Conservative party.

Other proposed Bills include the enterprise Bill. What does that have to do with improving productivity and infrastructure, and increasing skills? Nothing. All it says is that the Government will cut red tape by £10 billion. What does that mean? Normally it means that health and safety will be cut. The strike Bill is another example. The Conservatives say, “You have to have 40% of the workforce to have a legitimate strike.” In my constituency, the turnout was 62% and my vote was 42%, so 25% of my constituents voted for me—

Alex Salmond: That is low.

Geraint Davies: I know it is low by SNP standards. It certainly would not be enough for a proper strike under these proposals. In reality, it is very difficult to achieve 40% and it does not happen in local government. It is an attempt to change the balance of power in the workplace, another aspect of which is the creation of all those zero-hours jobs without any rights.

The way forward for Britain is greater productivity, high-wage jobs, high skills and a high-value, export-driven focus. It is not through hobbling people, taking away their wealth and making them work for a pittance.

The Queen has seen us through a world war and seen Britain emerge from the fire of war to create a health service, a welfare state and housing, which are now in a state of virtual bankruptcy. Now, we have ended up with penny-pinching Tories hobbling Britain. I hope that in our discussions we can think about growth instead of cuts to get down the deficit, and that we can work together to build a stronger, better, fairer Britain for all our children to share.

Ordered. That the debate be now adjourned.—(Sarah Newton.)

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Zero-hours Contracts

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Sarah Newton.)

10 pm

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): I am pleased to have the opportunity to introduce the first Adjournment debate of the new Parliament. It was a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies). I would love to tell him that the Scottish National party Members were sitting in their places because of the rumour that he was the most exciting speaker in western Europe, and that the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) was there because he wanted to hear every word the hon. Gentleman had to say, but in fact, I know that the right hon. Gentleman is sitting there with some of his colleagues because they want to hear what we on the Government Benches have to say about zero-hours contracts. It may seem unusual for a Conservative Member to be raising this subject, which was controversial at some point during the general election, but at a time when the Labour party is unable to focus on any subject at all, as evidenced by the number of Labour Members now in the Chamber, it is left to the governing party, the Conservative party, and what I think they would probably call the real Opposition to focus on the issues that are important to the nation, and zero-hours contracts is one of those issues.

The expression “zero-hours contracts” is a colloquial term for a contract of service under which a worker is not guaranteed work and is paid only for work carried out. It is fair to say that such contracts have attracted both criticism and praise. Employer organisations tend to stress the role that zero-hours contracts can play in helping businesses to meet fluctuating demand, and they argue that such contracts play a key role in keeping people in jobs. Trade union campaigners and others emphasise how the financial insecurity of those people who are on zero-hours contracts limits their ability to rent property or to access loans or mortgages, so that it becomes more difficult for them to provide for their families, and that the general uncertainty facing workers on zero-hours contracts is compounded because such people are not defined as employees, which means that they do not qualify for most employment rights.

The Office for National Statistics has examined the matter to estimate the number of people who have zero-hours contracts, and it is fair to say that there is a little blurring at the edges about the accurate numbers, depending on how they are counted. The ONS has collected statistics based on the labour force survey, which asks workers rather than employers about their employment arrangements, and this suggests that there may be about 697,000 people on zero-hours contracts. A survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development produced a rather higher number of about 1 million, but the ONS thinks that that may overstate the sampling of large employers. None the less, there is a small but significant proportion of the total workforce of 31 million people—perhaps between 2.2% and 3.2%—who are on zero-hours contracts.

The workplace employment relations survey estimated that the proportion of workplaces with at least some workers on zero-hours contracts has doubled from 4% in

2004 to 8% in 2011, and what is particularly significant is the concentration of workers on zero-hours contracts in certain sectors. The *Financial Times* reported in April 2013 that there were more than 100,000 zero-hours contracts in use across NHS hospitals, the number having risen by 24% over two years. In the hotel and catering sector, some 53% of employers make at least some use of these contracts, and it has been estimated that some 61% of workers in the domiciliary care sector are on zero-hours contracts.

A social entrepreneur, Mrs Sheila King, in my South Norfolk constituency has told me of the great value of zero-hours contracts for small charities. Mrs King conceived and developed the Pennoyer centre in Pulham St Mary in my constituency. The centre, which is run as a local village charity, is in a building which is part derelict Victorian primary school and part 14th-century medieval guild chapel, and which is now, with the help of grants Mrs King secured from the Heritage Lottery Fund and other grant-making bodies, a multi-purpose village centre. It serves as a conference centre, an IT training centre, a café, a restaurant, a village hall and, indeed, as a polling station in the recent general election, which I say with particular affection because it was where I cast my own vote.

Of the 13 people who work at the centre, four are on zero-hours contracts and they earn holiday pay for every hour worked. These workers include some women over the age of 60 who are happy to have a few hours' work here and there, and some sixth formers working for their A-levels who at certain times, when they are studying, want to be able to say no to any work at all, whereas at other times they will tell the centre that they would like as many hours as possible. Mrs King told me that it would be difficult to run the centre without the flexibility offered by zero-hours contracts, which she said were "flexible on both sides".

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Over the election period I had occasion to meet some people who were employed on zero-hours terms and their views were clear. The hon. Gentleman has given us a rosy picture of charities which use such contracts, but many people on zero-hours contracts are temporary agency workers who have no rights, as the hon. Gentleman said, and whose hours and pay are minimal. The companies employing them are successful and are making large profits. Is it not fair that those on minimal hour contracts should receive long-term contracts with better wages if the companies are making a large profit?

Mr Bacon: I agree that the picture is not all rosy. I started with the rosy news because I wanted to soften up my hon. Friend the Minister, but there are problems. That is why I applied for this debate. I will come on to some of those problems in a moment.

Mrs King told me:

"Just because it is not for everyone doesn't mean it is wrong for everyone and that it is somehow toxic. Implemented legally and fairly, zero-hours contracts can be a brilliant way for small charities like ours to run more effectively."

The whole issue of zero-hours contracts, as the hon. Gentleman said, featured in the general election campaign, particularly after the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), the former leader of the Labour party, said that the Labour party, if returned,

would abolish zero-hours contracts, although the manifesto does not say that. It does not call for the complete abolition of zero-hours contracts. It says:

"Labour will ban exploitative zero-hours contracts."

The hon. Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna), who was for a few minutes a candidate to succeed as leader of the Labour party, was quite explicit when he told the Labour party conference that Labour

"will act to outlaw zero hours contracts where they exploit people."

Meanwhile, the Conservative manifesto promised to

"take further steps to eradicate abuses of workers, such as non-payment of the Minimum Wage, exclusivity in zero-hours contracts and exploitation of migrant workers."

I am pleased that the new Government are now in a position to follow through on these commitments.

With reference to the comments from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), what struck me about the issue during the general election was how frequently voters mentioned it to me, unprompted, often while talking about their grown-up children entering the workforce, which suggests that it may be a bigger issue than the statistics suggest. In one election debate in a church, a member of the audience explained how his son travelled to Norwich each day to work in a retail outlet. When he got there at 9 o'clock in the morning he was told to go and sit in a store room at the back. Later in the morning, if it got busy, he would be called out on to the shop floor, for which he would be paid. He would then be ordered back to the store room to wait for his next slice of paid work later in the day.

I do not know anybody who would defend such arrangements. They are indefensible and, by the way, they are almost certainly illegal already, because the law states that "time workers" must be paid at least the national minimum wage when they are on standby at or near the place of work and are required to be available. I do not want to get this out of proportion. It is not a universal problem. Indeed, I met a young man earlier this week who was delighted with the flexibility that his zero-hours contract gives him, but who also said to me, "What you cannot do is take someone's time and then not pay them for it."

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I hope my hon. Friend will agree that the minority of employers who have got into that habit should be exposed in public, should defend themselves in public and should be condemned in public.

Mr Bacon: I completely agree.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing a debate on such an important issue. I think it would be fair to say that such employers are not in the minority. I agree with some of what he says, but not all of it. What assurances can he give to those on the Opposition Benches that members of his Front-Bench team will bring to an end exploitative zero-hours contracts and protect workers' rights, as the SNP-led Scottish Government are doing through their Scottish business pledge and fair work convention?

Mr Bacon: Should the Prime Minister choose to appoint me to the Government, I will start to give such assurances. In the meantime, I look forward to hearing what assurances my hon. Friend the Minister will give.

[Mr Bacon]

I asked USDAW—the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers—to provide me with individual examples of exploitation. I was slightly surprised, but also pleased, when it told me that it had negotiated away zero-hours contracts in most of the places where its members worked. Its policy document states that “short-hours contracts” are in many ways an issue of bigger concern, but I am convinced that there is a problem. Actually, I believe that the problem is more extensive in the area of domiciliary care, where careworkers are often forced to rush from care appointment to care appointment without being given adequate time at each appointment, or time to travel between appointments, for which they are not paid.

A freedom of information request by the trade union Unison suggests that 93% of councils in England and Wales do not make it a contractual condition for the home care providers that they commission to pay their home careworkers for their travel time. That is despite its being the main reason why so many home careworkers receive pay below the national minimum wage. I believe that Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs is investigating some home care firms, and I hope that they will be named and shamed.

After I spoke with Unison, it sent me the testimonies of several careworkers, some of them anonymised because the workers are simply too frightened to be open. One such home careworker wrote:

“I am on zero contract hours...If I kick off, I have the fear that they can turn around and take me off my calls...I work six days a week, which accounts to me putting in forty five hours plus...But I am lucky if I get paid for 28 of those hours”.

Another anonymous home careworker wrote:

“Until very recently I was working in home care, visiting vulnerable adults with a range of problems, such as dementia, MS, Parkinson’s, acquired brain injury, mental illness and the effects of stroke. Because I was providing a vital service to people with acute problems, I found the work highly rewarding. I really wish I could say the same about the pay and conditions of the job! Because no hours were guaranteed, there was no job security and I remember feeling nervous about complaining, in case my hours for the following week were cut. I was on little more than the minimum wage and out of this meagre sum I had to pay for my uniform and fuel”.

That is back to the worst management practices of the 1960s and 1970s.

Unison also sent me the testimony of a home careworker called Helen, who said this:

“I’m a home care worker and have been for most of my working life. I really don’t ever think about doing anything else. I love my job, I love the variety, I love the people I am lucky enough to work with. I don’t like the insecurity, I don’t like the debts, I don’t like the nights I lie awake wondering when will I ever be financially secure? I have seen many good workers leave, frustrated at the poor pay and the way zero-hours contracts are used by way of punishment and reward. If you turn down a shift, hours you were depending on can be taken and given to others, sometimes with only hours’ notice. I have seen how many use this as a way to simply force out staff who may have complained about quality of care. Is this acceptable? ‘Duty of Care’ means that we have to raise concerns, yet many are too scared of the implications financially if they do. Isn’t it time someone understood their Duty of Care to us? Isn’t it time those with the power to make a difference respected and valued care as much as I do?”

I want to say a brief word about housing schemes, not only because the Minister used to be the Minister for planning and knows of my interest in it, but because

it is potentially directly relevant to the provision of home care. It is an extraordinary fact that when planners look at housing schemes they are not required to consider the overall social impact. It is true that the key watchword is “sustainability”, but too often that means no more or less than what an expensive lawyer at a planning inquiry wants it to mean.

With regard to thinking holistically about the communities we want to see—and then designing and building places for people to live in, rather than large numbers of identical boxes—we are still in the dark ages. For example, if a mature couple with grown-up children and elderly parents visit a show home on a typical new-build development and asks how much sheltered accommodation is integrated into the scheme, where their elderly mum could come and live so that they and her grandchildren could see each other more often and more easily, they are treated almost as if they are mad. But if we were to design in such care provision when building new communities, we could do a much better job, with some permanent residential home careworkers built into the equation, without spending more money, and quite possibly spending less, while getting a better outcome. I believe that in the domiciliary care sector, there is still what amounts to systematic exploitation. I hope that the Government will look at the matter carefully.

The best case for zero-hours contracts is that they can provide an economical and low-risk way for employers to take a good look at new workers. From the employees’ point of view, they can be a way of getting into the world of work and showing what someone is capable of, leading on to better, more secure and better paid employment. The contracts can also provide invaluable flexibility for small organisations, including charities.

The best argument against zero-hours contracts is that they provide opportunities for unscrupulous employers who are determined to exploit people and who engage in practices that they would not wish to endure themselves, and that, in certain sectors such as domiciliary care, the problem amounts to systematic exploitation.

It can be true at one and the same time that zero-hours contracts can provide a useful and even invaluable tool to some organisations and industries and that they can be misused by companies determined to engage in systematic exploitation of vulnerable workers in certain sectors—domiciliary care, for example. In a Westminster Hall debate on home-care workers the year before last, the then Minister for Care, the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), stated:

“the idea of a zero-hours contract is, in most circumstances, completely incompatible with a model of high quality care, in which the individual really gets to know their care worker.”—[*Official Report*, 6 March 2013; Vol. 559, c. 262WH.]

This Minister needs to keep an eye on the issue. Zero-hours contracts are not going away. They have their place; they can even be invaluable. However, they are also a potential seedbed for gross exploitation.

I have five suggestions for the Minister. Will he undertake to keep a very close eye on the issue by establishing a small working group to keep him updated on issues around the use and misuse of zero-hours contracts? Secondly, will he undertake to work closely with the new Minister for Community and Social Care, my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), an ideal appointment to

that post, to ensure that firms providing care services are taking the required steps to stamp out bad practice and look after their employees? That could also ensure that the Government placed sustained pressure on such firms to do so.

Thirdly, will the Minister assist in establishing suitable whistleblower arrangements, or publicising existing whistleblower arrangements with trusted partners, so that vulnerable workers in areas such as the care sector feel confident about exposing malpractice? Will he work with HM Revenue and Customs, encouraging it to pursue cases where there are clear breaches of employment law—for example, the payment of the national minimum wage to care workers who are not paid for travelling between appointments—so that unscrupulous employers have a justified fear of ending up in the courts?

Will the Minister work with the excellent Minister for Housing and Planning—or encourage others to do so; this may be outwith his remit—to encourage more truly holistic housing schemes that provide long-term care solutions that are better for those in need of care, their relatives, careworkers and taxpayers, rather than engaging a small number of private sector providers who are diversifying because of the thinner pickings now available from PFI?

In our excellent Queen's Speech today, we rightly heard about the Government's determination to be a Government of one nation. "One nation" means that we look after taxpayers' money and look very sceptically before allowing large private equity companies to Hoover up cash that might well be better and more effectively spent directly by local community care co-operatives. "One nation" means that we encourage labour market flexibility but do not tolerate exploitation. "One nation" means that we look out for all our people. I look forward to the Minister's reply.

10.18 pm

The Minister for Skills (Nick Boles): It is a great honour to be speaking at the Dispatch Box on this, the first day of the new Parliament. I suspect that it will be the only time in my life when Her Majesty the Queen has the first word and I the last, although we can agree that her audience was somewhat larger and that she was a great deal better dressed.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon) on securing this debate on an important subject that thankfully, now that the election has passed, we can shed real light on. We can discover the facts and pursue the examples of bad practice that he outlined. He is right to say that zero-hours contracts are in and of themselves nothing new and that a relatively small proportion of the workforce are on such contracts. He also rightly referred to a recent study by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, which found that 60% of zero-hours workers were satisfied with their contracts and 65% of them were happier with their work-life balance because of those contracts. He described a number of situations involving individuals who actually welcomed these contracts because of the flexibility they gave them and the ability they provided to respond to other responsibilities, goals or ambitions that they had in their lives.

However, that should never be an excuse for complacency or for a belief that this is good for everyone and that every employer who makes use of these contracts is

doing so responsibly. My hon. Friend gave a number of important examples of abuse. I hope he is pleased to know that one of my first decisions as Minister responsible for employment law was to implement the provision in an Act passed in the previous Parliament by my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock), that banned exclusivity clauses in zero-hours contracts. Exclusivity clauses did something simply outrageous. The point of a zero-hours contract is that it does not guarantee a specific number of hours of work in any period of time. To then require that the person makes themselves available constantly, waiting for a phone call, preventing them from going out and earning income from other work, is simply outrageous. It was happening, I am glad to say, with a relatively small number and small percentage of zero-hours contracts, but it was quite intolerable and we were right to ban it. I am very glad that we have implemented that ban. We will be making sure that that ban is not simply symbolic but is enforced.

I am happy to look at examples of other abuses. My hon. Friend described very eloquently the case of a young man—the son of one of his constituents—who was called into work, kept on standby and not paid. My hon. Friend speculated that this practice was already illegal. While I do not know the full details of the case, if it is as he described I can reassure him that he is absolutely right—it is already illegal. If his constituent would like to approach him, and he would like to pass on to me the specific details of that employer and that young man, I will be very happy to get HMRC and any other enforcement authority to come down like a ton of bricks on that kind of abuse. It is against the law, it is inhuman, and it must not go on.

My hon. Friend has asked for some further, very specific commitments. He is always cheerful and affable, but he never gives up as a Member of Parliament, as I know both to my cost and my pleasure in my previous role as planning Minister. If, in this Parliament, we see a revolution in the number of people who are able to secure a plot of land to build their own home, it will be very largely thanks to his doggedness on that issue. I have no doubt that he will continue to be as dogged on the issue raised in tonight's debate.

On his first request, without absolutely committing to a working group—because I would want to know what its composition was—I can promise my hon. Friend that I will keep a very close eye on this. I assure him that I have already asked officials to look into other kinds of abuse of zero-hours contracts to explore whether there is something further that we can do to root out such exploitation of working people.

Sir Peter Bottomley: As a practical solution, would it be possible at some stage, not necessarily tonight, for the Minister's Department, or for him, to say where people should email or telephone if they have a possible abuse to report, so that there is a central place to collect this information, not necessarily for action on every case but at least to gather it together?

Nick Boles: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that issue, which was the subject of the third request from my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk. I was going to say that I do not know what the whistleblower arrangements are, but I will undertake to find out

[Nick Boles]

tomorrow and make sure that they are better publicised to citizens advice bureaux and to relevant charities that can make sure that people are able to report abuse.

My hon. Friend's second request, which will give me great pleasure to fulfil, is to work closely with the Minister for Community and Social Care, my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt). He is one of the most popular Members of Parliament and former Ministers, who I am delighted to say will now be on the Front Bench again. He is a deeply humane man, and I know that he will want to make sure that the people looking after the most vulnerable in our society are not exploited by their employers.

Jim Shannon: Will the Minister also look at firms that employ temporary agency staff and at their rights? Those I spoke to on the election trail told me that their rights have also been diminished.

Nick Boles: I am happy to look at that. If I may, I want to extend to the hon. Gentleman, as well as to hon. Members from all around the House, an invitation to bring me specific examples of bad practice—ideally with the identities of the employer, but if not, nevertheless with such examples—and I will try to find out what we can do about such practices if we have not already banned them, as was the case for the worker put on standby unpaid.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk asked me to get in touch with HMRC about the pursuit of breaches. He will be pleased to know that the previous Government, of which we formed a major part, introduced

the idea of naming and shaming employers who breach national minimum wage laws. We will continue that, and I am very happy to direct officials to look specifically at breaches of national minimum wage laws in the care industry, where, as he has rightly highlighted and others have agreed with him, there is a problem.

On my hon. Friend's fifth request, he is right that the whole question of the design of housing falls outside my ministerial portfolio. However, he knows that I share with him an absolute passion for the issue of housing—about how we must build more and better houses that work for modern families in all their shapes and sizes. I will continue to work with him as a private citizen and as a Member of this House to further that aim.

It has been a great pleasure to wind up this debate on the first day of Parliament. May I conclude by saying that today we have had a model of democracy and free speech? I know that all hon. Members from whatever party will be as dismayed as I was to learn that one of our number, the hon. Member for Clacton (Mr Carswell), was attacked outside by a group of, frankly, hoodlums simply because they disapprove of his views. I think that that is shameful. The hon. Gentleman is a man I like and respect. I think he is hugely misguided and that he is in the wrong party—I think he is beginning to realise that—but he has the right to express himself freely and openly, as we all do, and this House must defend the rights of hon. Members to do just that.

Question put and agreed to.

10.27 pm

House adjourned.

Petitions

Wednesday 27 May 2015

OBSERVATIONS

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Green belt land in Redbridge

The Petition of the Save Oakfield Site (SOS) campaign group,

Declares that the precious, high quality sports field known as Oakfield has twelve full size and nine junior size grass football pitches and four cricket grounds as well as two large pavilions which together act as an inclusive social hub contributing to community cohesion; further that the Petitioners believe that there are proposals to concrete over this irreplaceable green belt land and to destroy the pavilions; further that this would be a massive and irreversible loss to the residents of the Borough of Redbridge, to the many sportsmen and sportswomen in the surrounding London Boroughs and in the County of Essex and beyond, and to the many voluntary and other organisations that provide services to local schools and the wider public; further that the London Borough of Redbridge has planned to seek de-classification of green belt status for Oakfield; further that the Petitioners believe that these plans have occurred without good reason following a flawed process; further that at a time when sport is seen as the Olympic Legacy and as the solution to ever-increasing obesity in the nation, removal of such facilities represents a loss of opportunity for exercise for the existing and growing number of potential users and increases the risk of ill health and will also put further strain on NHS resources; further that the Borough Council would be failing to supply conveniently located, good quality playing fields to satisfy the current demand and the likely future demand in line with the policy of Sport England; further that the proposed development of the stated 800 units of housing on the site will increase already chaotic traffic congestion to intolerable levels and will increase the local pollution level which currently exceeds the rate that is identified as acceptable by the EU and the WHO and will reduce safety without contributing anything significant to social and key-worker homes; and further that all this is based on long-term population projections for the Borough that extrapolate from past trend analysis to produce unrealistic and unfounded housing demands on the Borough that ignore the needs and rights of the existing population for a sustainable quality of life and are unfair in relation to other London Boroughs and national Government demographic policies.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Redbridge Borough Council to reconsider the proposal to develop the Oakfield site for housing and further request that the House of Commons urges the Government to reject any requests to remove green belt status from Oakfield.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Lee Scott, Official Report, 10 February 2015; Vol. 748, c. 592.]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, received 27 March 2015:

Given my quasi-judicial role in the planning system I cannot comment on specific Local Plans or development proposals. However, I am aware that the London Borough of Redbridge is undertaking a review of its Local Plan (Core Strategy) which was adopted in 2008, and that in 2010 it undertook a Green Belt Study to inform its Local Plan review.

The petition expresses particular reservations over the council's proposal to release Green Belt land at Oakfield for the allocation of 800 homes.

The National Planning Policy Framework provides strong protection for the Green Belt, making it clear that most new building is inappropriate there. Green Belt is created and protected by local planning authorities, in line with national policy set out in the Framework. This makes it clear that most new building is inappropriate there; and a Green Belt boundary may be altered only in exceptional circumstances, through the Local Plan. New guidance in 2014 underlined the protection for Green Belt when local authorities plan to meet housing and other needs.

The Framework also empowers communities to use their Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plan to designate smaller areas as Local Green Space. Designation rules out new development there other than in very special circumstances.

This Government do not set top down housing targets or require local authorities to provide more homes than are needed, but the Framework does ask authorities to plan to meet their objectively assessed local housing needs in full, so far as is consistent with the policies in the Framework as a whole.

Planning authorities should also ensure that there is adequate infrastructure to support whatever development they approve. Where air quality is poor they should designate an Air Quality Management Area and develop an Action Plan.

As the Framework says (paragraphs 73-74), access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and wellbeing of communities. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the land to be surplus to requirements; or unless the land lost to sport or recreation would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in a suitable location. The Framework also makes clear that, in the Green Belt, local planning authorities should look for opportunities to provide access and opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation.

The London Plan, for instance, commits the Mayor of London to work with strategic partners to protect, promote and expand the extent and quality of, and access to, London's network of green infrastructure. This will secure benefits including biodiversity; natural and historic landscapes, sport and recreation. Brownfield sites across London are being targeted for redevelopment in order to limit pressure on Green Belt and greenfield land.

The Framework should be read as a whole, and it requires planners to have regard to a range of different social, economic and environmental priorities. Local authorities often have to balance apparently conflicting priorities when determining planning issues. Ultimately it is for each local authority to satisfy itself that the plan it submits for examination to the Planning Inspectorate is sound. A plan is sound if it is properly prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy in the Framework.

Sainsbury's roadworks in Belgrave (Leicester)

The Petition of residents of Leicester East,

Declares that the delayed roadworks in Belgrave, Leicester, which are part of an agreement made between Sainsbury's and Leicester City Council, are causing significant problems for businesses and residents in the area.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to investigate this case, and call upon Sainsbury's to honour their commitments and expedite the completion of these works. The Petitioners require assurances these roadworks

and surrounding problems are addressed before seriously impacting residents and businesses over the Christmas period.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Keith Vaz, *Official Report*, 18 March 2015; Vol. 594, c. 868.]

[P001453]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, received 27 March 2015:

The roadworks are being carried out subject to a legal agreement between Leicester City Council and Sainsbury's PLC, made in respect of mitigation works as part of a planning permission. It is for Leicester City Council, and any local planning authority entering into similar agreements, to ensure that potential noise and traffic problems are kept to a minimum, that works are executed without undue delay and to enforce, if appropriate, against any breach of the agreement made. Furthermore, a local authority has legal powers to tackle statutory noise nuisance, and local highway authorities have powers in relation to street works on public highways.

The Government are unable to comment on specific planning cases because of the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial role in the planning process.

PETITIONS

Wednesday 27 May 2015

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