

Thursday
28 May 2015

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 28 May 2015

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

9.34 am

Mr Speaker: Yesterday the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) raised a point of order asking whether the changes to our Standing Orders that the Government propose to bring forward would, first, breach the principle that all Members of this House are equal before the Chair, and, secondly, would have to be considered by me or by the Procedure Committee. I undertook to reflect and take advice before responding substantively.

I must make it clear that I am not party to the detail of what the Government are proposing, beyond what is set out in Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech. That is now available to all Members to read in *Hansard* and in the *Votes and Proceedings*, and in copies available in the Vote Office. No doubt the Government will provide more information in due course.

In general terms, however, I can say that it is for the House to decide how and whether to change its Standing Orders. From time to time, the Government table motions to make changes to the Standing Orders, sometimes in response to a recommendation of the Procedure Committee, sometimes on their own initiative. I would not accept the motion if it breached the rules of the House, but it is not for the Chair to judge the merits of a proposal. It is for the House to decide whether to agree to the Government's proposal.

While it is certainly an important responsibility of the Chair to ensure that Members are treated fairly and impartially, in accordance with the rules of the House, this does not limit the power of the House to determine its own rules and procedures.

Business of the House

9.36 am

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): Mr Speaker, I wonder if I might take the liberty first of congratulating you on your re-election to the Chair and of welcoming all new Members to the House, where I hope they will feel they can make a fruitful and purposeful contribution.

The business for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 1 JUNE—Continuation of the debate on the Gracious Speech, on the subject of Britain in the world.

TUESDAY 2 JUNE—Continuation of the debate on the Gracious Speech. The subject will be health and social care.

WEDNESDAY 3 JUNE—Continuation of the debate on the Gracious Speech, on the subject of devolution and growth across Britain.

THURSDAY 4 JUNE—Conclusion of the debate on the Gracious Speech. The subject will be the economy.

FRIDAY 5 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 8 June will include:

MONDAY 8 JUNE—Second Reading of the Scotland Bill.

TUESDAY 9 JUNE—Second Reading of the European Union Referendum Bill.

WEDNESDAY 10 JUNE—Opposition day (1st allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 11 JUNE—Second Reading of a Bill to be announced.

FRIDAY 12 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

It might also be helpful if I inform Members of the planned dates for the future Adjournments of the House and for sitting Fridays in the coming Session. The House will rise at close of play on Tuesday 21 July for the summer recess and will return on Monday 7 September. The House will rise for the conference recess on Thursday 17 September and return on Monday 12 October. The House will rise for a short recess on 10 November and return on Monday 16 November. We will rise for the Christmas recess on Thursday 17 December and return on Tuesday 5 January, and we will rise for the February half-term recess on Thursday 11 February and return on Monday 22 February.

The proposed dates for sitting Fridays in the coming Session are: 11 September, 16 October, 23 October, 30 October, 6 November, 20 November, 4 December, 22 January, 29 January, 5 February, 26 February, 4 March and 11 March.

It might also be of interest to Members to know that I intend to bring to the House the motion allocating the Chairs of Select Committees to parties next week, in order to allow the process for the election of Chairs to proceed. I expect the debate to take place next Wednesday.

Ms Eagle: I thank the new Leader of the House for announcing next week's business, and I would like to congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your re-election last

[Ms Angela Eagle]

week. I concur with the remarks you made yesterday in welcoming all new Members, congratulating Members who held their seats and commiserating with former colleagues who were defeated. As you rightly said, Mr Speaker, politics can sometimes be a bruising experience.

This is the most diverse Parliament ever, with a record number of women, LGBT, black and ethnic minority Members. The Parliament also contains those from other minorities such as the Liberal Democrats. I note—[*Interruption.*] Well, apparently they are not here at all, but I am sure everyone will get what I mean. I note that in the race to elect a successor to the former Deputy Prime Minister, Liberal Democrat candidates need the backing of 10% of their MPs. That should be easy, as by my calculations one Liberal Democrat currently constitutes 12.5%, and apparently they can nominate themselves.

Yesterday's Humble Address was a wolf in sheep's clothing. It was a legislative programme couched in fluffy soundbites, barely disguising a triumphalist Thatcherite agenda. The Prime Minister had the temerity to promise a one nation approach just weeks after he ran the most divisive election campaign in years, pitting one part of the UK against another. He claimed in his legislative programme that he would help working people get on, but his plans amount to a shamelessly partisan attack on workers' rights and representation. As Her Majesty's official Opposition, we will look beyond the rhetoric to the reality of this Queen's Speech and hold this Government to account.

Today's written ministerial statement from the Leader of the House listed the Bills announced yesterday. I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving us the details of the length of the Session and the sitting dates, but we do not yet know what the mysterious Bill is that we are due to discuss on Thursday 11 June. Will he enlighten us now—or at least tell us when he will make that announcement?

On 9 June, I note that we are to debate the Second Reading of the European Union Referendum Bill. The Prime Minister has been desperately flying around European capitals trying to conduct negotiations on reforms that he has so far failed to specify in any great detail. Will the Leader of the House tell us whether the Government have already ruled out treaty change as an option, because it has been dismissed by European leaders? Will Eurosceptic Cabinet Ministers such as himself be allowed to remain in government if they campaign to leave the EU against the wishes of the Prime Minister?

I would like to welcome the new Chief Whip to his place. I see that he has already broken the bad habits of his immediate predecessor by actually deigning to turn up for business questions. I hope the new Chief Whip will be as effective in his job as the last one was!

I also welcome the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) to his new post. Given that an eagle is a predator and a powerful emblem used by countries across the globe, I thought I would honour the right hon. Gentleman's arrival by looking up what a grayling is. The dictionary defines it as "a small grey fish frequently used as bait"—[*Laughter.*] With that in mind, I look forward to working with him.

I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman has learned many lessons from his time as Justice Secretary that he can apply in his new brief: tougher sentences for repeat offenders could be applied to the recidivists already lurking on the Government Back Benches; he is well acquainted with those pesky peers because they have defeated him so many times already; and given his record on banning books in prisons, I just hope he is not let anywhere near the House of Commons Library.

As we get business under way, we are all coming to terms with the election results. Apparently, with the Chancellor having promised to give Lynton Crosby a proper French kiss if the Tories got a majority, he has managed to deliver only a desultory peck on the cheek. This is, I am sure, one of the first of many broken Tory election promises.

The leader of the Green party has achieved her dream of making it to Parliament by taking a job as a junior researcher. The Scottish National party has taken to trying to occupy our Front Benches, but I think SNP Members have taken quite enough seats already!

Chris Grayling: First, let me say that I look forward very much to the weekly jousts that the hon. Lady and I shall have across the Chamber. She may be an eagle, and the grayling may indeed be a fish, but I should add that the grayling is often caught by a number of my colleagues on the Back Benches who enjoy spending the afternoon on a river bank. However, I look forward to proving that the fish can indeed prove mightier than the eagle.

As for the hon. Lady's comments about the general election results and, in particular, about the Liberal Democrats, I am not sure that in her position I would be boasting about having reduced representation in the Chamber. I am not only delighted that a number of my colleagues vanquished their Liberal Democrat opponents at the election, but especially pleased that a number of my new colleagues beat sitting Labour Members. I am very proud of what they have achieved, and very proud to see them here. Along with all my colleagues, I congratulate them on those extraordinary results, and on the success that they have brought to their constituencies.

I must also tell election buffs that there will be no shortage of elections this summer. We have had a general election, but we now have the Labour leadership campaign and the Labour deputy leadership campaign. My colleagues may not have seen the hon. Lady's campaign slogan, which is "We want Angela". We must wait and see whether the Labour party does indeed want Angela, but I wish her the best for her campaign. It is a crowded field—of seven, I believe—and I wait with interest to see how successful she will be. She has all our good wishes.

I should point out to the hon. Lady that the "triumphalist Thatcherite agenda" she described won the general election. Given that she claims to be a champion of equalities, it is always a shame to hear her make disparaging comments about Britain's first woman Prime Minister—something this party is immensely proud of.

Our party's position on the European referendum is absolutely clear. We campaigned for a European referendum during the general election, and we will deliver a European referendum. By contrast, the Labour party campaigned against a European referendum, although its temporary leader appears now to have decided that Labour will

support it. My question is this: do all the leadership candidates support it? We shall find out in the months ahead, but better a sinner that repent. The people of this country want a vote on Europe, and we will deliver it.

The hon. Lady asked what Bill we were to debate in two weeks' time. She will discover that during next week's business questions, and I look forward to continuing our jousts then.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Last August, *The Times* reported that the Prime Minister had promised the Magistrates Association that he would extend magistrates' sentencing powers to a year by the end of the last Parliament. That was very welcome indeed. The former Member of Parliament for Bermondsey and Old Southwark, Mr Simon Hughes, has boasted that he personally blocked the move. Now that we are not lumbered with the likes of Simon Hughes in this place, will the Leader of the House tell us whether the Prime Minister's promise, which many of us welcomed so much in August, will be delivered during the current Parliament?

Chris Grayling: I am a great supporter of our magistracy. Magistrates are volunteers, and they do a fine job for our country. They play an important role in communities throughout the country, and we should be grateful to all of them for what they do. I fear that my hon. Friend will have to wait for an announcement from my right hon. Friend the new Lord Chancellor, who is currently getting his feet under the table, but I know that my right hon. Friend agrees with me about the importance of the work done by magistrates, and I have no doubt that, as time goes by, he will present further proposals that will enable us to make the best possible use of them.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House grant time for a debate on the issue of fracking in Lancashire, which is of great concern to many of my constituents?

Chris Grayling: The issue has been widely debated in the House, and I know that it is of concern to the hon. Lady's constituents. However, I also believe that it is important to ensure that we have proper, affordable supplies of energy for the future. We must deal with the issue carefully and sensitively. There will be plenty of opportunities for the hon. Lady to raise it during next week's debate on the Queen's Speech or by means of an Adjournment debate, and I know that she will be a champion of her constituents in this regard. I must say to her, however, that it is very important to, in particular, the pensioners in her constituency for us to ensure that there is affordable energy for all our futures.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Two issues are of concern in the area that my right hon. Friend and I represent. One is the dreadful rail service that is currently being suffered on the Brighton main line route to London, and the other is the decision that will have to be made in the wake of the Davies commission's report on runway capacity in the south-east of England. Members who are interested in those issues will attempt to raise them in Westminster Hall, but I think that they are sufficiently important to be debated in Government time at an appropriate moment, and I invite my right hon. Friend to consider that.

Chris Grayling: As a neighbouring MP in Surrey, I well understand both the concerns that my hon. Friend has raised. I have many constituents who raise concerns about the rail service, and of course the question of airports is going to be a very live one for this Parliament. The Transport Secretary is on the Front Bench so will have heard my hon. Friend's comments. When the time comes for the publication of the Davies report, the Transport Secretary will, I have no doubt, make a statement to this House and address these issues. I can assure all Members there will be plenty of opportunities to raise questions.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): First, may I congratulate you very warmly on your re-election, Mr Speaker? I was one of your initial sponsors so it is particularly gratifying to see you in your place once again.

May I also congratulate the Leader of the House on being appointed to what I think is one of the great roles in this House? He and I entered Parliament together in 2001, and look at what has become of him! It is good to see him in his place. We on the Scottish National party Benches intend to keep in this Session to the good-natured but robust debates we have come to enjoy, and which have characterised business questions for much of the past few years.

Yesterday we found that the Government intend to make progress on their plans for English votes for English laws by changing the standing orders of this House. I listened very carefully to your ruling on this issue, Mr Speaker. I have to make an appeal to the Leader of the House: this is no way to discuss something of such constitutional significance. This affects the rights of individual Members of this House, and we have to have a Bill—we have to have legislation. I now hope that, for something as important as this, the right hon. Gentleman will think about it and bring a Bill before this House, so that we as hon. and right hon. Members have the opportunity to properly scrutinise and properly debate something as important as this.

When are we going to get a statement from the Scotland Office on the outcome of the leak inquiry into the botched smearing of Scotland's First Minister? The former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), has already said that he would have resigned from that position over his role in this nonsense, but surely we must now hear from the Secretary of State himself on the role of the Scotland Office in this attempted smear.

Lastly, the Leader of the House is now clearly seeing that the real Opposition in this House sit on the SNP Benches. Labour, rudderless and leaderless, with its unedifying rush to the right—the Tory-lite right—by the leadership candidates, will not be holding this Government to account; it will be those of us on these Benches who will do so, and it is a job we look forward to.

Chris Grayling: First, on the issue of English votes for English laws, let me remind the hon. Gentleman that this is about creating a fair devolution settlement for the whole of the United Kingdom. In 10 days' time we shall be debating the Second Reading of the Scotland Bill, which extends substantial powers to the Scottish Parliament. He must understand that it is important to make sure that we have a devolution settlement that is seen by all

[Chris Grayling]

the people of the UK as fair for their interests. That is what we intend to do, and it is right and proper that it is debated in this House, and it will be. It is for this House to change its Standing Orders and it will be done, if it is done, by a vote of all the Members of this House, which is right and proper. It all Members of this House vote for a change, that change will happen.

On the Scotland Office and the leak inquiry, it is important to say that these matters are under careful consideration. There is some speculation at the moment that this may lead to a Standards Committee investigation. I think it is very important that if there is a possibility of further investigation, the person who holds my office does not at this stage comment one way or the other on it. It is clearly not desirable for there to be leaks wherever they happen, but I think the hon. Gentleman will have to wait for any due process that may take place.

Lastly, the hon. Gentleman made a point about how he sees the role of his party. I heard the shadow Leader of the House talk about the issue of who sits where. We shall watch that with interest from this side of the House: it is the first time I have seen anybody play musical chairs without the music.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): May I congratulate the people of Ireland on the outcome of their recent referendum? It is to be applauded. Maybe someone should bake them a cake—although I know where the cake will not be coming from.

During the last Parliament I pushed hard on free transport to schools, and I would like a debate on this as soon as possible. Local authorities have discretion to give payments to parents for free transport, but they are increasingly refusing to do so. This is discriminating against many parents who are now having to find hundreds of pounds, and if they have two children attending school more than three miles away they could end up paying more than £1,000. Please may we have a debate on this issue to ensure that we can remove such discrimination against parents?

Chris Grayling: I know that my hon. Friend has argued that case before. He makes a compelling case on behalf of his constituents, and I simply suggest to him that he uses one of the opportunities in the next week during the debate on the Gracious Speech, or seeks to secure an early Adjournment debate, to ensure that those issues continue to be heard by Ministers.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): In the light of growing congestion across our cities, not least in York, may we have a debate about the impact of congestion on health, on transport and on our environment?

Chris Grayling: We shall debate transport and the economy next week during the debate on the Gracious Speech, and I encourage the hon. Lady to bring forward thoughts about the issues that her constituency faces, or to seek an Adjournment debate when a Transport Minister can listen to her concerns. We as a Government have sought to create a balanced transport project, investing in roads when we need to, in rail when we need to and in alternative transport such as cycle routes when we need to.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who spoke for the Scottish Nationalists, made a fair point. This House has to scrutinise in detail any changes that affect a Member, and I am sure that will happen, but does the Leader of the House agree that if we had a business of the House committee, such issues would be dealt with much more easily? Do the Government have any proposal—could we have a statement on such a proposal—to bring in such a committee?

Chris Grayling: I hear my hon. Friend and remind him that in the previous Parliament we provided Members with more freedom to set the timetable and subjects of debate than any previous Government. That will continue in this Parliament. It is right and proper that time is allocated to Back Benchers so that they can pick subjects for debate.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): When can we debate early-day motions 4 to 30?

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Captain Thomas Clarke, aged 30, from Cardiff, Flight Lieutenant Rakesh Chauhan, aged 29, from Birmingham, Warrant Officer Class 2 Spencer Faulkner, aged 38, Corporal James Walters, aged 36, from Cornwall, Lance Corporal Oliver Thomas, aged 26, from Brecon, Sapper Adam Moralee, aged 23, from Newcastle, Captain Richard Holloway, aged 29, from Durham, Warrant Officer Class 2 Ian Fisher, aged 42, from Essex, Lance Corporal James Brynin, The Intelligence Corps, aged 22, from Shoreham-by-Sea, Flight Lieutenant Steven Johnson, aged 38, from Collingham, Nottinghamshire, Flight Lieutenant Leigh Anthony Mitchelmore, aged 28, from Bournemouth, Flight Lieutenant Gareth Rodney Nicholas, aged 40, from Newquay, Cornwall, Flight Lieutenant Allan James Squires, aged 39, from Clatterbridge, Flight Lieutenant Steven Swarbrick, aged 28, from Liverpool, Flight Sergeant Gary Wayne Andrews, aged 48, from Tankerton, Kent, Flight Sergeant Stephen Beattie, aged 42, from Dundee, Flight Sergeant Gerard Martin Bell, aged 48, from Ely, Cambridgeshire, Flight Sergeant Adrian Davies, aged 49, from Amersham, Buckinghamshire, Sergeant Benjamin James Knight, aged 25, from Bridgwater, Sergeant John Joseph Langton, aged 29, from Liverpool, Sergeant Gary Paul Quilliam, aged 42, from Manchester, Corporal Oliver Simon Dicketts, The Parachute Regiment, aged 27, Marine Joseph David Windall, Royal Marines, aged 22, Corporal William Thomas Savage, aged 30, from Irvine, Fusilier Samuel Flint, aged 21, from Blackpool and Private Robert Murray Hetherington, from the United States of America.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Lance Corporal Jamie Webb, 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment, aged 24, from Wythenshawe, Kingsman David Robert Shaw, 1st Battalion The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, aged 23, from Barrow-in-Furness, Sapper Richard Reginald Walker, 28 Engineer Regiment, aged 23, from Leeds, Captain Walter Barrie, 1 Scots, aged 41, from Glasgow, Lieutenant Edward Drummond-Baxter, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles, aged 29, from County Durham, Lance Corporal Siddhanta Kunwar, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles, aged 28, from Pokhara, Nepal, Corporal David O'Connor, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 27, from Havant, Hampshire, Corporal Channing Day, 3 Medical Regiment, aged 25, from

Newtownards, County Down, Captain Carl Manley, Royal Marines, aged 41, Captain James Anthony Townley, Corps of Royal Engineers, aged 29, from Tunbridge Wells, Sergeant Jonathan Eric Kups, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, aged 38, from Nuneaton, Warwickshire, Sergeant Gareth Thursby, 3 Yorks, aged 29, from Skipton, Private Thomas Wroe, 3 Yorks, aged 18, from Huddersfield, Lance Corporal Duane Groom, 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, aged 32, from Suva City, Fiji, Sergeant Lee Paul Davidson, The Light Dragoons, aged 32, from Doncaster, and Guardsman Karl Whittle, 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, aged 22, from Bristol.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Corporal Jack Leslie Stanley, The Queen's Royal Hussars, aged 26, from Bolton, Sergeant Luke Taylor, The Royal Marines, aged 33, from Bournemouth, Lance Corporal Michael Foley, Adjutant General's Corps (Staff and Personnel Support), aged 25, from Burnley, Lancashire, Captain Rupert William Michael Bowers, 2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment, aged 24, from Wolverhampton, Sergeant Nigel Coupe, 1st Battalion The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, aged 33, from Lytham St. Annes, Lancashire, Corporal Jake Hartley, 3rd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment, aged 20, from Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, Private Anthony Frampton, 3rd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment, aged 20, from Huddersfield, Private Christopher Kershaw, 3rd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment, aged 19, from Bradford, Private Daniel Wade, 3rd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment, aged 20, from Warrington, Private Daniel Wilford, 3rd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment, aged 21, from Huddersfield, Senior Aircraftman Ryan Tomlin, 2 Squadron RAF Regiment, aged 21, from Hemel Hempstead, Lance Corporal Gajbahadur Gurung, Royal Gurkha Rifles, aged 26, from Majithana, Nepal, Signaller Ian Gerard Sartorius-Jones, 20th Armoured Brigade Headquarters and Signal Squadron (200), aged 21, from Runcorn, Cheshire, Rifleman Sachin Limbu, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles, aged 23, from Rajghat, Morang, Nepal, Private John King, 1st Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment, aged 19, from Darlington, Squadron Leader Anthony Downing, Royal Air Force, aged 34, from Kent and Captain Tom Jennings, Royal Marines, aged 29.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Guardsman Jamie Shadrake, 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, aged 20, from Wrexham, Wales, Lance Corporal Matthew David Smith, Corps of Royal Engineers, aged 26, from Aldershot, Lieutenant Andrew Robert Chesterman, 3rd Battalion The Rifles, aged 26, from Guildford, Warrant Officer Class 2 Leonard Perran Thomas, Royal Corps of Signals, aged 44, from Ross-on-Wye, Guardsman Craig Andrew Roderick, 1st Battalion Welsh Guards, aged 22, from Cardiff, Guardsman Apete Saunikalou Ratumaiyale Tuisovurua, 1st Battalion Welsh Guards, aged 28, from Fiji, Corporal Alex Guy, 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, aged 37, from St Neots, Cambridgeshire, Lance Corporal James Ashworth, 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, aged 23, from Kettering, Private Gregg Thomas Stone, 3rd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment, aged 20, from Yorkshire, Corporal Michael John Thacker, 1st Battalion The Royal Welsh, aged 27, from Swindon, Wiltshire, Captain Stephen James Healey, 1st Battalion The Royal Welsh, aged 29, from Cardiff, Corporal Brent John McCarthy, Royal Air Force, aged 25,

from Priorslee, Telford, Lance Corporal Lee Thomas Davies, 1st Battalion Welsh Guards, aged 27, from Carmarthen, Corporal Andrew Steven Roberts, 23 Pioneer Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps, aged 32, from Middlesbrough, Private Ratu Manasa Silibaravi, 23 Pioneer Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps, aged 32, from Fiji, Guardsman Michael Roland, 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, aged 22, from Worthing and Sapper Connor Ray, 33 Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal), aged 21, from Newport.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Sapper Elijah Bond, 35 Engineer Regiment Royal Engineers, aged 24, from St Austell, Rifleman Sheldon Lee Jordan Steel, 5th Battalion The Rifles, aged 20, from Leeds, Private Thomas Christopher Lake, 1st Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, aged 29, from Watford, Lieutenant David Boyce, 1st The Queen's Dragoon Guards, aged 25, from Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, Lance Corporal Richard Scanlon, 1st The Queen's Dragoons Guards, aged 31, from Rhymer, Gwent, Lance Corporal Peter Eustace, 2nd Battalion The Rifles, aged 25, from Liverpool, Private Matthew Thornton, 4th Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment, aged 28, from Barnsley, Private Matthew James Sean Haseldin, 2nd Battalion The Mercia Regiment, aged 21, from Settle, Yorkshire, Rifleman Vijay Rai, 2nd Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles, aged 21, from the Bhojpur District, Deaurali East of Nepal, Marine David Fairbrother, Kilo Company, 42 Commando Royal Marines, aged 24, from Blackburn, Lance Corporal Jonathan James McKinley, 1st Battalion The Rifles, aged 33, from Darlington, County Durham, Sergeant Barry John Weston, Kilo Company, 42 Commando Royal Marines, aged 40, from Reading, Lieutenant Daniel John Clack, 1st Battalion The Rifles, aged 24, from North London, Marine James Robert Wright, 42 Commando Royal Marines, aged 22, from Weymouth and Corporal Mark Anthony Palin, 1st Battalion The Rifles, aged 32, from Plymouth.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Lance Corporal Paul Watkins, 9th/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's), aged 24, from Port Elizabeth, Republic of South Africa, Highlander Scott McLaren, The Highlanders 4th Battalion the Royal Regiment of Scotland, aged 20, from Edinburgh, Private Gareth Leslie William Bellingham, 3rd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Stafford), aged 22, from Stoke-on-Trent, Corporal Lloyd Newell, The Parachute Regiment, Craftsman Andrew Found, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, aged 27, from Whitby, Rifleman Martin Jon Lamb, 1st Battalion the Rifles, aged 27, from Gloucester, Lance Corporal Martin Joseph Gill, 42 Commando Royal Marines, aged 22, from Nottingham, Corporal Michael John Pike, The Highlanders 4th Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, aged 26, from Huntly, Scotland, Lieutenant Oliver Richard Augustin, Juliet Company, 42 Commando Royal Marines, aged 23, from Kent, Marine Samuel Giles William Alexander MC, Juliet Company, 42 Commando Royal Marines, aged 28, from London, Colour Sergeant Kevin Charles Fortuna, A Company, 1st Battalion The Rifles, aged 36, from Cheltenham, Marine Nigel Dean Mead, 42 Commando Royal Marines, aged 19, from Carmarthen, Captain Lisa Jade Head, 11 EOD Regiment RLC, aged 29, from Huddersfield, Colour Sergeant Alan Cameron, 1st Battalion Scots Guards, aged 42, from Livingston, Scotland, Major

[Paul Flynn]

Matthew James Collins, 1st Battalion Irish Guards, aged 38, from Backwell, Somerset and Lance Sergeant Mark Terence Burgan, 1st Battalion Irish Guards, aged 28, from Liverpool.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Private Daniel Steven Prior, 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 27, from Peacehaven, East Sussex, Lance Corporal McKee, 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment, aged 27, from Banbridge, County Down, Northern Ireland, Lance Corporal Liam Richard Tasker, Royal Army Veterinary Corps, aged 26, from Kirkcaldy, Fife, Scotland, Private Robert Wood, 17 Port and Maritime Regiment Royal Logistic Corps, aged 28, from Hampshire, Private Dean Hutchinson, 9 Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps, aged 23, from Wiltshire, Lance Corporal Kyle Cleet Marshall, 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 23, from Newcastle, Private Lewis Hendry, 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 20, from Norwich, Private Conrad Lewis, 4th Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 22, from Bournemouth, Warrant Officer Class 2 (Company Sergeant Major) Colin Beckett, 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 36, from Peterborough, Ranger David Dalzell, 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment, aged 20, from Bangor County Down, Private Martin Simon George Bell, 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 24, from Bradford, Private Joseva Saqanagonedau Vatubua, 5th Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, aged 24, from Suva, Fiji, Warrant Officer Class 2 Charles Henry Wood, 23 Pioneer Regiment Royal Logistic Corps, serving with the Counter-Improvised Explosive Device Task Force, aged 34, from Middlesbrough, and Corporal Steven Thomas Dunn, 216 (Parachute) Signal Squadron, attached to 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment Battlegroup, aged 27, from Gateshead.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Private John Howard, 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 23, from Wellington, New Zealand, Guardsman Christopher Davies, 1st Battalion Irish Guards, aged 22, from St Helens, Merseyside, Ranger Aaron McCormick, 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment, aged 22, from Coleraine in County Londonderry, Senior Aircraftsman Scott 'Scotty' Hughes, 1 Squadron Royal Air Force Regiment, aged 20, from North Wales, Sapper William Bernard Blanchard, 101 (City of London) Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal), aged 39, from Gosport, Hampshire, Corporal David Barnsdale, 33 Engineer Regiment, aged 24, from Tring, Sergeant Peter Anthony Rayner, 2nd Battalion The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, aged 34, from Bradford, Rifleman Suraj Gurung, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles, aged 22, from Gorkha in Nepal, Corporal Matthew Thomas, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Sergeant Andrew James Jones, Royal Engineers, aged 35, from Newport, South Wales, Trooper Andrew Martin Howarth, The Queen's Royal Lancers, aged 20, from Bournemouth, Kingsman Darren Deady, 2nd Battalion The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, aged 22, from Bolton, Captain Andrew Griffiths, 2nd Battalion The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, aged 25, from Richmond, North Yorkshire, Lance Corporal Joseph McFarlane Pool, The Royal Scots Borderers 1st Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, aged 26, from Greenock, and Lance Corporal Jordan Dean Bancroft, 1st Battalion The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, aged 25, from Burnley.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Sapper Ishwor Gurung, 69 Gurkha Field Squadron, 21 Engineer Regiment, aged 21, from Pokhara, Nepal, Sapper Darren Foster, 21 Engineer Regiment, aged 20, from Carlisle, Rifleman Remand Kulung, 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Cheshire), aged 27, from Nepal, Lieutenant John Charles Sanderson, 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Cheshire), aged 29, from Oklahoma, USA, Marine Adam Brown, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 26, from Burtle, near Glastonbury, Lance Sergeant Dale Alanzo McCallum, 1st Battalion Scots Guards, aged 31, from Hanover, Jamaica, Sapper Mark Antony Smith, 36 Engineer Regiment, aged 26, from Swanley, Kent, Corporal Matthew James Stenton, The Royal Dragoon Guards, aged 23, from Wakefield, Lance Corporal Stephen Daniel Monkhouse, 1st Battalion Scots Guards, aged 28, from Greenock, Staff Sergeant Brett George Linley, The Royal Logistic Corps, aged 29, from Birmingham, Sergeant David Thomas Monkhouse, The Royal Dragoon Guards, aged 35, from Aspatria, Cumbria, Senior Aircraftman Kinikki 'Griff' Griffiths, aged 20, Marine Jonathan David Thomas Crookes, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 26, from Birmingham, Marine Matthew Harrison, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 23, from Hemel Hempstead, Major James Joshua Bowman, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles, aged 34, from Salisbury, Lieutenant Neal Turkington, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles, aged 26, from Craigavon, and Corporal Arjun Purja Pun, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles, aged 33, from Khibang village Magdi District, Nepal.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Marine David Charles Hart, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 23, from Upper Poppleton, North Yorkshire, Bombardier Samuel Joseph Robinson, 5th Regiment Royal Artillery, aged 31, from Carmarthen, Private Thomas Saphon, 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment, aged 20, from Warrington, Trooper James Anthony Leverett, Royal Dragoon Guards, aged 20, from Sheffield, Corporal Seth Stephens, Royal Marines, Corporal Jamie Kirkpatrick, 101 Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal), aged 32, from Llanelli, Bombardier Stephen Raymond Gilbert, 4th Regiment Royal Artillery, aged 36, from Topcliffe, North Yorkshire, Colour Sergeant Martyn Horton, 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment, aged 34, from Runcorn, Lance Corporal David Ramsden, 1st Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment, aged 26, from Leeds, Private Douglas Halliday, 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment, aged 20, from Wallasey, Merseyside, Private Alex Isaac, 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment, aged 20, from the Wirral, Sergeant Steven William Darbyshire, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 35, from Wigan, Lance Corporal Michael Taylor, Charlie Company, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 30, from Rhyl, Marine Paul Warren, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 23, from Leyland, Lancashire, Marine Richard Hollington, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 23, from Petersfield, Trooper Ashley Smith, Royal Dragoon Guards, aged 21, from York, Corporal Taniela Tolevu Rogoiruwai, aged 32, from Nausori, Fiji, Kingsman Pomipate Tagitaginimoce, aged 29, from Nausori, Fiji, and Marine Steven James Birdsall, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 20, from Warrington.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Lance Corporal Andrew Breeze, B (Malta)

Company, 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Cheshire), aged 31, from Manchester, Private Jonathan Monk, 2nd Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, aged 25, from London, Lance Bombardier Mark Chandler, 3rd Regiment Royal Horse Artillery, aged 32, from Nailsworth, Gloucestershire, Corporal Terry Webster, 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Cheshire), aged 24, from Chester, Lance Corporal Alan Cochran, 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Cheshire), aged 23, from St Asaph, North Wales, Marine Anthony Dean Hotine, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 21, from Warminster, Marine Scott Gregory Taylor, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 20, from Buxton, Corporal Stephen Curley, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 26, from Exeter, Gunner Zak Cusack, 4th Regiment Royal Artillery, aged 20, from Stoke-on-Trent, Corporal Stephen Walker, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 42, from Lisburn, Northern Ireland, Corporal Christopher Lewis Harrison, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 26, from Watford, Sapper Daryn Roy, 21 Engineer Regiment, aged 28, from Consett, County Durham, Lance Corporal Barry Buxton, 21 Engineer Regiment, aged 27, from Meir, Stoke-on-Trent, Corporal Harvey Holmes, 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment, aged 22, from Hyde, Greater Manchester, Fusilier Jonathan Burgess, 1st Battalion The Royal Welsh, aged 20, from Townhill, Swansea, Rifleman Mark Turner, 3rd Battalion The Rifles, aged 21, from Gateshead, and Guardsman Michael Sweeney, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, aged 19, from Blyth in Northumberland.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Rifleman Daniel Holkham, 3rd Battalion The Rifles, aged 19, from Chatham, Kent, Lance Corporal of Horse Jonathan Woodgate, Household Cavalry Regiment, aged 26, from Lavenham, Suffolk, Sergeant Steven Campbell, 3rd Battalion The Rifles, aged 30, from Durham, Lance Corporal Scott Hardy, 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, aged 26, from Chelmsford, Private James Grigg, 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, aged 20, from Hartismere, Suffolk, Captain Martin Driver, 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, aged 31, from Barnsley, Corporal Stephen Thompson, 1st Battalion The Rifles, aged 31, from Bovey Tracey, Devon, Lance Corporal Tom Keogh, 4th Battalion The Rifles, aged 24, from Paddington, London, Rifleman Liam Maughan, 3rd Battalion The Rifles, aged 18, from Doncaster, Rifleman Jonathan Allott, 3rd Battalion The Rifles, aged 19, from North Shields, Corporal Richard Green, 3rd Battalion The Rifles, aged 23, from Reading, Rifleman Carlo Apolis, 4th Battalion The Rifles, aged 28, from South Africa, Sergeant Paul Fox, 28 Engineer Regiment, aged 34, from St Ives, Rifleman Martin Kinggett, 4th Battalion The Rifles, aged 19, from Dagenham, Senior Aircraftman Luke Southgate, II Squadron Royal Air Force Regiment, aged 20, from Bury St Edmunds, Lance Sergeant David 'Davey' Walker, 1st Battalion Scots Guards, aged 36, from Glasgow, Lieutenant Douglas Dalzell, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards from Berkshire and Sapper Guy Mellors, 36 Engineer Regiment, aged 20, from Coventry.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Kingsman Sean Dawson, 2nd Battalion The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, aged 19, from Ashton-under-Lyne, Manchester, Rifleman Mark Marshall, 6th Battalion The Rifles, aged 29, from Exeter, Lance Sergeant Dave Greenhalgh, 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, aged 25, from Ilkeston, Derbyshire, Lance Corporal Darren Hicks, from Mousehole,

Cornwall, Warrant Officer Class 2 David Markland, 36 Engineer Regiment, aged 36, from Euxton, Lancashire, Corporal John Moore, The Royal Scots Borderers, 1st Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, aged 22, from Lanarkshire, Private Sean McDonald, The Royal Scots Borderers, 1st Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, aged 26, from Edinburgh, Corporal Liam Riley, 3rd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment, aged 21, from Sheffield, Lance Corporal Graham Shaw, 3rd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment, aged 27, from Huddersfield, Lance Corporal Daniel Cooper, 3rd Battalion The Rifles, aged 22, from Hereford, Rifleman Peter Aldridge, 4th Battalion The Rifles, aged 19, Corporal Lee Brownson, 3rd Battalion The Rifles, aged 30, from Bishop Auckland, Rifleman Luke Farmer, 3rd Battalion The Rifles, aged 19, from Pontefract, Captain Daniel Reed, 11 Explosive Ordnance Disposal Regiment, Royal Logistics Corps, aged 32, from Rainham, Kent, Private Robert Hayes, 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, aged 19, from Cambridge, Sapper David Watson, 33 Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal), aged 23, and Rifleman Aidan Howell, 3rd Battalion The Rifles, aged 19, from Sidcup, Kent.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Lance Corporal Tommy Brown, The Parachute Regiment, Lance Corporal Christopher Roney, A Company, 3rd Battalion The Rifles, aged 23, from Sunderland, Lance Corporal Michael David Pritchard, 4th Regiment, Royal Military Police, aged 22, from Maidstone, Corporal Simon Hornby, 2nd Battalion The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, aged 29, from Liverpool, Lance Corporal David Leslie Kirkness, 3rd Battalion The Rifles, aged 24, from West Yorkshire, Rifleman James Stephen Brown, 3rd Battalion The Rifles, aged 18, from Kent, Lance Corporal Adam Drane, 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, aged 23, from Bury St Edmunds, Acting Sergeant John Paxton Amer, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, from Sunderland, Sergeant Robert David Loughran-Dickson, 4th Regiment Royal Military Police, aged 33, from Deal, Kent, Corporal Loren Owen Christopher Marlton-Thomas, 33 Engineer Regiment (EOD), aged 28, Rifleman Andrew Ian Fentiman, 7th Battalion The Rifles, aged 23, from Cambridge, Rifleman Samuel John Bassett, 4th Battalion The Rifles, aged 20, from Plymouth, Rifleman Philip Allen, 2 Rifles, aged 20, from Dorset, Sergeant Phillip Scott, 3rd Battalion The Rifles, aged 30, from Malton, Warrant Officer Class 1 Darren Chant, 1st Battalion The Grenadier Guards, aged 40, from Walthamstow, Sergeant Matthew Telford, 1st Battalion The Grenadier Guards, aged 37, from Grimsby, Guardsman James Major, 1st Battalion The Grenadier Guards, aged 18, from Grimsby, and Corporal Steven Boote, Royal Military Police, aged 22, from Birkenhead, Liverpool.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Corporal Nicholas Webster-Smith, Royal Military Police, aged 24, from Glangwili, Staff Sergeant Olaf Sean George Schmid, Royal Logistic Corps, aged 30, from Truro, Corporal Thomas 'Tam' Mason, the Black Watch, 3rd Battalion the Royal Regiment of Scotland, aged 27, from Rosyth, Corporal James Oakland, Royal Military Police, aged 26, from Manchester, Lance Corporal James Hill, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, aged 23, from Redhill, Surrey, Guardsman James Janes, 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, aged 20, from Brighton, Acting Corporal Marcin Wojtak, 34 Squadron RAF regiment, aged 24, from Leicester, Private James Prosser, 2nd Battalion The Royal Welsh, aged 21, from Cwmbran, Acting Sergeant

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Michael Lockett MC, 2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment, from Monifieth in Angus, Acting Sergeant Stuart McGrath, 2nd Battalion, The Rifles, aged 28, from Buckinghamshire, Trooper Brett Hall, 2nd Royal Tank Regiment, aged 21, from Dartmouth, Kingsman Jason Dunn-Bridgeman, 2nd Battalion The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, aged 20, from Liverpool, Corporal John Harrison, The Parachute Regiment, Private Gavin Elliott, 2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment, aged 19, from Woodsetts, Worksop, Nottinghamshire, Lance Corporal Richard Brandon, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, aged 24, from Kidderminster, Sergeant Stuart 'Gus' Millar, The Black Watch, 3rd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, aged 40, from Inverness, Private Kevin Elliott, The Black Watch, 3rd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, aged 24, from Dundee, and Sergeant Lee Andrew Houltram, Royal Marines.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Fusilier Shaun Bush, 2nd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, aged 24, from Warwickshire, Sergeant Paul McAleese, 2nd Battalion The Rifles, aged 29, from Hereford, Private Jonathon Young, 3rd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment (Duke of Wellington's), aged 18, from Hull, Lance Corporal James Fullarton, 2nd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, aged 24, from Coventry, Fusilier Simon Annis, 2nd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, from Salford, Fusilier Louis Carter, 2nd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, from Nuneaton, Sergeant Simon Valentine, aged 29, from Bedworth, Private Richard Hunt, 2nd Battalion The Royal Welsh, aged 21, from Abergavenny, Captain Mark Hale, 2nd Battalion The Rifles, aged 42, from Bournemouth, Lance Bombardier Matthew Hatton, 40th Regiment Royal Artillery (The Lowland Gunners), aged 23, from Easingwold, North Yorkshire, Rifleman Daniel Wild, 2nd Battalion The Rifles, aged 19, from Hartlepool, Private Jason George Williams, 2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment, aged 23, from Worcester, Corporal Kevin Mulligan, The Parachute Regiment, aged 26, Lance Corporal Dale Thomas Hopkins, The Parachute Regiment, aged 23, Private Kyle Adams, The Parachute Regiment, aged 21, Craftsman Anthony Lombardi, aged 21, from Scunthorpe, Trooper Phillip Lawrence, Light Dragoons, aged 22, from Birkenhead, Warrant Officer Class 2 Sean Upton, 5th Regiment Royal Artillery, aged 35, from Nottinghamshire and Bombardier Craig Hopson, 40th Regiment Royal Artillery (The Lowland Gunners), aged 24, from Castleford.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Guardsman Christopher King, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards, aged 20, from Birkenhead, Liverpool, Captain Daniel Shepherd, 11 Explosive Ordnance Disposal Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps, aged 28, from Lincoln, Corporal Joseph Etchells, 2nd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, aged 22, from Mossley, Rifleman Aminiasi Toge, 2nd Battalion The Rifles, aged 26, from Suva, Fiji, Corporal Jonathan Horne, 2nd Battalion The Rifles, aged 28, from Walsall, Rifleman William Aldridge, 2nd Battalion The Rifles, aged 18, from Bromyard, Herefordshire, Rifleman James Backhouse, 2nd Battalion The Rifles, aged 18, from Castleford, Yorkshire, Rifleman Joe Murphy, 2nd Battalion The Rifles, aged 18, from Castle Bromwich, Birmingham, Rifleman Daniel Simpson, 2nd Battalion The Rifles, aged 20, from Croydon, Corporal Lee Scott, 2nd Royal Tank Regiment, aged 26, from King's Lynn, Private John Brackpool,

1st Battalion Welsh Guards, aged 27, from Crawley, West Sussex, Rifleman Daniel Hume, 4th Battalion The Rifles, Trooper Christopher Whiteside, The Light Dragoons, aged 20, from Blackpool, Captain Ben Babington-Browne, 22 Engineer Regiment, Royal Engineers, aged 27, from Maidstone, Lance Corporal Dane Elson, 1st Battalion Welsh Guards, aged 22, from Bridgend, Lance Corporal David Dennis, The Light Dragoons, aged 29, from Llanelli, Wales, Private Robert Laws, 2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment, aged 18, from Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, Lieutenant Colonel Rupert Thorneloe MBE, Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion Welsh Guards and Trooper Joshua Hammond, 2nd Royal Tank Regiment, aged 18.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Major Sean Birchall, 1st Battalion Welsh Guards, aged 33, Lieutenant Paul Mervis, 2nd Battalion The Rifles, aged 27, from London, Private Robert McLaren, The Black Watch, 3rd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, aged 20, from the Isle of Mull, Rifleman Cyrus Thatcher, 2nd Battalion The Rifles, aged 19, from Reading, Lance Corporal Nigel Moffett, The Light Dragoons, aged 28, from Belfast, Corporal Stephen Bolger, The Parachute Regiment, Lance Corporal Kieron Hill, 2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Worcesters and Foresters), aged 20, from Nottingham, Lance Corporal Robert Martin Richards, Armoured Support Group Royal Marines, aged 24, from Betws-y-Coed, North Wales, Sapper Jordan Rossi, 25 Field Squadron, 38 Engineer Regiment, aged 22, from West Yorkshire, Fusilier Petero 'Pat' Suesue, 2nd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, aged 28, from Fiji, Marine Jason Mackie, Armoured Support Group Royal Marines, aged 21, from Bampton, Oxfordshire, Lieutenant Mark Evison, 1st Battalion Welsh Guards, aged 26, Sergeant Ben Ross, 173 Provost Company, 3rd Regiment Royal Military Police, Corporal Kumar Pun, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles, Rifleman Adrian Sheldon, 2 Rifles, from Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Corporal Sean Binnie, 3 Scots, aged 22, Lance Sergeant Tobie Fasfous, 1st Battalion Welsh Guards, aged 29, Corporal Dean Thomas John, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, aged 25, from Neath, and Corporal Graeme Stiff, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, aged 24, from Munster, Germany.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Lance Corporal Christopher Harkett, 2nd Battalion The Royal Welsh, aged 22, from Swansea, Marine Michael 'Mick' Laski, 45 Commando Royal Marines, aged 21, from Liverpool, Corporal Tom Gaden, 1st Battalion The Rifles, aged 24, from Taunton, Lance Corporal Paul Upton, 1st Battalion The Rifles, aged 31, Rifleman Jamie Gunn, 1st Battalion The Rifles, aged 21, from Leamington Spa, Lance Corporal Stephen 'Schnoz' Kingscott, 1st Battalion The Rifles, aged 22, from Plymouth, Marine Darren 'Daz' Smith, 45 Commando Royal Marines, aged 27, from Fleetwood, Lancashire, Corporal Daniel 'Danny' Nield, 1st Battalion The Rifles, aged 31, from Cheltenham, Acting Corporal Richard 'Robbo' Robinson, 1st Battalion The Rifles, aged 21, from Cornwall, Captain Tom Sawyer, 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery, aged 26, from Hertfordshire, Corporal Danny Winter, 45 Commando Royal Marines, aged 28, from Stockport, Marine Travis Mackin, Communications Squadron United Kingdom Landing Force Command Support Group, aged 22, from Plymouth, Sergeant Chris Reed, 6th Battalion The Rifles, aged 25, from Plymouth, Corporal Liam Elms, RM, 45 Commando Royal Marines, aged 26, from Wigan, Lance Corporal

Benjamin Whatley, 42 Commando Royal Marines, aged 20, from King's Lynn, Corporal Robert Deering, Commando Logistic Regiment Royal Marines, aged 33, from Solihull, Rifleman Stuart Nash, 1st Battalion The Rifles, aged 21, from Sydney, Australia, and Lieutenant Aaron Lewis, 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery, aged 26, from Essex.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Lance Corporal Steven 'Jamie' Fellows, 45 Commando Royal Marines, aged 28, from Sheffield, Marine Damian Davies, aged 27, Sergeant John Manuel, aged 38, from North East England, Corporal Mark Birch, aged 26, from Northampton, Marine Tony Evans, aged 20, from Sunderland, Marine Georgie Sparks, aged 19, from Epping, Marine Alexander Lucas, 45 Commando Royal Marines, aged 24, from Edinburgh, Colour Sergeant Krishnabhadur Dura, 2nd Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles, aged 36, from the Lamjung District of Western Nepal, Marine Neil David Dunstan, aged 32, from Bournemouth, Marine Robert Joseph McKibben, aged 32, from County Mayo, Rifleman Yubraj Rai, 2nd Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles, aged 28, from Khotang District, Eastern Nepal, Trooper James Munday, aged 21, from the Birmingham area, Lance Corporal Nicky Matson, 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 26, from Aveley in Essex, Private Jason Lee Rawstron, 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 23, from Lancashire, Warrant Officer Class 2 Gary 'Gaz' O'Donnell GM, 1 Explosive Ordnance Disposal Regiment Royal Logistic Corps, aged 40, from Edinburgh, Ranger Justin James Cupples, 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment, aged 29, from County Cavan, Ireland, Corporal Barry Dempsey, The Royal Highland Fusiliers, 2nd Battalion Royal Regiment of Scotland, aged 29, from Ayrshire, Signaller Wayne Bland, 16 Signal Regiment, aged 21, from Leeds and Private Peter Joe Cowton, 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 25, from Basingstoke.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Sergeant Jonathan Mathews, The Highlanders, 4th Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, aged 35, from Edinburgh, Lance Corporal Kenneth Michael Rowe, Royal Army Veterinary Corps, aged 24, from Newcastle, Corporal Jason Stuart Barnes, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, aged 25, from Exeter, Lance Corporal James Johnson, B Company, 5th Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, aged 31, from Scotland, Warrant Officer 2nd Class Dan Shirley, Air Assault Support Regiment, Royal Logistics Corps, aged 32, from Leicester, Warrant Officer 2nd Class Michael Norman Williams, 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 40, from Cardiff, Private Joe John Whittaker, 4th Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 20, from Stratford-upon-Avon, Corporal Sarah Bryant, Intelligence Corps, aged 26, from Liverpool, Corporal Sean Robert Reeve, Royal Signals, aged 28, Lance Corporal Richard Larkin, aged 39, Paul Stout, aged 31, Lance Corporal James Bateman, 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 29, from Staines, Middlesex, Private Jeff Doherty, 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 20, from Southam, Warwickshire, Private Nathan Cuthbertson, 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 19, from Sunderland, Private Daniel Gamble, 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 22, from Uckfield, East Sussex, Private Charles David Murray, 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 19, from Carlisle, and Marine Dale Gostick, 3 Troop Armoured Support Company, Royal Marines, aged 22, from Oxford.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Drummer Thomas Wright, 1st Battalion The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters, aged 21, from Ripley, Derbyshire, Guardsman Neil 'Tony' Downes, 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, aged 20, from Manchester, Lance Corporal Paul 'Sandy' Sandford, 1st Battalion The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters, aged 23, from Nottingham, Corporal Mike Gilyeat, Royal Military Police, aged 28, Corporal Darren Bonner, 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, aged 31, from Norfolk, Guardsman Daniel Probyn, 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, aged 22, from Tipton, Lance Corporal George Russell Davey, 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, aged 23, from Suffolk, Guardsman Simon Davison, 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, aged 22, from Newcastle upon Tyne, Private Chris Gray, A Company 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, aged 19, from Leicestershire, Warrant Officer Class 2 Michael 'Mick' Smith, 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery, aged 39, from Liverpool, Marine Benjamin Reddy, 42 Commando Royal Marines, aged 22, from Ascot, Berkshire, Lance Bombardier Ross Clark, aged 25, from South Africa, Lance Bombardier Liam McLaughlin, aged 21, from Lancashire, Marine Scott Summers, 42 Commando Royal Marines, aged 23, from Crawley, East Sussex, Marine Jonathan Holland, 45 Commando Royal Marines, aged 23, from Chorley, Lancashire, Lance Corporal Mathew Ford, 45 Commando Royal Marines, aged 30, from Inmingham, Lincolnshire, Marine Thomas Curry 42 Commando Royal Marines, aged 21, from East London and Lance Bombardier James Dwyer, 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery, aged 22.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of James Thompson, Trooper Ratu Sakeasi Babakobau, Household Cavalry Regiment, aged 29, from Fiji, Trooper Robert Pearson, The Queen's Royal Lancers Regiment, aged 22, from Grimsby, Senior Aircraftman Graham Livingstone, Royal Air Force Regiment, aged 23, from Glasgow, Senior Aircraftman Gary Thompson, Royal Auxiliary Air Force Regiment, aged 51, from Nottingham, Lieutenant John Thornton, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 22, from Ferndown, Marine David Marsh, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 23, from Sheffield, Corporal Damian Mulvihill, 40 Commando Royal Marines, aged 32, from Plymouth, Corporal Damian Stephen Lawrence, 2nd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment (Green Howards), aged 25, from Whitby, Corporal Darryl Gardiner, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, aged 25, from Salisbury, Wiltshire, Sergeant Lee Johnson, 2nd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment, aged 33, from Stockton-on-Tees, Trooper Jack Sadler, The Honourable Artillery Company, aged 21, from Exeter, Captain John McDermid, The Royal Highland Fusiliers, 2nd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, aged 43, from Glasgow, Lance Corporal Jake Alderton, 36 Engineer Regiment, aged 22, from Bexley, Major Alexis Roberts, 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles, aged 32, from Kent, Colour Sergeant Phillip Newman, 4th Battalion The Mercian Regiment, aged 36, Private Brian Tunnicliffe, 2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Worcesters and Foresters), aged 33, from Ilkeston, Corporal Ivano Violino, 36 Engineer Regiment, aged 29, from Salford and Sergeant Craig Brelsford, 2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment, aged 25, from Nottingham.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Private Johan Botha, 2nd Battalion The Mercian

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Regiment, from South Africa, Private Damian Wright, 2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment, aged 23, from Mansfield, Private Ben Ford, 2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment, aged 18, from Chesterfield, Senior Aircraftman Christopher Bridge, C flight, 51 Squadron Royal Air Force Regiment, aged 20, from Sheffield, Private Aaron James McClure, 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, aged 19, from Ipswich, Private Robert Graham Foster, 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, aged 19, from Harlow, Private John Thrumble, 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, aged 21, from Chelmsford, Captain David Hicks, 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, aged 26, from Surrey, Private Tony Rawson, 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, aged 27, from Dagenham, Essex, Lance Corporal Michael Jones, Royal Marines, aged 26, from Newbald, Yorkshire, Sergeant Barry Keen, 14 Signal Regiment, aged 34, from Gateshead, Guardsman David Atherton, 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, aged 25, from Manchester, Lance Corporal Alex Hawkins, 1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment, aged 22, from East Dereham, Norfolk, Guardsman Daryl Hickey, 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, aged 27, from Birmingham, Sergeant Dave Wilkinson, 19 Regiment Royal Artillery, aged 33, from Ashford, Kent and Captain Sean Dolan, 1st Battalion The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters, aged 40, from the West Midlands.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Marine Richard J Watson, 42 Commando Royal Marines, aged 23, from Caterham, Surrey, Marine Jonathan Wigley, 45 Commando Royal Marines, aged 21, from Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, Marine Gary Wright, 45 Commando Royal Marines, aged 22, from Glasgow, Lance Corporal Paul Muirhead, 1 Royal Irish Regiment, aged 29, from Bearley, Warwickshire, Lance Corporal Luke McCulloch, 1 Royal Irish Regiment, aged 21, Corporal Mark William Wright, 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 27, from Edinburgh, Private Craig O'Donnell, The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 5th Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, aged 24, from Clydebank, Flight Lieutenant Steven Johnson, aged 38, from Collingham, Nottinghamshire, Flight Lieutenant Leigh Anthony Mitchelmore, aged 28, from Bournemouth, Flight Lieutenant Gareth Rodney Nicholas, aged 40, from Newquay, Cornwall, Flight Lieutenant Allan James Squires, aged 39, from Clatterbridge, Flight Lieutenant Steven Swarbrick, aged 28, from Liverpool, Flight Sergeant Gary Wayne Andrews, aged 48, from Tankerton, Kent, Flight Sergeant Stephen Beattie, aged 42, from Dundee, Flight Sergeant Gerard Martin Bell, aged 48, from Ely, Cambridgeshire, Flight Sergeant Adrian Davies, aged 49, from Amersham, Buckinghamshire, Sergeant Benjamin James Knight, aged 25, from Bridgwater, Sergeant John Joseph Langton, aged 29, from Liverpool, Sergeant Gary Paul Quilliam, aged 42, from Manchester, Corporal Oliver Simon Dicketts, The Parachute Regiment, aged 27, Marine Joseph David Windall, Royal Marines, aged 22, and Ranger Anare Draiva, 1 Royal Irish Regiment, aged 27, from Fiji.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Lance Corporal Jonathan Peter Hetherington, 14 Signal Regiment (Electronic Warfare), aged 22, from South Wales, Corporal Bryan James Budd, 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 29, from Ripon, Lance Corporal Sean Tansey, The Life Guards, aged 26, from Washington, Tyne and Wear, Private Leigh Reeves, Royal

Logistics Corps, aged 25, from Leicester, Private Andrew Barrie Cutts, Air Assault Support Regiment, Royal Logistics Corps, aged 19, from Mansfield, Captain Alex Eida, Royal Horse Artillery, aged 29, from Surrey, Second Lieutenant Ralph Johnson, Household Cavalry Regiment, aged 24, from Windsor, Lance Corporal Ross Nicholls, Blues and Royals, aged 27, from Edinburgh, Private Damien Jackson, 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment, aged 19, from South Shields, Tyne and Wear, Corporal Peter Thorpe, Royal Signals, aged 27, from Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, Lance Corporal Jabron Hashmi, Intelligence Corps, aged 24, from Birmingham, and Captain David Patton, The Parachute Regiment, aged 38.]

[That this House salutes the bravery of the armed forces who served in Afghanistan and records with sorrow the deaths of Sergeant Paul Bartlett, Royal Marines, aged 35, Captain Jim Phillipson, 7 Parachute Regiment Royal Horse Artillery, aged 29, from St Albans, Hertfordshire, Lance Corporal Peter Edward Craddock, 1st Battalion The Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment, aged 31, Corporal Mark Cridge, 7 Signal Regiment, aged 25, Lance Corporal Steven Sherwood, 1st Battalion The Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Light Infantry, aged 23, from Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire, Private Jonathan Kitulagoda, The Rifle Volunteers, aged 23, from Clifton, Bedfordshire, Sergeant Robert Busuttill, the Royal Logistic Corps, Corporal John Gregory, the Royal Logistic Corps, and Private Darren John George, the Royal Anglian Regiment.]

These early-day motions honour the names of the 453 British soldiers who died in Afghanistan—most of them as a result of the decision to invade Helmand in 2006. Is it not crucial that we inquire into what happened in Iraq—we are still waiting for Chilcot—and what happened in Helmand before we contemplate engaging in new invasions as recommended by Lord Dannatt?

Chris Grayling: The thoughts of this House should be, and will always be, with the families of those who lost their lives in Afghanistan and of those before them who lost their lives in Iraq. They did a vital job for this country; we cherish their memories.

The hon. Gentleman will have many opportunities to raise those issues immediately. He makes a point specifically about the Chilcot report. It has been the view of this Government, and of the previous Government for some time, that we are keen to see that report at the earliest opportunity, but it is of course for Chilcot himself to decide when he is ready to publish, when all the issues have been resolved.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The coalition did much good work to support our market towns and high streets, and I am sure this Government will want to continue that. An important component of the vibrancy of our high streets and market towns is, however, high street banks. NatWest is proposing to close a number of branches in northern Lincolnshire, including in Barton-upon-Humber. Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate about the importance of high street banks to the vibrancy of our local market towns?

Chris Grayling: I very much agree with my hon. Friend, particularly in relation to rural areas of Britain. Lincolnshire is a very spread-out county, and the loss of services from rural market towns can have a serious effect on communities. I commend him for his work in

championing his area—and all the Members, and new Members, for Lincolnshire who I know will focus clearly on how we protect services in rural areas. I encourage my hon. Friend to request an Adjournment debate or to raise the matter during the debate on the Gracious Speech. The protection of services in rural areas remains a matter of the utmost importance and will continue to be so for the Government and for hon. Members.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The increase in the number of kites, buzzards and other birds of prey and raptors across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has resulted in pigeon lofts being savaged and songbird numbers being decimated. As bird of prey numbers increase, other bird life decreases. I asked for a debate on this issue in the previous Parliament, so will the Leader of the House agree to a debate on it now, as it is very important for the future of all bird life across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

Chris Grayling: It is important that we ensure good environmental stewardship; some of the more controversial countryside issues in recent years have been about that. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. People only have to drive through parts of the home counties to see the extraordinary number of red kites in the skies, bearing in mind that a few years ago they were almost extinct across most of the United Kingdom. I am sure that his points will be picked up by my colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and I encourage him to draw attention to the issue in this Parliament, both at questions and through the system of Adjournment debates.

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Further to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), this is not just about the protection of public services in rural communities; it is also about fair funding across rural communities in this country, particularly in Lincolnshire, as I, like my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), whom I welcome to her new place, am all too well aware. May we have a debate, in Government time, on fair funding for rural communities, so that my constituents and those who make their homes in rural Britain can know what this Government intend to do to ensure that their public services are properly funded?

Chris Grayling: I hear very clearly the point that my hon. and learned Friend makes. I represent a county where similar arguments have often been made, although it is less geographically spread than his own. He will, of course, have the opportunity to raise this issue in next week's Gracious Speech debate on English matters as well as those relating to devolution, and I hope he will make that point to Ministers.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Given that both of Redbridge's NHS trusts are in special measures, primary care is in crisis and our accident and emergency waiting times last winter were among the worst in the country, will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate on the impending closure of the accident and emergency unit at King George hospital, which is opposed by the overwhelming majority of the people of Ilford North?

Chris Grayling: We will, of course, have a debate on health at the start of next week, and the hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity to raise those issues then if he wishes to do so.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): When can we expect a statement on the implications of the Penrose inquiry into the contaminated blood scandal, which reported just a few days before the start of the general election campaign?

Chris Grayling: First, may I praise my hon. Friend for the work he has done in this area? We are talking about a group of people who have suffered badly as a result of what happened. I will ask my colleague the Secretary of State for Health to respond to him and indicate what is planned next.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): During the pre-election period, the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean escalated significantly and HMS Bulwark was redeployed—I am sure that all of us in this Chamber would pay tribute to the service personnel. Given that escalation and deployment, will the Foreign Secretary come to this House to make a statement on the current state of affairs?

Chris Grayling: The crisis in the Mediterranean has clearly been a matter of great concern for everyone involved. The loss of life has been tragic, which is why HMS Bulwark is deployed there. The Secretary of State will be in this House as part of the debates on the Gracious Speech and the hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity to raise that question directly with him.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): There is no evidence of any dangers posed by second-hand inhalation of e-cigarette vapour, yet a recent ruling of the House of Commons Commission means that Members and their staff who have given up tobacco and choose to vape are no longer permitted to do so in their private offices, with the use of e-cigarettes being restricted to designated areas outdoors, where users of e-cigarettes are exposed to harmful second-hand tobacco smoke. I chair the all-party group for e-cigarettes, so I am keen to stimulate informed debate about these devices and I wonder whether we might consider the consequences of the Commission's ruling.

Chris Grayling: I commend my hon. Friend for his work in this important area. May I suggest that he put that matter formally to the Administration Committee when it is formed? As I have already said, we will start the process of shaping Select Committees in the next few days. When that has happened, he will have the opportunity to make a representation to the Administration Committee about the changes he would like to see.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I am told by head teachers in my constituency, particularly in the most deprived areas, that it is not unusual to place adverts for science and maths teachers nationally and not receive a single application. Will the Leader of the House grant an urgent debate on the impact of this Government's education policy on the recruitment of teachers and the long-term supply of science, technology, engineering and maths teachers?

Chris Grayling: I am proud of what we have done to encourage the growth and development of sciences in this country. It is a matter of record that while we had to take difficult public spending decisions in the previous Parliament, we also managed to protect the science budget and to do all we could, through the development of apprenticeship programmes and of higher standards in schools, to encourage more people to learn sciences, develop science skills and, hopefully, go on into teaching. Teach First offers an opportunity to get smart people into deprived areas to provide high quality teaching, and we will continue with that policy.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Yesterday, I was present for Her Majesty's most Gracious Speech. Had I not been, I would have accepted an invitation from Red Funnel to hear the announcement that its new vessel, Red Jet 6, is to be built on the Isle of Wight. She is the first vessel of her kind to be built in the UK for 15 years, and the contract was won in competition with shipyards around the world. Will the Leader of the House find time to hold a debate on the future of British shipbuilding?

Chris Grayling: May I congratulate my hon. Friend's constituents on winning that contract? The Red Funnel line is vital to them. As he knows, I travelled on it recently when I came over to visit him. I met some of the staff who work on the line, and I was very impressed with the service, which is crucial to the island. I know that my hon. Friend will use the opportunities that are available to Back Benchers to continue to bring forward debates on this and other matters of importance to his constituency in the way he has done since we were both first elected in 2001.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Under commissioning arrangements brought in by the right hon. Gentleman's Government, dermatology services in Nottingham were procured separately and elective services transferred to a private provider. Since then, the majority of consultant dermatologists have left Nottingham—indeed only two remain. Patients face delays, and some have to travel to Leicester or Derby for services they could previously receive locally. A nationally renowned research-based team has also been broken up. When will the Secretary of State for Health come to the House to apologise to my constituents for undermining our national health service?

Chris Grayling: Over the past two or three months, we have heard endless stories from the Opposition about how the Government are destroying the national health service. Let me remind them that the British electorate simply did not believe them, and the reason for that is that we have steered the national health service forward, and we have more people being treated and more doctors and nurses in our health service. We will continue to improve and to spend money on the service.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): May I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your re-election and the Leader of the House on his new appointment? Let me also mention the excellent Conservative manifesto on which this Government will seek to govern. It contains a commitment to introduce fair funding for schools. Members of the F40 group across this Chamber will recognise the need for that pledge to be made a reality.

When will the Education Secretary come before the House and tell us when we will finally see fair funding for local authorities and schools in F40 areas?

Chris Grayling: The Secretary of State will be here for Education Question Time. We start the timetable for daily oral questions next week, and a few days after that there will be an opportunity to put that question to her. I am proud of the progress we have made in our education system over the past five years. Standards are rising and young people from all backgrounds have a better start in life and better chances. This country is rising up the international education league tables, and I want that progress to continue in this Parliament.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): In Stoke-on-Trent North and Kidsgrove and across the country there have been alarming reports of children returning to school malnourished. I would be grateful if in government time we had a debate to discuss this urgent situation in my constituency and across the country.

Chris Grayling: I welcome the hon. Lady to the House. She makes an important point. We recognise that there are still some deep-rooted social problems in our communities. That is why we established the troubled families programme and why we will do everything we can to improve the situation in those families. It is a central part of what the Government have worked on and will continue to work on. The best way of ensuring that all families in all parts of the United Kingdom have the chance to prosper is by getting more people into work and getting our economy growing so that everyone shares in that prosperity.

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): May we have an urgent debate on BT's provision of broadband within Nottinghamshire for areas such as Lamin's Lane and Burntstump Hill, where constituents of mine have been connected because of a fault in the system, only to be disconnected later because BT wants to reconnect them to a system that does not supply superfast broadband?

Chris Grayling: I do not know about the circumstance to which my hon. Friend refers, although it sounds as if something has gone badly amiss in his constituency. I have no doubt that he will be champing at the heels of BT to ensure that that situation is rectified. He will have the chance in the debate next week on the economy to raise matters related to broadband, which is an important part of our strategy of ensuring that this country has the modern infrastructure—not simply transport but IT infrastructure—that we will need to continue the economic progress we have made in the past five years.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): May we please have a statement on the recent terrible earthquake in Nepal and how the UK Government are supporting the people there as they rebuild their country?

Chris Grayling: It is worth putting on record our sympathies and condolences to the people of Nepal in what we all agree was a terrible series of events. I am pleased that Britain has provided aid support, financial and otherwise, to the people of Nepal, and we will continue to do so. The Secretary of State has just returned from Nepal. She will be in the House to answer questions at

the appropriate time and the hon. Gentleman will be able to ask her for more details about the support that we are providing.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): May we have a statement from the appropriate local government Minister on the policy of Her Majesty's new Government on Gypsies and Travellers? This week Traveller caravans invaded the London Road car park in Kettering, causing massive disruption to town centre residents and workers. Last week, a neighbouring local authority granted yet further planning permission for inappropriate Traveller encampments in the countryside, leading to a further over-concentration of such developments around the village of Braybrooke in my constituency. The previous Government had a consultation on this. May we please have the results of that consultation and early action to ensure that Gypsies and Travellers abide by the same rules that everyone else has to abide by?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I have experienced an unwanted incursion in my own constituency in the past 36 hours. This is a genuine problem for communities up and down the country. Powers exist for both local authorities and the police to deal with incursions quickly and effectively if they choose to do so. A lot of this requires local will power. I encourage my hon. Friend to put maximum pressure on his local authority and the police to ensure that that happens. He will have the opportunity to raise the Government's policy on 29 June in Communities and Local Government questions, and I have no doubt that Ministers will take note of his remarks today as well.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): The country was shocked by the death of Olive Cooke, who had been pursued by charity fundraisers. Vulnerable pensioners around the country are regularly and relentlessly being targeted not only by charity fundraisers but by criminal organisations, many operating from outside the UK. This causes great distress, not only to them but to their family and friends who are concerned about their welfare. I recognise that dealing with this effectively will require cross-departmental action. Will he put that to his colleagues and ensure an early statement on how we can stop this gross exploitation?

Chris Grayling: I absolutely agree with the right hon. Gentleman: it was a shocking case and an example of wholly inappropriate behaviour. This Government will bring forward measures to address issues in the charitable sector. That will provide an opportunity to debate and discuss these issues, but I hope he will make a point of continuing to push on this matter during this Parliament. He will not find opposition in any part of the House to ensuring that charities operate in a way that is acceptable and, frankly, consistent with the role they are supposed to play.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): The House will have noticed today that Tony Blair, the former Prime Minister, has stepped down from his role as middle east peace envoy. The fact of the matter is that the whole of the middle east region is in a very dangerous situation, whether that be through further threats to countries such as Jordan or Lebanon, the refugee crisis going into Turkey or IS possibly infringing on a NATO country

such as Turkey. An important debate has to be held in this country on how we see the middle east peace process and how we handle the middle east. May I urge my right hon. Friend to find Government time outside the debate on the Queen's Speech so that we can properly address all those issues, which have become more and more paramount in recent months, and so that the view of this House and what Her Majesty's Government should be doing to try to bring about peace in the middle east can be addressed at the earliest opportunity?

Chris Grayling: I absolutely echo and endorse my hon. Friend's comments about the situation in the middle east. These matters will of course be debated on Monday, but we will undoubtedly return to them in this House in the near future. I note my hon. Friend's comments about Tony Blair. I think we should put on record our thanks to Tony Blair for the work he has done. I saw an interesting statistic the other day. The Labour party has had eight leaders in the past 40 years. Only one of them has won a general election, and he is the only one they never talk about.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab): Has the Leader of the House had time yet to study yesterday's figures from the Office for National Statistics, which show that the city with the lowest disposable income per person is now Leicester? He may also be aware that over the last four years child poverty increased in Leicester. Will he therefore ensure that when the Chancellor comes to the House and outlines his £12 billion of social security cuts, he will also lay before the House estimates for what impact the cuts will have on child poverty over the next four years?

Chris Grayling: Where the hon. Gentleman and I disagree is that I do not think the solution to Leicester's problems is providing Leicester with more welfare. I think the solution to Leicester's problems is creating jobs, supporting business, encouraging the development of new skills and creating a better environment for young people in Leicester to grow up in. That is what this Government will seek to achieve.

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): I thank the Leader of the House for visiting my constituency a few weeks ago, when he would have seen some of the stunning countryside we have in Pendle. One of the most popular policies in our manifesto with my constituents was the plan to create a £1 billion brownfield regeneration fund, to help to bring forward brownfield land for new housing developments, rather than greenfield land. Pendle has 46 hectares of brownfield land, 40 hectares of which is assessed as suitable for housing. May we therefore have a debate on ensuring that we provide record numbers of new homes and protect our green fields at the same time?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that we have to provide new homes for the people of this country. We also have to protect the character of this country. We will have to get that balance right over the next five years, but I am absolutely clear that we cannot possibly go on with a situation where too many, particularly among the younger generation, cannot aspire to own their own homes. That has to change.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): For some time now we have seen the monopolisation of our high street banking system by a select number of institutions. It has recently come to my attention that in Salford and Eccles a number of high street branches have been earmarked for closure. Would the Leader of the House be amenable to an open and frank discussion about the future of our banking system, so that we can offer a service that truly serves the people, rather than the interests of shareholders and hedge fund managers?

Chris Grayling: I welcome the hon. Lady to this House. Obviously it is important for all of our constituencies that we ensure that a proper range of services is available to our constituents. At the same time, commercial decisions have to be taken by organisations that are looking to make sure that they deliver the right service in the right places. These issues are never easy, but she will have the opportunity to make a request for an Adjournment debate—which, by the sounds of it, would have support on this side of the House as well. These are issues that can and should be debated in this House; there are opportunities for her to requisition such a debate.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your much deserved re-election as Speaker.

Next Wednesday's debate is entitled "Devolution in Britain". I wonder whether that is deliberately designed to exclude Northern Ireland from the debate, given that we are part of the United Kingdom. If the debate is solely about devolution to the towns of Great Britain, will the Leader of the House make room for a debate on devolution across the rest of the United Kingdom, given what is happening in Northern Ireland and the precarious place in which devolution in Northern Ireland now stands?

Chris Grayling: May I start by extending the Government's good wishes to the First Minister of Northern Ireland? We wish him a speedy recovery. May I also say that we, as a Government, remain absolutely committed to the process of devolution in Northern Ireland. There are issues and challenges at the moment, as the hon. Gentleman knows. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is working hard with representatives of both communities to try to ensure that the progress that has been made can continue.

The subject of next week's debate is chosen not by the Government but by the Opposition, so I cannot dictate the title of the debate. However, I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues from Northern Ireland who want to discuss devolution issues in that debate will be able to catch your eye to do so, Mr Speaker.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): When will we see the Bill promised in Government time on the repeal of the foxhunting ban? It would enable us not only to flush out those Government Members who, like many of us, do not support the repeal of the ban, but to work out the Scottish National party's position. Apparently, it is that SNP Members will not—possibly—vote against the repeal because the cruelty in question is to animals in England and Wales, rather than animals in Scotland.

Chris Grayling: In the latter part of his question, the hon. Gentleman makes an interesting and broader point. Although I extend a welcome to all the new SNP MPs

in this House, they will of course have to decide about the rights and wrongs of voting on matter in our constituencies where we have no ability to vote on the same matters in their constituencies. On foxhunting, there is a clear commitment from this Government that the matter will be voted on. We will bring forward our plans in due course. The hon. Gentleman will have to wait to see exactly what is proposed, but that will happen.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Carcraft of Rochdale, a second-hand car dealership, which has its headquarters in my constituency, recently, suddenly and unexpectedly announced its closure, with the loss of more than 100 jobs in Heywood and Middleton and more than 500 in its outlets in the north and the midlands. Will the Leader of the House launch an investigation into the business practices of Carcraft of Rochdale?

Chris Grayling: I extend our sympathy and support to those who have lost their job. It is never welcome news for any of us when we lose a significant local employer in our constituency—it has a really challenging effect on those involved. At least they are facing the challenge of finding a new job in a labour market that is improving rather than one that is getting worse, where the opportunities are better than they were. The hon. Lady can use a number of the means at her disposal, such as Adjournment debates and oral questions, to raise issues related to her constituency. I know she will take the opportunity to do so, and this is one such opportunity.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): Warrington and Halton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has recently tried to borrow £15 million to cover its day-to-day running costs and is going to run a £15 million deficit this year. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Health Secretary to come to this House and make a statement about the dire state of hospital finances in many parts of our country, which has been directly caused by the arrangements set up under the Government's Health and Social Care Act 2012 and by their failure to fund the NHS properly, and which is now having an impact on patient care?

Chris Grayling: I have to say, the chutzpah of Opposition MPs on this issue is enormous. We are the party that has continued to increase spending on the NHS. We committed in the general election to increasing spending on the NHS. I remind the hon. Lady that the front runner in her party's leadership contest is the person who told us that we were irresponsible for increasing NHS spending.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): Fixed odds betting terminals continue to plague our high streets, bringing misery and debt to many families and individuals. Given the conflicting views of the new Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), when can we have a statement on the matter? It is vital to many people in the United Kingdom that the issue is resolved and something is done about it.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity next Thursday in questions to the new Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I, too, congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your re-election. Given that the Gracious Speech signalled the Government's intention to devolve more powers to those city regions with metro mayors, will the Leader of the House ensure that when he brings forward his proposals to change the Standing Orders of the House in relation to English votes for English laws there will be no unintended consequences impacting on the 27 Members of Parliament from Greater Manchester who, to use his own logic, will be able to vote on health matters relating to his constituents, but not on health matters relating to their own constituents?

Chris Grayling: When we bring forward our proposals, there will be plenty of opportunity for this House to scrutinise them, but we are not offering to Manchester the chance to take the kind of powers that are being offered to the Scottish Parliament. When we bring forward those proposals, which I think are right for England, the interesting question for Labour is whether it will support them. Are English Labour MPs going to defend the right of their own constituents or are they going to put party advantage first?

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I was shocked to be told by a Minister towards the end of the previous Parliament that there had been only nine prosecutions for non-payment of the minimum wage during the preceding five years. Given that allegations have been made about a number of companies operating in my constituency, when will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the enforcement of the minimum wage?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman can apply for such a debate at any time. We condemn unreservedly employers who do not pay the minimum wage. They are breaking the law; it is as simple as that. I hope and expect that the relevant authorities will take action wherever they find such breaches.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am delighted that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) has overcome his natural shyness, and that new Members will now benefit from hearing him.

Mr Skinner: You, Mr Speaker, could have advised the Leader of the House as well as I can that the word “chutzpah” is pronounced “khutzpah”. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the most vindictive, mean piece of legislation announced yesterday was the attack upon the political levy, which is an attempt to withdraw funds from the Labour party—the Opposition? Will that legislation be drawn wide enough for us to put down amendments to include those hedge funds and all the other City institutions that give money to those people in the Tory party who sit on millionaire's row?

Chris Grayling: I remind the hon. Gentleman that people who donate money to the Conservative party make an individual choice to do so. A large number of trade union members vote Conservative, but still end up putting their money into the Labour party. It is time they had a choice. I extend my sympathies to the hon. Gentleman. It will be a difficult Parliament for him because whenever he stands up to ask a question, he will not know whether, when he sits down again, he will find an SNP MP already in his place.

Indictment against FIFA Officials

10.28 am

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement as to the implications for the Football Association and the home nations of the indictment preferred against certain FIFA officials by the Department of Justice in the United States and the criminal proceedings opened by the Attorney General of Switzerland.

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): The arrests that took place in Zurich yesterday, along with the statements released by both the US Department of Justice and the Swiss Attorney General, were shocking in both scale and scope. However, they were also far from surprising. Anyone who has spent time looking at FIFA, as the Culture, Media and Sport Committee did during the previous Parliament, will know that this is merely the latest sorry episode to suggest that FIFA is a deeply flawed and corrupt organisation.

The revelations have shown how important it is for sports bodies to uphold the highest standards of governance, transparency and accountability. That is what we ask and expect of all our domestic sports bodies in the UK. International bodies should be no different. That is particularly true for an organisation such as FIFA, an organisation that should be the guardian of the world's most popular sport, not one whose members seek to profit personally from the passion of the game's fans.

I welcome the investigations now under way into the allegations of bribery and corruption, and I fully support the Football Association's position that significant and wide-ranging reforms are urgently needed at the very top of FIFA, including a change of leadership. I also welcome the statement from UEFA, which has called for a postponement of the election, and the statement from Visa this morning. It is important that other sponsors reflect on their links to FIFA and consider following Visa's lead. The Minister for sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), will be writing to her European counterparts later today to set out our concerns and seek their support for change.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the insight team of *The Sunday Times*, without whose investigations many of these allegations may never have come to light. Football is the world's game, and it is our national game. It is a fundamental part of British life and culture. Yet these revelations have dragged the game's reputation into the mud. The time has clearly come for a change, and we will offer whatever support is necessary to the Football Association to see that change realised.

Stephen Phillips: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer, and indeed for coming to the House this morning to answer the urgent question. Football, as he says, is our national game. It is the most played and watched sport in the United Kingdom and worldwide. The whole House will share his concerns following the events of yesterday. Under the failed leadership of Sepp Blatter, FIFA has again let down fans across Britain and across the world.

Given that, what discussions is my right hon. Friend having with the home nation associations in relation to the unfolding scandal, which, as is clear from the charges brought against FIFA officials in the United States, reveals a pattern of corruption that has existed over decades? Does he think, as seems obvious to everyone except Sepp Blatter, that the election of a new president of FIFA should not now go ahead this week? What steps will he take in conjunction with the home nations to ensure that the election does not take place and that FIFA has the opportunity to elect a president who can rid it of corruption and lead the organisation through what is undoubtedly the worse scandal in its history? Can he assure football fans across the country that his Department will make reform of FIFA a top priority so that the organisation serves football worldwide and does not exist merely to line the pockets of its officials?

Although I doubt that my right hon. Friend has yet read the 161-page indictment preferred by the US Attorney General, he will know from his work on the Select Committee in the previous Parliament that the English Football Association made an unsuccessful bid for the 2018 World cup, which cost something in the region of £19 million. The bid had the backing of His Royal Highness Prince William of Wales and David Beckham, among others, but it received only two votes. What investigations does he now intend to carry out to examine whether the bid failed due to bribery and corruption on the part of FIFA officials? Will he discuss with the English Football Association the steps that can now be taken to recover the £19 million that was wasted and that could have gone to grassroots community football in this country? Can he say what steps the Government will now take to recover any money they wasted on the failed bid? Does he think, as no doubt many Members do, that the bidding process for hosting the World cup in 2018 and 2022 should now be reopened?

At least some of the criminal behaviour that founds the US indictment and the criminal investigation by the Swiss Attorney General made public yesterday is alleged to have taken place in the United Kingdom. What discussions has my right hon. Friend had overnight with our Attorney General and the Home Secretary as to whether a criminal investigation should be commenced in this country and, if appropriate, charges brought? Given the scale of the corruption revealed by *The Sunday Times* and by "Panorama" as long ago as 2010, why has no action been taken to date? Can he assure the House that a full criminal investigation of any unlawful behaviour in this country will now be launched?

Finally, given the importance of this issue to the whole country, or at least to those of us who follow the beautiful game, will my right hon. Friend undertake to return to the House next week to update hon. Members on further developments and to ensure that Parliament is kept fully informed of developing events in relation to a corruption scandal that affects something that is at the absolute core of our national life?

Mr Whittingdale: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for bringing this matter to the House today. I share a lot of the concerns that he has expressed.

On the attitude of the English Football Association and the football associations of the other home nations, I will of course be in touch with them. I hope to speak to Greg Dyke later. I am very pleased that all four

football associations from the home nations have taken the same approach in supporting UEFA in calling for a change of leadership and, now, for a postponement of the election that is due to take place tomorrow.

The allegations that are now coming out of the US Attorney General's indictment have of course been around for a very long time. One of the striking things has been FIFA's reluctance to carry out any proper, thorough, independent, transparent investigation of them. The Garcia report was not published in full and failed to address some of the most serious allegations. I hope that one of the consequences of these latest moves by the American authorities is that we will now have a proper investigation that will lead to the reforms all of us want. I very much welcome the moves already made by UEFA, and I hope that other football associations will now come behind it, but it is a matter for the English FA and the other associations, in the first instance, as to how they proceed tomorrow and in the days that follow.

My hon. and learned Friend is right that there have been calls in this House for the English authorities, particularly the Serious Fraud Office, to look into the allegations of corruption. We had a debate on that in the previous Parliament led by my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins), who has also done a tremendous amount in this area. I am sure that that will have been heard and that those allegations are being looked at.

Finally, my hon. and learned Friend asked that I come back and report to the House. As Mr Speaker will be aware, it is DCMS questions next Thursday, and I suspect that this matter may well come up on that occasion.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I warmly congratulate the Secretary of State on taking up his new responsibilities. There was a time before he was Chair of the Select Committee, but none of us can remember that any more, so we know that we have somebody who knows his onions on these matters. I join him in the tribute that he made to *The Sunday Times* and that the hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) made to "Panorama". Some of this would not be coming out now had it not been for that investigative journalism.

Yesterday the whole world saw that beneath the mask the beautiful game has a very, very ugly face. Can anyone be in any doubt at all that FIFA is rotten to the core and needs swift and wholesale reform? What is particularly galling is that the value of the World cup is not created by FIFA but by the many millions of loyal fans around the world. Football belongs to the mums and dads taking their children to their first match and to the youngsters lining their bedroom walls with posters, not to the fat cats who have creamed off millions of pounds for themselves. Is it not inconceivable that Sepp Blatter should continue in post now that his own election as president in 2011 is under investigation by the Swiss authorities?

What investigations have been undertaken in this country into whether British nationals and British banks have been involved? Is the Secretary of State absolutely confident that British authorities have not been rather reluctant to investigate seriously? Is it not a bit embarrassing that it has ended up being the Swiss and the Americans

who are bringing this to light rather than the British? Is he absolutely confident that no licence fee money has found its way into corrupt hands? Did any of the sponsors who are now, very reluctantly, raising their voices knowingly provide money that was used for a bribe?

Does the Secretary of State share our concerns about the 2022 World cup? Matches will be played indoors in temperatures exceeding 40° C. Hundreds of workers have already died building the stadiums—an estimated 62 per match that will be played. Human rights are systematically being abused. Should not Qatar immediately suspend its kafala visa system for migrants working on the stadiums and improve all workers' conditions? What representations have the Government made to Qatar on the detention of BBC journalists investigating human rights abuses there?

Now that Visa, McDonald's, Budweiser, Coca-Cola, Adidas, Hyundai and UEFA have all finally raised major concerns about the 2018 and 2022 competitions, should not the bidding rounds be reopened? If not, is it not time for the major football associations of the world to consider creating alternative competitions for those dates?

Mr Whittingdale: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for his kind words. I am not sure that he will have endeared himself to the Father of the House, who was my distinguished predecessor as Chairman of the Select Committee, but I am grateful to him for his remarks.

I cannot promise that we will always be in complete agreement when we debate matters on the Floor of the House. However, on this occasion I share a lot of the concerns that the hon. Gentleman expressed. In particular, I agree with him that a change in leadership of FIFA is very badly needed. I want to pay tribute to the FA, particularly David Bernstein, Greg Dyke's predecessor, who first called for that change and indeed supported alternative candidates. As I mentioned earlier, all four home nations are supporting the candidacy of Prince Ali.

The investigation in this country is a matter for the Serious Fraud Office, as I have said, but I have no doubt that it heard the calls made in the last Parliament for an investigation and that it will look closely to see whether any laws have been broken in this country. I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the £15 million put up for the England bid for 2018. It is too soon to say that the competition should be rerun, but we will wait to see what the outcomes of the criminal investigations are and whether there has been serious malpractice. A lot of very serious allegations have been made, and we now need a proper investigation into them.

On the specific points that the hon. Gentleman made about Qatar, I welcome the fact that the Qatari Government have now brought in a workers charter. I hope that it will lead to an improvement in the condition of migrant workers, but we are obviously concerned about the reports of exploitation. I was also very concerned about the detainment of the BBC journalists, which appeared to be an infringement of freedom of the press. As I said, this is an area where the freedom of the press has played a vital part in exposing wrongdoing within FIFA, which just reinforces why the principle of the freedom of the press matters so much.

[Mr Whittingdale]

I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that these very serious matters need to be investigated quickly, and we will give every support we can to the US and Swiss authorities in doing so.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State to his new post. Following on from his lead, will he confirm that the Government stand ready to support the Swiss and US authorities in their investigation? Will the Government accede to a request to share information they hold relative to the England World cup bid in 2010—information gathered on other bidding nations as part of the tournament process? Should the Football Association share with the authorities the information in its secret dossier, which was revealed to the Select Committee, because it may contain relevant information for the prosecutions by the US Attorney General and the Swiss authorities?

Mr Whittingdale: I once again pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work that he has done in this area, particularly for his efforts to assemble a coalition in Europe to press for fundamental change in FIFA. On the help that we can give the authorities, I am very happy to confirm that we will make available any information we have that may be helpful in the investigations. Allegations were certainly made, particularly by Lord Triesman as chairman of the team for the 2018 bid. They were dismissed by FIFA at the time, but I have no doubt that the authorities will be willing to take them a lot more seriously than FIFA appeared to do. I want to thank Lord Triesman for coming forward at that time and *The Sunday Times* for producing evidence. I would also like to pay tribute to you, Mr Speaker, for your efforts in ensuring that those allegations were properly heard and that the right of Parliament was defended.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I join others in warmly congratulating the Secretary of State on his appointment. It is well deserved. I cannot think of anyone in the House who is better placed to deal with these matters than he is. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) on his elevation to the shadow Cabinet. I am sure that Department for Culture, Media and Sport questions will now be box office as a result.

May I press the Secretary of State on the comments made by the hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips)? Of course it is for the SFO to conduct the investigation, and it would be wrong for the House to direct it to do so, but has the Secretary of State had a discussion with the Attorney General, because it is possible for him to review with the head of the SFO any information that could be of relevance to the international inquiries?

Mr Whittingdale: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. As I have observed elsewhere, I hope my appointment sets a useful precedent for Select Committee Chairmen.

As the right hon. Gentleman says, the SFO investigation is a matter for the SFO, but it will have heard the calls today and the calls made by my hon. Friend the Member

for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) in the debate in the previous Parliament—I understand that it is considering them. I have not yet had an opportunity to talk to the Attorney General, but I will be happy to do so, and to make clear to him and to the SFO that we will assist in any way we can.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his appointment. I hope other Ministers will forgive me when I say that, when the new Government were put together, his was the best appointment made by the Prime Minister.

The Secretary of State should be very proud of his record on this issue, and of the leadership he showed when he was Chairman of the Select Committee. We know from those inquiries that FIFA is clearly corrupt, that Sepp Blatter has been leading the way in that corruption, and that somebody has to make a stand. If the election goes ahead and Sepp Blatter is re-elected, unbelievably, as the head of FIFA, will my right hon. Friend encourage the home nations to withdraw from FIFA and to make a stand, or if they were to make that decision, would the Government support them?

Mr Whittingdale: I am grateful to my hon. Friend who, I am delighted to see, maintains his record of doing nothing to curry favour with the Chief Whip.

As my hon. Friend says, we need to look at the matter carefully. What happens after Friday if Sepp Blatter is re-elected will need careful consideration, primarily by the FA. It has been taken for granted up until now that Sepp Blatter will win, but the election has not yet taken place, and elections do not always produce the outcome that the experts predict. We shall wait and see. I shall certainly be seeing Greg Dyke very shortly to discuss the attitude of the FA. There are a number of options. Whether one would resort to the nuclear option my hon. Friend suggests is a matter for the FA, but we will need to discuss that option with it.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Given the high number of workplace deaths in Qatar, how will the Government monitor the effectiveness of the workers charter for migrant workers there?

Mr Whittingdale: We are in regular contact with Qatar—we have a good and strong relationship with the Qataris. Obviously, we will raise any concerns that are brought to our attention about the conditions of migrant workers. As I have said, the workers charter to which the hon. Gentleman refers has been introduced—it was developed with the International Labour Organisation to protect the rights of migrant workers. I understand that the Qataris are keen to address any concerns that have been highlighted, but we will go on pressing them when any further concerns are brought to our attention.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): I wish this were a happier occasion to welcome my right hon. Friend to his richly deserved position at the Government Dispatch Box. The behaviour of FIFA—not just currently, but over decades—would make any football fan weep with anger. Does he agree that, in the short term, the best

and most effective leverage over FIFA comes from its commercial sponsors, which pour many hundreds of millions of pounds into it? Will he use his and the Government's influence on those sponsors to persuade them to stop spending so much money supporting a systemically corrupt organisation?

Mr Whittingdale: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. I welcome the statement that has already been made by Visa, and I hope that the other sponsors will follow suit. One assumes that commercial organisations wish to make sponsorship deals to attach themselves to a brand that is popular and successful, not one that is tarnished and regarded as corrupt. They are, therefore, well placed to press FIFA to make fundamental changes. If it fails to do so, they will have to consider whether to continue their sponsorship. That is obviously a matter for them, but I welcome the moves that have already been made by sponsors to put that message to FIFA.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I share the incredulity of many football fans that Sepp Blatter and the senior leadership of FIFA can remain in their positions after these allegations, which have been going on for some time. Does the Secretary of State agree that the Swiss Government need to take a serious look at how they regulate and oversee the activities and finances of international sporting organisations, including not only FIFA but the International Olympic Committee, UEFA and many other bodies located in Swiss territory?

Mr Whittingdale: I am sure that the Swiss authorities will do that, but they are acting in co-operation with the US Justice Department and have clearly taken the allegations seriously. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the IOC, and it is worth noting that some 15 to 20 years ago similar allegations of corruption swirled around that body. It acted decisively and carried out wholesale reform, cleaning up the whole bidding process for the award of the Olympic games. That is a good precedent for the kind of action that we now want to see FIFA also undertake.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): On that point, does the Secretary of State really believe that FIFA can re-establish its reputation as a clean, non-corrupt organisation? Is it not now time for UEFA and other organisations to form a new global football body to try to have a fresh start?

Mr Whittingdale: I hope that FIFA can clean up its act, but to do so it will certainly need a change at the very top. Fundamental reform can happen only if it is led from the top, and I have no confidence that that will happen under the present leadership.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): How many UK companies are involved in World cup construction, particularly in Qatar? What assessment have the Government made of British involvement in the next two World cups, and what is their position on the role of British companies, again especially in Qatar?

Mr Whittingdale: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a precise answer about the number of companies involved, although I would be happy to obtain those figures for him. It is certainly the case that some very successful British companies are involved in the preparations for the World cup, and we strongly support and assist that involvement. If there are concerns about working conditions, I do not believe that they are in areas where British companies are involved, but we will continue to talk to them and to the Qatari Government about those issues.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his well-deserved appointment and thank him for his statement today. Football fans in Kettering will be greatly concerned about the FIFA allegations because, at the grassroots level, Kettering Town football club is struggling to find a permanent home while at the top of the game tens of millions of pounds have allegedly been paid in bribes. I am sure that football fans in Kettering would want their MP to ask the Secretary of State why this matter has been left to the United States, which is not well known as a leading soccer nation, when many European countries, with well-established football reputations, have failed to take this long-overdue legal action.

Mr Whittingdale: As I said earlier, I have not yet had the chance to read the full indictment from the US authorities, but it is well known that they take such allegations seriously. I welcome the fact that a proper investigation will now take place. Ideally, it should not have been left until the US authorities—or any national authority—acted, because the allegations have been made to FIFA repeatedly over the last two years. That body should have investigated the allegations rather than sweeping them under the carpet, which has been its practice until now.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): Twenty years ago today, I joined 26,000 other Huddersfield Town fans at Wembley for a memorable play-off victory. Will the Secretary of State reaffirm the importance of this issue, because our beautiful game does not belong to Blatter and his corrupt cronies, but to the fans?

Mr Whittingdale: My hon. Friend is entirely right—and, in a sense, that is the greatest sadness. The game generates passion among millions of people in this country and around the world, and the World cup should be the greatest event in football, yet it has been tarnished by the potential allegations of corruption over the allocation of the World cup in 2018 and 2022 and by the apparent corruption among so many members of FIFA. For the fans' sake, this has to be addressed, because it is dragging football down and doing huge damage to a game that so many people love.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): FIFA has investigated itself many times and given itself a clean bill of health. Why have previous allegations not been taken sufficiently seriously and why has it taken action by the United States authorities to get us to where we are today?

Mr Whittingdale: FIFA has previously promised that allegations will be investigated, but when Garcia was appointed to carry out an inquiry, not only did his

[Mr Whittingdale]

report fail to address some of the most serious allegations, but it was redacted and not published, much to the distress not just of all those observing FIFA but of Mr Garcia himself. FIFA's repeated failure to take these allegations seriously and to conduct proper inquiries has led to the position we are in today.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): My right hon. Friend described the nuclear option in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), but that is not the nuclear option; that is simply sending in the infantry. The real nuclear option, which would cause Armageddon in the football world, is a boycott of the World cup by UEFA. As my right hon. Friend said, UEFA has acted honourably and is today trying to make representations to boycott the congress. Will he send the Minister for Sport to meet her counterparts in Europe to discuss the option of UEFA boycotting the World cup in 2018, which would have such an impact commercially on FIFA that it would have to take notice?

Mr Whittingdale: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that if we are to bring effective pressure to bear on FIFA, we need to assemble as large a coalition as possible. UEFA has already taken a good lead on this, and we will be approaching other European football associations, and football associations from other parts of the world, to try and build as wide and as strong a coalition as possible. I mentioned that the Minister for Sport is writing to her counterparts today, but I am sure she would be happy to take up his suggestion of having meetings with them in due course to discuss how best to take the matter forward. I do not think we are yet at the stage of boycotting the World cup, which might cause concern to the many people who enjoy the World cup, but there is no question but that something has to be done.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): Four years ago, the original chairman of our World cup bid, Lord Triesman, named four people—Jack Warner, Nicolas Leoz, Ricardo Teixeira and Worawi Makudi—for seeking bribes in return for their supporting our bid. How is it then that four years later we are in this position and still blaming a corrupt organisation, FIFA, when the actions concerned are criminal? Why has it taken the United States to act—this is the repeated question from across the House—when British institutions, banks and authorities could have got involved and could and should have done more? Will the Secretary of State come back to the House and tell us what lessons have been learned, so that we can be sure that rotten apples with big international footprints will not in future be left alone by our authorities for the fear that we have in this country about taking them on?

Mr Whittingdale: My hon. Friend is right to say that these allegations have been around a long time. They were made by Lord Triesman to the Select Committee in the last Parliament and indeed by *The Sunday Times*, which published a huge amount of evidence suggesting very serious corruption. As to why criminal investigations

have not taken place, I believe the Serious Fraud Office has been looking at this. I will speak to the Attorney General and I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is sitting alongside me, as she will have heard our hon. Friend's comments. The important thing now is to act together to make sure that a thorough investigation is carried out. My hon. Friend mentioned Mr Jack Warner. One thing about which the Select Committee report expressed surprise was the fact that FIFA dropped its investigation into Jack Warner, yet he is now one of the individuals who has been arrested in Zurich.

BILLS PRESENTED

HIGH SPEED RAIL (LONDON - WEST MIDLANDS) BILL

Presentation and resumption of proceedings (Standing Order No. 80A)

Mr Secretary McLoughlin, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mrs Secretary May, Mr Secretary Duncan Smith, Secretary Sajid Javid, Secretary Greg Clark, Secretary Elizabeth Truss, Secretary Amber Rudd and Mr Robert Goodwill presented a Bill to make provision for a railway between Euston in London and a junction with the West Coast Main Line at Handsacre in Staffordshire, with a spur from Old Oak Common in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham to a junction with the Channel Tunnel Rail Link at York Way in the London Borough of Islington and a spur from Water Orton in Warwickshire to Curzon Street in Birmingham; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First and Second time without Question put, and stood committed to a Select Committee (Standing Order No. 57 and Order, 29 April); to be printed (Bill 1) with explanatory notes (Bill 1-EN).

EUROPEAN UNION REFERENDUM BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Secretary Hammond, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary David Mundell, Mrs Secretary Villiers, Secretary Stephen Crabb, Mr Oliver Letwin, Mr David Lidington and James Wharton presented a Bill to make provision for the holding of a referendum in the United Kingdom and Gibraltar on whether the United Kingdom should remain a member of the European Union.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Monday 1 June; and to be printed (Bill 2) with explanatory notes (Bill 2-EN).

SCOTLAND BILL

Secretary David Mundell, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mrs Secretary May, Secretary Michael Gove, Mr Secretary Duncan Smith, Secretary Amber Rudd, Mr Secretary McLoughlin, Mrs Secretary Villiers, Secretary Stephen Crabb, Greg Hands and Damian Hinds presented a Bill to amend the Scotland Act 1998 and make provision about the functions of the Scottish Ministers; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Monday 1 June; and to be printed (Bill 3) with explanatory notes (Bill 3-EN).

Point of Order

11.1 am

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Yesterday you kindly addressed the House before we debated Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech, and you made it clear that there is a responsibility within this House in how we conduct ourselves and how we should encourage members of the public to conduct themselves. You will have noticed yesterday that, whatever our political views, it is unreasonable for Members to be attacked for their views by members of the public whether they agree with them or not. There is nothing we in the House can do about that, but I seek further guidance from you, Mr Speaker, about what consequences and powers you have if individuals of this House are encouraged to be targeted by any other Member within the House, as was instanced once or twice in previous Parliaments.

Mr Speaker: That is an ingenious attempted point of order, but at this stage, with my not being privy to details that may be known to the hon. Gentleman, I am inclined to regard the question, though potentially important, as hypothetical. In the rather wise words of the late Lord Whitelaw, it is perhaps best to cross bridges only when one comes to them. We will leave it there for now, but if what is mulling in the hon. Gentleman's brain becomes a concrete and specific point, I will treat of it when that moment arises.

Debate on the Address

[2ND DAY]

Debate resumed (Order, 27 May).

Question again proposed,

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 leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Home Affairs and Justice

11.3 am

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): The Gracious Speech we heard yesterday set out the Government's programme for the first Session of this Parliament, including a series of important measures on justice and home affairs. It is a programme that will build on our strong record of achievement under the last Government. Crime is down by more than a quarter since 2010; over 870 bogus colleges have been shut; the driving licences of over 9,500 illegal immigrants have been revoked; our benefits system have been tightened; over 1,700 people have been arrested as a result of sham marriage operations and more than 600 removed; and more than 24,000 foreign criminals have been removed since 2010 and our deportation laws have been streamlined.

In the past five years, we have implemented a programme of radical police reform, introduced a landmark Modern Slavery Act, worked to transform the criminal justice system by improving support for victims, rehabilitating offenders and making prisons more effective and legislated to strengthen our response to the grave threats we face from terrorism. Now, with a strong and clear mandate for government, we must build on those achievements, and work even harder to create a safer and fairer Britain for all. The programme of legislation that my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor and I will set out today will ensure that we can continue to cut crime, protect victims, reduce net migration, ensure justice is done, and work to prevent terrorism. It will support the wider work of the Government—a Government for working people; a Government for one nation.

The Gracious Speech referred to a policing and criminal justice Bill. As I have said, in the last Parliament we implemented a programme of radical police reform to make policing more accountable and transparent, and to give back to the police the professional discretion and freedom to do what they do best: fight crime. We abolished the unaccountable institutions and abandoned the centralised approach that had existed before, and established a sensible new framework of institutions and processes. We introduced crime maps, beat meetings, and police and crime commissioners, making police forces properly accountable to the communities that they serve. We established the College of Policing, and new schemes such as direct entry and Police Now. We set up the National Crime Agency, beefed up the Independent Police Complaints Commission, and made Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary properly independent.

[Mrs Theresa May]

Police reform is working. Crime is down by more than a quarter since 2010, and, according to the independent Crime Survey for England and Wales, it has never been lower. Today policing is more professional, more accountable and more transparent. However, much work remains to be done, and the policing and criminal justice Bill will ensure that we can go further and faster with reform.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab): Estimates provided by the House of Commons Library suggest that we are likely to lose 300 police officers in Leicestershire because of the cuts that are to come. When will the Home Secretary be able to give us the actual figure?

Mrs May: When we first came to office, we made it clear that we would have to reduce public sector spending because of the economic mess that we had been left by the last Government. We had been bequeathed the largest deficit in our peacetime history, and the previous Chief Secretary to the Treasury had said, "There is no money." At that time, Labour Members kept telling us that we would not be able to reduce spending without crime going up, but, as we have seen very clearly, spending has been reduced and crime has fallen.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): The Home Secretary may be aware of two separate shooting incidents that have taken place in my constituency over the past 10 days, one of which was tragically fatal. Happily arrests are being made and investigations are continuing, but will the Home Secretary tell us what steps the Government are taking, and what resources they are giving Greater Manchester police so that they can tackle the continuing tragedy of gun and gang-related crimes?

Mrs May: We have done a significant amount in relation to both gang-related crime and firearms. On firearms, we have introduced a new offence applying to middlemen, because the firearms used in attacks are often hired out by those who possess them. We are also doing some work across Europe in relation to the availability of firearms, and the way in which they are brought into the United Kingdom.

We have attacked the problem of gangs on two levels. Our work in connection with "Ending Gang and Youth Violence" has focused on the street gangs that have often been such a problem in many areas, and some of the work done by Greater Manchester police in bringing agencies together to deal with gang-related crimes has served as a model for others. We have also set up the National Crime Agency, which has enhanced the ability of the police to deal with the organised crime groups that often lie behind such crimes. Incidents such as those to which the hon. Lady has referred are, of course, tragic, and, as she has said, the police will be properly investigating them. We have enhanced their ability to deal with incidents of that kind.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Home Secretary talked about the cuts that are to come. What would she say to Assistant Commissioner Mark Rowley, who leads on counter-terror for the Met, and who has warned that further cuts in neighbourhood and mainstream policing would put at risk the fight against terror?

Mrs May: Over the last five years, the Government protected the money available for counter-terrorism policing, and I am pleased to say that the figures from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary show that the proportion of police officers on the front line has gone up over the last five years. The Metropolitan police force is one of the forces that has maintained police numbers, under the Mayor of London, and it has actually been recruiting new members.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): But of course it is not just about the numbers on the front line; it is also about how those officers are deployed on the front line. Does the Home Secretary share my concern that in Greater Manchester there are now proposals effectively to merge neighbourhood policing and response policing? The fear of the communities I represent is that those bobbies will be taken off the beat and will instead be sucked into responding to calls.

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman made an important point at the beginning of his remarks, and I suggest that he might sometimes make it to some of his colleagues, because he is absolutely right that it is not about the number of police officers; it is about how they are deployed. That is a decision taken by the chief constable of an area, who will of course be discussing that with the police and crime commissioner. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman might like to take it up with his local police and crime commissioner whom he might know quite well from his time in this House.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): The Home Secretary just said that the Metropolitan police have managed to maintain their police numbers, but police numbers in London are down by 3,000 on 2010 figures.

Mrs May: The Metropolitan police were able to maintain the figures that the Mayor committed to, and indeed the force is recruiting police officers at the moment, as are a number of forces around the country.

I referred to the policing and criminal justice Bill and there are a number of measures in that that I believe will bring important reform. First, we will change pre-charge bail to prevent the injustice of people spending months or even years on bail only for no charges to be brought.

Secondly, we will amend the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 to ensure that 17-year-olds who are detained in police custody are treated as children for all purposes under that Act.

Thirdly, we will strengthen the powers and extend the remit of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary to better allow it to comment on the efficiency and effectiveness of policing as a whole.

Fourthly, we will overhaul the police disciplinary and complaints systems to increase accountability and transparency. We will enable regulations governing police conduct to be extended to cover former police officers, ensuring that misconduct cases can be taken to a conclusion even when an officer leaves that force. We will make the police complaints system more independent of the police through an expanded role for police and crime commissioners, and there will be a new system of "super-complaints" which will allow organisations such as charities and advocacy groups to lodge complaints on behalf of the public.

Fifthly, we will enshrine in legislation the revised core purpose of the Police Federation of England and Wales, and make the federation subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

Sixthly, we will introduce measures to improve the police response to people with mental health issues. The Bill will therefore include provisions to cut the use of police cells for section 135 and 136 detentions, reduce the current 72-hour maximum period of detention, and allow more places, other than police cells, to fall within the definition of a “place of safety”.

Finally, subject to the outcome of a public consultation, we will provide enhanced protections for children by introducing sanctions for professionals who fail to take action on child abuse where it is a professional responsibility to do so.

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary also include the Official Secrets Act and the fact that restrictions from it remain, including this week stopping people coming forward and assisting police in getting those who have perpetrated historical child abuse brought to justice?

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman has raised this issue on a number of occasions in the House and the answer I will give him now is no different from that I have given previously. It is already possible for arrangements to be put in place so that people can come forward and give their evidence without concerns about the Official Secrets Act. It is now an issue for Justice Goddard in relation to the child sexual abuse inquiry. It is for her to discuss the matter, if she wishes to, with the Attorney General, ensuring that arrangements are in place so that people come forward. The hon. Gentleman and I share the same intention: people who have evidence, who have allegations of child sexual abuse, whether it has occurred recently or in the past, should be able to come forward to the inquiry and ensure that those allegations—where appropriate; where they are specific—can be investigated by the police. We all want to ensure that we recognise what has taken place, that evidence is brought forward and that the inquiry is able to come to proper judgments about what went wrong in the past and how we can ensure that it does not happen in the future.

In addition, the Bill will allow us to deliver further reforms to the criminal justice system to protect the public, to ensure offenders are punished appropriately and to make our systems and processes more efficient. We will also enshrine the rights of victims in primary legislation to make sure that victims are supported and protected throughout the criminal justice process, making it clear to criminal justice agencies that they must comply with their duties towards victims.

The Policing and Criminal Justice Bill will ensure that we can better protect the public, but we must also protect the public from specific harms, so I turn now to the trade in new psychoactive substances. I know that the ready availability of these substances on the high street is of deep concern to Members, to the public beyond and to many parents in particular. The issue was raised recently with me by new colleagues, whom I am happy to welcome to the House, my hon. Friends the Members for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) and for Torbay (Kevin Foster). The issue concerns many people in their communities.

In 2013 there were 120 deaths involving new psychoactive substances in England, Scotland and Wales, so the Gracious Speech includes a Bill to introduce a blanket ban on the supply of new psychoactive substances. During the previous Parliament we took a number of significant steps to deal with the issue, including using enhanced powers under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, such as temporary class drug orders, to ban more than 500 new psychoactive substances. But with these existing powers we are always playing catch-up, banning new psychoactive substances on a substance-by-substance or group-by-group basis, while the suppliers stay one step ahead.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): May I congratulate the Home Secretary on her reappointment, and on her choice of Parliamentary Private Secretary, the hon. Member for Northampton North (Michael Ellis)? She has poached a former member of the Select Committee on Home Affairs to assist her.

I warmly welcome what she says about psychoactive substances, which is fully in keeping with the recommendations made by the Committee in the previous Parliament, but will she say something about prescription drugs? There has been a tendency for the use, and abuse, of prescription drugs to increase, so it is important, when looking at the whole issue, that we send out the strong message that they are abused as well.

Mrs May: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. He and I spent some time across the Committee Room from each other, discussing a number of home affairs issues during his very competent chairmanship of the Home Affairs Committee. As he says, the Committee came forward with proposals on the issue, and I am pleased, having looked at the issue and having had the expert panel, that we have come to the view that a blanket ban is necessary.

We have looked at the issue of prescription and other drugs, and I am happy to write to him. I think the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs may be looking at that, but I will confirm that and write to him.

The introduction of a blanket ban will ensure that our law enforcement agencies have the necessary powers to put an end to this trade and to protect our young people from the harm caused by these untested, unregulated substances. We will also continue to build on our balanced and successful approach to drug misuse—reducing the demand for drugs, restricting their supply and supporting individuals to recover from dependence.

Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): Those substances are a menace in my constituency, and I welcome the Home Secretary’s statement. Will police forces have powers, for example, to shut down shops that sell them?

Mrs May: Yes, the point of the blanket ban on the sale of these substances is that it will include powers to be able to ensure that there will be sanctions for those who carry on trying to sell them. Another issue of concern is people being able to buy these substances over the internet, and we will be looking at that. In addition to the head shops, that is a matter of concern, and so all those angles will be covered in our Bill.

In recent years, we have seen the devastating impact that extremism can have, not just on individuals and families, but on different communities. Britain is an

[Mrs May]

amazingly diverse, tolerant and inclusive country, which many people are rightly proud to call home. Here, everybody is free to lead their lives as they see fit; to follow any religion or none; to wear what they like; and to establish faith schools and build places of worship. But there are those who seek to sow division, to spread hatred and intolerance, and to undermine our values—cherished values such as our regard for the rule of law, democracy, equality and free speech, and our respect for minorities.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): Of course freedom of speech is a basic right that we should all respect and cherish, but does the Home Secretary agree that it comes with responsibility. People should not mock people's faith, because that could lead to intolerance, which then leads into extremism and radicalism, which we should all do everything we can to prevent?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that with rights come responsibilities. Just as everybody is free to choose to follow whatever religion or faith they wish, so they should respect the right of other people to do that.

Extremism affects people in all corners of our country and comes in many forms—non-violent as well as violent; Islamist as well as neo-Nazi—and there are signs that it is a growing problem. In 2013-14, the civil society organisation Tell MAMA received 734 reports of anti-Muslim incidents—up 20% compared with the same period the previous year. In 2014, there were more than 1,100 anti-Semitic incidents, which is more than double the number of the year before. We also know that thousands of people follow extremist groups online. Extremism, and the twisted narratives that support it, cannot be ignored or wished away. We must confront it head on and form a new partnership of every single person and organisation in this country who wants to defeat it. We must unite around the values that so many of us share, and which allow us to prosper and live in peace. That is why Her Majesty's Government will introduce a comprehensive counter-extremism strategy to promote social cohesion and protect people from extremism.

Rehman Chishti: Will the Secretary of State give way on one further point?

Mrs May: I am being very generous, but I will give way to my hon. Friend.

Rehman Chishti: The Home Secretary is being very generous and I am always very grateful to her. On the specific issue of counter-terrorism, she has done brilliant work on dealing with hate preachers coming into the country and on kicking them out of the country. One issue that urgently needs addressing is that some who have been banned from coming into this country are able to air their views here from satellite television channels from outside it. Will the new Bill be able to address that?

Mrs May: I can assure my hon. Friend that that is exactly one of the issues that we will be looking at. It may require legislation but it obviously requires discussions

with internet companies and others, and I am pleased to say that the Prime Minister has appointed Baroness Shields, who, as my hon. Friend may know, is well versed in these matters of technology, to look at exactly this issue of extremist material online and how we can deal with it.

As part of our wider work on extremism, we will introduce an extremism Bill, which will provide three important new powers. Those will allow us to: restrict extremists, to stop them engaging in harmful activity, through new extremism disruption orders; ban extremist groups that promote hatred but which fall short of proscription through banning orders; and close premises that persistently host extremist speakers and events with new closure orders. As I have said, the Bill will form one part of our wider strategy, which contains a range of non-legislative measures, including a major new programme to help people in our most isolated communities play a full and successful role in British life. That will include training; help to find work; and intensive English language training. It is imperative that we work together to tackle extremism and that, as we do so, we challenge it from every possible angle.

It is clear that we must not only work hard to defeat damaging and divisive extremism, but ensure that, in the fight against terrorism and other serious crime, the security and law enforcement agencies have the powers and capabilities they need to keep us safe from those who have been twisted by extremism and seek to do us harm.

Last summer, we legislated to deal with two urgent problems relating to communications data and—separately—the interception of communications. That put beyond doubt both the legal basis on which we require communication service providers to retain data and the application of our laws on investigatory powers to providers overseas. But the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014 contained a sunset clause, which means that new legislation is required before the end of next year. The Act contains measures to deal with only limited and specific problems, and there are still significant gaps in our law enforcement and intelligence agencies' capabilities.

That Act also places a statutory obligation on the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, David Anderson QC, to carry out a review of investigatory powers. That review is now complete and will be published shortly. It is a comprehensive and thorough document and I wish to take this opportunity to thank David Anderson for his work.

The Government are considering the content of the report very carefully as we frame the investigatory powers Bill, which will be brought forward in the coming months. The legislation will cover the full range of investigatory powers that David Anderson has reviewed. Although I cannot provide full details on the Bill while we are still considering the report, I can assure the House that, in considering these sensitive powers, we will look to balance the important needs of privacy and security.

It is also right that any legislation should be given full and proper consideration and I can assure the House that hon. Members will be given the opportunity to scrutinise this legislation thoroughly.

In the previous Parliament, we took robust action to reform the chaotic and uncontrolled immigration system that we inherited from the Labour Government. We transformed the immigration routes for migrant

workers, reduced red tape and increased flexibility for businesses, and introduced a new route for the exceptionally talented. We took action to ensure that students who want to come to Britain really are coming here to study.

Yvette Cooper: Will the Home Secretary confirm that net migration is now at 318,000, which is more than 70,000 higher than when she took office? Will she tell us, given that she has reaffirmed that she wants to keep her net migration target, in what year does she plan to meet it?

Mrs May: The right hon. Lady has correctly quoted the last figure that was produced by the Office for National Statistics. When I said that we brought control into the system of immigration, we did just that. Earlier, I mentioned that we shut 870 bogus colleges that the Labour Government had allowed to exist to bring in people who wanted a back-door route to work rather than people who wanted to study here in the United Kingdom. Yes, there is more work for us to do. We introduced measures in the Immigration Act 2014—

Yvette Cooper *rose*—

Mrs May: If the right hon. Lady lets me finish this sentence, I will allow her to intervene again.

We introduced measures in the Immigration Act 2014 to make it easier and faster to remove those who have no right to be here and to restrict access to our national health service, bank accounts and rented property for those who are here illegally.

Yvette Cooper: The Home Secretary promised—“no ifs, no buts”—that she would meet her target and get the figure down to the tens of thousands. Instead it is three times that much. Will she answer the question? If she is going to keep that target for the future, in what year will she meet her net migration target?

Mrs May: We fully accept, as the figures show, that we did not meet the net migration target, but it is absolutely right that we retain that ambition. The question for Labour is: does it think that immigration into this country is too high, and if it does, what would it do about it? Interestingly, during the election campaign, immigration was a subject on which Labour was surprisingly silent, but I was not at all surprised given its record in Government.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): My right hon. Friend is right to point out how completely inadequate the previous Labour Government were in controlling immigration, but she missed out one important issue: their immigration policies led to children being imprisoned. Those policies were reversed under the coalition Government, but we still have a far too pervasive estate of immigration detention. What measures is my right hon. Friend considering to move us further away from the terrible immigration policies of the previous Labour Government?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend has raised an important point. One of the early moves that the coalition Government made was to prevent the detention of children for immigration purposes. He also raises an important point about the detention estate. The Home Office is

looking at what estate is required and at the whole question of periods of detention. I and, I suspect, my hon. Friend would prefer to see people detained for a very short period—in fact, many people are detained for only a matter of days, and the majority of detentions are for less than two months. It is important that we have a system for identifying and quickly deporting people who should not be here. That is why we took some measures in the Immigration Act 2014, and I will come on to the further measures that we intend to take to enable that to happen.

Keith Vaz: The problem is not the willingness of this House to pass tough legislation to deal with illegal migration but the ability of the system to enforce it. In the last Parliament, only 3% of the allegations made to get people removed resulted in deportation, and the Government rightly abandoned the campaign with their bus asking people to leave the country, thanks to the work of the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart). The campaign was a mistake, and she stopped the bus in its tracks. We need an effective system of removal, and that is where we are being let down at the moment.

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman makes the obvious point that we want to be able to remove the people who are here illegally and have no right to stay here. We inherited a system with many appeal routes, and people could constantly churn around the system. There was no concept of deporting foreign national criminals first and allowing them to appeal from outside the country. Those are changes that the Government have already made, but further legislative changes need to be made to enhance our ability to deal with the issues. One of the other changes that the previous Government made, which the right hon. Gentleman supported, was to break up the UK Border Agency and create a separate immigration enforcement body.

Keith Vaz: We recommended it.

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman says that he recommended it. We brought immigration enforcement into the Home Office so that we could focus more clearly on the system of removals and its efficiency.

Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): There is an enormous gap between the recently published figures on net migration and the ambition set out by the Conservative Government. The right hon. Lady has now been the Secretary of State for five years, and she owes it to the House and the public to say by how much she expects to reduce net migration over the coming Parliament.

Mrs May: I suggest that the right hon. Lady looks at the Conservative party manifesto, which made it clear that the Government's ambition to reduce net migration to the tens of thousands remains. The reason we say that is simple. We recognise that uncontrolled immigration has an impact on people's lives, on public services and on jobs, and helps to hold down wages at the lower end of the income scale. Indeed, the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas), who was in charge of Labour policy before the election, said that the migration policy of the Labour Government was a covert wages and incomes policy. That was precisely its

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impact. So we recognise the impact of immigration, and that is why we continue to set ourselves that ambition and why we wish to build an immigration system that works in the national interest, is fair to British subjects and legitimate migrants, but is tough on those who flout the rules or abuse our hospitality.

Now that we are no longer encumbered by a coalition, we can take stronger action. We can create an immigration system that is tougher, firmer and fairer. We will introduce a new immigration Bill, which will ensure that we can remove those with no right to be in the UK more quickly, create a fairer labour market for working people and deny illegal immigrants access to public services. We will take the radical step of making illegal working a criminal offence, to make Britain a less attractive place for people to come and work in illegally. That will provide a firmer legal foundation for seizing the earnings of illegal workers as the proceeds of crime. We will also create a new enforcement agency to crack down on the exploitation that fuels illegal immigration.

We will further reform the immigration route for migrant workers and consult on the introduction of a levy on work visas under tier 2 of the points-based system to fund the development of skills. If we are to close the skills gap more quickly, we must reduce our reliance on foreign labour. We will also introduce a requirement that all public-facing public sector workers must speak fluent English. We will act to tighten up access to our public services and protect them against abuse by people who are here illegally. We will build on measures introduced in the Immigration Act 2014 to provide a more immediate impact and extend into previously unregulated public service areas. We will deny financial services to illegal immigrants, building on the existing power to prevent them from opening a bank account, and we will make it easier for landlords to evict illegal migrants from rented accommodation.

In addition, we will build on our reforms to speed up the removal process by extending the power introduced by the Immigration Act 2014 to require individuals to leave the UK before bringing an appeal against a decision in all human rights cases, except where there is a real risk of serious, irreversible harm as a result of the overseas appeal. This power is already making a difference, with over 800 foreign criminals deported since July 2014, and our new Bill will take those reforms even further. We will also create a power to require that foreign national offenders are tagged when released on bail by an immigration tribunal.

Finally, I want to turn to a subject that cuts across many of the home affairs and justice issues I have mentioned. Time and again, we have seen how the current framework of human rights law as applied by the European Court of Human Rights has led to rulings that have prevented us from removing dangerous foreign criminals from Britain. That has been the case in too many other instances, helping rapists, murderers and illegal immigrants rather than their victims or the law-abiding majority. Where we can, we have taken action. Even under the coalition, we legislated to deal with abuse of article 8 of the European convention on human rights—the right to a family life—by requiring the courts to have regard to Parliament’s view of the public interest in such cases, as set out in the Immigration Act 2014.

But the time has come to look at our human rights laws. We will bring forward proposals for a Bill of Rights to replace the Human Rights Act. This would reform and modernise our human rights legal framework and restore common sense to the application of human rights laws, which has been undermined by the damaging effects of Labour’s Human Rights Act. It would also protect existing rights, which are an essential part of a modern, democratic society, and better protect against abuse of the system and misuse of human rights laws.

In the last Parliament we made significant strides forward in reforming the police and our immigration system and passed important legislation to counter terrorism. The programme of legislation I have set out today will build on that work. It will ensure that we can go further and faster with police reform and ban harmful new psychoactive substances; challenge extremism which threatens lives, families and communities; crack down on illegal working and continue to build an immigration system that is tougher and fairer; and reform and modernise our human rights law. This is a programme that is on the side of working people and which helps us to create a safer and fairer Britain. It is the programme of a Government for one nation, and I commend it to the House.

11.38 am

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): This is the second day of the debate on the Queen’s Speech, when we are debating some of the gravest challenges that our country faces: public safety, national security, citizenship and the wellbeing of our communities; how we counter the extremism that poisons minds and terrorises communities; how we ensure high standards in policing and make sure that we still have police on our streets; how we control and manage migration, tackle exploitation and remain an outward-looking country; and how we protect our security, our liberty and our democracy. However, before I turn to the substance, let me congratulate the Home Secretary on her reappointment to this great office of state. It is no secret that I wish today that it had been me standing in her shoes—and not just because she usually wears such particularly cool shoes. She and I perhaps have more in common than either of us normally likes to admit. After all, we are both running for the leadership of our parties, even if I am the only one who will publicly admit it. However, I wish her the best of luck. [Interruption.] And, as I see from the expression on the Justice Secretary’s face, I fear she is going to need it.

We wanted to be on the other side of the House because we wanted a very different Queen’s Speech. Yes, there are things in it that are from our manifesto, and yes, there is some common ground, yet overall it is a Queen’s Speech that claims to be about one nation but does more to divide us than ever—a Queen’s Speech that claims to help working people, yet takes away working people’s rights.

There were things we really wanted on home affairs and justice: a new offence to outlaw exploitation of immigration undercutting pay and jobs—it is modern slavery and it should be a crime—a new law to tackle violence against women, stronger laws against child abuse, stronger protection for victims, and plans to save money by abolishing police and crime commissioners. Seriously, after turnout last time of about 13%, I cannot

believe even the right hon. Lady is looking forward to another round of police and crime commissioner elections next year.

Let us look at what is in the Queen's Speech—or at least what was almost in the Queen's Speech. Two weeks ago, the Government promised the Queen's Speech would announce the repeal of the Human Rights Act. Two weeks on, the repeal has been repealed. We have been here before, because two years ago, the Home Secretary promised Tory party conference that she would abolish the Human Rights Act; she promised us a document and a draft Bill, and said that she was prepared to pull out of the convention altogether. But what happened? No document, no plans, no Bill. Last time, it took her two years to ditch her promise; this time, it has taken her two weeks. The British Bill of Rights has disappeared again, and we still have no idea what the Government want to do—which rights they want to repeal, whether they want to be in the European convention or out, or whether there will even be a Bill.

This time, the Home Secretary cannot blame the Liberal Democrats for the chaos. This time she and the Justice Secretary have to take responsibility and this time they are going to have to work together to sort it out. I bet that will be fun for them. Look at them—they cannot even bear to sit next to each other on the Front Bench. I bet the Home Secretary was really pleased at the right hon. Gentleman's appointment. He is probably the only person in the Government who could make her relationship with the former Deputy Prime Minister look like a good one. Last summer, the Justice Secretary told friends that the Home Secretary was “dull and uninspiring”. Then she said he was a “wild-eyed neo-con”. He said she

“lacks the intellectual firepower and quick wits”.

No wonder they want to abolish the right to free speech.

One can understand the poor old Prime Minister trying to find the Justice Secretary a job that he could actually do. He clearly could not stay at the Department for Education—he upset the entire teaching profession and lost so many teachers' votes. He clearly could not stay as the Chief Whip—he upset all his Back Benchers and lost an awful lot of parliamentary votes. So the one job the Prime Minister thought the right hon. Gentleman could do was go and be in charge of justice and prisoners—because at least they do not have the vote.

The only real reason the Government are back-peddalling on the abolition of the Human Rights Act is that they know that their plans will unravel in Parliament. Still they have not told us which rights they want to ditch. The right to be free from torture, the right to free speech, the right to a fair trial, the right to protest and freedom of association—these are inalienable rights. They are protection for individuals against the abuse of power by the state. The Human Rights Act has helped victims of crime let down by the justice system to hold the police to account. Think of the young woman in Winchester who was raped, but when she went to the police for help, they failed to investigate for six months, threatened her with prosecution instead, and told her she was a liar. They arrested her. That rapist is now behind bars and that young woman has had justice, an apology and compensation from Hampshire police, thanks to the Human Rights Act.

The power of our Human Rights Act is that it recognises that rights come with responsibilities. It has qualified rights as well as absolute rights—victims' right to justice means that convicted criminals lose their right to freedom—and it puts the power of remedy back in the hands of Parliament, respecting our sovereignty. It protects individuals against abuse of state power. It protects the rule of law.

Do this Government really want to withdraw from the European convention on human rights, from which the Human Rights Act was drawn? Do they really want to rip up the Good Friday agreement? Do they really want to join Belarus as the only country on the continent that is not prepared to accept international standards on human rights? Do they really expect Belarus, Russia, China or anywhere else in the world to take us seriously when we call on them to meet international standards on human rights, if we are running away from them ourselves?

That would be a shameful abandonment of Britain's historic respect for the rule of law and a wilful destruction of the post-war legacy that Britain gave the world. It was a British Tory, David Maxwell Fyfe, one of the prosecutors at the Nuremberg trials, who drafted the convention. It was Winston Churchill who argued for the Council of Europe with the convention at its heart as the strongest bulwark against the hideous disregard for humanity that scarred Europe.

Labour, Conservatives and Liberals alike upheld the council, the Court and the convention as a means of bringing the British concept of respect for the rights of individuals—respect for our common humanity—to the wider world, so how did it come to this? This year is the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, and this month is the 70th anniversary of VE day, the ending of the holocaust, the deepest and most immoral betrayal of our common humanity in history, and we should be proud that our country, our Britain, was so determined to build a legacy and a convention so that it could never happen in Europe again. It puts us to shame, it shrinks and diminishes us, for a British Government to be trying now, on the 70th anniversary, to destroy that humanitarian legacy. We in the Labour party will do everything in our power to stop the Tory party destroying Churchill's legacy. We will stand up for our human rights, responsibility and respect for our common humanity, and I hope that this whole Parliament will do so, too.

There are other Bills before us, including a new Bill on legal highs, which we welcome. We called for action and we will look at the detail. There is a new Bill on policing. I hope the Home Secretary now accepts the kind of reforms to police standards recommended by the Stevens commission that we set up in 2013—stronger action on disciplinary issues and better training and professional development. She also needs to deal with the Independent Police Complaints Commission because it still is not doing the job. She needs to come clean about how many police officers are going to be left once her next budget cuts have finished. Over 10,000 police officers are set to go in the next few years, yet 999 calls waits are up, rape and sexual offence prosecutions are down, neighbourhood police officers are disappearing from our streets, and more child abuse is being reported but less is being prosecuted. There are year-long delays

[Yvette Cooper]

in investigating online child abuse—year-long delays. That is not crying wolf. It is crying out for something urgently to be done.

Nowhere are those cuts more serious than when it comes to the terror threat. As Assistant Commissioner Mark Rowley, the most senior counter-terrorism officer in the country, has warned, the loss of neighbourhood policing, mainstream policing teams, undermines the work on counter-terrorism, too. More needs to be done to tackle the threat of extremism, especially Islamist extremism linked to the rise of ISIL, to tackle hate crime, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and to tackle those who want to divide us. Therefore, we have called for new legislation. New powers will be needed, including proper checks and balances to make sure that powers are properly used and not abused. We will scrutinise the Home Secretary's new plans carefully, as well as her new investigative powers laws. I hope she will confirm that there will be an opportunity for detailed pre-legislative scrutiny of those proposals.

The police need reforms so that they can keep up with new technology to keep us safe in a digital age, but the safeguards need to keep up with technology, too. The last draft communications data Bill was too widely drawn and put too much power specifically in the hands of the Home Secretary. We will scrutinise this one in detail and take heed of the report from David Anderson when it is published. I still urge the right hon. Lady to do much, much more on prevention of extremism in the first place, involving communities, local organisations and faith groups—something that, sadly, in the previous Parliament, the Government cut back repeatedly and that needs to be restored.

The Home Secretary made much of her new plans on immigration. The trouble is that we have heard much of it before. Four years ago she put forward new immigration rules and said that as a result the Government anticipated that net migration would fall

“from the hundreds of thousands...to the tens of thousands.”—*[Official Report, 23 November 2010; Vol. 519, c. 169.]*

That is what she promised—no ifs, no buts. Instead, all we heard from her today was an awful lot of ifs and an awful lot of buts. *[Interruption.]* She says that she never said, “No ifs, no buts.” Perhaps it was the Prime Minister who said it—how quick she is to disown him now. In fact, far from falling to the tens of thousands, net migration has gone up by over 70,000. She cannot blame the previous Labour Government for the big increase over the past five years. It is higher now that it was in 12 of the 13 years that we were in office, as well as higher than when she took office. She made this her target. She made this her big promise. She has failed repeatedly. The target is in tatters.

The Home Secretary also put forward rules that she said would allow the deportation of far more foreign criminals, yet she is deporting 500 fewer foreign criminals a year than she was five years ago. Two years ago she also brought in an Immigration Bill that she said would stop people working here illegally, yet the number of employers fined for employing illegal workers has gone down, not up. She is right to talk about enforcement, because the rules should be enforced, but who is going to do the job when she is about to cut far more enforcement officers in her next round of budget cuts?

Mr Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): Given the right hon. Lady's criticism of the Government's position on immigration, if the Government bring forward proposals to toughen up the regime, presumably the Labour party will support them.

Yvette Cooper: We have already supported many of the measures that the Government introduced in the previous Parliament on a number of different areas, and we have called for measures in areas where the Government have refused to toughen up the rules, for example, student visitor visas, which the independent inspectorate has warned have been abused. The Home Secretary has repeatedly refused my calls to tighten up the rules in that area. We also think that we need more enforcement staff in order to do the job, which again is something that she has repeatedly refused to do. Time and again she says one thing and does another, or promises one thing and then does the opposite. Immigration is important to Britain, but it needs to be controlled and managed so that the system is fair, so that people can have confidence in the immigration system and so that we can enjoy the historical benefits of people coming to this country, setting up businesses and contributing. We need a system that is controlled and managed for the future.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I am grateful to the right hon. Lady, who is making an excellent speech. Does she also recognise that while the rhetoric about immigration is ever-present and ever-ongoing in the UK body politic, there are fishing boats tied up in the north-west of Scotland because of this type of debate? We need to get migrant workers in to work on the fishing boats, but that is not happening because of the migrant-phobic debate we are constantly having in the UK. We must realise that migrants sometimes help our economy and help jobs on land when they work at sea.

Yvette Cooper: The point I just made was that in a global economy, and also given Britain's history, we have long seen benefits from people coming here from all over the world, making this country their home and contributing to our economy, and setting up some of our biggest businesses, including Marks & Spencer. But we also need a system that is fair and that is controlled and managed. That is why we have highlighted areas where we think stronger controls are needed in order to make the system fair; for example, better enforcement is needed. We want to see lower migration as well, but the system has to recognise the different kinds of migration, which I think is the point the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) is making.

The problem with the gap between the Government's rhetoric and the reality is that in the end it undermines confidence in the whole system and faith in any immigration promise the Government might make. It also allows some people to exploit the issue in order to divide us. The Government are taking the British public for fools.

Richard Fuller: I commend the right hon. Lady for her passionate and effective speech. She talks about fair immigration policies. Does the Labour party support a reduction in the income limit for a spousal visa?

Yvette Cooper: We said in the run-up to the election that that issue should be reviewed because there were anomalies around, for example, women British citizens who are likely to be earning less than men. They may therefore be treated differently by the immigration system; they may have a spouse who is earning far more than them. We said that the system ought to be reviewed to ensure that it does not have perverse consequences. People need to be able to support their family. If they want to bring a family member into Britain, it is important that there is that proof in the system, but it also needs to recognise people's different circumstances.

Mrs May: What is the right level of net migration into the United Kingdom, according to the right hon. Lady?

Yvette Cooper: Our problem with the net migration target is that it treats all migration as being the same. We would like, for example, fewer people coming in under the student visitor system, but more coming in as university graduates. We think there is a serious problem with trying to treat all migration as being the same. The approach that the Government have taken has repeatedly failed. The Home Secretary's net migration target has failed. It is in tatters; it is just a mockery that takes the British people for fools.

Mrs May *rose*—

Yvette Cooper: I will give way to the Home Secretary if she can tell me when she expects to meet her fantasy net migration target.

Mrs May: I asked the right hon. Lady what she thought was the right level of net migration into the United Kingdom, and she has not answered that question. I give her another opportunity to do so. She says that she wants to affect net migration into the UK by changing the student visitor visa route. Student visitor visas are not included in the net migration figures.

Yvette Cooper: That is exactly the point, because the Home Secretary's net migration target includes some kinds of immigration and not others. She has ignored student visitor visas because they are not included in her net migration target, but she includes refugees in her net migration target and wants to push it down.

Keith Vaz: The problem with having a net migration figure is that we cannot control the number of people who want to go out of the country.

Yvette Cooper: My right hon. Friend is right—that is a problem.

The Home Secretary's net migration target includes students, visa over-stayers, workers and refugees, but it does not include illegal immigration. That is why she failed so badly in the previous Parliament to deal properly with illegal immigration. It also does not include people who enter the country on short-term visas, even if they may then over-stay and break the rules and abuse the system.

The problem for the Home Secretary is that by treating everything as part of her net migration target, she is failing. The area where her approach is failing most,

and is most immoral, is the inclusion of refugees in the net migration target. That has created an incentive for the Home Office to resist giving people sanctuary, undermining our long tradition of humanitarian help. Ministers shake their heads, but let us look at the evidence about what they have done as a result of their direct incentive to cut the number of refugees that Britain accepts.

Eighteen months ago, I called on the Home Secretary to make sure that Britain was doing its bit to give sanctuary to some of those in greatest need in the refugee camps outside Syria. She resisted until she was forced to give in, and even then she accepted only 140 people. Last summer, she led the arguments in Europe to stop search and rescue in the Mediterranean, leaving people to drown in the waves in order to deter others from coming here. Now she is again refusing to help when the UN asks for help. Ministers are right to target people-smugglers' assets and their empty boats before they can set sail, and right to try to build stability in the region, but that is not enough. Frontex has said that the main cause of the increase in boats is the situation in Syria, which has caused the worst refugee crisis since the second world war. Yet the Home Secretary is still resisting the UN's appeal to give sanctuary to more Syrian refugees, and refusing to help the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to provide refuge to more of those fleeing Syria and so manage the boat crisis.

I do not expect the Home Secretary to sign up to an arbitrary quota system that is beyond our control, but I do expect her to offer to help. She should work with local councils to see how many more places we can offer and do far more to give desperate people sanctuary, because they are now fleeing not just from the civil war with Assad but from ISIL—a barbaric organisation that oppresses, persecutes and beheads people for their faith and for who they are. Throughout our history, from the Huguenots to the Kindertransport, this country has refused to turn its back on those fleeing persecution and seeking sanctuary. Just as she should not rip up the legacy of international standards on human rights, she should not rip up that legacy of international compassion either.

Mr MacNeil: I would add, by way of context, that although the debate in the UK makes it seem unique in leading on migration—that we are almost being “swamped”, which is the word we see in the tabloid press—the reality, according to Eurostat, is that the UK is No. 11 for the share of foreigners as a total of the population, behind countries such as Germany, Spain, Belgium, Ireland and many others. I do not think other countries have the same level of phobic debate that we now have here. It would be good to detoxify that debate and to recognise the contributions made by migrants, as the right hon. Lady did earlier.

Yvette Cooper: Every country in Europe is facing issues of immigration and of people moving across borders, but we should be clear in this House about separating the debate on immigration from that on asylum and refugees. They are two separate issues. Yes, we should have strong controls on immigration and we should have a sensible debate, but we should also make sure that we do not turn our back on our historical tradition of providing sanctuary for those in greatest need.

[Yvette Cooper]

In the end, that is what most disturbs me about this Queen's Speech and this Home Secretary's approach. We can point to many failures—failing to keep police on the streets, failing to help victims of child abuse and of the most serious crimes, failing on border enforcement, failing to restore confidence in the immigration system—but, worst of all, she is turning our country inwards, making it a smaller, narrower, darker place. We need to be proud of who we are, of the values for which we stand internationally and of our confidence, determination and international vision. We want the rest of the world to follow the standards that we have championed, the compassion that we showed when other human beings were persecuted or abused and the outward-looking, positive nature of the country we have always been. That is the vision that this Parliament and this Labour party should be championing now.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. There may need to be a time limit on Back-Bench speeches, but I will play it by ear and see whether a degree self-discipline helps us to get through the number of Members who wish to contribute. I know that the right hon. Gentleman I am about to call will wish to take account of that gentle guidance. I call Dr Liam Fox.

12.1 pm

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): The Gracious Speech sets out a programme with both vision and ambition. The Government have three historic tasks in this term: balancing the budget; doing so in a way that does not diminish our national security; and, of course, giving the British people a say on our future relationship with the European Union. The great dividing line at the general election was between those who believed in living within our means and those who believed there was a different way. The myth peddled by the left—that there is an easy and painless alternative to what they call “austerity”—was seen through by the British public.

Dealing with the deficit is the great unfinished business from the last Parliament. Let me remind the House of the actual figures. Government debt is almost £1.6 trillion, or 81% of GDP. Debt interest is £43 billion this year, which is more than 3% of GDP and more than 8% of Government tax income. Almost a tenth of what people pay in their taxes goes towards debt interest. This is a profoundly immoral policy, because it says that the generation coming after us should pay for our spending today. It is a wholly unacceptable way for the country to proceed economically.

I do not believe that overspending by more than £87 billion, as we are this year, fits anyone's definition of austerity. It will not be easy to reduce our deficit, given the plans we have set out, quite understandably, on such things as the pension lock and the NHS. However, it is not just about shrinking the size of the state; it is about which state we are shrinking. In my book, we should not reduce the security of the state to pay for the welfare state.

Mr MacNeil: The right hon. Gentleman is painting an accurate picture of the disastrous state of UK finances and the mismanagement of them over the years. Will he tell us when the UK last did not have a black hole in its annual current account?

Dr Fox: I take issue with the hon. Gentleman's assessment, because we are seeing a rapid improvement in the state of Britain's finances. He and his colleagues say that we should spend more money and do so for longer. The consequence of that would be to run up even more debt interest, which would be a further burden on taxpayers and a further brake on the economic growth that the country requires.

There are a number of risks to the security of the state: failing states, and transnational terrorism and fundamentalism, which is manifested at the moment most appallingly by ISIS. Our security services need not only appropriate funding but appropriate powers to do their job properly, which is why I welcome the Home Secretary's proposals. To those who say that our security services are too great, and that their powers are too widespread, I should mention that in this country we spend more in a year on the elderly heating allowance than we spend on the budgets for all three of our security services combined. I welcome measures to help the security services to do their job, but I reiterate that strong powers for the security services must be matched with strong oversight powers for this House of Commons.

Of all the threats we face, I believe that the single greatest threat facing both this country and our allies comes from Putin's Russia. The actions that we have seen in the Ukraine should make us realise that we are only one miscalculation away from a potential article 5 conflict on the European continent. We have seen the redrawing of Europe's borders by force, which we thought we would never see in the years after world war two.

We have two simultaneous problems: the weakness of the west, and Putin's aggressive stance. We in the west, collectively, watched a cyber-attack on Estonia, one of our NATO allies, and we did nothing. We saw Ukraine's gas being cut off in breach of a treaty, and we did nothing. We saw the invasion of Georgia, where Russia still has troops, and we did not even call it an occupation. We have now seen Crimea torn away by Putin's expansionist actions.

Putin's attitudes themselves cause a problem. He still believes in the old Soviet idea of a near abroad—that Russia should be able to control the actions and policies of its geographical neighbours. That is unacceptable in the modern world. He also believes that the protection of ethnic Russians lies not with the constitutions or laws of the Governments under which they live, but with an external power, meaning Russia. When he hands out Russian passports to ethnic Russians in more and more countries on the periphery of Europe, we should be extremely worried.

We see the creation of an arc of instability as a matter of policy by Putin, involving Kaliningrad in the Baltic, the Republic of Srpska in the Balkans, and Georgia and the client state in Armenia. They add up to a very great risk facing European security. Russia is testing new weapons systems in Ukraine, and the Ukrainians need more secure communications, unmanned aerial vehicles and anti-artillery capabilities.

We need to face down the Russian threat as a matter of urgency, even if it is not at the top of what most people regard as their immediate political agenda. If we are to do so, we need a united NATO—united, properly funded and rebalanced. In the cold war, we understood that we needed military strength underpinned by economic power and based on a clear values agenda. Today, only four NATO

members meet the 2% GDP target that is supposedly the floor of their contribution to NATO. As a consequence, NATO is too dependent on the United States. We would not have been able to go through the conflict in Libya without the United States. For all Europe's pretensions to global influence, it is unable to deliver because it is unwilling to spend what it needs to spend to provide the capabilities that are necessary to underpin that.

We will have a full defence review. I simply say this to my right hon. Friends in the Government: defence is the first duty of Government. It is non-negotiable. We need to spend what we need to spend to keep us safe. We cannot begin with a number and work out how much defence we can get for it.

We need to maintain the primacy of NATO in the face of growing European Union pretensions in the field of security. I have watched as the European Union has tried to get further into the realms of a common defence policy. That will result in duplication and the diversion of scarce resources. It will weaken NATO and drive a wedge between us and the United States.

That brings me to the third of the Government's challenges—the EU itself. It is worth reminding ourselves of what Chancellor Merkel has so eloquently said: Europe represents 7% of the global population, 25% of global GDP and 50% of global social spending. That is an utterly unsustainable position to maintain. In the European Union, eurozone unemployment is 11.4%, compared with 5.5% in the UK. That figure is hugely flattered by Germany's 4.8% unemployment rate. Take Germany out of the equation and we can see how badly the rest of the eurozone is faring.

It is not that there is a crisis in the eurozone—the eurozone is the crisis, and it always has been since the creation of the flawed and fundamentally unstable and unsound single currency. The euro could have followed one of two models. It could have followed a purely economic model, only available to those who met the entrance criteria, or a political model, with ever closer union an indispensable tool in that. Of course, neither model was chosen. Instead, a hybrid was created and the wrong countries were allowed to join without ever meeting the convergence criteria. Having joined, those countries were allowed to follow fiscal policies that saw an even greater divergence from where they were supposed to be.

The price for all that is being paid especially by young Europeans. Some 4.85 million young Europeans are unemployed, 3.25 million of whom are in the eurozone. How many young Europeans will be sacrificed on the altar of the single currency before European leaders wake up to the truth and the impact of their folly? The euro is flawed, and de-risking the euro is the single most important task facing European leaders at present.

How different Europe looks now from how it was perceived at the time of the last referendum. In 1975, Europe was at the centre of the global economy and global political influence. We now see a backward-looking, introspective Europe, diminishing in both global economic importance and global political reach.

At some point in the next two years we will have a once in a generation opportunity to reset our relations with the European Union. We need to have a full and transparent renegotiation process, and we need to be right, not quick. The temptation is always to go for the

renegotiation that can be achieved, for the sake of political expediency, rather than a more difficult one that might be less successful. That would be a great mistake, and I am heartened by what the Prime Minister has said in recent days. It is not just about migrants' benefits or the City of London; it is about the creep towards ever closer union, which we have seen happening in a ratchet mechanism over the last couple of decades, and the core issue of sovereignty.

The European Union is increasingly taking on the trappings of statehood—a diplomatic service, a foreign policy and now even the suggestion of a European intelligence service, although I regard that as something of an oxymoron. Too many of our laws are being made beyond our borders, and that is the crux of the argument that we need to address and change in the renegotiations and the referendum that will follow.

On the timing, some people want to have a quick referendum and I have already heard others saying that we must be willing to say yes to a reformed EU without knowing what that will look like. We must resist any attempt to bounce the British people into an early referendum. We can wait until we are ready. We must give our people a full explanation of the choices, and the inevitable pluses and minuses on both sides of the ledger, because we have to have a clear resolution of this issue, not simply begin a repeating chapter.

As well as all those great national and international issues, we will want to champion some important regional issues. In the south-west, where we saw a blue tide sweep right up the peninsula with some phenomenal gains, we have some real problems with fair funding. In North Somerset, we have real problems with fair funding in rural areas for education, health and local government. We also face an environmental problem at the hands of the National Grid, whose electricity transmission plans would be a sore scar on our beautiful environment. If the Government believe in green energy generation, they should also believe in green energy transmission, which should be an equal partner in the Government's policy.

The Government's programme is ambitious and its aims give great cause for optimism. We are not the continuation of the coalition: we were elected as Conservatives and I look forward to our governing as such.

12.15 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It gives me great pleasure to participate in this debate as the new SNP Member for Edinburgh South West and as the SNP spokesperson on justice and home affairs. It also gives me great pleasure to speak shortly after two such distinguished fellow female Members, the Home Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary. I may not agree with much of what the Home Secretary says, but I applaud her chutzpah and her style. I agree with a lot of what the shadow Home Secretary says, and I also applaud her style.

As this is my maiden speech, before I address the subject matter of this debate I wish to say something about my constituency and my immediate predecessor, Alistair Darling. I have the honour of representing the South West division of Edinburgh, one of the most beautiful urban constituencies in the United Kingdom.

[*Joanna Cherry*]

That is perhaps not surprising as it is situated in the most beautiful capital city in the world—Edinburgh, the capital city of Scotland.

The constituency of Edinburgh South West stretches from the city centre through Dalry, Gorgie and Fountainbridge to the village communities of the Pentland hills, including Juniper Green, Currie and Balerno. My constituency contains leafy suburbs, such as Colinton and Craiglockhart and former council estates, including Wester Hailes, Broomhouse, Sighthill and Oxgangs. My constituency is often referred to as prosperous, and it has prosperous parts, but it is not without its pockets of urban deprivation. However, I am pleased to say that those same areas are also home to vibrant community projects such as the Whale arts centre in Wester Hailes, the Clovenstone boxing club and the Dove centre, to name but a few.

As well as the rural beauty of the Pentland hills, my constituency contains hidden gems of urban repose such as the handsome Saughton park, which dates from the Edwardian era and is currently undergoing a restoration project.

No mention of my constituency would be complete, of course, without reference to the illustrious Heart of Midlothian football club, whose fans include my esteemed and right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond). I was particularly delighted to read earlier this week that Heart of Midlothian football club was one of the first companies to sign up to the Scottish Government's business pledge to pay the living wage to all direct employees over the age of 18—may many others follow in their footsteps.

My predecessor, Alistair Darling, had a distinguished career in this House as part of a 30-year career in front-line politics. Like me, he is a lawyer and advocate, and he was a Member of Parliament from 1987 to 2015. During that time, he was one of only three people to serve continuously in Labour Cabinets from Labour's victory in 1997 to its defeat in 2010. He did so latterly as Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he played a crucial role in steering the UK's troubled banks back from the brink of catastrophe.

I must also pay tribute to Alistair Darling's role as chairman of the Better Together campaign, which successfully campaigned for Scotland to remain part of the UK in last year's independence referendum. I am able to pay such tribute both as a gracious loser and with the comfort of knowing that while my side may have lost that battle, recent events tend to suggest that we will yet win the war. I wish Alistair Darling every success and happiness in his future career outwith politics.

Alistair Darling's three predecessors in what was formerly the seat of Pentlands attained, like me, the rank and dignity of QC at the Scottish Bar. The late Norman Wylie QC, formerly Lord Advocate and latterly Lord Wylie, a senator of the College of Justice, was followed by the right hon. Malcolm Rifkind QC and then by the right hon. Lynda Clark, formerly Advocate General and now Baroness Clark of Calton, also a senator of the College of Justice. It was part of my career plan to be a senator of the College of Justice, but having become swept up in recent exciting events in Scotland, I fear that might not happen now. I am proud to follow in the tradition of my constituency being represented by

senior counsel and particularly proud that for the first time it is represented by senior counsel who is a member of the Scottish National party. In fact, because of the vagaries of the count, I am particularly proud to say that I am the first ever SNP MP to be elected in the capital city of Edinburgh.

I come now to the subject of today's debate. As a lawyer, it is appropriate that I should make my first speech in the House in defence of human rights and the rule of law, but before I do that I want to say something about the Scotland Bill published earlier today by the Government. I very much regret to say that the Bill does not deliver on the cross-party agreement reached through the Smith commission, and I am happy to confirm that the SNP will be seeking to amend it to ensure it delivers on the Smith commission proposals in full.

The tone and tenor of the Government's approach to human rights and civil liberties issues give me and my party grave cause for concern. While the Government appear to have been blown off course in their zeal to implement their manifesto pledge to repeal the Human Rights Act, I note that the Home Secretary has confirmed that a Bill will be brought forward to introduce a Bill of Rights and to repeal the Human Rights Act. Lest there be any doubt, I and my party are fundamentally opposed to the repeal of the Act and would consider it a thoroughly retrograde step if that were to be done. Any reduction in current human rights safeguards will threaten the fundamental freedoms to which everyone is entitled in a modern democratic society governed by the rule of law. We should not forget, as the shadow Home Secretary reminded us, that the people who have benefited from the human rights protection afforded by the Act are often the most vulnerable in our society—for example, disabled people affected by welfare reform and the families of military personnel killed on active service because the Ministry of Defence supplied them with outdated equipment.

Nor, as the shadow Home Secretary reminded us, should we forget that the United Kingdom was in at the foundation of the European convention on human rights and that it was brought forward largely at the suggestion of Winston Churchill. Since we became a signatory to the ECHR, both Scotland and the UK have been setting standards for the world in safeguarding human rights. The Scottish Government take pride in that, and I really wish that the UK Government would do the same.

The right-wing press likes to run stories about what a poor record we have in Strasbourg, but contrary to the impression in the press the UK loses less than 1% of the cases brought against it in Strasbourg. The right-wing press also likes to run scare stories about alleged—I stress the word “alleged” because everybody is entitled to a fair trial—foreign criminals who cannot be deported, but the UK has successfully managed to deport alleged foreign criminals, such as Abu Qatada, who was deported in a way that meant he faced trial with proper safeguards against the use of evidence obtained by torture. That is only right in a society that believes it ought to be governed by the rule of law.

It might have taken time to deport Abu Qatada, but the UK Government should be proud of doing things properly. Instead they have managed to give the impression that respecting human rights and upholding the rule of law are an inconvenience. Such an attitude is not the way forward. As the shadow Home Secretary said,

every country in Europe, save Belarus, is a signatory to the ECHR. A UK withdrawal would send out entirely the wrong signal on the international stage.

In Scotland, the Human Rights Act is part of a larger picture. The rights in the ECHR are written into the devolution settlement by virtue of the Scotland Act 1998. In Scotland, we have a national action plan for human rights and a UN-accredited human rights commission. The SNP's commitment to human rights extends beyond the civil and political rights in the Act to economic, social and cultural human rights. We believe in Scotland that human rights are central to the way we address the overall challenge of building a fairer and more equal society. Repeal of the Act is strongly opposed in Scotland. Indeed, last November, the Scottish Parliament voted overwhelmingly to endorse the Act.

Last year during the independence referendum campaign, the Prime Minister invited Scots not to leave the UK but to stay and lead the UK. With the overwhelming mandate we have received from the people of Scotland in the recent general election, I and my fellow SNP MPs intend to do just that, at least for the time being—to lead the UK. On this issue in particular, we would be proud to join other friends among Opposition Members, and possibly among Government Members too, in a progressive alliance of all Members who believe in the Human Rights Act and the value of participation in international instruments such as the ECHR.

The nationalism of the SNP is a civic nationalism that looks outwards and wishes to play a full part on the world and European stage. For so long as Scotland remains part of the UK, that is the approach that the SNP will advocate. I urge the House not to indulge in the narrow, inward-looking nationalism of withdrawing from the ECHR and drawing up its own Bill of Rights.

My message to the House, and in particular to those on the Government Benches, when considering whether to repeal the Act and leave the ECHR, can best be summarised by the words of my fellow countrywoman, Mary Queen of Scots, when she was on trial for her life before an English court:

“Look to your consciences and remember that the theatre of the whole world is wider than the kingdom of England”.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. As signalled on the annunciator, a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches will apply from now.

12.27 pm

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry). It is not given to many people to arrive here and make their maiden speech from the Front Bench as the official spokesperson for their party. In congratulating her, I simply say that it was not just an excellent maiden speech; it was an excellent Front-Bench speech as well. Clearly, the admiration that many of us in other parts of the UK have for the Scottish legal system and its practitioners is well based. I am sure she will be heard with great authority in the House for many years to come.

To add a personal note, it is a particular pleasure for those, like me, entering their fifth Parliament, not only to find ourselves sitting on the Government Benches

once again, but, more importantly, to be able to welcome a completely Conservative Queen's Speech for the first time in those 18 years. That shows how long it can take. My friendly message to Labour Members is that the political wheel does turn—eventually. If it takes 18 years for the Labour party to perfect the role of an effective Opposition, I will be content, and I wish them a long and happy time of it. Having sat on the Opposition Benches for my first 13 years in Parliament, however, I would pass on a piece of hard-won advice: do not blame the British people for getting it wrong or being fooled by your opponents, but accept that you might have been thinking and saying the wrong things. Until they make that leap of understanding—it took a long time for the Conservative party to make it—they will not take the first step on what can turn out to be a very long journey from the Opposition Benches to the Government Benches.

It is a great pleasure to have a Conservative Prime Minister describing his legislative programme as a one nation programme to help working people. There are those of us who described ourselves as one nation Conservatives when it was considerably less fashionable to do so than it now is. We in particular welcome not just the Queen's Speech, but the underlying ideology. We have seen other parties try it—I think “one nation Labour” comes under the heading of a nice try that did not fly. Now we have a Prime Minister who firmly places himself in the tradition of Conservative one nation Prime Ministers, from John Major, Harold Macmillan, Baldwin and all the way back to Disraeli—Prime Ministers who recognised the need to unite a country that is too easily divided between classes, regions or even the constituent countries of the UK.

Let me deal with a number of Bills that the Home Office is bringing forward, although I may follow the always good example of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) and stray slightly more widely at some stage. I shall start with the extremism Bill. I am sure that all parts of the House will welcome and accept the need for more effective action against extremist organisations and individuals, particularly those who seek to radicalise young people.

I know that Ministers will want to consider these two points on the detail of the Bill. First, we need to think about what the strengthened role for Ofcom will mean. As Ministers will be aware, Ofcom has always been a body that regulates after the fact rather than pre-censoring programmes beforehand. It seems to me that that important distinction should be maintained. Secondly, as mentioned in an intervention on the Home Secretary, there are now many different platforms through which extremist material can be broadcast so that young people can see it. Getting those platforms to take down the extremist content might be more effective and increasingly important in trying to combat such material than simply looking at traditional broadcasting regulation. It will be important to reflect on the details of the extremism Bill.

On the investigatory powers Bill, I was delighted to hear my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary make the point that we need to strike a balance between the freedoms and the privacy that are an essential part of democratic life in this country, and the need to be able to deal not just with terrorism but with organised crime. Organised criminals are as adept as terrorists at using communications data and new forms of communication

[*Damian Green*]

to commit their crimes. The draft Bill that was before the House for some years included proposals to see the provisions on data taken out of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and to allow the creation of a new regulatory framework.

Let me make two basic points. First, the degree of oversight seems to me to be key—and not just the degree of oversight, but who operates it. There needs to be an important element of independence in that, whether or not it be judicial or parliamentary or some mixture of the two. Getting the oversight right will go a long way towards making more acceptable to those in this place who are very concerned about civil liberties the increased powers that might be necessary for the police and the security services. Secondly, I hope Ministers will address the amount of time for which data can be retained. Given that I was responsible for abolishing the Labour Government's identity card scheme, I absolutely do not want this Government to go down the route whereby the state holds individuals' private information for unnecessarily long periods. I urge Ministers to reflect on that.

On the immigration Bill, I know from personal experience that trying to cope with immigration is like squeezing a balloon: one pushes one side and something new pops up on the other side. There is a need for a constant refreshing of the means of control over immigration; the legislation and the controls need constant updating. I particularly welcome the idea of having a much more robust system on welfare for people coming here. The issue goes wider than immigration. If the welfare state is to continue to maintain legitimacy and people's confidence, we must retain the idea that those who can should contribute and that when people need it, they can take out from it. That has been a settled idea, popular with the British people for generations. They think, "We will contribute if we can, and if we need it, we will take out", but if people who are seen not to have contributed are able to take out, the moral basis of the welfare state will die away, which would be an extremely serious matter.

On the proposed policing and criminal justice Bill, I want to address one welcome and necessary issue—changes to how the police will deal with people with mental health problems. Police officers have told me that out on patrol they spend about a third of their time dealing with people who are by no definition criminals but who are suffering from mental health problems. Those police officers are aware that they are not paid to do that and that other mental health professionals would do much better for the victims of those mental health problems. The moves embodied in this particular Bill will be most welcome.

I welcome the new Lord Chancellor to his place, and I view it as appropriate to take a careful look at and consult on proposals for a human rights Act. I think we need to make Parliament and the British courts the arbiters of individual decisions, while writing into our law the original European convention on human rights, which contains essential freedoms. There are existing models in other countries, such as the German constitutional court, showing that national sovereignty can be combined with adherence to the convention principles and membership of the Council of Europe.

I would be extremely reluctant to see Britain withdraw from the convention, which I think would send out all the wrong signals.

Finally, I welcome the European referendum Bill. I will be campaigning for Britain to remain a member of a reformed Europe. I agree with much of what my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset said, although it is possible that we might find ourselves on different sides of this argument. It is a grand strategic choice, which will affect Britain and its place in the world for decades. I hope that the debate will be conducted in that way. It is an extremely important debate about the future of our country and our ability not just to stay prosperous, but to project our voice in the world. I believe that that is best done within the European Union.

There is a large amount to welcome in this Queen's Speech. It is the legislative embodiment of pragmatic moderate conservatism. As such, it deserves—and I am sure it will receive—the support of this House and the people of this country.

12.37 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I was delighted to hear the speech of the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry). When I was elected 28 years ago, it was said that too many lawyers were entering the House of Commons. However, I think we should make an exception in her case and in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer)—two very distinguished QCs who are making their maiden speeches today. The hon. and learned Lady will clearly be a star of this Parliament, and we will all want to hear more of what she has to say on these issues. I want to correct the hon. and learned Lady on one point. Edinburgh may be the most beautiful capital city in the world, but she needs to come to see Leicester, which is by far the most beautiful city in England.

I welcome you to the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I want to say to the electors of Leicester East, "Thank you for sending me back for my seventh term". It is good to see the House with so many new faces in it, and I particularly welcome the most diverse House of Commons that we have ever had, with more women and more members of the ethnic minority community than ever before. When my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) and I were elected, there were only four MPs from the black and Asian minority communities; we now have 41, including the first woman of Asian origin ever elected in Scotland, the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh). I was about to say that she is sitting in her usual place, but that is, of course, usually the place of UKIP MPs—and we are delighted that she has taken it over. There are problems with seating, but we are very pleased to see her there.

This Queen's Speech debate has been dominated by Europe and immigration. I agree with much of what the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green) said about Europe, but not so much with what he said about immigration. I think the Government need to confront real problems on that issue. They made a start in the last Parliament. In the past, Labour Ministers have said "mea culpa" over the broken system that existed under successive Governments, both Labour and Conservative.

I was pleased when the last Government abolished the UK Border Agency—as a direct result, I should say, of recommendations made in the last Parliament by the Home Affairs Committee, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) and others were members. The fact is, however, that while we can pass numerous Acts of Parliament in the House of Commons, we will have real problems if the system of enforcement does not work effectively. As I said to the Home Secretary earlier, only 3% of the allegations that are made about illegal migration result in deportation. I echo the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) in saying that Labour Members will support the Government's efforts to deal with illegal migration and abuse by passing new legislation, but we must have an enforcement system that works, and it must go beyond some of the initiatives that we saw five years ago.

I am particularly concerned about what is happening in the Mediterranean. I do not believe that the solution offered by the European Union—a quota system—is the answer. To my mind, the answer is to give a huge amount of support to the countries of the Maghreb, because that is where the problem lies. Last year, 92% of the people who entered Italy had come from Libya. Sometimes we have to step back and remember the way in which our foreign policy decisions affect countries, bearing in mind that it results in attempts by refugees and asylum seekers to come to western Europe.

Along with others, including my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North, I went to Calais to see the large number of people who wished to come and settle in the United Kingdom. Many had paid up to €7,000 to people-traffickers in order to get to France, and they had one ambition: to come and live in the United Kingdom. It is far too late for us to deal with the situation in Calais. Even passing laws in the House will not deal with the problem; it must be dealt with on an EU basis, and that means that we must work with colleagues to deal with it at source. We must work with the transition countries, but we must also deal with the countries that are most affected by these crises.

In the last Parliament, the Home Secretary initiated a revolution in the landscape of policing. She is still in her job, and we shall be able to see whether that landscape has finally settled down. We hope very much that there will be no more change, because although change is sometimes very attractive, if we mess with the system any more, we shall see a great many disgruntled people operating in the system.

I am saddened to learn that Keith Bristow, whom the Home Secretary appointed to run the National Crime Agency, has just announced that he will stand down next year. A top cop who, when he was given the job, hoped that he would be there for a number of years to bed in the new agency is now going to leave. If policing is to be effective, we shall need to consider such personnel issues, and ensure that we carry the police force with us. I see that the Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice is present. I am sure that he is in regular contact with all the stakeholders, but they have been through a great deal, and I think that we should now step back and ensure that the system beds in.

As for the question of the European Union, I am one of the Labour Members who feel that it is important to give the British people a choice in an in/out referendum.

I am absolutely clear about how I will vote—I will vote to stay in the European Union—but I think that it was wrong for us to say, for years and years, that this House rather than the British people should make the decision. They now have a chance to make that decision, and my party is in favour of the referendum. We will support the Europe Bill that was included in the Gracious Speech.

However, I think that we should be careful with our use of the word “reform”. I know that the Prime Minister is busy this week—I believe that he will meet Angela Merkel tomorrow, he has already met the Danish Prime Minister, and Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, went to see him last Sunday—but we need the House to be involved in these decisions. I do not think that we can leave it entirely to the Prime Minister. It is not that I do not trust the Prime Minister—of course I do: he is the elected Prime Minister of this country—but I think that the House needs a say in what constitutes the reform agenda. It must be about more than just changing the benefits system; we need a fundamental reform of the way in which the EU performs its business.

To assist that process, I think that we need Members such as the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) and the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), as well as Opposition Members, to contribute their views on how the reform agenda can be developed. If that happens, the British people will see this as a genuine negotiation. The worst possible outcome for the Government would be a belief that the only purpose was to have a referendum, and that the matter would then be settled for a generation. If we take a proper, thorough look at the way in which the institutions operate, the British people will be satisfied that we have done a good job.

I saw no reference in the Queen's Speech to our relations with India. I think that the way in which we have developed relations with the second-most populous country on earth has been particularly successful under successive Governments, and I therefore think it important for us to invite the Prime Minister of India, Mr Modi, to visit Britain. I hope that that is on the Government's agenda, although it was not in the Queen's Speech. The official visits have already been announced—it is the President of China who is coming—but I think that we ought to adopt an even-handed approach to China and India, given that they represent two-sixths of humanity.

Finally, let me say something about the national health service. As some Members will know, I suffer from type 2 diabetes. I know that you have a particular interest in the subject as well, Mr Deputy Speaker, for I have attended many meetings with you. Apparently we are going to increase the NHS budget. I want it to increase in support of preventive work on diabetes, given that 700,000 people in the country have diabetes but are entirely unaware of it. They include many members of the south-east Asian community, and many members of other communities. Unless we provide preventive care, the cost to the NHS will be even greater than the 10% of the budget that we are currently spending. We are spending so much money on an area of health policy that we cannot reverse, while we could be helping to prevent those with diabetes from acquiring the most serious strain, and even helping to put off the advent of diabetes for years.

[Keith Vaz]

Those are some of the issues that I hope the House will be able to debate and develop during the year.

12.47 pm

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): Let me begin by congratulating the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) on her eloquent maiden speech. I look forward to her continuing contribution to this place.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this important debate. The Gracious Speech set out a clear vision of what our country can be. It can be a country of security and opportunity for everyone at every stage of life: a country where people, wherever they are and wherever they live, can have the chance of a good education, a decent job, a home of their own, and the peace of mind that comes from being able to raise a family and enjoy a secure retirement.

I want to speak about what the Bills that were outlined yesterday mean for my constituents, the good people of Pendle—who, I am delighted to say, returned me to the House to speak on their behalf with an increased majority. I shall refer to a range of Bills, rather than concentrating on the home affairs elements that form the main focus of today's debate. However, given that in the past 24 hours, lobby groups such as Amnesty have encouraged my constituents to email me about the Human Rights Act, let me put it on record that I strongly support the steps that the Government are taking to replace it with a British Bill of Rights. For me, this is an issue of sovereignty. I believe that it should be for British courts and British judges to uphold our rights and freedoms, as they did very well for hundreds of years before the current Human Rights Act came into force.

Let me now deal with some broader issues. The most important issue for my constituents is the need for the new Government to continue to build on the success of the last in pursuing a long-term economic plan which helps working people, rebalances our economy by supporting both manufacturing and the north of England, and allows workers to keep more of their hard-earned money.

We have already achieved a lot. Under the last Labour Government, 1.8 million manufacturing jobs were lost, hitting the north of England and constituencies such as mine hard. When the coalition Government came to power, the future of our country was by no means certain. We were still in the throes of recession, borrowing billions of pounds to bridge the gap between income and expenditure, confidence was at an all-time low and, to top it all, we were informed by the former Chief Secretary, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), in his now infamous note, that there was no money left. It was against that backdrop—that toxic economic inheritance—that the coalition Government had to set about rebuilding and rebalancing our economy. That required tough, and at times unpopular, decisions and hard choices. In this Parliament we need to finish the job of clearing the deficit, rather than passing ever-increasing debts on to our children.

The Queen's Speech sets our new Government on the right track. The ban on income tax, VAT and national insurance increases for five years will be very welcome

to the people I represent, as will be the 30 hours of free childcare a week for three and four-year-olds from 2016-17.

Mr Syms: I am glad to see my hon. Friend back here with an increased majority. The childcare proposals are key to our being successful over the next five years.

Andrew Stephenson: Definitely. In the election campaign I visited many of the nurseries in my constituency, where we talked about childcare and the need to expand provision. The nurseries across Pendle and the rest of the UK will welcome the Government's proposals.

Measures to further strengthen the northern powerhouse and support our businesses are also very good to hear. In March, the final funding package for the largest redundant mill complex in Lancashire, Brierfield Mills, which is located in my constituency, was agreed. Since I helped secure £1.5 million in Government funding to buy Brierfield Mills for the local council in March 2012, I have been actively involved in promoting the regeneration of that massive mill complex. A masterplan was drawn up in 2013, including a hotel, flats, offices and a pub, and after a hard-fought battle we helped to secure assisted area status for the site in July 2014, which helped to unlock additional funding.

Following extensive lobbying, the scheme became part of the Government's growth deal with the Lancashire local enterprise partnership, in which there was a record £251 million of funding for projects across Lancashire. Using that funding, the LEP agreed to allocate £3.7 million, to go alongside £1 million of regional growth funding I helped secure and £3.5 million in funding from Pendle Borough and Lancashire County Councils, meaning work can now get under way and should be complete by the end of 2017.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman talks about finishing the job. I wonder whether he has any idea how that will come across to my constituents in Brent Central, who have experienced a 50% increase in unemployment among black, Asian and minority ethnic young people. Also hundreds of people have had to move out because of the legislation on the bedroom tax.

Andrew Stephenson: Across this country in every constituency we have seen a fall in unemployment, so I would be very surprised if there has been an increase in the hon. Lady's constituency. The last Government created 1,000 jobs a day. Some 2 million jobs were created across the UK by the last coalition Government and this Government—this majority Conservative Government, which won such an outstanding victory at the general election—now plan to go much further in helping people into work and helping people to support their own families.

I was talking about Brierfield Mills in my constituency because I feel that shows what can be achieved in terms of transforming local communities and boosting economic growth. I feel the measures in the Queen's Speech will make even more projects such as that possible in the coming months and years.

Also in east Lancashire, on Sunday 17 May, the first train journey to Manchester from Burnley in more than 40 years took place, following the reopening of the Todmorden curve, a long-overdue investment finally

made possible because of the coalition Government's regional growth fund. Commitments by the new Government to push ahead with even more rail improvements that will benefit the north, including HS2, are therefore to be welcomed.

Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman understand that many of the jobs that have been created are part-time, insecure and low-pay jobs, with no protection in work? Does he also understand that many people are not on unemployment benefit purely because of the massive number of sanctions that take them out of receiving benefit, therefore varnishing the figures? He talks about rebalancing; this country has become more unbalanced with the wealthiest doubling their wealth while the poorest are suffering more, with many people visiting food banks—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr George Howarth): Order. The hon. Lady should realise that interventions must be brief.

Andrew Stephenson: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, but all I would say is she is completely wrong in every point she makes. Office for National Statistics figures show that 80% of the new jobs created under the last Government in the last year have been full-time jobs. We are starting to see wages rise. In the north of England, so often overlooked and neglected by the Labour party, we are starting to see a real economic recovery and this Government need to work to support that. That is why Conservative MPs across the country have been returned, the vast majority with increased majorities, and the hon. Lady's party's negative campaign was rejected by the British public.

Unemployment across Pendle has more than halved. Yesterday, on the same day as the Queen's Speech, we saw that consumer confidence is now at a record high and people's positivity about their job prospects and personal finances is at its highest level for seven and a half years. That is great news, as is the news that unemployment in Pendle now stands at just 2.5%, but there must not be an ounce of complacency from anyone in any part of this House. The Government must continue to do everything they can to support our businesses, large and small, and make the UK the best place to do business in the world, allowing those businesses to create the well-paid jobs our constituents want to see.

This is particularly important in Pendle, because while the vast majority of firms continue to expand, on the last day Parliament sat before the general election Rolls-Royce contacted me to say there would be a further 121 job losses at its sites in Barnoldswick in my constituency, a deeply regrettable decision given the huge support provided to the aerospace sector by the coalition Government, the size of Rolls-Royce's order book and the fantastic skills workers have at the two Barnoldswick sites.

I raised my concerns with the former Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the former right hon. Member for Twickenham, and I have already been in touch with the new Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills about what the Government can do to support workers. I am being kept updated on what is being done by the Barnoldswick Rolls-Royce skills and job retention action group. However, this just

goes to show why the measures in the Queen's Speech on continuing to support British manufacturing and the British recovery are so important.

Finally, I would like to turn to what was said in the speech about the NHS about implementing the NHS's own five-year plan, increasing the health budget and ensuring the NHS works on a seven-day basis. In 2007, under Labour, Burnley general hospital saw its accident and emergency department downgraded as more and more services were transferred to Blackburn. Poor care was regularly front page news; there were reports on the high rates of hospital-acquired infections such as MRSA. Thanks to the action taken since 2010, we have seen a real improvement in the NHS in my area. In 2014, we saw the opening of a new £9 million urgent care centre at Burnley general hospital, a new £4 million health centre in Colne and a new £6.3 million A and E at Airedale hospital. Hospital-acquired infections have more than halved. Since 2010 East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust has recruited 391 extra nurses and 40 more doctors. Also, in March this year, the last Government announced a £15.6 million cash boost to refurbish parts of Burnley general hospital, following extensive lobbying by the former Member for Burnley, my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) and myself, but we need to go further, and that is why I welcome what was said in yesterday's Queen's Speech about further strengthening our NHS and the other Bills due to come before this House.

I believe Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech sets out a clear and ambitious programme for the year ahead and I look forward to working with the Government to deliver it.

12.59pm

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me early in this debate on the Loyal Address and giving me the opportunity of making my maiden speech.

As another lawyer who is new to the House—it could be a theme this afternoon—I start by paying tribute to the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) and her contribution earlier. I can safely say that it set the standard for the rest of the maiden speeches to follow.

Ninety-six years ago, the first Member of Parliament for what was then the constituency of Pontypool made his maiden speech from the Opposition Benches. In it he paid tribute to the miners, the railwaymen and the women of the Women's Industrial League. Those generations may be gone now, but their values are not, and we in Torfaen, the eastern valley of the south Wales coalfield, still have a great sense of unity and of solidarity that is based on a very simple principle: "you judge the strength of a society not by how you treat the wealthiest, but by how you treat the most vulnerable."

It is a matter of great pride to me to stand here before you today, Mr Deputy Speaker, as the grandson of an eastern valley miner, and to succeed a Member of Parliament who was himself the son of an eastern valley miner. I want to pay the warmest of tributes to my predecessor, Paul Murphy. As a historian, I know only too well the challenges that Paul faced, first as the Minister of State in Northern Ireland from 1997 to 1999, chairing the talks process, and later, as Secretary

[*Nick Thomas-Symonds*]

of State, over a three-year period. As a historian I can only say I appreciate Paul's monumental achievement in overcoming those challenges.

Paul is also a great figure in Wales's political journey, having served twice as the Secretary of State for Wales to ensure that our devolution settlement bedded down and worked to the benefit of the people of Wales. Above all, Paul never forgot, while holding those great offices on the national stage, that his most important priority was always the people of the eastern valley. Paul always carried out those roles with great courtesy, great dignity and great integrity. That is why Paul Murphy is respected in all parts of this House. In Paul Murphy I know that I have the model Member of Parliament to follow.

I first met Paul Murphy on work experience at his office in 1997—a year that is remembered fondly by Opposition Members. After my work experience finished, he wrote a reference, in which he said that one day I would end up with a top job. Well, I cannot think of a greater job than representing the people of Torfaen.

Torfaen is defined by the Afon Llwyd, the grey river, that starts in the hills above my home town of Blaenavon, a world heritage site, and flows south through Pontypool and into the new town of Cwmbran. Indeed the very name of the constituency, Torfaen, comes from the river, because Torfaen, or rock breaker, was the name of the river in pre-industrial times. That river, and the landscape it has carved out, of a deep and narrow valley, is still a clue to its modern-day character, because, while every village and town in Torfaen is unique, we are as a community very tightly packed together. We are also, incidentally, a community that has benefited from migration from all over the UK and from beyond.

We have a great industrial heritage, one that can be experienced at Big Pit mining museum, the national mining museum of Wales. We also have a wonderful, rich cultural heritage of choirs, chapels and rugby, and I look forward to a great 2015-16 season at Pontypool rugby club.

In Cwmbran, there is the grave of John Fielding, who won the Victoria Cross for his heroism at the battle of Rorke's Drift in January 1879. That grave is a fitting symbol of Torfaen's great tradition of public service and self-sacrifice.

The past five years have been extremely difficult for the people of Torfaen, and I fear on the basis of this Queen's Speech that the next five years will be more difficult still. I worry about cuts in our public services and in police numbers to a police service that is already severely under strain. We need a Government, more broadly, who change their economic policy, who truly work for the ordinary men and women of my constituency—a constituency in which scores of families have been forced over the past five years to rely, on a weekly basis, on food banks. We need a Government who seek to promote, not undermine, employment rights; a Government who look to give a future to people who are on zero-hours contracts so that they can move away from them and build a secure future for their families. Above all, for security of employment in Torfaen, we need a yes vote in the European referendum that will come before the end of 2017.

I have been given a lot of advice since my arrival in this House. Probably the one piece that sticks in my mind is simply, "be yourself". Prior to becoming a Member I was lucky enough to write biographies of two great figures of the Labour movement, Aneurin Bevan and Clement Attlee. I take my inspiration from that Labour Government of 1945-51—not just the great improvement that they brought about for working people in the post-war era, but their central political lesson that politics is ultimately about constructive achievement for people. There is another lesson from that Government and their great Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, one that you, Mr Deputy Speaker, may have some sympathy with. It is that democracy is about government by discussion, but it works only if we can stop people talking.

But it is to talk for Torfaen that I am in this place—a central duty and one I will never forget.

1.7 pm

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) on his maiden speech. He painted a vivid picture of his constituency and spoke with great eloquence and fluency in making his points. He also spoke with great soul and with a great sense of compassion for his constituents. That will hold him in good stead in this House, and all Members will benefit from his contributions in the years ahead.

The hon. Gentleman brought with him what I hope we all bring, which is a sense of energy from our engagement with the electorate over the past few weeks, as we participated in and celebrated our fantastic democracy. I am sure that he, along with me, will have heard one message from his constituents, which is that their main interest is to ensure and assure a better future for their children and grandchildren. We may differ on the prescriptions to achieve that objective, but that will be the thing we both remember from the recent election.

This idea of a better future arises not only in the sense of a better economic future for our constituents, but in the sense that we have a Government that will stand up for and defend the freedoms of our country, and reflect the best aspects and values of our great nation. Let me try to cover three aspects of that future in my contribution on Her Majesty's most Gracious Speech.

On the issue of values as it pertains to the Home Office, work particularly needs to be done on the future of immigration detention. The Yarl's Wood detention centre is next to my constituency, and it is part of a detention estate in this country that has grown under Governments of all colours and all stripes. It has grown from being one that focused on a range of people to being not a minor part of our immigration policy, but more of a default position. As the all-party group report published just before the election showed, we need to reconsider a number of aspects of immigration detention. First, we need to bring in a time limit for detention, so that people are not detained indefinitely. Secondly, we need to ensure that vulnerable people are not detained at all. I was encouraged when our Home Secretary said earlier that she and her Department are looking at a positive way in which immigration detention in this country can be reformed. At the moment, immigration detention is ineffective and costly, and for too frequently it leads to instances of injustice that are a

stain on our country's values. So I look to her and her ministerial team to engage positively with people from all parts of the House to reform immigration detention.

Also on values, I have some concerns about the Prevent strategy. Some of my constituents who are in positions where they will be or have been asked to engage in Prevent have told me alarming stories about the lack of precision in the guidance provided to them on how they can perform their role in ensuring that extremism does not take root in their particular areas of responsibility, be it in education, social work or other activities. During my term of office here, I will be looking critically at the Prevent strategy to make sure that it is being implemented with the best of intentions and in the way intended by the ministerial team.

This is a perilous area, because if we get the Prevent strategy wrong, we risk giving succour to those who say that it is an attack on a particular religion and that we are setting one part of society against another. I do not want that to happen; everyone in this country, no matter what their background, should have the right to freedom of expression. They should have the right to express their own religion and to say what they believe in their own way. They should not feel that they are targeted by some form of shadow organisation of activities that will point them out and sanction them if they behave in a way or say things that are thought, for not a very precise reason, to be extremist. So I will be a defender of those rights against the extremes of any Government policy put in place under the title of "Prevent".

Our freedoms also depend on a strong military force that is engaged actively in preventing the decline of freedom around the world. I have concerns that the UK Government are not doing enough in a number of arenas around the world. We are not doing enough in our work with China to push back on China. It is an assertive power in the South China sea, where it is creating new land embattlements on the Spratly islands and other islands, and having a domain that is far in excess of any internationally recognised limits.

I am also concerned about freedoms in Bangladesh, and I hope the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development will look at the decline of the democratic space there and ensure that we are putting all the pressure we can on to ensure that democracy can flourish. I am concerned at hearing about people being targeted and murdered on the streets of Dhaka because of what they write. I am also worried about the fact that the Rohingya Muslims who have left Burma are not even welcome in Bangladesh, and I am worried about the last election in Bangladesh and about how the country will move forward in the next few years.

I am also concerned about the Government's response in Nigeria in tackling the threat from Boko Haram. In all those things we see that there is a role to play for not only our military force, but our engagement through our international development efforts. I fear that if the UK Government do not assert themselves internationally in both ways, and have the resources to do so, the freedoms we have in this country, which we have taken for granted for generations, will be under threat.

The Government also need to take account of the most fundamental threat to our country's future and our future generations; we need to continue the work of getting our economy back on track and of reducing our deficit, and then to begin the important task of repaying

the debt. One crucial thing the Labour party did not understand in the last election was the importance of not only getting rid of the deficit, but reducing debt. The debt burden that we pass on to future generations is a stain on this generation's excess. I want to support a Government—and I know I will be supporting one—that are determined in their efforts to ensure that we do not do that to future generations. An important part of that policy will relate to how we understand the work of wages in the UK. We need to find a way to encourage our private sector employers to pay the living wage. We need to find ways in which we can reduce the massive amount of corporate welfare paid out in tax credits, not by reducing people's wages, but by reducing the dependence of companies on the wages they pay people being subsidised by the taxpayer.

We also need to move forward assertively with the Government's extension of the right to buy. That policy offers something that also eluded the Labour party in the last election; it takes account of the fact that most people want the opportunity to own their own home, regardless of whether they live in a council house or one provided by a social housing association. I look forward to seeing the Government's proposals on the right to buy.

Beyond that, there are one or two specific policies I hope we will cover in this Parliament. The arrangements for our emergency services—our fire, ambulance and police services—could do with reform. We could reform their boundaries so that they are contiguous; we could consider a merger of the red 1 and red 2 ambulance services with our fire service; and we could consider how to make greater use of national procurement so that we reduce costs in our emergency services. I hope the Government will engage with the unions and others to ensure that that happens successfully.

As a Parliament, we need to have a proper debate about the right to die. That may not be an issue to deal with in Government time, but we need to discuss it as a Parliament. I have constituents, as do all hon. Members, who confront this issue with very different perspectives, and we need to make sure we give them voice while we are here.

Finally, let me mention an issue that has affected some of my constituents significantly: safety for our taxi drivers. This is covered in the Law Commission's proposals and is due to be covered in legislation, and I hope that taxi safety is one issue to which the Government will also give time.

1.17 pm

Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): Thank you for calling me, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I welcome you to the Chair, as you oversee our proceedings.

We have just emerged from a long general election campaign, during which immigration featured as a hugely important and sometimes toxic issue. In Barking and Dagenham, immigration has been at the heart of politics for more than a decade. Indeed, in 2006, voters in my constituency were so angry with all mainstream politicians that they chose to protest and elected 12 British National party councillors to the local authority. Focusing on the issue of immigration has therefore been central to my constituency work for many years, and I am thankful that the good people of Barking and Dagenham worked with me to expel and keep out the heinous politics of the BNP by denying it any democratic mandate.

[Margaret Hodge]

My work and experience, however, leaves me depressed by the Government's failure to learn the lessons of the past and frustrated by their approach, as set out today and in the Queen's Speech. Although some proposals enjoy cross-party support, the Government's overall approach continues to be based on a false prospectus, which is that we can somehow dramatically cut net migration, either by yet more domestic legislation or by some fantasy renegotiation of free movement in Europe. Despite the failure to deliver a reduction in net migration over the past five years, the Government continue to promise to do so during this Parliament. Yet all the facts show, unambiguously, that they will fail to deliver on their ambition, and the worst thing is that they know that now. Their pledge on numbers is hollow. They are delivering on rhetoric; but failing to realise the reality, and by so conning the British public they are further eroding any remaining trust people have in their political leaders.

Recent figures show net migration rising yet again. Standing at around 300,000, it is at almost its highest level ever and is more than 100,000 higher than the 2013 figures. Despite endless Acts of Parliament, a stream of bureaucratic reorganisations and all the tough talk, net migration is high and rising, and that is not just down to free movement of labour in Europe. Yes, net migration from the EU was up by nearly 50,000 during the year to September 2014, but net migration from outside the EU went up by almost the same number—54,000.

Migrants do not come to Britain to scrounge benefits. Many come to study, which is a good thing, as it brings much-needed income to our universities, strengthens our research and development capability and helps the next generation establish lifelong friendships and relationships that will support our international interests and strengthen UK security over decades to come. Most migrants come because they have secured a job, and we need their skills both to enable growth and to maintain our public services. Fewer than one in five comes to Britain to look for work. Even if we could stop those jobseekers at our borders, net migration would still be running at more than 200,000.

The truth is that people crossing national borders are a feature of the modern world. In the same way that capital crosses borders in a globalised economy, so people cross borders in a globalised world. Just as the Chinese are likely to provide the capital to build British nuclear power stations, and the Indians provide the capital for the Jaguar plant in the midlands, so people from other countries staff our hospitals and work in our industries. We cannot and will not buck that trend. I remember when we thought that we could cut the net migration numbers by toughening up the regime on asylum seekers. We did that, and then the numbers seeking work permits grew. We tried to close that route too, and then people tried to come in through the student visa route. The Government have now tightened up that avenue, potentially damaging our educational sector. Is the next step to get tougher on visitors and damage our vibrant tourism sector?

People come to Britain because we are a tolerant and open society and we have a successful and growing economy with plenty of opportunities. It is a good place in which to live, work and bring up a family. Migration

will continue to happen and we should stop pretending that we can stop it. The dishonesty at the heart of the Government's policy is what is impacting on people's views. That dishonesty is breeding mistrust of politics and the political class. When the Government promise to cut the numbers and then fail, people lose trust in politicians and politics. What we really need from the Government is strong, open and candid leadership, which changes the conversation about immigration and talks about the reality of globalisation and the movement of people. Why are Ministers so frightened of telling the truth? Doing so should not stop us doing the things that we can and must do. Here again, the Government have failed to deliver over the past five years. It is the lack of control of our borders, more than the numbers coming in, that angers people and fosters suspicion and hostility.

When we examined those issues in the Public Accounts Committee, we were horrified by the sheer incompetence we found time and again. Some 50,000 people whose applications to remain in Britain had been rejected had disappeared into the community. Some 29,000 applications for asylum, which dated back at least seven years, remain unresolved, with many people still waiting for the first decision on their case. More than 10,000 foreigners who had been in prison have not been deported despite a 10-fold increase in the staff who were supposed to be tasked with delivering the deportation of foreign national prisoners. Indeed we uncovered the fact that one in six foreign national offenders who had completed their sentences had absconded and disappeared into the community.

Let us get those things right and deliver the basics. That requires more than tougher rhetoric, or yet more Home Office legislation. It means simply delivering effectively and efficiently. That is how the Government can establish confidence in the immigration system and in how we control our borders. Getting a grip on the bureaucracy will achieve far more than passing more legislation in this House of Commons.

I welcome the cross-party consensus on the difficult issue of how we ensure fairness to everybody in the rationing and allocation of public resources. I first challenged the old orthodoxy in 2008 and I know from my work in the constituency that if we introduce the principle that people should contribute to a society and earn their entitlement before accessing the public goods that have to be rationed, whether it is social housing or benefits, we would be seen as being fair to everybody, be they recent immigrants or families who have lived in the UK for generations. Such an approach helps to lance the boil that so easily turns fear of the impact of immigration into racism and hostility to people of different races, creeds and colour.

I support the Government's intention to develop that principle. We would all do well to understand that only 6% of EU migrants claim out-of-work benefits and many of them have earned that entitlement by working and living in Britain for many years. That does not absolve the Government of their responsibility to ensure that there are enough school places, GPs and hospitals and public transport facilities to meet the needs of everybody in our communities, including migrants and their families.

The Conservatives' record over the past five years has been abysmal. While the Government wasted their very limited capital creating free schools in areas where there

are a surplus of school places, they refused properly to fund new primary and secondary schools in areas such as mine, where there is huge pressure for more places.

The Government will not build a one-nation Britain if they do not transform their approach to immigration. Honest explanations, not empty rhetoric, are what will unite Britain. Efficient administration, not pages of legislation, are what will convince people that the Government are in control. Investment in our public services, so that immigrants do not become the scapegoats, is what will help us build a united Britain where communities gain strength from their diversity.

1.27 pm

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge), for whom I have huge respect. None the less, I have to say that her speech did remind me of Talleyrand's comment on the Bourbons, who, he said, had learned nothing and forgotten nothing. Labour should remember that one reason why it lost the trust of the British people is that it lost control of immigration. It is the responsibility of Government to control immigration. The British people demand it of us and this Government have set out the ways in which they will do so. I trust that the right hon. Lady will support them when we read the immigration Bill.

I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) for her speech. It was full of the vim and ginger for which she is renowned, but it sounded less a critique of the Gracious Speech and more a screen test for the leadership of the Labour party. She is a very brave lady, as she not only has taken on the shadow Home Office brief again, but is running for the leadership of her party. That is taking two very big gulps from a very poisoned chalice, and I wish her well, even if some of her colleagues do not.

There are some very strong Bills in this Gracious Speech and I shall touch on two of them. The first is the energy Bill. Energy security is a huge issue for our country; indeed it is a matter of national security. A decade or so ago, we were a net gas exporter. We now import most of our gas supplies. If we are to meet our carbon reduction obligations under the Climate Change Act 2008, we must switch off our coal-fired power stations in the next few years. They currently provide 34% of our generating capacity. To make up the shortfall in the short term, we will need more gas-fired stations, and that means importing even more gas. I do not think that the British people, British firms and British manufacturing wish to increasingly rely for their lighting and heating on the caprice of Mr Putin or on the direction of Glencore tankers as they change course on the high seas towards the highest bidder.

I hope that the energy Bill will focus on increasing the exploitation of our shale gas reserves, which can not only provide the Treasury with a welcome income stream and provide many thousands of new jobs, but help our energy security. I trust also that the Bill will look at increasing and enhancing gas storage facilities around our country so that we are not just a few hours away from running out of gas, as we have been in some winters.

I also hope that the Bill will deal with our creaking energy infrastructure—the pipes, the pylons and the power stations that keep our lights on and our water

warm. All parties accept that we need to spend about £110 billion in just 10 years on that infrastructure. The big six—however much we sometimes criticise them—will supply £70 billion of that £110 billion investment on their current trajectory. We need more smaller companies to come in and meet the £40 billion shortfall. Otherwise, the poor old taxpayer and bill payer, the teacher, the plumber and the council worker, will have to make up the cost. The energy Bill is an important Bill, and I hope that it will contain those provisions.

Another extremely innovative Bill is the city devolution Bill, which will write the northern powerhouse concept into law and, I hope, make it a reality. I hope that the city fathers and the city mothers in the west midlands will take note of the provisions in that Bill. My own local large city, Birmingham, was known in the 19th century as the workshop of the world. Today it needs to be the science laboratory of the world. It is proud to call itself our second city. I say to people in the midlands, “Why have so little ambition? Why stop at being second? Why not try to be the first city of Britain?” If Birmingham and its environs is to be the first city of our country, it needs to take on that northern powerhouse to provide homes, skilled workers and integrated transport infrastructure. I trust that the leaders of our local councils will look at the Bill, talk to Ministers and realise the opportunities that can be found in a midlands powerhouse.

This is a strong Queen's Speech. It is a fresh Queen's Speech. It contains Bills that mean business. I believe that it seals the deal that we made with the country on 7 May, and I look forward to supporting it in the next 12 months.

1.34 pm

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I am grateful to have the chance to speak on the contents of the Gracious Address, on what it is likely to mean to my constituents, on what should have been included, and on what my constituents need from this Government. Of course, the speech contains a lot of warm, but ultimately hollow, words. It talks about one nation, opportunities for those who are disadvantaged, boosting the economy and bringing the country together, but warm words often hide harsher realities, and sadly this legislative programme is no exception. The speech refers to boosting economic productivity and living standards, but were these not problems during the past five years? The last Government wasted more than three years presiding over flat growth and painful austerity, and the truth of the matter is that the economic situation is only marginally better now than it was in 2010.

The speech refers to the Government providing full employment with a requirement to report on the economy, on jobs and on apprenticeship creation. But all too often over the past couple of years I have heard about employers using apprenticeships as an excuse for cheap labour, with apprentices taken on, discarded when the apprenticeship is finished and forced to make way when a new batch is hired to replace them. That is not an entry to a career, it is exploitation. We can interpret the plans to reduce the legislative burden on small businesses to create jobs as code for a bonfire of health and safety protections for workers—something I have already seen happen under the most recent law changes.

[Robert Ffello]

Now I have to admit that, at the time of the speech, I saluted the headline-grabbing promise that workers on minimum wage would not pay tax, but sadly even that nugget of good news has been watered down to the less appealing promise that if someone works for 30 hours on the minimum wage they will not pay any income tax. Thirty hours on the minimum wage is not enough to live on, so someone working a typical 40-hour week on minimum wage will see a quarter of their income liable to tax. Call me cynical if you will, and many do, but let us see what tax cuts the richest in our society get in the same legislation. During the election campaign, the Chancellor ducked time and again the question about cutting the top rate of tax.

There is a very long list of what is wrong with the measures announced in the Queen's Speech, and I hope to catch your eye, Mr Deputy Speaker, in the forthcoming Second Reading debates so that I can go through them in more detail. Today we are highlighting the home affairs and justice elements of the address. While I welcome in principle the proposals to ban so-called legal highs, there is sadly little else to be welcomed in these two policy areas. Tackling illegal working by seizing the wages of the worker, who has probably been paid a pittance anyway, seems to me to target the wrong person. It is the employer who should face the harshest of penalties for exploiting the illegal worker. With measures to bring forward the snoopers' charter, combined with the ability of the state to declare someone an extremist and severely limit their ability to work, we may face the sort of scenario normally reserved for dystopian movies.

At face value, plans to stop mentally ill people being held in police custody are very much to be welcomed, but when, as in Stoke-on-Trent, there just are not enough beds in secure units, what choice will police officers face? Will they have to put mentally ill people at risk because the resources simply are not there?

I add my voice to those defending the Human Rights Act 1998. Looking more widely, perhaps I missed it during the Speech, but where was the announcement on freezing the amount of education funding per pupil? And what of the proposals that would create chaos for secondary schools if the manifesto commitment were kept to make secondary pupils re-sit SATS when they got to secondary school? Has that been sensibly dropped? Where will the £30 billion of austerity cuts fall? Who will face the axe? Will carers be in the front line for those cuts?

I hope that I am wrong, but I foresee a grim five years ahead. At the end of the next five years, our NHS will be unrecognisable, and not for the good. Private companies will have cherry-picked the most profitable parts, with the remaining core being delivered by the public sector and paid for by an ever-squeezed budget. Waiting lists for non-emergency surgery will go the way they did in the 1980s, with patients waiting years to have a hip or knee operation or forced to suffer the rationing of expensive medicines. Some might say that I am overly sceptical, but the evidence is already there. In North Staffordshire our cancer and end-of-life care is about to be sold off on a 10-year, £1.2 billion project. In the running for the contracts are the likes of CSC Computer Sciences, which was paid billions of pounds to design an NHS record-keeping system that never worked, or

United Health, also known as Optum, which is embroiled in the so-called hospice packing scandal in the US, or Virgin Care, which was warned by the Care Quality Commission about the operation of its other NHS services, or indeed Interserve Investments, the PFI provider that refuses to disclose the role in securing bids of Lord Blackwell, the former Conservative policy chief. I am afraid that all this talk of legalising euthanasia plays straight into the hands of a cash-strapped NHS. We are already hearing evidence of that in other countries.

During the last five years, my constituents have time and again seen draconian cuts to their welfare needs, punishing the poorest and those with disabilities. I have seen people with profound learning disabilities being sanctioned for "not trying hard enough" and people with terminal cancer told that they are fit for work. Indeed, it has almost become a sick joke that the DWP will say that someone is fit for work provided that they are breathing. The massive level of success at appeal proves the truth behind people's claims. People who find their benefit cut from one day to the next are increasingly having to fall back on charities such as the Trussell Trust. I worry that many on the Government Benches share the view of my Tory opponent in the general election, who disputed the number of people relying on food banks and said that he hoped to see more of them in future.

I fear that by 2020 we will have a society where people are almost literally starved into taking minimum-wage, zero-hours jobs and where people have to give up their family home or take in lodgers, or simply go hungry because of the bedroom tax—although of course by then it will be rare to have a council or housing association home, because, rather than the Government building more homes, by 2020 we will have seen the end of social landlords through an enhanced right to buy. Sadly, I believe that by 2020 we will also be back to 1980s standards of education, with a riot of free schools, many opening and closing to get round bad reports from Ofsted. We will see large class sizes once more and another generation lost, with no future, in a job market that benefits the unscrupulous employer.

But it need not be like that. Our NHS could still be saved. Instead of a mad rush to privatise everything for the benefit of Cabinet Ministers' mates in the private health sector, we could invest £8 billion in a proper, joined-up health and social care system, where mental health is finally put on an equal footing with physical care, raising standards up, not pushing them down. We could reform welfare by ensuring a culture of targeting the very small number who abuse the system, while helping those who need help, and by supporting those with debilitating conditions and genuinely ensuring skills and training for those who need to be supported back into the workplace, rather than having these schemes that are just about money making for the training provider without giving any genuine help to people.

By making the minimum wage a living wage, we could end the need for working tax credits, which subsidise poverty pay from employers who know they can get away with it. We could have a tax system that ensures that there is no tax to pay on the basic level of income needed to pay for expenses such as accommodation, food, heating and lighting, while progressively taxing earnings so that those with the most pay the most. On immigration, we should have a properly staffed border

system that ensures that those who come here to work can do so, provided they do not undercut pay and conditions for those working here, while also ensuring that those who want a free ride simply cannot have one.

I want to see our country grow and be strong in a self-assured way that does not need to victimise or be jealous of what others might have. But sadly, after another five years of Tory misrule, I fear it will be everyone for themselves and a justice system that lets the Government get away with it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr George Howarth): Order. Before I call the next speaker, it might be helpful to say that, because of the good discipline that has been shown in speeches, we can now extend the speech limit to 12 minutes.

1.43 pm

Mr Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): Welcome back to the House, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I would like first to congratulate those Members who have made their maiden speeches. The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) was fluent and confident, and we expect to hear more from her in the debates ahead. I thought the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) made a very impressive speech, without notes. I expect he will be a great contributor to the debates in this Chamber. Both of them succeed people who have had very distinguished parliamentary careers. I think history will treat Alistair Darling well when it comes to how he dealt with the difficult situation of the banks collapsing. Paul Murphy was a distinguished Secretary of State—latterly he was Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee—and a thoroughly decent man. Both will be missed.

Like many Members, I have waited 18 years for a Gracious Speech from a Conservative Government. Sometimes it felt like it would take longer than that—certainly after my first election in 1997, some of us wondered whether we would ever have a Conservative majority again. It has taken a lot of work, a lot of effort and, I think, some luck to get back to the situation we are in today. I think history will also treat the coalition Government well. They made a great contribution and started to put the country on the right track in terms of the economy. We have to continue the good work and continue to get the deficit and the debt down, as we pledged to do.

I was particularly pleased prior to the election that the Chancellor announced that we would start to reduce debt levels this year. I hope that over the next five years we will make progress back to a more solvent and dynamic economy. If somebody had said in 2010 that we would have created 2 million jobs, I would have said that, under the circumstances, that would be a very difficult ask, but we have created 2 million jobs. The challenge in this Parliament is to ensure that living standards pick up, that people start to get reasonable pay increases as the labour market tightens and that we do our best to encourage higher productivity.

One way of doing that is not to raise taxes, but to reduce taxes, to increase incentives for people in work. One of the particularly impressive achievements of the

previous Government was to increase tax allowances and at the same time cap welfare, which greatly increased the incentives to work. We have to continue in that way, so that people really feel that they can take jobs and are better off taking jobs. Some of the angriest people in my constituency are people who feel they are working hard and not really getting far—they have got kids' shoes to buy; they have got to pay for petrol for the car—while people in the same road seem to have an easier ride because they have accessed the benefits of the welfare state. The welfare state has to be a safety net—it is still important that it should be there—but the incentives should be loaded on those who take jobs and have families to bring up. We should do everything we can to encourage higher living standards.

I was particularly pleased with the Gracious Speech in that we will finally be able to get legislation through this House on a referendum on the European issue. While I have been in this House, we have had the treaties of Nice, Amsterdam and Lisbon. On every occasion we have tried to get a referendum and we have been rejected. What we are doing is right and proper. I had just left school when we had the last referendum, and the vast majority of Members of this House did not have the opportunity to vote. We have to reset the relationship, and in doing so, we can be a real friend of the European Union. It needs reform. Clearly, the high levels of unemployment and the stodgy way that the eurozone is working at the moment mean that there is an opportunity both for Britain to meet its objectives and for our European partners to meet the objective of having a much more effective European Community. Therefore, I hope that, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) said, we have high ambition for the renegotiation—that we do not rush, or over-rush; that we get it right and put it to the British people so that, at the end of the day, they can make a choice about where they see their future. It is important that we get this right, and I am sure that the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor, who are tasked with this, will be doing all they can to get the right outcome.

I am also pleased that we will continue a lot of the work in the Home Office, as we have set out today. There is a real worry about the impact of the war in Syria and Iraq and about people returning to the United Kingdom, with a worry that many UK citizens may be a danger to their fellow citizens. That is a great challenge for the Home Office. It certainly has to be a high priority for the Government, and it is a worry for many of my constituents. It is also important that we have made many pledges on immigration. It is a job that we still have to finish—it was clear from the election that many electors were not happy that we had not made as much progress, but were happy to give us a chance to continue with the job. That is why it is important that we should bring forward tougher immigration policies in this Parliament.

However, net migration is a difficult issue, not least because when we have a Conservative Government, fewer people want to leave the country. That is one of the realities of having that target. The other thing is that when we have one of the fastest-growing economies and most of our neighbours have tanked, it is inevitable that some people are going to come in and take jobs. The key thing we have to rely on is that if we are getting the majority of Brits into jobs, we should not be too worried

[*Mr Robert Syms*]

about others coming in as well. It is only when foreign workers are displacing local workers or the welfare system is disincentivising local workers that we ought to be concerned.

I am particularly pleased with the energy security Bill. I must admit that this is one of the things I worry about. I worry about the lights going out, because with changes to coal-fired plants and the Magnox nuclear plants going offline at some point, one can easily see that plants are closing. What one cannot necessarily see is sufficient investment to ensure that the lights stay on in the future. I hope the Government give high priority to ensuring that we build a new nuclear plant in Somerset, and perhaps one or two others. I am a little frustrated that we have not made as much progress as we need to make. Although renewables have their place in a balanced energy policy, I hope we do not rely too much on the unreliable renewables as we shut down coal and nuclear plants, both of which are reliable. Energy security will be a key issue, I think.

I hope that this Government will continue the good work of the coalition Government. I am pleased with the Prime Minister's commitment to leading a one nation Government. It is clear that we won a majority only because many people who in the past had not voted Conservative were persuaded by our period in office that we were a competent and confident party to continue with the job, so we have to make sure that we maintain a broad approach and broad appeal. I believe the country is immeasurably stronger than it was in 2010. I hope that until 2020, we can continue the work, continue the long-term economic plan, continue to ensure that we have energy security, continue our reforms to create more apprenticeships and ensure rigour in education, and continue to ensure that the people of our country have real choice in their lives and in their public services. I fully support the Gracious Speech and I am pleased, after 18 years in this House, that we finally have a Conservative Government.

1.51 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair this afternoon, Mr Deputy Speaker, and to participate in a debate in which a number of hon. Members are making their maiden speech. I pay particular tribute to the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), who made the first maiden speech today. She is my parents' Member of Parliament and represents the community in which I grew up and which, indeed, I visited only last week. I look forward to comparing notes with her on an area that we both know and love very well.

I listened with great care to the Queen's Speech and the Prime Minister's remarks yesterday, and I was pleased to hear the talk of unity and his vision of one nation, but when we look at the detail of the Government's programme, it is clear that the risks of division, not unity, are great—the risk of division of our country from the rest of Europe, which businesses and families in my constituency greatly fear; the risk of division between rich and poor, which is set to be exacerbated by welfare cuts of £12 billion; and divisions between the generations, as young people continue to bear the brunt of spending cuts.

Whatever constitutional settlements are developed over the course of this Parliament—I look forward to debating the Scotland Bill and seeing effect given to the cross-party agreement reached through the negotiations under the auspices of the Smith commission—we must take care not to exacerbate divisions between our four nations. I am particularly concerned about the way in which the nationalist card was played in England by the Prime Minister during the general election campaign. As a Scot who has lived in England for more than 30 years, this is my home and I love it, but I still take great pride in my Scottish history and identity; I still define myself as Scottish. What I want to say is therefore not about the experience of nationalism in Scotland—that is for those who live in Scotland today, not for ex-pat Scots such as myself—but about our experience of nationalism here in England, because our experience here matters too.

Like many of my constituents and constituents of right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House, I have family members on both sides of the border. We worry about growing division and hostility towards each other, and I beg those who try to stoke the flames of an ugly nationalism to take great care in what they say and do. For our safety and security—the safety and security of all our constituents—we need not more division in our countries, but less. I also know, from speaking to many of my constituents, that divisions between cultures within our communities are also being exacerbated.

The Home Secretary was right to speak in her opening remarks this afternoon of the shocking rise in anti-Semitism. Muslim constituents have told me of rising hostility and scepticism towards them. Migrants and asylum seekers constantly hear hostile rhetoric. I am proud of the highly diverse communities in my constituency, and proud of the welcome we give—that we have given over many years—to those who arrive to live among us. We draw strength and success from that diversity, but of course there is a risk of tension, too. I recognise that it is the Government's responsibility to keep us safe and to take action against dangerous extremism, but the price of that action must not be the alienation of members of minority communities, especially not alienation of the young people in those communities—an alienation that I know from my constituency too many feel already.

As the law on terrorism and extremism is to be strengthened by the Government, so too, I hope, will Ministers pay close attention to measures to foster strong community relations. I welcomed what the Home Secretary said about measures to tackle isolation; those measures must be consulted on and planned jointly with our minority communities, and implemented with their full engagement. If an impact of police cuts is less community policing, that will lead to less trust between police and our minority communities, and as a result, less useful intelligence. If we are to have fair and effective counter-terrorism and anti-extremist legislation, we must take care that such legislation is not seen as loaded against particular sections of our community. Careful discussion, exploration and reassurance on the new legislative measures the Government introduce will be extremely important to all communities in our country. I was pleased to hear the Home Secretary refer to the Tell MAMA programme today, but I hope the Government will confirm continued funding for that vital service.

I also hope—I was disappointed to hear very little about this in the Queen’s Speech—that the Government will continue to pursue an active agenda to counter the rise in reports of disability hate crime. The increase may, to a degree, be attributable to greater confidence in reporting, which would be greatly to be welcomed, but it is quite clear from reports published only in the past few weeks that extremely serious incidences of disability hate crime and abuse remain and are going unacknowledged. I hope that the Government will, in their criminal justice Bill, consider what further measures might be needed not only to strengthen the law, if that is necessary, but, perhaps even more important, to highlight the need for very high quality practice by all criminal justice agencies, whether in policing, prosecution or our courts system.

I welcome the Government’s proposed measures on tackling and outlawing the use of so-called legal highs. That issue was drawn specifically to my attention during the general election campaign by young people in Manchester who are involved in the Rathbone charity. I assure Ministers that if their proposals help to tackle this scourge on many of our communities, they will be welcomed by many young people in my constituency.

I want to ask about the resources that will be available to tackle crimes of violence. In the last Parliament, prosecutions for sexual and domestic violence decreased, and violent and gang-related crime remains a worry. As I said earlier today, in the past 10 days, there have been two shootings in my constituency, one tragically fatal. It is vital that the police have the resources they need to tackle and stamp out gun and gang-related crime, which is an understandable and immediate concern to my constituents.

I add my voice to those who will speak up for the Human Rights Act. I was proud that the Labour Government in 1997 brought rights home and I am not prepared to stand by and allow our commitment to human rights in this country and around the world be degraded in any way. I am pleased to see the Justice Secretary in his new place—I congratulate him on his new position. Perhaps in passing, while talking about the rights of unpopular people, I can ask him what the Government’s intentions are in relation to votes for prisoners. He may recall that I was one of 22 Members in the previous Parliament who voted in favour of following the Court ruling, which insists that the UK Government should not simply apply the blanket ban that currently pertains.

In conclusion, my constituents—my neighbours—want to live peacefully and safely with their neighbours. The duty of the Government is to secure that for everyone, and I will be scrutinising the legislation and the programme that they bring forward to ensure that that is delivered.

2.1 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Tapadh leibh agus feasgar math—thank you and good afternoon, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green). I know that many on our Benches would agree with much of what she says and I thank her for her gracious comments.

It is an honour and a privilege to be elected as the Member for the most beautiful constituency in the country, Ross, Skye and Lochaber, and to be called to

speak in this debate. Ross, Skye and Lochaber is by far the largest constituency in the UK, with a land mass of 12,000 sq km. It also contains a number of islands, including my home island, the Isle of Skye. I am the first resident of Skye to be a Member of this House since 1833, when Charles Grant, the first baron of Glenelg, was the Member. He was the owner of the Waternish estate, as opposed to myself—the owner of a humble croft.

In making my maiden speech, I am reminded of the remarks made by the late right hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar, Donald Stewart, a man who was an inspiration to many of us on the SNP Benches. In 1970, Donald became the first SNP candidate to win a seat at a general election. I am sure that he will be looking down on all of us today. He would be proud that the SNP returned 56 Members of Parliament and achieved 50% of the vote in Scotland—a strong voice that will speak up for all in Scotland. We will demand in this Parliament that we get what we were promised by all our opponents in Better Together. When Gordon Brown spoke for Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberals, he said that we would get as close to federalism as we could, and that we would get home rule in the spirit of Keir Hardie. That is what the people of Scotland voted for and that is what we will demand in this Parliament.

Donald Stewart said in his maiden speech:

“If I stray into controversial matters, they will, in a sense, be impartial controversies, since as a Nationalist Member I shall be in controversy with both sides of the House from time to time. For that reason, if I stray I hope that it will be less objectionable to the traditions of the House.”—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1970; Vol. 807, c. 1345.]

This House is blessed to have been served by a remarkable number of SNP Members, including my good friend Winifred Ewing, who represented both Hamilton and Moray. Winnie was instrumental in establishing the SNP as a parliamentary force. Much of the campaigning that she engaged in bore fruit. Her maiden speech on 20 November 1967 was on the issue of lowering the voting age from 21 to 18, a move that was ultimately delivered.

In the recent referendum in Scotland, one of the greatest achievements was to see 16 and 17-year-olds participating in the vote—not just participating, but fully engaging in the debate on Scotland’s future. It is a matter of much regret that so many of those young people, who fully participated in the democratic process, were denied the opportunity to vote in the general election. That was wrong and it must be righted—16 and 17-year-olds must be allowed to participate and vote in any European referendum. It is their future; they must be permitted to have a say.

It is not just young people who risk being disfranchised in any European vote. It is also those EU citizens who live and work here. I was contacted yesterday by a constituent of mine of Dutch origin, who has lived in and contributed to Scotland for 25 years. It is not right that such individuals may be denied a say about our future in Europe. As he said in his letter to me:

“Not being able to vote in the UK election was bad enough, but now being treated like some kind of unwanted foreigner is a real blow.”

In raising the issue of Europe and the interests of young people, it is perhaps pertinent to pay tribute to my predecessor for Ross, Skye and Lochaber who represented

[*Ian Blackford*]

the voters here for 32 years. Charles Kennedy spoke passionately on both those topics and is renowned as a Member who worked hard on representing the voters over a long period. I want to wish Charles well in whatever he chooses to do, and I am sure the House will want to join me in that.

I want to reflect a little more on the constituency of Ross, Skye and Lochaber. It is, as I mentioned, by far and away the largest constituency in the whole of the UK. It stretches from the east to the west coast of Scotland, from the northern reaches of Wester Ross as far south as Glencoe. Logistically, it is a challenge. From my own home in the north of Skye I have to drive 166 miles before I reach the southern boundary. For me and for my predecessor, adequately getting around to serve the interests of the 54,000 electors is a challenge.

We know that the issue of boundary changes will come up over the next few years. There has been a suggestion that the three vast highland constituencies of the Highland Council area may be reduced to two in order to satisfy demands for an increase in the number of electors per seat. I should point out that when one of my predecessors for the then named Ross and Cromarty seat, Hamish Gray, was elected in 1970, there were 27,000 electors in that seat, reflecting a recognition at that time that there had to be a relationship not just in the numbers, but in the geography of the area that Members represented. That must apply today as well. Voters in the highlands and islands must have effective representation. Creating even larger constituencies in the highlands and islands will break that link between a hard-working local MP and the people. Democracy demands that all the people of the highlands and islands should be effectively represented.

If you, Mr Deputy Speaker, or any other hon. Members have not yet had the opportunity to visit the most beautiful part of the world, I encourage you to do so. However, in saying so, I recognise the degree of difficulty involved in getting there. I know that in this House there is much debate on a third runway at Heathrow. I would like just one airport in my constituency. It can be argued that the constituency is one of the jewels in the crown of the tourist industry, and it is a disgrace that visitors cannot get there by air. FlySkye, a local campaign group that I have been pleased to be part of, is campaigning to get the closed airfield on Skye reopened. Let us get Skye and the western highlands connected to the outside world.

Connectivity, whether it be transport or digital connectivity, is hugely important to the future prosperity of the highlands and islands. Anybody who has visited the region will be aware of the limited broadband and mobile capabilities. Although the current investment in broadband is welcome, it does not go far enough. When we consider such initiatives as the connected cities programme that will create speeds of up to 1 gigabyte, it is simply not good enough that rural areas, if they are lucky, can look forward to speeds of up to 5 megabytes. We are being left behind and the lack of capabilities holds back business opportunity, limits investment opportunity and continues the drain of young people away from this region, as it has done for decades.

A comparative lack of young people and an overabundance of those above retirement age restricts our growth opportunities and puts pressure on our social

services. More than 20% of the population of Ross, Skye and Lochaber are over 65, compared to a national average of 17%. We need to make it easier for people to stay in the highlands and for young families to relocate to that part of the world. To do that, we must turn a number of competitive disadvantages into advantages. There are many things that can be done. Time limits me from going into too many of these today, but let me mention a couple.

It is a disgrace that those who live in the highlands, the wettest and windiest part of the UK, which results in high energy use, pay the highest electricity prices in the whole of the UK. We are discriminated against by the existence of 14 regional markets, and that must end. Fairness demands that we have one national market for distribution. Highlanders and islanders must no longer pay a premium that pushes so many of my constituents into fuel poverty.

Then there is support for our crofters and farmers, a subject dear to my heart and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil)—we talk about the SNP Benches, but we want to call this the crofting Bench. The European Community granted convergence uplift money in recognition of the poor deal that our crofters and hill farmers face, but that money has not been gifted to the people it should have been gifted to. We will be demanding that our farmers and crofters get a fair deal from this Parliament over the next five years. Working with colleagues in the Scottish Parliament, we need to ensure that crofting gets the support it needs so that we can continue to support a way of life for generations to come.

My own home is in the scattered townships of Glendale. Perhaps I should note the historic role that Glendale played in making sure that crofters' rights were protected through the Crofting Act of 1886, after the work done by the Napier commission. It was the Glendale rising of 1883 that led Parliament to establish the Napier commission, which was notified to the House by the then Home Secretary, Sir William Harcourt, on 19 March 1883. Glendale Estate was the subject of the first community buy-out in 1908. I am pleased that as we sit here the Scottish Parliament is discussing additional land reform measures that will create opportunities for all our communities throughout Scotland.

I am grateful for this opportunity to speak today and look forward to being a constructive voice in this House, working with all Members, but in my case with a particular emphasis on speaking up for the highlands and islands. I want to finish with some words from my old friend Winifred Ewing: "We have come here not to settle down, but to settle up for the people of Scotland."

2.12 pm

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): Let me begin by commending the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) for his excellent maiden speech, which was both passionate and confident. I might disagree with him on a number of issues, but I certainly agree on the need to prioritise the availability of broadband for rural communities and to consider the wider needs of our farming communities. I look forward to supporting the Government, which I am certain will deliver on many of those agendas.

I thank the people of Salisbury for re-electing me as their Member of Parliament, and with a considerably larger share of the vote than I managed in 2010. I look forward to serving all the communities of Salisbury and south Wiltshire over the next five years.

I would also like to welcome new Members. I am particularly pleased that Wiltshire returned five Conservative MPs, including my hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan), who worked so tirelessly to win back that seat.

Yesterday we heard in the Gracious Speech how the Government will

“legislate in the interests of everyone... giving new opportunities to the most disadvantaged”.

I want to focus my observations on the Gracious Speech on three areas, because I think that it is critical that the Government stand up for hard-working people and address their everyday concerns. First, the announcement that there will be legislation to support greater homeownership and give housing association tenants the chance to own their own home is hugely welcome. I passionately believe that owning one's own home is an aspiration that working people throughout the country have, and it is one that too often has not been prioritised by successive Governments. The security and dignity that comes with owning one's own home is an excellent method of relieving poverty and encouraging individuals to be free from state handouts. The proposed legislation will help 1 million more people own their own home.

It is absolutely right, however, that the housing stock that is sold needs to be replaced. That is a key concern of many of the people I met in recent weeks while campaigning in Salisbury and south Wiltshire. I am happy to acknowledge that the previous Government built twice as many council houses over the past five years as the Labour Administration did over 13 years. Housing starts in 2014 were at their highest annual level since 2007, with over 217,000 more affordable homes delivered between April 2010 and September 2014.

It is really important that we maintain that record by continuing to build more homes for our constituents, and our manifesto sets out clearly how that will be done. In particular, I welcome the creation of a £1 billion brownfield regeneration fund to unlock 400,000 new homes on brownfield land. That is particularly welcome in my constituency, where so many opportunities have been missed in recent years.

Acquiring an asset such as a home of one's own gives people security and confidence for the future, but the Government are also right to focus on bringing forward legislation to ensure that people working 30 hours a week on the national minimum wage do not pay tax. I welcome the fact that later this year, for the first time in seven years, the national minimum wage will increase above inflation. By removing the burden of tax from the working poor, we are helping them gain greater independence from the state and enabling them to support themselves and their families.

It is right, and completely unsurprising to me, that it is the Conservative party that will introduce that measure to support the poorest in our communities and get them back to work. The truth of the matter is that the best way out of poverty is permanent employment. It is the Conservative party that will continue to get more and more people back into work. We are the party of working

people. Compared with 2010 there are now over 2 million more people in employment, and I am pleased to note that in my constituency just one in 125 working-age people are now without work.

I would like to turn my attention to the troubled families programme, which over the past five years took over 100,000 families out of difficulty. It was started under the excellent leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr Pickles), who was an excellent Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. I am delighted that his work will be expanded and will continue to turn around the lives of thousands of the hardest-to-help families.

Cross-departmental initiatives can be challenging for Ministers and for Whitehall to manage, but the truth is that for many families the benefits derived from a range of interventions from different sources can add enormous, life-changing value. I believe that the Government must continue to adopt a one-nation approach that looks long and hard at the deepest causes of entrenched poverty in our communities and take bold and innovative action to deal with the realities that exist.

I very much welcome the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), who explains why the Conservative party is the party of working people and those with aspiration. While I will leave the rebranding to him, I passionately believe that this Government must remain focused on securing offers of employment to those who are in poverty, and on offering tax cuts to those in employment and those who want to own their own home—we must be the party that allows people to do that.

I represent Salisbury, which is the home of the headquarters of the Trussell Trust. In the previous Parliament, I worked with Members across the House—particularly the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field)—in examining carefully the issues behind the use of food banks. It always deeply depresses me when this issue is used in a nakedly party political way. For me, what is really important is that we have an honest examination of the range of issues for those who use food banks rather than focusing on the headline numbers, which do not do justice to the complexities involved. As a Government Member, I will do my best over the coming five years to examine the initiatives proposed by the Government and seek to apply them to the poorest in our communities, offering a reasoned analysis and critique that I think will help as we move forward in tackling these very difficult issues.

I am proud that the Gracious Speech indicates that this will be a Government who offer true compassion and genuine social justice. Success in the dimensions that I have laid out will determine just how successful this Government will be and what will happen in front of the electorate in five years' time.

2.21 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): May I begin by paying tribute to all those who have made such eloquent maiden speeches today? For my part, having spent many years having my legal arguments torn apart in court, and more recently my evidence questioned in various Select Committees, the opportunity of making an uninterrupted speech in this Chamber is too good to be true.

[Keir Starmer]

Since it is customary to root a maiden speech in one's constituency, I have decided to start in the British Library, which lies in the heart of my constituency of Holborn and St Pancras. As the *Camden New Journal* reported early in February this year, four surviving Magna Carta manuscripts arrived at the British Library just in time for the 800th anniversary in June of the historic settlement in 1215. Great claims are made of Magna Carta. They include that Magna Carta was the foundation of the notion of equality before the law and individual freedom; that it enshrined due process, habeas corpus and access to justice; and that it was the origin of trial by jury. If all those claims were actually true, no doubt the remaining provisions of Magna Carta would be earmarked, alongside the Human Rights Act, for repeal, not celebration.

As the former Lord Chief Justice, the late Lord Bingham, rightly pointed out:

“Establishment of a charter of human rights in the sense understood today was not among”

the barons’

“objectives. Chapters 39 and 40 were important not as conferring rights on the subject but as imposing a restraint on the King.”

It was their own interests and privileges that the barons were seeking to protect, not the rights of their fellow citizens. Yet from its beginnings as a local feudal settlement offering partial, not universal, protection, Magna Carta has achieved an iconic status here and around the world. Despite steps taken soon after 1215 to water down and even cancel the provisions—a habit, I observe, that we have not yet kicked in relation to fundamental human rights instruments—the core ideas of Magna Carta, reinterpreted, even misinterpreted, have inspired the legal and political development of human rights across the world. It may have taken hundreds of years, but the proclamation in clause 40 of Magna Carta, intended at the time only for the barons, that

“To no one will we sell, to no one deny or delay right or justice”,

when extended to all of us, really took hold in our collective consciousness.

It is thus ironic that in the year when we celebrate Magna Carta, proposals were announced in the Queen's Speech yesterday to

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

That is code, of course, for repealing the Human Rights Act, which, like Magna Carta, is a human rights instrument setting out fundamental values and rights. It too has its origins in a historic settlement between the individual and the state. In the aftermath of the second world war, nations came together to say, “Never again.” They established the United Nations and agreed a simple set of universal standards of decency for mankind to cling to going forward, which were then set out in the universal declaration of human rights. These standards were intended to protect the individual from the state, to uphold the rights of minorities, and to provide support for the vulnerable. The idea was simple: these standards would first be enshrined in regional treaties such as the European convention on human rights and then be given legal effect in every country. In the UK this was achieved when Labour enacted the Human Rights Act in 1998.

The link between those post-war universal rights and Magna Carta was made by no lesser a figure than Eleanor Roosevelt, who expressed her hope that the universal declaration of human rights would become “the international Magna Carta of all men everywhere.”

If speaking today, Eleanor Roosevelt would, of course, have expressly included women, but the sentiment is important. The whole point of human rights is that they apply universally to all people everywhere.

Lord Bingham said that Magna Carta was “as influential for what it was widely believed to have said as for what it actually did.”

The Human Rights Act, by contrast, is singled out for attack because of what it is believed to say rather than what it actually does. Nothing in the Human Rights Act makes the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights binding in our courts. The obligation on the UK as a whole to abide by the decisions of the European Court is found in the European convention, signed nearly 60 years ago. Repealing the Human Rights Act will make no difference unless the UK also withdraws from the convention itself.

Nor has there been a fundamental shift in defendants' rights under the Human Rights Act. By stark contrast, the Human Rights Act has heralded a new approach to the protection of the most vulnerable in our society, including those in care homes, child victims of abuse and of trafficking, women subjected to domestic and sexual violence, those with disabilities, and victims of crime.

That is important in my constituency of Holborn and St Pancras. There we celebrate great vibrancy and diversity, but you do not have to go very far to find great inequality, whether measured in wealth, health, housing or child poverty. It is those on low pay, those in poor housing, those with physical and mental health needs, the vulnerable, the put-upon and the bullied in St Pancras and Somers Town, in Regent's Park, in Gospel Oak, in Haverstock and across my constituency who will be the losers if we abandon the guarantee of equal rights for all. The Human Rights Act matters to the people of Holborn and St Pancras precisely because its provisions apply to everyone, faithfully reflecting the world's solemn promise in 1945 that human rights are universal.

My predecessor, the right hon. Frank Dobson, to whom I pay tribute, was a powerful advocate of the rights of everyone in Holborn and St Pancras throughout his highly distinguished parliamentary career. In his maiden speech on 16 May 1979, he spoke with a passion that never deserted him about housing, health and education. An Opposition spokesperson for most of Labour's period out of office in the 1980s and 1990s, he was promoted to the high-profile role of Secretary of State for Health after the 1997 election. He was particularly trenchant in his opposition to the Iraq war, to invasions of civil liberties and to the privatisation of the NHS. Widely respected and widely regarded, he served the people of Holborn and St Pancras for 36 years. Although I doubt I will clock up 36 years, I intend to follow in Frank Dobson's footsteps—albeit my jokes are likely to seem tame when compared with his, and I might give the beard a miss.

It took us nearly 750 years to journey from the partial application of human rights in Magna Carta to the universal application of human rights in the universal

declaration of human rights. As we now celebrate the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, let us affirm the principle that human rights apply to everyone equally. Any proposed British Bill of Rights inconsistent with that principle will not be worth the paper it is written on and will face widespread opposition, not least from me on behalf of my constituents in Holborn and St Pancras.

2.31 pm

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): May I first congratulate the new hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) on his very interesting dissertation on Magna Carta, some 800 years old?

How very appropriate it is, Mr Deputy Speaker, to have in the Chair this afternoon a fellow Member from an adjacent constituency. I find it quite fitting that I am apparently the first of the new Conservative intake to make their maiden speech. As the House will be aware, my seat of South Thanet was far from a normal seat to have fought. Historically, it was a Conservative seat and, save for the peculiarities, shall I say, of the 1997 to 2010 period, it has always been such. I did know Dr Stephen Ladyman who held the seat during those years fairly well, and I hope that he is doing rather well in life.

The seat was won back for the Conservatives by my predecessor, Laura Sandys, in 2010. She was a Member who was well loved in this House for her compassion, her honesty and her integrity. Her appeal was even more strongly felt and evident across South Thanet. She leaves me a strong legacy of community service that I can only endeavour to live up to. I am sure I speak for the whole House when I say that we wish her well in her new endeavours, and in her new interests and campaigns, which are close to her heart. There is one particular story from the excessive canvassing that went on in South Thanet, in which a couple extolled their appreciation of the work of Laura Sandys in support of the Salvation Army in Ramsgate and looked forward to my similar attendance in serving the homeless a well-deserved Christmas lunch this Christmas day. I will certainly endeavour to be there for them.

Before this election, South Thanet was something of a well-kept secret in this country, but because of the importance of the result, it became a seat of some national and international interest. I know that local businesses certainly enjoyed and benefited from that focus. My campaign was followed on a virtual daily basis by news channels from Japan, China, Canada, the US and virtually every European TV, radio, online and traditional media. I must say that, despite being sent the link to the online version of the Japanese story that appeared, I remain to this day quite unaware of what it actually says.

From all the more traditional UK news agencies, who literally camped out in Ramsgate and Broadstairs, it was most gratifying regularly to hear a very similar report: "We've never been here before. Isn't it beautiful? We can't wait to come back again." Such is the beauty of the constituent towns of South Thanet. We have more blue flag beaches than virtually anywhere else in the UK. We have the house and chapel that Pugin designed in Ramsgate for himself; it is of course a smaller version of this grand place, and I certainly look forward to enjoying a drink with many hon. Members over the years to come in the room named in his honour.

We have Sandwich, the best preserved medieval town in Britain, which—to follow on from what the hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras said—recently found its own 800-year-old version of Magna Carta. We have Broadstairs, which regularly appears in the top 10 best places in Britain in which to live. We have villages that are truly the epitome of rural England. We have Ramsgate royal harbour, the only royal harbour in the UK. It is the port from which Operation Dynamo departed, that very British of endeavours that saved over 300,000 soldiers stranded at Dunkirk. The 75th anniversary of Operation Dynamo was celebrated and remembered just last weekend. We have a far more distant history of note in the constituency: the first landing of the Romans at Richborough and of St Augustine 1,400 years ago, who brought Christianity to these shores; and it was the site of very many Viking invasions. I feel that we can claim with complete honesty that South Thanet has much to do with the history and perhaps now the ultimate destiny of our nation.

South Thanet is a constituency of very many parts. It has pockets of poverty and pockets of plenty. Cliftonville in the north was once called by many the Brighton of Kent, with Northdown Road often called its Bond Street. My family hail from Kent despite my name—you are not having me over on the SNP Benches—for as many generations as any of us dares look back to. As a child in the late 1940s, my mother used to holiday in Margate because, in her words, "We couldn't afford to go to Cliftonville." It is my aim to make Cliftonville once more one of the most desirable areas in which to live and work.

It is a rather strange irony that the jet engine has led to the demise of many of our once thriving coastal towns that derived their income from tourism, as we have all gone further afield. We are all guilty of that. I certainly hope that it may be the jet engine in the form of a reopened and thriving Manston airport—recognised as a key part of the regional airport strategy and national aviation safety, perhaps with cargo at its heart, as well as aircraft recycling and high-tech engineering—that could be the salvation of a revised business base in Thanet in general.

On to Ramsgate—with its harbour, port and marina—which ranks alongside Dover as having the closest proximity to France, Belgium and Holland. It is described by many as the "Monaco of the south-east". Those are not my words, but I share the sentiment. I intend to deliver that sentiment—to make Ramsgate marina, port and harbour a rival of any on the south coast and to be very much at the heart of a regeneration project.

For too long South Thanet has lagged behind very many normal figures for the south-east, with unemployment marginally higher and with relative measures of poverty always distinctly higher than the south-east norm, so I am here not just to fight for a fair share for South Thanet, but to deliver what South Thanet needs and fundamentally deserves.

I would like to put something on the radar of my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), who I hear has a nose for such things. I served as a councillor for River ward on Medway unitary authority for some eight years before coming here. It was a split ward and, following my election to that authority in 2007, it was represented by me and a Labour councillor. The then Labour councillor was elected to this House as the hon. Member for Sefton

[Craig MacKinlay]

Central (Bill Esterson) in 2010, and was returned once more this month. I stand to be corrected—my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset will probably tell me that something similar happened in 1872—but to my knowledge it is the first time that two Members of Parliament have been returned from the same council ward ever. However, I stand to be corrected.

In my previous—dare I say normal?—life, I was in practice as a chartered accountant and chartered tax adviser for some 27 years. I certainly hope to play a very full and active role in the Budget and wider Treasury debates in future, as we continue to address the deficit, present fairer taxes and continue the measures for growth, but I am particularly pleased to make my maiden speech today in the home affairs debate on Her Majesty's Gracious Speech. I have served as a magistrate in Kent for the past 10 years, and I was pleased to hear the Leader of the House's warm appreciation this morning for the work of the thousands of volunteer lay magistrates across this country.

There is much within the Queen's Speech that I would want to comment upon, hence why I thought I would get my maiden speech out of the way, but following the Home Secretary's speech, I warmly welcome the proposals for a blanket ban on psychoactive substances—the so-called legal highs. It has been done successfully elsewhere, and I want it done here. Too often as a lay magistrate, I see drugs misuse at the heart of recidivist crime. It brings hopelessness to many young lives. I would welcome a broader and sensible debate on drugs policy.

I welcome the Home Secretary's proposals to bear down on immigration, adding to the measures already taken during the previous Parliament. A fast turnaround of failed claims is key to that. I hope we deliver. It is finally accepted by Labour that it left our country with an open door immigration policy. In Government alone, we Conservatives need to do far more, as the numbers remain too high, as they have been for far too long. I certainly intend to contribute to that debate.

I want to see changes to human rights legislation over this Parliament, with a domestic court guaranteeing our rights, and not a foreign court where we have little more than hope of common sense prevailing.

That leads me on to my final point. Most will know that the issue of our membership of the European Union brought me into politics some 24 years ago. It is for that reason that I am very proud to be part of this Parliament, where we will deliver on our commitment to an in/out referendum.

The EU has changed beyond compare from what we first assented to all those years ago. It is an issue that has been a running sore in British politics for decades. I am thankful that it will come to rest within this Parliament with, I hope, our finding a renegotiated settlement that is in tune with the majority of the British people. The chanceries across Europe need to take careful note of what we regard as acceptable as part of that renegotiation. For me, it need be little more than the free trade and friendship that we thought we had agreed to in 1975.

2.42 pm

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I commend the hon. Member for South Thanet (Craig MacKinlay), who made an excellent maiden speech. He has had a

bumpy but successful journey here. Like him, I welcome the measures in the Queen's Speech to ban psychoactive drugs. Mephedrone is a bane in south Wales. I have campaigned on the issue for three years, and it is good that the Home Office wants to address that scourge. I also welcome the expansion of the troubled families initiative, which has been discussed in the Public Accounts Committee in recent years. It is a good thing, and I am pleased that it is being rolled out.

I welcome the Government's commitment to full employment, but the emphasis on full employment must not be a false promise. That commitment is the focus of my speech.

Let me say how proud I am to represent once again the people of Blaenau Gwent. It is the place where I grew up and the place I call home. Its historical importance in the Chamber cannot be underplayed. I stand on the shoulders of political giants, and it is humbling, but it cannot be enough to come to the House as Blaenau Gwent's MP and celebrate history. Standing up and looking only at history does Blaenau Gwent a disservice—a disservice to those I follow, from Nye Bevan to Michael Foot; and a disservice to the constituents who look to me to build on their legacy. Instead, all hon. Members are here to serve our constituents, and to help to deliver a better future.

The Government of the past five years were happy to see parts of the country get back on their feet and surge ahead, but that vision of Britain is short-sighted. It is a vision in which parts of the country thrive while large swathes of communities that still need support are left to wither on the vine. Struggling communities cannot be left behind. They need a fair deal to pull themselves up. We should not be content with a two-lane economy, with one heading to the future and one leading to a dead end.

Comparing the economy to a highway is more than just a turn of phrase. We all know that infrastructure, our roads and our transport links are at the heart of any thriving constituency. In that respect, Blaenau Gwent has started a new chapter in the past five years. The Welsh Labour Government have borne the brunt of cuts from Westminster, yet they have driven ahead with improvements to the heads of the valleys road, which will make such a difference to my community. I have campaigned with others for improvements to our valleys rail network, and now electrification is to be delivered as we welcome Ebbw Vale's new town station.

For Blaenau Gwent, those economic lanes could be literal ones if the Circuit of Wales racetrack proceeds. The jobs and finance in tourism and engineering that it could bring would be game changing in the south Wales valleys.

We can rightly be proud of all those developments, but the Government cannot now say that they have done all they can. When speaking to the people of Blaenau Gwent on the doorstep over the past two months, the refrain was the same: Blaenau Gwent needs jobs—I can see from the hon. Members with doorstep tans around me that many have done the same in their constituencies. The improvements to road and rail that are being delivered are the start. They attract businesses to our areas. They help youngsters and they help skilled workers to get to jobs elsewhere. But that is only the start. The future is not in reach just yet.

We are a proud borough, despite the difficulties of recent decades. We do not lack in culture, in countryside or in community. Our brass bands and our choirs are the envy of the country—I would say that they are a little bit better than those of my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds). Our valleys are breathtaking, and we are on the doorstep of the Brecon Beacons. Even when cuts have threatened to eat at Blaenau Gwent's community, it finds a way to fight back. Our Market Hall Cinema in Brynmawr has gone from being a casualty of Tory funding squeezes to an award-winning social enterprise.

Those are just a few examples of the beautiful, harmonious, loud and proud Blaenau Gwent. They do not deserve to be abandoned in the pursuit of growth for a few. The Government need to take action to make a difference in Blaenau Gwent. We need an effective Work programme that gets our youngsters and those being retrained back on the career ladder; much better education and training to ensure that we have a skilled workforce for our businesses; and strong economic growth in south-east Wales, not just in south-east England.

I do not want to stand here in five years' time talking about the past, however noble it may be. It is up to me and to all hon. Members to fight for our communities, not just for what they are, but for what they could be. I want to fight for a better future for my constituency of Blaenau Gwent.

2.48 pm

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): It is a great honour to follow the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith), who showed why we are all here, with our passion for our constituencies and all believing that we represent the best constituency in the country. That was also rightly the theme of the excellent maiden speech by my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Craig MacKinlay). I made my maiden speech 10 years ago and he has already beaten me on two points. First, I was the second of our intake to make my maiden speech, not the first, and secondly, I noted the panoply of TV and media that followed him around during his election campaign. I am delighted to say that I was followed by the *Wimbledon Guardian*, the rain of south-west London and Finnish TV, which pulled out of an interview halfway through, I think for all sorts of reasons.

Ten years on, I still regard being a Member of Parliament, chosen by our electorate to represent them here, as a great honour not only in the context of our constituencies but in the context of what we do here for our country. The Human Rights Act has been discussed already, but we embody the protection under the law for all our citizens and it is an honour and privilege to be given their confidence to do so.

After 10 years, I am delighted that we had yesterday a Conservative Gracious Speech. It set out a clear vision for the country of security, aspiration and opportunity for everyone. The Queen's Speech followed faithfully the manifesto on which my hon. Friends and I fought and based our election campaigns. It was a manifesto and a campaign to be proud of. Despite the cheap parody that some have made of what was said, it was an election campaign in which my side talked about hope and aspiration for the future. Others talked about being anti-business and the politics of envy and, unsurprisingly, the country yet again rejected that approach.

The Queen's Speech builds on the achievements of the last five years, including the monumental achievement of cutting the deficit, on which there is still more to do, but huge progress has been made; a cut in income tax for 26 million people; and the creation of more jobs and apprenticeships than ever before, so that unemployment in my constituency is now under 1% and we have created more than 1,000 apprenticeships in the last two years. There were many other achievements, but I have mentioned the ones on which the Queen's Speech needed to build—and I think it does.

The first task for any one nation Government is to make sure that all people have the opportunity of a job, because that is crucial to people's lives, hopes and aspirations, and that is set out in the Gracious Speech. The second task is to make sure the first is done with fairness and to champion social justice. That must come from education. I see that the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice is in his place—I congratulate him on his new role. Many Conservative Members will wish to praise what he did in the previous Parliament in reforming education, so that more and more children have the opportunity to attend good schools, and the support he gave to many schools through extra money that recognised the primary places crisis that we had in London. I first spoke about that crisis in 2007, and his achievements in that regard do not go unrecognised.

The Gracious Speech builds on those achievements more concretely. The enterprise Bill will sweep away regulation. The Conservative party has always been the party of business and small business, and the enterprise Bill will embody that in law. The children Bill will be attractive to large swathes of the country in introducing 30 hours of childcare, and I suspect that the EU referendum Bill will be one of the more hotly debated Bills.

Today is of course home affairs day. We had a long debate in January on the Serious Crime Act 2015, and I am greatly concerned about the issue of cybercrime and its economic consequences, including organised crime syndicates and the potential for foreign state activity. Our networks—electricity, telecoms, power, banking, fuel and food distribution—rely on logistics systems backed by complex cyber-systems. If those networks came under criminal control, even for a relatively short time, the scale of theft about which the Home Secretary spoke—some £24 billion—would be dwarfed.

Cybercrime is an issue to which the Government rightly paid great attention over the last five years, and I hope that we will continue that in the next five years. I welcome therefore the investigatory powers Bill, which will provide the opportunity to address some of those issues. The economic consequences of cybercrime could be devastating to this country. We therefore need to ensure that our law enforcement and intelligence agencies have the powers and capabilities they need to keep Britain safe. I think a lot of people see this in the context of extremism and international terrorism, but I also see us using those powers of “who”, “where”, “when” and “how”—not necessarily of content—to combat cybercrime in a hugely effective way. I very much welcome that. Modernising the law on data communications so that the police and the agencies have that information will be one of the most widely supported, if not highest profile, measures in the Gracious Speech.

The shadow Home Secretary rightly talked about the need to distinguish between asylum and immigration, but then she muddle-headedly expressed a number thoughts

[Stephen Hammond]

in which she completely brought them back together again. Those who fought the election campaign will have heard many things on the doorstep, but for a number of people immigration was one of the key factors in deciding how to vote. I found that not only in south-west London, where I do a lot of campaigning, but in other parts of the country while helping various colleagues. The new immigration Bill, particularly the provision on preventing illegal immigrants from accessing services that allow them to remain in the country and the “deport first, appeal later” principle in respect of people with no status to remain in the country, will be a powerful tool that could help to reset the whole immigration agenda. As many new MPs will quickly find out, this place deals with a huge panoply of issues. Many MPs might say, “You represent Wimbledon, a leafy suburb”, but immigration is among those issues I deal with. Only yesterday, I dealt with someone who had been in this country illegally for nine years and was still trying to stay here. The powers and provisions in the new immigration Bill will enable us to act with fairness and justice.

Although this is home affairs day, I would like to stray into an area that is not explicitly home affairs but which clearly affects many people in this country. I am talking about infrastructure and the approach the Government are setting out in two Bills. In one area, there is continuation. The benefits of the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill, which is passing through Committee, will be unparalleled. The Chancellor has rightly spoken about the need to bring economic prosperity to all parts of the country, and I have long been a proponent of high-speed rail as a means of extending capacity to bring economic growth to widespread areas of the country, so I strongly welcome the Bill.

I also welcome the housing Bill. For many of us, housing was a key issue on the doorstep during the general election campaign. Much has been said about right to buy—I will not rehearse the arguments colleagues have already made—but the provisions to build more starter homes, increase the right to build, create a register of brownfield land and establish a London land commission are all innovative ideas that we need to bring forward, so I am delighted that they will be in the Bill. The Chancellor’s record on supporting infrastructure in the previous Parliament—of taking difficult decisions while keeping capital expenditure high—was pretty much unparalleled, and I know that he rejects the British disease of doing a piece of infrastructure, sighing and then doing nothing for the next five years.

I impress on the Front-Bench team my support for the housing and high-speed rail Bills and urge them to think about how we could bring infrastructure projects more closely together. I hope that either within or outside the existing ministerial structure, a ministry for infrastructure could be brought forward in this Parliament. The benefits, in terms of linkages between energy, housing, broadband and transport, could be huge, as too could the cost and delivery benefits. We need to create a cluster of expertise and a conglomeration of skills within government. From my brief experience as a Minister, I got the impression that those skills were unfortunately lacking inside what is a well-intentioned civil service. Those skills are not there, and they could be brought together. From this country’s point of view,

it is hugely encouraging to see the continuing commitment to infrastructure, but I press the Front-Bench team to think about a potentially better way to deliver it.

It is an honour, 10 years on, to contribute to the debate on the Gracious Speech. I congratulate all new Members elected at this general election. I wish them the camaraderie, the skill and the opportunities that this House brings, and I hope they have a successful future representing their constituents.

3 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech. This is the first time I have been called a maiden, and it seems a little unusual as my children watch me from the Strangers Gallery. I assure everybody here that it is good that they are behind the glass—I can see them talking up there!

I am exceptionally proud to be one of the new women MPs elected to this Parliament, and to be one of the working parents elected—we have a lot to offer when deciding what is best for our country, which has not always happened. Like those of my predecessor, John Hemming, my roots in Birmingham, Yardley run deep. I know from reading his maiden speech that this was a source of great pride for him—and I feel the same.

A Brummie accent is a rare thing in this Chamber, and I look forward to changing that. Like so many Brummies, my nan and grandad from both my mother’s and father’s sides moved from Birmingham’s Peaky Blinders-famed inner city industrial areas in Small Heath, Ladywood and Winson Green to the estates of Yardley and Sheldon that were newly built in the ’30s and ’40s. They were proud of their new homes and raised all their children there.

My family benefited from decent council houses and good communities, and during my campaign I was proud to knock on the doors of three different houses where my parents had lived—on Garretts Green Lane, Frodesley Road and Gleneagles Road.

During the campaign, I visited Yardley Great Trust, a charity whose history in the area is even longer than mine. Originating in the 14th century, the Yardley Great Trust has helped to alleviate poverty and support residents in their sickness and old age, and it continues to do so today. In 1966, the Yardley Great Trust gave my mum a grant to help poor local kids stay in education, so that she did not have to leave school to help her single mother with the housekeeping before doing her A-levels. She went on to achieve a great many things and gave me and my brothers a good life and lots of opportunities. Birmingham, Yardley was good to my family, and I plan to repay this debt.

I requested to make my maiden speech in this section of the Queen’s Speech debates because, along with all things Birmingham, Yardley, I am deeply committed to improving our country’s response to victims of domestic and sexual violence and abuse in all its forms. Having worked for years in a service that operated refuges, rape crisis, child sexual exploitation services and human trafficking services, I know that we need to do more. We need look no further than at the poor rape conviction rates to know that for very vulnerable victims our justice system is too often just another establishment that has failed to protect them.

For years before I sat on these Green Benches—and, I am sure, for many more after—there will have been calls for Government Departments to work better together to understand the multiple and layered effects that our decisions have on people's lives. I can think of no better example than the interaction between the Department for Work and Pensions and our Justice and Home Affairs Departments. I have no doubt that the Home Secretary is committed to ending child sexual exploitation, and it is true to say that her Department has invested in improving services for victims of sexual violence. However, as a Government, it is no good to give with one hand and take away with another. This Government's rumoured plans to remove housing benefit from people aged under 21 will be disastrous for these vulnerable victims. While I do not agree with this measure at all, I want to compel the Government to remove from this new legislation vulnerable people in supported accommodation. To make my point, I shall tell the story of Helen.

Helen was an 18-year-old girl I met in my first week in my old job, and she has stayed with me for the last six years. She had been abused by her father as a child, and had been in and out of local authority care throughout her—so-called—childhood. Between the ages of 15 and 18, she had been exploited by one “boyfriend” or another, all of them much older than her and none with her best interests at heart.

Helen had come to ask for support from our services following her abuse. She was being supported by an independent sexual violence adviser so that she could be helped to give statements to the police, and seek convictions and justice for her childhood abuse. However, following the breakdown of her relationship with her mother and, subsequently, her grandmother, she became homeless, and her life was difficult and chaotic. In the absence of a stable living environment, she again fell victim to those who abused her, and fell out of the justice system.

Eventually—after cycles of absconding and returning—we were able to secure supported living for Helen. I remember driving her to what is now my constituency to take her to St Basil's, a brilliant youth homelessness charity. With the aid of housing benefit and the home she was given, she was able to learn to look after herself and, with support, seek justice in order to move on with her life and make a future.

Where will Helen go now, in a future that will not give her housing benefit? How many A and E visits will she make during this Parliament? How many custody suites will she block up? How many police reports will be filed for her by a stretched force? Worse still, how many other people will be abused by those who abused Helen while justice is not done? If that is not enough to alarm the justice and home affairs teams who are sitting opposite me, perhaps I should put it differently: how much will this cost their Departments?

In the last Parliament, the domestic violence lobby was able to ensure that victims living in refuges were exempt from universal credit and the benefits cap. Although the Government's decision was an afterthought, it was the right decision to keep women and children safe. I urge this Government not to make the same mistake of making the most vulnerable young people an afterthought. I urge them to exempt young people who are at risk of homelessness, and those who are in supported accommodation, from their welfare reform. Last year,

25% of the victims who lived in Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid refuges alone were aged between 18 and 21. We must protect these victims.

Justice and security do not end in their defined Government Departments. In my constituency, there are lots of Helens, and it is my job to amplify their stories so that we stop finding it easy to look away. I will never look away. I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the chance to tell that story, and I look forward to telling many more.

3.8 pm

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), who made an excellent speech. I entirely concur with her observations about domestic violence and sexual abuse. Those are appalling crimes and are utterly indefensible, and action must be taken to put them under a spotlight. We need to be surer in future that we can prevent such things from happening—as urgently as possible—and that, when they do happen, we can pounce properly, accurately and firmly. The hon. Lady made some very powerful points that should land in a safe place, and I would certainly support her in promoting such a development.

Birmingham is a great city, and that is one of the reasons why I am determined to reopen a station in Stroud, enabling people to travel to Birmingham without having to change trains too often. If I have my way, people from Stroud will be going to Birmingham all the more often, and I hope that people from Birmingham will reciprocate by coming to Stroud. This is an important mission of mine, and I look forward to ensuring that commuters, business and tourists benefit from the initiative I am taking.

It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay). Many Conservatives, at least, were particularly pleased by his election victory, which, as we know, had seminal consequences. I congratulate him on making a fabulous speech too.

My constituency is very beautiful; I do not need to expand on that as I did so in my maiden speech five years ago. My constituency covers not just Stroud; all the other parts of it matter, too—the valleys and vales. It is not just beautiful; it is a place of economic vibrancy and good community spirit. It has a strong interest in manufacturing and the creative sector and all the rural characteristics we would expect of a constituency in Gloucestershire. I salute my constituency, and I thank the electors for returning me to this House.

The most impressive sentence in Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech was the second one, in which she talked about one nation. I have been a fully signed up supporter of one nation ever since I got involved in politics. It is a particularly strong theme that underpins all parts of the Government's agenda—building a nation where everybody feels they have opportunity, fair liberty and the capacity to fulfil their lives, and where nobody from any part of the country feels excluded, and where anybody can express themselves properly, within reason. That is the kind of country I want to live in, and we keep on needing to make it because we come across challenges all the time. One nation Britain and a one nation Government is precisely what we want to see.

Ian Blackford: We are told as we come into this Parliament that there are four nations: Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will reflect on that, rather than talking about one nation.

Neil Carmichael: That is a good point and I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and of course one nation does mean a collection of the four nations in a United Kingdom.

One nation is really an expression of how we feel about the people in our nation—how we want to give opportunity, how we want to make sure they can propel themselves forward, how we want to make sure nobody is left behind, how we want to make sure our standards of justice are right for all and fair to everybody. That is the kind of one nation I talk about, and that is the kind of one nation the Government want to build—and the one nation is, of course, the whole of the United Kingdom, and I pay tribute to that. On devolution, which doubtless is to the fore of the hon. Gentleman's mind, we want to see, and we will deliver, proper devolution to Scotland.

Mr MacNeil: I am amazed at what the hon. Gentleman says about the progress of four nations becoming one nation. Might he argue one day that one Europe should become one nation? Is that the path of progress he is following?

Neil Carmichael: Our values as one nation are, of course, ones we would want everybody else to follow. We are talking about the United Kingdom, and the current position is that this Government have capacity and dominance over this country, but I also want to emphasise that what matters is that sense of fairness, of equality and of inclusion.

The dominant home affairs topic in the contributions of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary was immigration. It is a critical issue and the Government rightly want to tighten things further in due course, but there is another side to the coin: the way in which we operate ourselves, which is partly to do with the other key issue in the Gracious Speech—productivity. We as a nation need to address our economic productivity. We need to be sure that we can compete well with our competitors in Europe and beyond. We need to address the significant productivity gap between ourselves and, for example, Germany or the United States of America. That is one aspect of this debate on which we should focus in this Parliament.

The skills agenda aims to equip young people with the ability to get the jobs and careers they need and that businesses need them to have. It is about making sure that our factories can produce goods competitively, giving us a trade advantage and delivering higher standards of living for people in those industries.

The key challenge of delivering a strong skills agenda is underpinned by what we do in our schools, so I am really pleased that the speech referred to a Bill to tackle coasting schools. There is a debate about the definition of a coasting school. A coasting school is one in which a child is not able to progress as he or she should or, even worse, is regressing; and we have measurements for that and can see where schools are failing. Too many children leave school without sufficient qualifications and learning capacity. That is captured by the long-tail-of-underachievement argument, and we have to stamp it out. If young people do not get a fair start in life early

enough, we let them down—and we let everybody else down, too, because we are all in this together when it comes to the kind of society we build and the kind of economy we want. Skills are absolutely critical.

Another aspect of this debate is the way in which we structure our businesses and think about investment so that we have a clear pathway to develop the new technologies that will lead us to solve the problems of climate change and tackle the productivity gap. I want firms to think more about their long-term prospects and long-term investment needs, so let us alter the tax system to encourage such investment.

The speech refers to tax in another way: enabling hard-working people to keep more of what they earn. I am pleased that once we have passed the necessary legislation anyone on the minimum wage will be exempt from income tax. That is a fabulous encouragement to people to get jobs; it is a fabulous motivation for families to move into the world of work, if they have not done so in the past; it is also a great reward in terms of the idea that people should contribute to our economy, because the real issue is making sure that we as a country can deliver the lifestyle and opportunities that young and older people need to fulfil their lives. That is a really important part of the speech.

There are other elements that we need to celebrate and promote. I want more apprenticeships, which are a key part of equipping people to develop themselves, their interests and issues. The Government are absolutely right to aim to create even more apprenticeships than we managed to create in the past five years. That is what business wants to see and what we all need to see in our constituencies. In my constituency, nearly one in four people is involved in manufacturing and engineering, so they are an important part of the local economy. It is imperative that we have university technical colleges and the promotion of the skills we should have, and I will back the Government as they continue to make sure we have that range of educational provision. I salute the idea of more academies, but I also want to be clear that they are properly accountable, because accountability is crucial in any walk of life, and certainly when we are dealing with the teaching and well-being of our children. I want to enhance that further.

In summary, this Queen's Speech is, as we have been discussing, about creating one nation—a nation that is proud of its people.

Craig MacKinlay: My hon. Friend mentioned the interesting topic of UTCs, which are springing up across the whole country. Does he have any experience of them locally, because they are certainly of interest to me?

Neil Carmichael: I certainly do, because we are going to have a UTC in my constituency very shortly. It will provide skills for people between the ages of 14 and 18 in the areas of advanced manufacturing, cyber studies and so on. We have secured the commitment, the site and the sense of purpose, as well as all the necessary commitments from partners. It will be located at Berkeley Green, on the site of a former nuclear power station. It has facilities for precisely the sort of thing that my hon. Friend asks about and it will contribute massively to the pipeline of skills that an economy such as my local one, and the surrounding area, needs desperately. I urge you to pursue UTCs wherever you can, as necessary.

In summary, we want a country where people have opportunity and the capacity to thrive and lead fulfilled lives. We want people to be able to deliver for themselves and their families the sort of life that we all aspire to and can have within our reach. That is what this whole debate will be about. That is the general foundation of this Government's plan for the next five years and it is well worth supporting and promoting in our constituencies.

3.22 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for giving me my first opportunity to speak in this magnificent Chamber. I have the privilege and the honour to represent Edinburgh East—as with some others, the title of the constituency is something of a misnomer; as well as including the eastern parts of our great city, it embraces most of the city centre of Edinburgh. Therefore, the area is replete with architectural and historical landmarks with which I am sure you will be extremely familiar. From the castle on Castlehill, which dominates the city centre and whose provenance makes this place look positively contemporary, one goes down the Royal Mile, past the ancient city chambers and the cathedral of St Giles, to the bottom and the Palace of Holyrood and, of course, our own Scottish Parliament.

The constituency is also the seat of our ancient university, and the area thrives because of the many tens of thousands of students and academics within its borders. At this point, with relevance to the immigration debate, I would just like to make a point about one of the proverbial babies that has been thrown out with the bathwater in recent immigration reforms: the post-study work visa, which used to be afforded to people who came here to study in higher education. It provided students in higher education with the opportunity to stay in their community for a short time after finishing their studies to work and, in particular, to give back to that community some of the skills and experience they had developed in our institutions of higher learning. I would like to think that as this debate unfolds and we get down to the detail, we will be able to examine the possibility of getting some replacement mechanism for that.

I should also say that the area I represent is a great artistic and creative one. It is the home of the world's largest arts festival, the Edinburgh festival fringe; most of the venues are within my constituency, and I am very proud to have played such a role in developing that festival over the past 10 years. From the city centre one goes north, just west of the old port of Leith, and then along the coast to the thriving communities of Portobello and Joppa. It is an area that is rich, diverse and charming and one that I am privileged to represent.

I want to spend a minute or so mentioning other parts of my constituency. I am talking about the communities that are a million miles away from the vibrant and colourful images that adorn our tourist brochures. There has been much talk, both during the election campaign and in this debate, about aspiration. There are parts of my constituency where, despite public sector investment in infrastructure, aspiration has all but been extinguished, families are living on the margins, and despair and desperation hang over the place in a way that is almost palpable. The reason for that can be summed up in one simple word: poverty. There is not enough money to go round. Before anyone says it, we

are not talking here about the workshy or the feckless. We are talking about the working people to whom the Prime Minister referred. They are people who work harder than any of us have ever done; who go out and work long hours in insecure jobs for poor pay and who, at the end of the week, bring home enough just to feed their families and just to get by, but not enough to live a fulfilled and enjoyable life and to have happiness for themselves and their families.

I implore this Chamber to recognise that the challenge in front of us, in the second decade of the 21st century and in such a wealthy country, is to try to eradicate that poverty. Some 21% of children in my constituency—in some areas it is as high as 50%—live in poverty, which is a scandal. Over the coming days, when we talk about that and the welfare reforms, I will plead with this Chamber not to do anything to make matters even worse. When we hear about the £12 billion of cuts that are proposed in the welfare budget, we wait with bated breath to see where they might fall. I presume that the Government will not cut people's pensions, which means that they will look at the very big areas of disability benefits and of tax credits. If they take money out of either of those areas, they will make a bad situation much worse in some areas of my constituency. They will push people to the margins and, at times, over the edge and they will complete their alienation from the society in which they live. I implore them not to do it.

I wish to say a few words about my predecessor, Sheila Gilmore. Sheila was elected in 2010 in what was then a safe Labour seat. She served the area well and to the best of her ability and I wish her well in whatever she does next. The reason why Sheila is not here has nothing to do with her capabilities and everything to do with the predicament of her party. Five years ago, Labour won Edinburgh East with a majority of more than 11,000 votes. Three weeks ago, I won the same seat with a majority of more than 9,000 votes. That result was replicated the length and breadth of Scotland. These results are remarkable, are they not? What has happened has been not a political swing in the normal psephological sense of the word but a structural shift in political alignment across the communities—most notably the urban working-class communities—of Scotland.

To understand what is happening in Scotland, you must first understand what is not happening in Scotland. I take offence when people suggest that the rise of my party is in some way part of a continuum, which has seen the rise of racist and xenophobic organisations throughout this great continent of Europe; it is nothing of the kind. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) said earlier, our nationalism is an inclusive civic nationalism. It is about people having pride in their communities and in their country. It is about empowerment and about trying to give people some sense of control over their own lives in a world where global forces constantly make them feel impotent. That is why it resonates with people, many of whom are alienated from the process of government in this country. But there is something else at work as well and that is this: our party now exists to put forward not just that civic nationalism but a credo that is fused also with social democracy—a prospectus that was once the terrain of the Labour party but that it has now abandoned. This powerful idea of people coming together to take control of their own their lives

[Tommy Sheppard]

and to change the society around them so that it benefits everyone is a potent force and it commands the support of the majority of people in Scotland.

I urge Members not to mistake our intentions. I say that because we have already received a few jibes. We do, of course, want self-government for Scotland. There is no secret about that. But we had a referendum last year, and we know the result of that referendum. We lost it. We accept that we lost the referendum. We may not agree with it, but we did. We did not in this election seek a mandate for independence, and we did not get one. We have not come to this Chamber to argue the case for independence. That debate, and the debate about the next chapter in Scotland's history will take place in a different Chamber in a different Parliament 400 miles to the north of this one. We have come here to give Scotland a strong voice in this Parliament. We have come here to represent the people who elected us, and you will find us constructively engaged in order to deliver that.

We come here not to disrupt but to be constructive. We come here to be good parliamentarians and to use the often arcane and antiquated processes that exist in this Parliament for the benefit of the people who elected us. Sometimes we will perceive a Scottish national interest, and we will argue the case for that, but on many other occasions, the interests of our constituents will completely align with the interests of yours, and we hope very much to find common cause and create a united Opposition across the Chamber in order to prevent some of the worst excesses that may fall upon us from the Conservative Government—a Government by the way that is not one that we wanted. The Conservative party has not had a mandate in Scotland for some time; it does not have one now. This is not the result that we wanted for the UK, but we accept that the Conservatives won, and good luck to them.

I would point out, however, that the reason why we have a majority Conservative Government is not that the Labour party lost to the SNP in Scotland but that the Labour party lost to the Conservative party in England. Even if Labour had won every Scottish seat, there would still be a majority Conservative Government. So I appeal to the people on these Benches to get over it; let us work together constructively to advance as much as we can and defend the people who elected us.

Mr Speaker, you gave us a gentle rebuke yesterday for the applause that we gave in this Chamber, and we take that with good grace. We know of course that it is not traditional practice in the Chamber, but we did not know just how unacceptable it might be found. We will try to refrain from doing it again. It will take us time to learn the processes at work here; it will take us time to get our feet under the table. And it will take you time to get used to us, but I hope that we will be able to do that in the weeks and months ahead, and we look forward to working constructively with you on behalf of the people who elected us.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. It is a great pleasure to hear from the hon. Gentleman, and I know that I will be joined by a great many colleagues in admiring the spirit of solidarity that motivates large numbers of members of one party to turn up at the same time. I say that in a spirit of genuine respect. Thank you for what you have said.

I am in the happy position now of being able to announce the removal of the time limit because we have a bit more time than we thought. That does not mean that the available time should be abused, but it is there.

3.33 pm

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will try and bear it in mind that it is not Friday today and take your instructions in the spirit in which they are intended.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) on a marvellous maiden speech. He said that it would take him a while to get his feet under the table, but based on the speech that I have just heard, I do not think that it will take any time at all. That was a most accomplished performance. The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) spoke earlier in the debate. Both maiden speeches were excellent, and although I may not agree with much of what the SNP says, there is clearly no doubt about the ability of the SNP people who were elected or about the passion with which they argue their cause. I welcome them to the House of Commons in that spirit.

The maiden speeches from the two Edinburgh Members were of exceptional quality, and so were the other maiden speeches that I have heard today. The hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) made a wonderful maiden speech from the Labour Benches, as did the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips). She said that her children were in the Public Gallery watching, and I am sure that they did so with an amazing amount of pride because she made a passionate and accomplished maiden speech.

I do not want the moment to pass without mentioning my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay), because he, too, made a brilliant maiden speech, which certainly bodes well for his future in the House. I think it is well known that one of the things that the Prime Minister and I agree about is that I should never be promoted. On the basis of the speech from my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet, I do not think it will be long before he finds favour with the powers that be, in a way that I never will.

I am told by Professor Philip Cowley that it is a matter of record that I was the second most rebellious MP in the last Parliament. Now that we have a Conservative majority, I hope that I do not need to continue in that vein. I was a rebel against the coalition Government, much of which I did not support. With a Conservative majority, I hope that I will not need to rebel so often. As I always say to the Whips, if the Government pursue Conservative policies, they will not have to worry about me rebelling. It is when they veer from that track that I shall be there to rebel.

I can tell the Government now that the majority may well be small, but if the need arises, I will always do what I believe is the right thing for my constituents and the right thing for the country. My duty as an MP is to hold the Government of the day to account. I could not care what colour the Government is; whichever Government are in power, I will hold them vigorously to account. I should make it clear right at the outset that those usual rules will apply in this Parliament, too. I just live in hope that the need will not arise quite as often as it did during the last Parliament.

I want to touch on just a few subjects in my brief remarks. The first is the Human Rights Act. The Secretary of State for Justice, whom I very much welcome to his position, will probably find me something of a nemesis in this Parliament. About 9%, I think it was, of all the parliamentary questions tabled in the last Parliament to the Ministry of Justice were from me personally, and I intend to continue with that, holding the Government to account on these issues in this Parliament, too. I welcome my right hon. Friend to his position and I have high hopes for him. I hope he will be able to reassure me and many of my colleagues who were enthusiastic supporters of repealing the Human Rights Act during the general election campaign—I found a great deal of support for that from my constituents—that the Government are not going soft on this issue and are not organising a retreat of any kind. I will be doing what I can, in my own modest way, to make sure they stick to their guns and do what they promised the electorate in the manifesto commitment on which we were elected.

This idea, which I heard earlier, particularly from the shadow Home Secretary, that doing that would turn us into a country like Belarus or take us back to being some medieval country is just for the birds. It really is absolute nonsense, to be perfectly frank. The idea that in this country we had no rights at all until 1998 is completely absurd. That is the argument that the Opposition parties try to portray. Our rights in this country go back centuries. They do not go back to 1998; our rights stem from things such as Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights, through common law and case law. That is where our rights and our freedoms come from in this country. They do not come from the Human Rights Act. This idea that we had no human rights and then, all of a sudden, in 1998 they all appeared out of nowhere is just complete nonsense, and the people who argue that case must know in their heart of hearts that it is nonsense.

The Human Rights Act has become a charter for illegal immigrants to avoid deportation, for criminals to avoid what was the will of this House when laws were set, and to allow prisoners to pursue vexatious complaints completely needlessly and at taxpayers' expense. That is really what the Human Rights Act has delivered. I am not aware of any of my genuine, law-abiding constituents who have ever needed to use the Human Rights Act to defend their freedoms. The Human Rights Act has been abused by people whom it was never intended to support in the first place. We cannot just sit idly by and allow that to continue. When we have seen that happen, it is quite right that this Parliament should act to make sure that the laws are in place as we intended and that we do not have those unintended consequences and unintended abuses going unchecked.

As it happens, there has been a lot of talk about how that relates to the European convention on human rights. Personally, I would like to see us withdraw from that too, to be perfectly honest, because the European Court of Human Rights is no more than a joke. It is full of judges, many of whom are not even legally qualified—they are not actually real judges; they are pseudo-judges—who are political appointees from the member states who have been sent to make political decisions, not legal decisions. They have overstepped their authority on many occasions, a prime example being a ruling that prisoners should have the right to vote, when clearly the right to universal suffrage was not one of the rights in

the European convention that we signed up to; we in this country have never allowed prisoners to vote. That is just one example of where they have exceeded their remit, overstepped the mark. We should not be a part of something we did not sign up to.

People say that the European convention was a British invention. It may well be, but how it is being interpreted today is not what Britain intended when the convention first came into being. We cannot sit back and just allow our own courts to be overruled, willy-nilly, by pseudo-judges who are political appointees making political decisions based on what they think the law should be, rather than what the law actually is. In this country we believe in the rule of law, which means that the law should be applied as it is, not as political appointees in those Courts think it should be. The Government need to do something about that and not just allow it continue—hopefully, by seeing through the repeal of the Human Rights Act.

I warmly welcome the EU referendum. It will not come as a great surprise to anyone here to hear that I will campaign enthusiastically for us to leave the European Union when the referendum takes place. Nine years ago, I launched the Better Off Out group in Parliament with a very small number of colleagues and, it is fair to say, long before it was fashionable to argue that we should leave the EU. I am delighted with the progress made since then. We are on the cusp of being able to make the historic decision to leave the European Union, which I would warmly support.

The idea that we need to be in the EU to trade with the EU is complete nonsense. People say that 3 million jobs depend on our trading with the EU. Of course they do—I do not deny that for one minute. But about 5 million jobs in Europe depend on trade with the UK, so there is no way they are going to stop. Does anyone seriously think that BMW, Mercedes, Citroën, Renault and Audi, and all the winemakers of France are going to say, “Well, it’s the principle of the thing. We don’t want to trade with the UK. We don’t want to access its market anymore.” Of course they want access to our market; we are too big a market for them to ignore. We were trading with Europe long before the European Union came into existence, and we will be trading with Europe long after the European Union has gone out of existence. If we sell good product at the right price, people will want to buy it, wherever they are in the world. I have not noticed China having great problems trading with the EU, and China is clearly not a member. The idea that one has to be in the EU to trade with the EU is palpable nonsense.

Those who argue most vociferously that it would be a disaster if we were to leave the EU are all the same people who argued that it would be a disaster if we did not join the euro. Why on earth anyone would listen to those people anymore, the Lord only knows. Tony Blair’s is one name that springs to mind. Hopefully no one will listen to them or be fooled by that nonsense. Those people have been proved wrong before and they will be proved wrong again. I look forward to taking on those arguments during the EU referendum debate and campaign.

I believe that those of us who want to leave the EU can win that campaign, not least because—I come to home affairs, which we are debating today—of the thorny issue of immigration. In the last Parliament, I was highly critical of the Government’s efforts—if one

[Philip Davies]

could call them that—to control immigration. The Prime Minister promised that we would reduce immigration to the tens of thousands, rather than the hundreds of thousands. I do not doubt the Prime Minister's sincerity when he made that promise, and I am perfectly happy to accept that he could not have foreseen our creating so many jobs in this country—more than in the rest of the EU put together—which led more and more people to want to come here. In that sense, we were a victim of our own success, but the fact remains that the Prime Minister made a promise that he was not entitled to make, because we cannot control the number of people coming into this country while we remain a member of the EU. That is a fact and we may as well be honest about it. People want the Government to control immigration, yes, but they also want the Government to be honest about immigration. While we are in the EU we cannot control the numbers coming in. The EU will never give up on the free movement of people. We know that, so let us be honest.

We cannot keep going with the numbers of people coming into this country each year. It is unsustainable. We do not have the land available to build all the houses needed to accommodate all those people. Even if we had, we do not have the wherewithal to build all the houses that would need building for the number of people coming into this country each year. It is just not feasible and we should be honest about that. If people want to stay in the EU and have unlimited immigration, that is fine. It is a perfectly respectable position to hold; it just happens to be one with which I disagree. If that is what people want, let them be honest with the public that that is the consequence of voting to stay in the EU. I do not mind what people's argument about the EU is, as long as they are honest about their opinion.

I shall make some final brief points, if I may. The first is about the police. I am a big supporter of the police and I voted against cuts to the police budget throughout the previous Parliament. I will continue to do that, if the need arises, during this Parliament. The police do a superb job. They face an awful lot of problems, not least the Government taking lots of people off the DNA database, which made the job of the police even harder unnecessarily. I hope the Government will give the police the resources they need to do what they are dedicated to doing—catching criminals and bringing them to justice. The first duty of the Government is to keep the public safe. That means providing the police with adequate resources to make sure that dangerous criminals are where they belong, which is behind bars. I hope that the Secretary of State for Justice will take to heart the fact that we want to see more criminals in prison. A doubling of the prison population would suit me fine, if the Secretary of State is looking for a rough estimate of how many people should be there.

The final issues are metro Mayors and HS2. All this stuff is basically about lots of people down south pretending that they know and care about the north and bringing forward proposals that nobody in the north is interested in, thereby highlighting how out of touch they are with people in the north. I rarely find anybody in the north who is interested in HS2. I have never yet come across a businessman who says, "Unless you get me to London 20 minutes earlier, I'm out of

here." What we need is better infrastructure in the north and across the north. HS3 is a far better idea than HS2, which is just a grotesque waste of money. I will continue voting against HS2, as I did in the previous Parliament.

As for metro Mayors, I have no idea where that idea comes from. The idea that we want to give more and more power to councillors like the people who run Bradford council, for example, and that they should get more powers over affairs affecting Shipley—how anyone could think that is a good idea, Lord only knows. My constituents want Bradford council to have fewer powers, not more powers. In fact, we want to get out of Bradford council altogether and set up our own council separate from Bradford's. Why on earth do the Government think it is a good idea to put more and more powers on these people, who were elected on such a low turnout? Why do we think they have a great democratic mandate to make decisions when they are elected on something like a 30% turnout, whereas MPs are elected on something like a 70% turnout? If the Government want to bring more localism into effect, they should give more powers to the people who got the mandate from their constituents, not to people who were elected by hardly anybody turning out to vote, as we saw with police and crime commissioners, which was another waste of time.

I broadly welcome the Queen's Speech. That would be a fair summary of where I am. I am open to anybody reinterpreting my remarks, but I have got it down as broad support for the Gracious Speech. I hope the Government will see through the promises that they have made on the EU referendum—I have every confidence that they will—and on the Human Rights Act. I want them to be aware that on matters such as metro Mayors, HS2 and other nonsense that they may come up with from time to time, I will be prepared, however reluctantly, to vote against them to keep them honest and true to true Conservative principles.

3.49 pm

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): Mr Speaker, thank you for calling me to make my maiden speech, and congratulations on your re-election. At the outset I want to thank four of my predecessors, because I knew them all. The first is Simon Mahon, who often visited my house—particularly during election time, when he came with leaflets—given that he was a first cousin of my late mother. I even remember, albeit a little vaguely, leafleting in the 1964 general election; a punishment inflicted on my children in many subsequent elections—I am pleased to say that they have forgiven me.

The second is Allan Roberts, who was well liked and respected by the people of Bootle constituency, even though he was from Manchester, and who died far too young, but to this day he is remembered with fondness. The third is Mike Carr, who, having taken up the cudgel from Allan, also died prematurely just months after his election in 1990, but in that short time he made a lasting and deep impression. Finally, Joe Benton, who many in this House will have known, unerringly served the people of Bootle for a quarter of a century as its MP and for many years before as a councillor.

Another of my predecessors, but one I did not know, was Andrew Bonar Law, the shortest serving Tory Prime Minister of the 20th century; he resided in Downing Street for just 211 days, I understand. Alas, the same

cannot be said of subsequent Tory Prime Ministers, but in Bootle constituency we have played our part in trying to keep their tenure to a minimum. I would be happy next time around, if this is permissible, to lend to other Labour candidates some of the 28,700 majority I received in the election, if that would be of help. I am sure that many of the people in my home town would approve of that generous and unselfish offer.

I was born in Bootle constituency, and all my primary, secondary and further education was undertaken there. Regrettably, we did not have a university, so I had to make my way to Liverpool and other universities instead—none of them was a bogus college, I add. I have worked in the constituency, lived there for most of my life and represented a council ward there. That has been not life limiting, but life affirming. It is therefore the greatest of privileges to have been elected to Parliament by the people of Bootle constituency. Colleagues, neighbours, possibly family and friends and perhaps even a few enemies have voted for me. Labour has a huge mandate from the people of Bootle constituency, and it is one that I intend to use to further the needs of my constituents.

Bootle constituency is not just the town of Bootle; it comprises other communities and towns—Crosby, Ford, Litherland, Old Roan, Orrell, Seaforth and Waterloo. Waterloo is a very topical place to talk about this year, the 200th anniversary of the battle of Waterloo. I am pleased to say that, unlike the original Waterloo, it is an area of peace and harmony.

My constituency, of which I am very proud, is a place of contrasts. It has huge docklands and hinterland within it. The entrance sign to the dock estate says, “The Port of Liverpool”, but I am pleased to clarify for the benefit of my Liverpool parliamentary colleagues that the port is actually in Seaforth, which is part of the Bootle constituency—but I will not split hairs. The port is expanding, and with that will come many challenges for our local communities. I hope that I will be able to play a constructive part in the economic regeneration and renewal that we all hope the expansion will bring. I am sure that good faith on all sides during the period of expansion can be of mutual benefit to both community and business. Ultimately, however, if need be, I will not shirk from being a protagonist for the needs of my constituents and the communities in which they live.

I said earlier that Bootle constituency is an area of contrasts. Yes, there are the industrial areas and the retail parks, but we also have a beautiful coastline, which earlier this week witnessed the magnificent sight of the three queens—Victoria, Mary and Elizabeth—sailing by, and they, too, were gracious. It has fantastic schools, great leisure facilities, marvellous health services and things to envy. However, it is the resilience, generosity and fortitude of our people that others should most envy.

As a coastal town, the sea has beguiled, entranced and been cruel in equal measures to our people. Nowhere in Bootle constituency is more than a few minutes away from the fantastic and iconic river and estuary that is the Mersey. The estuary and river have been the lifeblood not just of our local communities but, particularly in the dark days of world war two, of our country. As we commemorate and, yes, celebrate the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, I want people to know that Bootle constituency and its people played their part—a significant part—in the longest battle of the war, the

battle of the Atlantic. Our port and town were some of the most badly bombed of the last war. Over three quarters of dwellings were destroyed or damaged in some way by bombing. Hundreds of civilians—men, women and children—lost their lives at home, while their fathers, husbands, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters lost their lives across the globe. They lost their lives in defence of freedom from tyranny and prejudice and in defence of that noble cause, the rule of law.

The rule of law is the very structure that underpins the human rights of all, regardless of their race, creed, sexuality, political colour or country of origin, however inconvenient that might be for some. You cannot pick and mix with human rights laws. Over the centuries, this House has been a living, breathing monument to the rule of law and the cause of human rights. In that regard, it must stay its hand or for ever regret a retreat into a moral lacuna that gives succour to the very regimes we seek to influence for the better, as we did after the last war.

With this history behind me, I was elected to this House to ensure that the needs and rights of all those who live in Bootle, Crosby, Ford, Litherland, Orrell, Old Roan, Seaforth and Waterloo are my first and only priority. I intend to fulfil that responsibility to the best of my ability. I trust and hope, Mr Speaker, that you will, on occasion, grace me with the opportunity and, at times, indulgence and forbearance in this Chamber to do just that. Thank you.

3.56 pm

Mr Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for asking me to complete this debate. I shall endeavour to do so—that is, up until the very important closing speeches.

I apologise for being unable to be here for the opening speeches or for all the maiden speeches, though all those I heard were of an extraordinarily high quality, not least the one we just heard from the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) and the one that preceded it from the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), who made a speech that was absolutely in the traditions of this House. He is very welcome as a Member of this House if the contributions that he is to make, and his colleagues are to make, are of that calibre and quality. He should know that many people in this House claim Scots ancestry. My second name is Bruce, and I have always been proud to believe that somewhere in my bloodstream there is Scottish blood. There is great sympathy and fellow feeling with the people of Scotland. That is one reason why those of us who are Unionists want to retain Scotland as part of the greater unity of the United Kingdom. However, that is an issue that we can discuss, and if it is done in the manner that it was today, it will raise the level of debate very considerably.

I want to address the repeal and replacement of the Human Rights Act. I am a passionate defender of our civil liberties. In Cabinet, I defended, sometimes almost single-handedly, the right to trial by jury against attempts to limit and restrict it. Likewise, I fought against compulsory ID cards, often in alliance with my now dear departed friends in the Liberal Democrat party. I supported a free press against the Leveson attempt to introduce state control of our free media. I have advocated legalising cannabis.

[Mr Peter Lilley]

However, belief in human rights and civil liberties is not the same as belief in the Human Rights Act or the European declaration of human rights. They are not identical, although of course there was a deliberate political attempt to claim ownership of human rights by enshrining the European declaration of human rights in law in our Human Rights Act.

We all in this House support human rights. We did so before the Human Rights Act, we do so now that we have a Human Rights Act and we will continue to support human rights if the Human Rights Act is repealed. There is no controversy in practice about the core of each right. There is no controversy about the fact that Governments should not be entitled, willy-nilly and at whim, to deprive us of our liberty. There is no conflict or debate about whether Governments have the right to deprive us of our life if we are innocent and are not committing any acts or doing anything that requires self-defence.

The issue at dispute is: where rights conflict, who or what institution should decide the balance between those rights, and who should set the outer boundaries or the lower limits of triviality where rights apply? No right is absolute and unlimited. There is a right to freedom of speech, but there is no right to libel or slander, to spread hatred or stir up breaches of the peace, or to invade another person's privacy. We have the right to life, but we do not prosecute soldiers who, legitimately and under orders, take lives in war. We do not allow the courts to decide whether the woman should make the decision over the right to life of an unborn child, or to decide that such a right to life should be deemed absolute, as is likewise the case with suicide and euthanasia. There are boundaries to every right, and the balances between rights have to be resolved.

Balancing conflicting rights, as well as setting boundaries and limits to their triviality, is intrinsically a policy or political matter. In the last resort, that is why such issues have been decided by the political process in Parliament, not by the legal process in the courts. Where the boundaries of conflicting rights have not been drawn by statute, the courts do their best to interpret the law to create law, in the way they have learned to do in the common law process in this country, to fill in the gaps left by Parliament. Ultimately, however, Parliament has always been able to redraw the boundaries if it so wished to establish a statutory right or a limit to a right.

That is the process, with Parliament supreme over the courts, under which human rights have developed in this country from Magna Carta onwards. That charter was laid down not by judges but by barons. It is paradoxical that so many advocates of human rights—or self-declared owners of belief in human rights—now assert that the parliamentary supremacy under which those human rights evolved is a threat to human rights, and therefore argue that Parliament must be subordinated to the courts. But if judges are given the intrinsically political role of deciding on the balance between conflicting rights and the outer boundaries of rights, we will inevitably and ineluctably politicise the judiciary.

Such a politicisation has happened in the United States, where the Supreme Court is the supreme court—the supreme arbiter of the rights laid down in the constitution.

As a consequence, the appointment of judges is highly political—it is one of the most highly political decisions any President takes—and the political, cultural and social views of candidates, not their legal abilities, are paramount in the choice of candidates for the Supreme Court in America and their ratification through the political process. Indeed, Presidents try to embed their views for long after they and their elected term of office come to an end by appointing to the Supreme Court the youngest, fittest and most intransigent fellow believers, in the hope that they will continue to enforce their views when the President is long gone. Of course, even local judges can be elected in the States. Do we seriously want to go down that route in this country—the route of politicising the appointment of our judiciary?

The second consequence of giving judge-made law supremacy over Parliament-made law is that we take away the most important right of all of the British people: the right to hold their lawmakers accountable. The voters can turf out MPs if they do not like the way in which we interpret their rights, or if they believe we have infringed them in any way. We are accountable to the electorate, but judges are not accountable. In my view, they should not be politically accountable—they should not be removed or appointed as a result of the political process—but if they are given a political role and remain unaccountable, that lack of accountability will undermine respect for the law, as it is already doing.

I very much hope that we will repeal the Human Rights Act and restore a proper balance between Parliament and the courts, but we should not just replace the Human Rights Act with a British Bill of Rights that gives judges supremacy over Parliament—that would merely recreate in the domestic forum the problems we have created internationally. However, there is the issue of the European declaration and the European Court of Human Rights. When I was in the Cabinet, the renewal of our membership of that declaration, or our adherence to it, came up. I proposed that we renege from it at that point. It so happened that the Foreign Office had just made Croatia's adherence to the convention a condition of our recognition of it. It was felt that it would look odd if, having made that a condition, we reneged from the convention. I was quite happy to overcome that little problem, but that was why my advice was not taken.

Many appeal to the origins of the European convention on human rights and to chauvinistic sentiment. They say that the convention is ultimately British and that it was written by a British Attorney-General and other British lawyers; that it simply codified British human rights that had evolved over centuries, including the right to jury trial and so on; and that there was therefore absolutely nothing to worry about. Of course, those who codified and enshrined the convention did not realise that they were changing the process by which law was made. Instead of being made ultimately by Parliament, it was ultimately made by courts, often of a political composition but unaccountable to any electorate. Although it was inevitable and foreseeable, they did not anticipate that the courts, once they had been given the right to interpret a rather abstract document, would do so in an extensive and continually elaborated way.

The result is that judges have reached the sorts of decisions that would never have been reached had we not signed up to the European Court of Human Rights

and the European declaration of rights, and had we not enshrined it in our law. There have been judgments on relatively trivial issues, such as on whether prisoners should have the vote. I can see quite a good case for giving prisoners the vote—it would force hon. Members to go and campaign in prisons to win those votes, and we would learn more about prisons than most of us have done. I have only ever learned about prison when my friends have been put in it and I have had to go and visit—no names, no pack drill.

Whether or not prisoners are given the vote is essentially a political decision. It is not something that judges automatically know best. Underlying the belief in making judges supreme over Parliament is a belief that judges have an innate ability that others do not have to discern what is right and true, or the belief that the document that judges interpret is a revealed document, a bit like the Koran being interpreted by an ayatollah. It is not, of course. It is a rough summary of what had evolved in this part of the world, and leaving people to interpret it as they will gives them great and unaccountable power that they should not have.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a most thoughtful speech. It is worth articulating the exact legal and constitutional position. We signed the convention in the early 1950s, and the Human Rights Act was not passed until the late 1990s. If this Parliament were to repeal the Human Rights Act, it would be entirely our choice as to whether we stayed in the Council of Europe and remained wedded to the convention. We would not be expelled.

Mr Lilley: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right, although I am not sure that it would matter terribly if we were expelled from the Council of Europe. We might just as well belong to it, and I am sure that we could continue to belong to it even if we did repeal the Human Rights Act and no longer accepted the supremacy of the European Court of Human Rights.

The essential issue is whether political decisions should be taken by politicians and judicial decisions by judges. Those who believe that the Human Rights Act should remain on our statute book ultimately want judges to take political decisions, leaving us deprived of that right and the electorate deprived of any ability to hold those who make those laws accountable—or to throw them out if they make decisions the electorate do not like. It is very important that we recognise that that is the issue, not whether we believe in human rights. We all believe in human rights, but we need to decide how the balance between rights is to be determined and how the full extent of any right is to be limited. If that is the question, I am sure that the whole House will agree with the measures that the Secretary of State will develop after consultation and, in due course, bring before the House. I welcome every measure in the Queen's Speech, but above all the prospect of the repeal of the Human Rights Act.

4.12 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): We are a little ahead of time, but I will break the habit of a lifetime and not abuse my position by taking too much of the remaining time. I welcome the Lord Chancellor to his new job. He has already been warmly welcomed by the

legal establishment, and that has no doubt put him on his guard. He follows another non-lawyer in the job, and I can only pray for a better meeting of legal and non-legal minds than was the case with his predecessor. Given the almost instant rapport he had with the education profession, I am sure that will be the case. He has certainly made an excellent start by not putting any justice Bills before the House. Given the sorry history of the last Parliament, from the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 to the Social Action, Responsibility and Heroism Act 2015, no news is good news.

This debate has set a high bar for the quality of contributions from Members on both sides of the House, old and new, for the Queen's Speech and this Parliament. I shall briefly mention those who have spoken, and I hope that some of the old hands will excuse me if I skate over their contributions, given that we had 34 contributions from Back Benchers. We started—it seems some time ago now—with the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) who, as we would expect, gave a tour d'horizon on matters of security and international affairs.

The right hon. Gentleman was followed swiftly by the first of the maiden speeches, from the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), who generously said that her predecessor, Alistair Darling, was a difficult and hard act to follow. But with her robust defence of the Human Rights Act and the principles of the rule of law, she has already proved she might be a worthy successor. I was with her in almost everything she said, except perhaps when she said we were in danger of withdrawing from the ECHR after only 60 years but saw no problem with withdrawing from the Union after 300 years.

We then heard a thoughtful contribution from the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green), particularly on extremism and investigatory powers, as we would expect given his background. He reiterated his welcome support for the European convention.

I always learn something from the speeches of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), who has been an excellent Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee for many years. He is almost an institution and I hope to see him continue for many years to come—without giving away my voting intentions in any way.

The next maiden speech was from my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds). When I made my maiden speech, not only had I written it out in full—I have given that up now—but my hands were shaking as I gave it. For him to give a speech without notes, fluently and eloquently, set a great example. He also paid a generous tribute to someone I think we all greatly respect—his predecessor, Paul Murphy.

I disagree with the hon. Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller) on many issues, but he made the point, as he has done many times, about the dangers of extended detention for immigration and has earned our respect for championing that cause.

I think we are all disappointed—perhaps some on the Government Benches not so much—that my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge) is not continuing as the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee. She showed, however, that not continuing in that post will allow her to talk about many other

[*Andy Slaughter*]

subjects. From her own constituency and wider experience, she gave an extremely mature view of what was wrong with the Government's immigration policy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Flello) gave a very good deconstruction of what was wrong with the Gracious Speech as drafted by the Government. Obviously his time as a shadow Justice Minister stood him in good stead.

Even though I did not agree with much of the contribution from the hon. Member for Poole (Mr Syms), it was delivered in such an enthusiastic and reassuring manner that I found myself almost agreeing with it by default—but there it is.

I agreed with what my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) said in her excellent and thoughtful speech on the dangers of nationalism, which is a subject to which I suspect we will return on many occasions.

The maiden speech from the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) included a comment one often hears: "My constituency is the most beautiful in the country". We are all guilty of that—I often wax lyrical about the beauty of Shepherd's Bush Green—but those of us who have visited his part of the country will think he might actually have a point. It is an extraordinarily beautiful place. He might wonder why, therefore, that, as he told us, he is the first Member to live there since 1833. Others have not taken advantage of the opportunity.

There swiftly followed the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), whom I think we are going to hear a great deal more from on the subject about which he spoke with forensic skill, as one would expect. In a short period, he gave a rebuttal of the Government's plans to repeal the Human Rights Act, exploring some of the myths and dangers of their approach.

We heard another excellent, and good-humoured, maiden speech from the hon. Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay). He explained why he felt less in the public eye in the Chamber than he did on the doorsteps of South Thanet, given the media frenzy that accompanied his election process. Let us hope he has a quieter time now.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith) will excuse me if I say that his speech, despite his being an old hand, sounded a bit like a maiden speech—so great is his love affair with his constituency and given the way he described it and its heritage.

My new hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) gave, as I think all Members would agree, not just a good maiden speech, but a good speech that showed a real depth of knowledge and empathy on a subject that we all take very seriously—the issue of sexual exploitation and domestic violence.

I have mentioned speaking without notes, and this applies equally to the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard). Given what he told us about his constituency, there is a danger that he might become known as "the MP for the fringe". Because I know him from previous incarnations, I realise that when he spoke so passionately about the deprivation in his constituency, it was very sincere. We shall hear a lot more from him along similar lines.

I cannot avoid mentioning the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), who now sees himself as the lodestar of the Conservative party. We will know when the Conservative party is going wrong when it is not voting with him in the Lobbies.

The last maiden speech we heard today—by no means the least—was from my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd), who paid a generous tribute to his distinguished predecessors, including, of course, Joe Benton. My hon. Friend talked about the distinguished Labour history of the constituency and of his extremely large majority.

We will have more time to assess these affairs on other occasions, but let me do so briefly. Home affairs and justice often get the lion's share of legislation in the Queen's Speech under any Government—and there is no change here, at least for home affairs, with five Bills to the Home Secretary's name. I shall not comment on them in detail or go beyond the excellent analysis of the shadow Home Secretary, save to say that some of the proposed measures seem unhelpfully vague at this point. Both investigatory powers and extremism are important subjects that require sensitivity and balance between the rights of the citizen and the duties of the state. Until we see the detail in the presentation of those Bills, I will remain anxious about whether this Government will get that balance right.

By contrast, the policing and criminal justice Bill already contains a number of welcome specific provisions, not least the treatment of 17-year-olds as children for all the purposes of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, and the better regulation of detention under the Mental Health Act 1983. I note the catch-all phrase that the Bill will

"allow us to deliver a range of criminal justice reforms that will aim to better protect the public, build confidence and improve efficiency."

I fear that we are about to see yet another Christmas tree Bill on which a mishmash of unconnected new offences and pet projects are hung. One thing we would like to see in the Bill, however, are the provisions for the victims code. I do not know whether the Lord Chancellor will be able to confirm that it will be included in the Bill. Both my hon. Friends the Members for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) and for Holborn and St Pancras have made the case for that. I would welcome a change of heart from the Government on building the victims code into legislation.

Given the coalition Government's lamentable record on justice policy, I said that no news may be good news, but some things would have provided welcome additions to the Gracious Speech. There is nothing to deal with the crisis in our prisons; nothing to deal with the crisis in our courts; nothing to improve access to justice; nothing to improve advice services or to mitigate the attacks on civil and criminal legal aid overseen by the previous Lord Chancellor.

Let me spend my final few minutes addressing the proposed repeal of the Human Rights Act—a proposal that was perhaps the most touted of all the Queen's Speech measures in the run-up to its delivery yesterday, yet the Government have had the least to say about it in comparison with any other measures. Others have had plenty to say on the subject. I include, of course, jurists and practitioners such as my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras, but I am thinking rather

more of the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), the right hon. Members for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) and for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) and the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke).

When the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield describes the previous proposals as “puerile” and says

“This UK bill of rights is a recipe for disaster”,

when the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield says

“I have to say that I never thought a British government, let alone a Conservative one, would ever have thought of withdrawing from the convention for which, of course, we were responsible”,

or when an admittedly unnamed senior Tory says

“These plans will only pass if the PM wins the support of David Davis and Clarke”—

which I think he is some distance from doing—the Lord Chancellor may be in a little trouble. Not only is the weight of argument on his own Benches, as well as on ours, against him, but he does not appear to have the numbers, not only in the other place but in this House, to get such a proposal through, and he would be right to be nervous about his chances of doing so.

The Government have already got themselves into a bind from which even someone as clever as the Lord Chancellor may struggle to free them. There are constitutional difficulties in relation to the devolved Governments, and the negotiations about the EU referendum are in danger of contamination. If the Lord Chancellor has not already done so, I advise him to read the excellent article by the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield in today's *Times*.

Beyond that, there is confusion about the Government's real intention. The hon. Member for Shipley and others have said today that this is not just about scrapping the Human Rights Act, but about withdrawal from the convention. Some Members would welcome that, but if, as the Government say, that is not their intention and they simply wish to withdraw from the Act, they will not achieve their purpose. They seem to “elide over” the fact that we still have parliamentary sovereignty in this country, and the fact that decisions of the European Court are not binding on domestic courts. According to the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield, they are

“in danger... of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.”—[*Official Report*, 27 May 2015; Vol. 596, c. 97.]

Given that the anomalies and difficulties involving the European Court, whose existence we admitted at the time—the backlog, the insecurity of some of its judgments and, indeed, the fact that the UK courts were perhaps following them too closely—are all in the process of being resolved, one might ask what problem the Government are now seeking to solve.

No doubt the Lord Chancellor will say that this is an important constitutional measure, and that we should pause and consult. We cannot disagree with that theory, save for the fact that the Government—or the Conservative party—have had five years in which to consider the matter. There has been a commission, there have been six or seven drafts of the Bill, and we heard a clear statement last October from the previous Lord Chancellor about what he believed was required, and we heard another clear statement from the Prime Minister that he wanted to see action in the first 100 days. I do not know what has changed, other than the fact that the Lord

Chancellor is having trouble delivering the legislation. We shall, however, have an opportunity to examine the matter in more detail. We welcome the fact that there is to be a pause, and that legislation will not be presented during the current Session—not least because there must be less chance of its getting through during later Sessions.

Finally, let me make clear that if there is any attempt to undermine our human rights, and to undermine what my party and I regard as one of the finest pieces of legislation introduced by the Labour Government, we will resist it. We will join supporters from any other parties, on the Opposition or the Government Benches, to ensure that it is resisted. Our human rights are too precious and too important, and have been fought for too long, to be thrown away at the whim of a Lord Chancellor or a political party.

4.28 pm

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove): Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr Speaker, on your re-election in the constituency of Buckingham with an increased majority, and on your re-election as Speaker. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) on his increased majority. Over the last 12 months, I have made many—sadly unsuccessful—visits to his constituency, but not for the purpose of canvassing for the Conservative party; I was visiting Loftus Road to watch Queen's Park Rangers play. The relegation of Queen's Park Rangers last month was one piece of bad news, but it was, of course, mitigated by the good news of the election of a majority Conservative Government for the first time since 1992. Let me add that while I have occasionally enjoyed 90 minutes of pain at Loftus Road, I think we would all agree that the last five hours of debate have been of a conspicuously high standard. If debate in this House for the remainder of the five years of this fixed-term Parliament matches the standard of the debate we have heard today, this will go down as one of the best Parliaments in the history of the House of Commons.

May I particularly emphasise how impressed I was, and I know many colleagues were too, by the speeches of new Members, and I want to turn to some of those maiden speeches in a moment. However, as well as celebrating the excellent speeches by newly elected Members, may I acknowledge our gratitude to those Members who have departed this House? When we are considering home affairs issues, it is only fair to acknowledge that distinguished Home Secretaries like David Blunkett and Jack Straw are no longer in this House. Their contribution to our national debate on home affairs and justice matters has always been of the highest standard. Others who have stood down, including my former colleague Sir George Young and Sir Menzies Campbell QC, also augmented our debates in this place. I also want to say on a personal level that there were three Members who sought re-election but failed whom I have enjoyed debating with in this House and whose absence from it diminishes it as a place of debate. They are, of course, Ed Balls, former Member for Morley and Outwood, David Laws, former Member for Yeovil, and Charles Kennedy, former Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber. All three of them were distinguished parliamentarians and public servants of great ability. I hope they can continue to contribute to the life of this country. They still have a great deal to offer.

[*Michael Gove*]

I congratulate the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) on his maiden speech. His affection for his constituency was transparent in his every word, and I know he will be a diligent and effective constituency Member. He spoke from the heart and effectively on behalf of his constituents. I look forward to hearing him again in our future debates.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) on his maiden speech, delivered without notes and with great fluency. He is a highly accomplished barrister and the biographer of Clement Attlee and Aneurin Bevan, a combination of skills and talents that will add significantly to our future debates.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) enjoyed 12 minutes of uninterrupted speech in this place. I hope there will be many other opportunities for us to hear him, when we may perhaps have occasion to interrupt him to tease out the wisdom behind his remarks. I very much enjoyed his speech, both the analysis of the strengths and deficiencies of Magna Carta and the passion he showed in defence of human rights as a way of safeguarding the interests of his constituents, many of whom are among the poorest in our capital and our country. They will have an effective advocate in him.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) and say, as a fellow working parent, that it is good to have the hon. Lady in the House. Her speech was an effective, passionate and powerful plea on behalf of many of those who are sometimes forgotten in this place and by those of us who exercise Executive and administrative power. One of the good things my predecessor as Lord Chancellor did was widen the evidence criteria to ensure that more women in domestic violence cases were able to enjoy access to legal aid. He also ensured that specialist rape centres were funded more generously than before. It is only fair that we acknowledge that he, working with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, made significant strides forward, ensuring that violence against women and girls was treated with the seriousness it deserves.

I also congratulate with a particular sense of enjoyment my new hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay). There were moments when all of us may have felt saddened on the evening of 7 May and the morning of 8 May. There were also moments when many of us felt a sense of jubilation. I say with malice towards none that I felt particular joy to see his smile as he was elected the Member of Parliament for South Thanet. I had the privilege of campaigning alongside him during the general election campaign. I know he lost more than a stone and a half during that campaign. His exertions on behalf of his constituents were rewarded with a healthy majority and I know that during the next five years he will be a highly effective advocate for the people of that beautiful part of Kent.

We also had three very good maiden speeches from new Members elected for the Scottish National party. First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard). He spoke fluently and passionately without notes. As a graduate of Aberdeen University, I would have expected no less of him. The way in which he combined a determined and from-the-heart appeal on behalf of his constituents with respect for the traditions of this place and for other parties, was hugely impressive.

His experience not just in politics but in the world of entertainment will stand him in good stead here. He is the proprietor of The Stand comedy club in Edinburgh, and there is no better preparation for Westminster than watching a succession of jokers try to woo a difficult audience.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) on his maiden speech. He styled himself a poor crofter, and his commitment to crofting and crofting families is second to none. However, I think there are very few crofters, even on the Isle of Skye, who spent 20 years as an investment banker with Deutsche Bank, but I am sure that that special combination of abilities will make him a voice that we will all want to pay close attention to.

I also congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) on her very impressive maiden speech. She is a member of the Faculty of Advocates, and as she pointed out, Edinburgh South West, whether in the Scottish Parliament or here at Westminster, has been very lucky in having a string of distinguished lawyers from three parties to represent it. I also thank her for her commitment to bring to bear not just legal experience, but a proper sense of the balance between the place of the law and the place of Parliaments in deciding on our human rights. I hope that Scottish National party MPs will not take it amiss if I observe that recently the Justice Minister at Holyrood had occasion to reverse a position where his predecessor had sought to lower the evidential barrier for the admission of particular cases. The fact that there was a U-turn was a welcome sign that in every Parliament, if we listen to the public and pay close attention to their concerns, we can ensure that the vulnerable are better protected. The hon. and learned Lady's voice will be a valuable one in making sure that our deliberations on justice matters are enhanced and stronger.

We also had a succession of very impressive speeches from experienced Members, including the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz). I join my voice to his in congratulating the many members of black and minority ethnic communities in this House, which is now in every sense more diverse than it has ever been. That is all to the good, and his role in acting as a champion of greater diversity at every level of public and commercial life is one of the many assets that he brings to his role.

I also thank the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) for his speech, and the right hon. Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge) and the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green). The warning from the hon. Lady of the dangers of nationalism taken to excess had many heads nodding throughout the Chamber, and, while we may not always agree on the to and fro of legislation, I absolutely applaud her commitment to making sure that when we think about making decisions in this House we try always to reconcile rather than to divide communities.

There were a number of very accomplished speeches by Government Back Benchers, who have the weight of considerable experience. My hon. Friends the Members for Poole (Mr Syms) and for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond), my right hon. Friends the Members for Ashford (Damian Green) and for North Somerset (Dr Fox), my hon. Friends the Members for Bedford (Richard Fuller) and for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher),

and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley) all made excellent speeches. The warnings from my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset about the importance of maintaining vigilance in foreign affairs, the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford made about sensitivity in immigration, and the points that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden made about the importance of recognising that parliamentary sovereignty is the key to safeguarding our freedoms were all well received.

When the Home Secretary opened this debate, she outlined a significant range of measures, all of which are designed to enhance the security of citizens throughout the United Kingdom. This Home Secretary has been the most accomplished and successful in ensuring that we can put in place a suite of anti-terrorist and anti-extremist measures that deal with the single greatest threat to our way of life, to our security and to our freedoms. That, of course, is Islamist extremism. This Home Secretary has been responsible for the eviction of more hate preachers, and for a more determined and energetic pursuit not just of violent extremism, but of non-violent extremism and the ideology that ultimately gives rise to hatred and division in our communities. I take this opportunity not just to applaud her on her efforts in the past, but to say that the measures she is bringing forward today will I am sure go further than perhaps any other western nation has in making sure we can deal with the threat of extremism and, in particular, the vile ideology of hate which so many who twist the proud religion of Islam unfortunately have sought to propagate on our streets and in other countries.

The measures to bring forward legislation to deal with psychoactive drugs respond, as many speakers in the House have pointed out, to a widespread concern shared by many communities and many parents. It is important that we recognise that we need to maintain our vigilance against those drugs that are already illegal, which can have a devastating effect on young lives, but a number of substances that are currently legal can warp and ruin the lives of young people, and I know that the legislation the Home Secretary is going to bring in will be welcomed across the House.

I should also say that the Home Secretary's measures to better control immigration will be vital in making sure that we can bolster and maintain public confidence in the security of our borders. I know that there was some criticism from the shadow Home Secretary of our record on immigration. The Home Secretary and I would be the first to concede that there is more to be done, which is why we are bringing a measure forward, but—I wonder how I should put it; it is not hypocritical or disingenuous—there is an element of chutzpah, to borrow a word from those on the Scottish National party Benches, in the Labour party criticising any other party for laxity on immigration and a failure to control our borders.

On police and criminal justice matters, it is fair to acknowledge that this Home Secretary is bringing forward an enlightened, liberal and progressive police and criminal justice Bill. She will ensure that those who have mental health problems—a significant number in our society—do not find themselves in a police cell, as that is a wholly unsuitable place for those suffering mental health problems to find themselves; police misconduct will also be better

pursued and better investigated than ever before, so that individual citizens who may have been on the receiving end of police misconduct are better protected; the extension of freedom of information to the Police Federation will ensure that we are in a stronger position to safeguard the rights of individuals against corporate interests; and the review of the laws governing how professionals operate towards children in their care should ensure that the most vulnerable, who should always be at the forefront of our minds, will be better protected.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): Before we leave the subject of drugs too far behind, may I say that, although it is not my habit to praise the Conservative Government, or even their Queen's Speeches, I think that the commitment to addressing the problem of psychoactive drugs is extremely important? I appreciate that this is slightly outside the Minister's brief and may be more towards the brief of the Home Secretary, who is sitting next to him, but may we also examine the aspects around the taking of drugs? Nitrous oxide, and other such things, may not appear on the list, but it does create an appalling antisocial crisis on our streets at the moment—it certainly does in my constituency. So I welcome the inclusion and forgive me for saying, be it chutzpah or not, that I would like to see it extended not just to defining the chemical, but to addressing the issues around it.

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. Many of us will have read in the newspapers recently about the way in which the use of nitrous oxide, so-called "hippy crack", has led to some very unhappy consequences. The legislation we are going to introduce will look at the specific effects that chemicals have on individuals, so there will be an opportunity to deal with the menace that he identifies.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) lamented the fact that there was no legislation specifically to deal with prisons or the problems that we face in our courts system. I will be honest: although I would not use the word "crisis", there are difficult issues to be addressed in our prison estate and in our courts. That is why I am so very grateful that Sir Brian Leveson has produced an outstanding report on what we may be able to do to improve the operation of our courts system. I look forward to working with the judiciary and Members across this House to ensure that justice is fairer and faster.

We do need to address a number of problems in our prisons to ensure that they become places of rehabilitation as well as incarceration. Some steps that were taken by my predecessor to help transform rehabilitation are a very promising way forward, but we should also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the prison governors, the prison officers and, above all, the chief executive of the National Offender Management Service, Michael Spurr. Those dedicated public servants do an outstanding job, not just in making us all safe, but in trying to ensure that individuals have a chance at redemption and a second chance in their lives.

Of course, in the shadow Home Secretary's speech, and in some of the comments from other Opposition Members, we heard rhetoric on human rights that, if they will forgive me for saying so, was ever so slightly overblown. In Dickens' "The Pickwick Papers" there is a character called "the Fat Boy" who "wants to make your flesh creep."

[Michael Gove]

I did think that there was an element of the lurid in the description of what would happen if we were to tamper in any way with the Human Rights Act. To listen to Labour Members at some points one would have thought that prior to 1998 this country was a lawless wasteland in which the innocent were put to the sword and no one had any recourse to justice, and that after 1998 we entered a land where the rule of law was at last respected, after decades, if not centuries, of arbitrary rule. Although that depiction might go down well at a Labour constituency fund-raising function or indeed on the leadership hustings of that party, it is not appropriate to indulge in that sort of rhetoric when discussing important issues such as the balance between liberty and parliamentary sovereignty.

Yvette Cooper: A couple of years ago, the Home Secretary said that she was prepared to pull out of the European convention. Will the Justice Secretary rule that out, or does he still believe that that is something that this country should do?

Michael Gove: The right hon. Lady is getting ever so slightly ahead of herself. We propose to consult on the measures that we bring forward. We will not repeat the mistake that the Labour party made when it introduced the Human Rights Act. It did so without adequate consultation or preparation, and at a pace and in a way that gave rise to a variety of concerns. Those concerns have been articulated not just by members of the public and the right wing press—the bogies that the Labour party likes to invoke—

Yvette Cooper *rose*—

Michael Gove: No, let me continue. It has been the case that distinguished Supreme Court justices have expressed concern about the way in which the Human Rights Act and the European convention on human rights have an interaction. It is also the case that, as a result of comments made by Lord Hoffmann, Jonathan Sumption and, just this week, the former Lord Chief Justice, Lord Judge, we need to look at the matter again. But it is important that we do so in a spirit that is open-minded and that does not seek to prejudge things. The difference between those on the Opposition Benches and the Government is that the Opposition seem to think that the legislation that was passed in 1998 is perfect and they cannot admit of any change whereas we believe that our constitution is a living instrument that is capable of and susceptible to reform. The right hon. Lady needs to say whether there is any case for reform or whether the 1998 settlement is perfect.

Yvette Cooper: We look forward to the Justice Secretary telling us what he actually wants to change in his Bill of Rights. In the meantime, there is a very simple question: the European convention on human rights—in or out? We on the Labour Benches think that we should stay in the European convention that Churchill argued for. Does he: yes or no?

Michael Gove: I note that the right hon. Lady is firm and definitive on this question, but she was evasive when she was asked about immigration numbers by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. We want to preserve and enhance the traditions of human rights. There will be no diminution in that area; indeed there will be an enhancement of convention rights as a result

of the changes that we propose to make. But the difference between those on the Opposition Benches and Government is that we are prepared to look at the way in which those convention rights are enshrined in our law. We want to ensure that they are consistent with common law traditions and that our Supreme Court is genuinely supreme. None of those changes is contemplated by the Opposition, and for that reason I am afraid that they, like the SNP, have already ruled themselves out of the debate on reform that we need to have.

Yvette Cooper: One simple question: European convention—in or out?

Michael Gove: We are in the European convention at the moment. The right hon. Lady said, at the beginning of this debate—indeed it was also the position of the SNP in the course of this debate—that she would admit of no change whatever. We are prepared to consider change. We want to ensure that that change works in the interests of the majority of people in this country and that it is in our human rights traditions as well. It is important to recognise that our human rights have been best safeguarded by Parliament throughout its existence, that judges have a role to play in safeguarding the rule of law, and that it is the High Court of Parliament itself, as was pointed out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden, that has been the most effective safeguard of our freedoms throughout our history. We can look back not just to Magna Carta but to the struggle between Parliament and the Crown in the 17th century and the way in which the Glorious Revolution and the subsequent Bill of Rights safeguarded our liberties. We can also look at what happened in the 19th century as there was an argument over the extension of the franchise and as John Stuart Mill and others argued for basic fundamental liberties to be respected. All of those acts of progress occurred before the European Convention was written; before indeed we entered the Council of Europe. All of those steps forward depended on respect for and recognition of parliamentary sovereignty and the special place that this House has in reconciling different interpretations of human rights.

One of the things that we all have to recognise is that in that convention, within that charter, there are rights to privacy and family life, and rights also to free speech. The courts have at certain times erred on one side or the other of that balance. The voice of the people needs to be heard in the debate, and Parliament is the place where the voice of the people will be heard.

We will have an opportunity in the weeks and months ahead to consider the criminal justice measures that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary introduces. I hope that they will command support across the House. We will also have an opportunity to put on a firmer basis our commitment to safeguarding the rights that all of us are proud of in this place and that our predecessors in this House have fought so hard to secure. I hope that that debate will see people clamber out of the ideological trenches that some have dug today so that we in this Parliament can pass on to our successors an enhanced tradition of respect for liberty, for life and for the fundamental freedoms that make these islands such a precious place.

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—(Guy Opperman.)

Debate to be resumed on Monday 1 June.

HM Naval Base Clyde

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Guy Opperman.)

4.51 pm

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): I should first thank the Justice Secretary. In his anxiety to avoid answering a simple question, he has extended the time available for the Adjournment debate by 10 minutes, with his customary generosity. I have to acknowledge the role that he has played. Perhaps he wants to join us and focus on the key issue of safety at Her Majesty's naval base at Clyde.

I am delighted to have won this Adjournment debate. I regret slightly that I am not able to make a maiden speech for my new constituency of Gordon, largely because Gordon is a constituency of outstanding landscapes and natural beauty. Few constituencies can compare with Gordon, but one of the few that can is the constituency so ably represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara). It is a constituency of stunning natural beauty far too great to be polluted by the obscenity of weapons of mass destruction. I am grateful for the Minister's agreement to allow my hon. Friend to say a few words. This is a matter of constituency as well as general interest to him.

I want to do three things in the debate this evening. First, I want to get some detailed answers from the Ministry of Defence. We had today in a written statement from the Secretary of State for Defence 500 words of the suffocating bland complacency that typifies so much of the MOD's reaction to serious concerns. I knew the Secretary of State for Defence at university and, although I might have accused him of many things, he was neither bland nor complacent. He seems to have picked up some bad habits in his tenure as Secretary of State for Defence. We want detailed answers to detailed questions this evening.

Secondly, I want to examine the lessons from the working, or indeed malfunctioning of the reactor prototype HMS Vulcan at Dounreay and what that tells us about the safety concerns at the Faslane base. The difficulties that that reactor has experienced and the MOD's reaction to them give us serious cause for concern. Thirdly, I want to examine the inherent safety concerns about nuclear reactors, made double of course by the fact that the nuclear reactors in this case are associated with nuclear weapons and tripled by the fact that the nuclear weapons are on a submarine. That tells us that there is an inherent unsafe aspect to Trident submarines. How can that be reconciled with the new political reality in Scotland, where by my count 57 Members of Parliament out of 59 oppose the renewal of the Trident deterrent in Scotland?

I say 57 not because I am expecting an imminent by-election in Scotland, but because the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) is on the record as opposing the renewal of Trident. I congratulate him on his recent promotion to the Labour Front Bench—I should say that we have been the cause of that promotion. I hope that that promotion to the Front Bench does not mean that he has undergone some mind-melding process over the last week. I hope that he will stay faithful to the commitments made to his constituents publicly on his opposition to the renewal of Trident as a nuclear device.

I want to start with the claims made by Able Seaman McNeilly—claims that are published via WikiLeaks and also through the excellent journalism of the *Sunday Herald*. Briefly, those claims—I know that the Minister will treat them seriously and give us the detailed answers that we seek—are, first, that at the final security checkpoint in Faslane naval base, no security checks of ID cards were made, that the PIN code system was broken and that both Navy personnel and contractors were allowed access with no verification of identity. Secondly, aboard a vessel, on the missile compartment deck, no one asked for identification or checked to see whether personnel were on the list providing them with access to that part of the submarine. Thirdly, bags coming on board the submarine were going unchecked. It would be extraordinary, Mr Speaker, if we had a greater level of security in the House of Commons than might exist at that nuclear naval base.

Fourthly, the vast majority of equipment onboard may be defective. It was alleged that HMS Vanguard was in the worst condition and had to be recalled to port several times, forcing other vessels to do extended patrols. Fifthly, it is alleged that a problem with one of the nuclear reactors aboard one of the SSBNs had been found and an instructor had suggested that all the boats might need to get their reactors replaced. We know that the process of refuelling is already under way.

It is claimed, sixthly, that firefighting equipment has been removed from the submarine while in port; seventhly, that complaints about defective equipment and safety concerns are being ignored; eighthly, that rules on constant manning of crucial positions such as the nuclear reactor's main control desk and the nuclear missiles' control and monitoring position are being ignored; ninthly, that the correct procedures to avoid a fire in the weapons storage compartment were not being followed, but no disciplinary action followed or was pursued; tenthly, that HMS Vanguard was nearly lost on two separate occasions, first in a deep depth incident, where the SSBN exceeded the recommended depth, and secondly when it crashed into a French SSBN. The report alleges that the extent of the latter incident has not been fully revealed.

It is claimed, eleventhly, that there have been numerous floods and fires aboard the SSBN, fire alarms are frequently ignored and concerns over fire hazards were dismissed; twelfthly, that personal electronics equipment is frequently used in the vicinity of the missile compartments, despite being explicitly banned; and thirteenthly, that standard operating procedures and safety procedures are routinely ignored across the board. The last of the main allegations in the report is that the tests carried out at the end of a patrol had to be conducted three times because they kept failing, largely due to defective equipment.

Those are just some of the allegations—or revelations—made by Able Seaman McNeilly. Of course, we have no way of knowing whether any or all of them have substance, but I would submit to the House that in the crucial matter of safety, which is clearly what is at stake, the House and the public deserve better information and a more comprehensive explanation than the 500-word written statement issued by the Defence Secretary today. That is not just an insult to this House; it is an insult to the intelligence of the general public.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab) *rose—*

Alex Salmond: I gladly give way to a Member who has a long interest in these matters.

Jeremy Corbyn: The right hon. Gentleman may be aware that, in the previous Parliament, the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), the former Member for Lewisham, Deptford and I attended the conference on the humanitarian effects of nuclear weapons in Vienna. Most countries that took part in that conference have put on record a detailed assessment of the effects of a nuclear explosion, brought about by an accident or an act of war and the detonation of a nuclear weapon. Is he aware of any assessment made of what the effects would be on Scotland, on Glasgow, on the north of England or on Northern Ireland of a nuclear explosion, either by accident or design, in the Clyde, and what the effect would be on the wider population? Would he support such a report being sought from the UK Government?

Alex Salmond: I am aware of reports estimating the extraordinary damage that could result from such an occurrence. What I am not aware of is whether Her Majesty's Government have ever conducted such an assessment, and whether they would be prepared to do that now and to release the findings to the general public and to this House.

The second question I want to raise is what the failings in the prototype reactor at Dounreay tell us about the functioning of the reactors on board the submarines at Faslane. I point to a statement—another written statement—from the Secretary of State for Defence on—

Mr Speaker: Order. I apologise for interrupting the right hon. Gentleman, but the moment of interruption has been reached—an unusual phenomenon with which new Members will come to terms readily—and I am obliged to ask the Whip on duty to move the Adjournment.

5 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Guy Opperman.)

Alex Salmond: That would not be first time that a Speaker has intervened on me in this House, Mr Speaker—[*Laughter*]. But always helpfully.

On 25 March this year, the Secretary of State for Defence, in a written statement, explained the decisions that had been taken on precautions following the discovery of the breaches in the cladding around one of the fuel cells at the shore test facility at Dounreay. For Members of the House who are unfamiliar with this, let me say that that has been a matter of concern for some considerable time. The breaches in the fuel cell cladding have led to the refuelling already of one of the Trident submarines and to the potential refuelling of a second one in the near future.

The prototype reactor is designed and operated at extensive level to test whether in future there might be breaches in the reactor on board the submarines. There are two aspects that should give the House considerable cause for concern. First, we have been assured by the current Secretary of State for Defence and his predecessor that when this has happened, all appropriate authorities

have been informed and kept up to date with the consequences of these microscopic breaches, but I submit that the process of consultation and information is severely inadequate.

The responsible democratic body is the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, but despite the fact that SEPA was informed by the MOD within a reasonable timescale, but not immediately, it was years before the general public and this House were informed. Hon. Members may well ask why SEPA, a democratic agency reporting to Scottish Ministers, did not immediately and timeously release information, as it would in a civil nuclear incident affecting the environment. The reason is that the MOD invoked Crown immunity regarding the control and flow of information from the test reactor. I submit—I hope the Minister will reply specifically on this point—that we are past the stage where it is acceptable that the invocation of Crown immunity can conceal from the general public, for months and perhaps even years, nuclear incidents that may have a bearing on the safe operation of nuclear reactors in the Faslane base.

Secondly, the microscopic breaches in the reactor in Dounreay have resulted in that reactor being closed down. It is to be decommissioned in the next few years. That seems to me to be sensible when radiation leaks have been identified.

The difficulty in the matter which concerns this House is that that position has led to an examination of whether there should be a prototype reactor on the new generation of nuclear submarines. The conclusion that was reached and that was in the statement of the Secretary of State for Defence this year was that his expert panel concluded that it was a valid decision not to prototype PWR3 because there was no practical course of action that would enable a prototype facility to be built ahead of the first successor submarine.

It is bad enough that a prototype reactor is giving a signal of potential problems in a nuclear fleet, and that the Secretary of State for Defence did not timeously inform the general public of what was going on or allow the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to do its duty. That is bad enough, but to come to the conclusion that we might move to a main gate decision on renewing this nuclear deterrent without having a functioning prototype reactor which would tell us of potential problems in the new reactor is an extraordinary situation which must be inherently unsafe, unless the Minister has some information that the new reactor will be built in such a way that it does not have the failings of just about every other nuclear reactor built in recent history.

Lastly, I spoke of the new political reality in Scotland and the 57 out of 59 Members who were clearly elected as being against any decision to renew the nuclear deterrent at extraordinary cost at a time of austerity. The attitude of 57 out of 59 Members of Parliament from Scotland to next year's main gate decision will be to oppose it. That should give the Minister substantial cause for thought.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman back to his place in this House. May I appeal to him not to conflate two separate issues? They are indeed separate issues. One is the very real concerns about faulty operating practices leading to potential accidents. The other is the wider issue about whether or not we should have a nuclear deterrent.

It might surprise him to know that many of us who believe that we should have a nuclear deterrent are as concerned as he is about the dangers of operating faults and accidents in the systems that we have.

Alex Salmond: These Members will conclude that, unfortunately, one of the consequences of having such a nuclear deterrent is having these systems in a situation which causes inherent danger. The point that I am making is that the working of the system is inherently dangerous because a nuclear reactor and nuclear weapons on a submarine are not an easy fit. The military value of this deterrent as an independent deterrent is non-existent. Its use would break international law. It is not a weapon of security, but a sign of the insecurity of the United Kingdom, believing that fading grandeur can be protected by being one of the big five in having possession of nuclear weapons.

If my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute is lucky enough to catch the Speaker's eye in a minute or so, he will be, as far as I can check from the House of Commons records, the first hon. Member of this House ever to make two substantive speeches on the first two sessional days—an extraordinary occurrence which even the greatest of parliamentarians through history have not achieved. Such will be the activity of my hon. Friend.

With that in mind, perhaps the Minister will allow me to paraphrase one of the great parliamentarians of the past. Given the political realities in Scotland, she and the Government will be making a fatal mistake if they believe that this costly trumpery, this useless, expensive, unlawful and inherently dangerous military plaything will be tolerated any longer by those on the SNP Benches, by this party or by our country.

5.9 pm

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) for securing this important debate, and I am extremely grateful to him for ceding to me some of his allotted speaking time. I am also exceedingly grateful for the fact that he sought to add no further pressure on my second appearance in the Chamber. As I am sure he understands, this issue is of great concern to my constituents, as Faslane is situated in Argyll and Bute.

The dossier compiled by Mr McNeilly makes for very worrying reading indeed. I, too, am extremely disappointed that the Minister sought to dismiss in a 500-word statement absolutely everything contained in that extremely detailed 18-page dossier. I regard that written statement as absolutely inadequate. It goes nowhere near reassuring me or my constituents about the level of safety at Faslane or onboard the UK's nuclear submarine fleet. As my right hon. Friend said, the dossier paints a disturbing picture of a lax attitude to safety and security both onshore and onboard our submarines. There are stories of people gaining access to meetings for which they do not have sufficient security clearance, bags being taken onboard submarines unchecked and the routine use of untested portable bluetooth electronic devices in missile compartments.

I would like to highlight, in particular, a number of specific allegations concerning both the nuclear missiles and the nuclear reactors on board the Vanguard-class submarines. On page 4 of the dossier, Mr McNeilly

states that he was told by one of the instructors that they had found problems with the nuclear reactor onboard HMS Vanguard, suggesting that all Vanguard-class submarines might have to have their reactors replaced. Is the Minister aware of problems beyond those already known about the nuclear reactors on HMS Vanguard, and are they similar to the "trouser-leg" problems that affected the Resolution-class submarines?

As my right hon. Friend said, remembering the widely reported radioactive leak at the Vulcan reactor at Dounreay, and given the fact that it took two whole years for that to be made public, how can we as MPs hold the Ministry of Defence to account, and how can the public have confidence in the Minister's investigations, when it appears that bad news is released only when it can no longer be concealed? The Ministry told us that it would cost £120 million to refuel HMS Vanguard. Should other submarines in the class require refuelling, can she confirm that that would cost about £500 million?

On page 11 of the dossier, Mr McNeilly alleges that the reader-worker procedure for removing the inverters from the missiles at the end of their patrol was not followed. The line-by-line reader-to-worker instructions were, according to Mr McNeilly, "completely ignored", and the removal of the inverters from the missiles became a race between the starboard-side and port-side teams, to see who could finish the job quickest. If that is an indication of the general attitude onboard towards nuclear weapons-standard operating procedures, we should all be very concerned.

On page 14 of the dossier, Mr McNeilly alleges that while he was on patrol with HMS Victorious the nitrogen drench in the missile compartment fell below the minimum 3625 psi required. When he asked what could be done about it, he was told:

"There's nothing we can do while on patrol".

The nitrogen drench is what is used to put out fires in the missile compartment. Therefore, according to Mr McNeilly's dossier, if a fire had broken out in the missile compartment and the nitrogen drench was not working, there would have been a real danger of one or all three of the solid-fuel rockets within any or all of the missiles onboard igniting and going off in a sympathetic detonation, with potentially disastrous consequences for everyone onboard. As I have said, those are just three of a catalogue of very serious and deeply troubling allegations, yet none of them was addressed in the Minister's 500-word statement.

Mr McNeilly's dossier points to concerns about staff training and high levels of staff turnover leading to a worrying lack of suitably qualified and experienced personnel available to the service. The Royal Navy has a proud tradition, and we recognise that people make great personal sacrifices in order to serve, for which we are very grateful, but the rate at which people are being pushed through the training pipeline due to manpower shortages leading to massive staff turnover is of grave concern. There is more than a suggestion in Mr McNeilly's dossier that there is indeed a worrying shortage of highly trained and highly skilled professionals to fill those roles.

In any workplace, security and safety are paramount, but when dealing with nuclear weapons and nuclear-powered submarines, safety and security must be absolutely sacrosanct, because, to be frank, we are all just one

[Brendan O'Hara]

mistake away from a catastrophe. I look forward to the Minister addressing all these points in detail, far beyond the 500 words on offer to us currently.

5.15 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Penny Mordaunt): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) on securing this Adjournment debate on an important subject that the Ministry of Defence keeps under constant review and independent scrutiny.

I will start by addressing the concerns raised by Able Seaman McNeilly. Hon. Members will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State tabled a written ministerial statement at the earliest opportunity to update the House on this issue. I will go on to address the concerns that hon. Members have raised about McNeilly himself and his welfare, and then the wider issues that have been raised in this debate.

Before I do so, I hope that Members will permit me briefly to pay tribute to all those who are involved in the nuclear enterprise and nuclear deterrence. Whatever our different views about the merits of the capability, I hope we can all agree that we owe the men and women in the submarine service a huge debt. Their training is extremely demanding. Their deployments, by their nature, are mentally and physically challenging. What we ask of them, and what they deliver at a personal level, is truly extraordinary. The captain of an SSVN will have spent more than 10 years of their naval career underwater. An engineer is responsible for a machine more complex than the space shuttle. An able seaman will be working on a shift system, six hours on watch, six hours off, for three months at a time. There is a particular dedication in the service among all ranks. My personal belief is that those who work in the service firmly believe that the sacrifices that they are making on our behalf are worth it—fundamental to our national security. I hope I can speak for all Members of this House as I put on record our thanks for their dedication and their service.

I welcome this opportunity to address Members' concerns. It is vital that we reassure the public. That is why I sought to brief Members with a constituency interest at the earliest opportunity last week. We owe it to our servicemen and women as well, and to the civilian staff who support them, to rebut unjustified accusations against the quality of what they do. That is not to say that running such a complex operation, uninterrupted for over 47 years, is without its challenges, but the view being perpetuated of a culture of carelessness and complacency is utterly unjust. I can assure the House that neither the operational effectiveness of our nuclear deterrent nor the safety of our submariners or members of the public has been compromised. The Ministry of Defence has a responsibility to carry out its nuclear activities worldwide in a safe and secure manner. We take this, and our commitment to protect defence personnel, the workforce, the public and the environment very seriously. When managing safety, our aim is to maximise transparency while balancing the need to maintain national security.

In my first week as Minister at the Ministry of Defence, I witnessed the Royal Navy's response to the McNeilly allegations. It did not dismiss them. Each point raised

was thoroughly and methodically investigated—not just what occurred and when, but why he drew the conclusions that he did. I want to place on record my thanks to the Navy for its swift action.

I appreciate that there are those who are calling for complete transparency on all that has been found, but that is simply not possible or reasonable—certainly not on the Floor of the House—given that this goes to the very heart of protecting a national defensive deterrent capability. Other channels that I shall touch on later may allow hon. Members a deeper dive into these issues.

Alex Salmond: May I point out to the Minister that the suffocating complacency of which I spoke was that of MOD Ministers in their response to serious concerns about safety? She is a new Minister, so perhaps she can blow a breath of fresh air through the Ministry of Defence and agree to withdraw the Crown immunity certificate that stops the Scottish Environment Protection Agency reporting on nuclear incidents. Will she at least allow that Government organisation, responsible to Scottish Ministers, to do its job as far as military matters are concerned?

Penny Mordaunt: I will address all the points made by the right hon. Gentleman, but I must stress that he cannot have his cake and eat it. The allegations he has made are about the safety and security of this capability. I will answer as much as I can on the Floor of the House, but I absolutely stress the dedication of the Royal Navy in addressing those concerns—keeping the deterrent safe and ensuring the security of the capability—and any suggestion that somehow there is complacency is absolutely not correct. I am pleased that the right hon. Gentleman has acknowledged that this evening.

I can assure the House that the Navy's investigation included an analysis of the service history of the boat and of the patrol report; a review of the ongoing programme of work to improve safety and security at Her Majesty's naval bases of Clyde and Devonport; one-to-one interviews with McNeilly's chain of command, his colleagues and McNeilly himself; and consultations with the regulatory and operating authorities. McNeilly's concerns proved to be either factually incorrect or the result of misunderstanding or partial understanding. Some of his concerns drew on historical, previously known events, none of which had compromised our deterrent capability and from which, where appropriate, lessons had been learned to develop our procedures as part of a continuous improvement programme.

Only one of the allegations is yet to be fully examined—that e-cigarettes were used on the submarine. I must stress that no corroboration for that has been found. Nevertheless, the chain of command is considering what further steps should be taken to ensure that it does not happen.

On the specific comments about security at Her Majesty's naval base Clyde, McNeilly's observations focus on one limited aspect of the security jigsaw—access to one internal area. There was no reason why he should have been aware of the extensive security that is layered around the controls that he experienced. Taken as a whole, I am satisfied that the overall system for security within and around the base at the time was robust and fully effective in meeting its requirements.

We are, however, not complacent. There is an ongoing programme of work constantly to review and improve security at the base. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will send a clear message that he supports such work. He may not see the merits of the capability, but I hope that he would support its security and, where we identify the merits of further improvements to security, agree that they should be implemented.

Perhaps the most concerning aspect of this case is that McNeilly said he raised these matters while deployed, but was ignored. For his concerns, whether justified or not, to be ignored would be wholly incompatible with the leadership, the divisional system and the safety culture we expect from the Royal Navy. We have investigated this thoroughly, including through interviews with McNeilly's former crew mates. We have not found any evidence, formal or informal, of his raising any safety concerns, even privately with those closest to him.

I will touch on the welfare of the able seamen, which I know is a concern of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara). I congratulate the hon. Gentleman both on the two speeches he has made in close succession and on his appointment as his party's defence spokesman. I updated him after Able Seaman McNeilly was arrested, and I spoke to the hon. Gentleman at the time about the welfare checks that were being done on him. He was arrested by the police in Scotland on 18 May as he landed at Edinburgh airport, because he was reported as a missing person, having failed to return to duty following a period of leave. He was released the following day and passed into the care of the Royal Navy. On 20 May, he was moved to HMS Nelson, a shore establishment in Portsmouth, while concerns that he had raised were investigated. He has at all times been afforded the duty of care we give to all our personnel. He has been in contact with his family, and the Royal Navy has offered additional support to them should they wish to visit him.

Brendan O'Hara: Has Mr McNeilly been charged with anything? What is his current legal status? Has he been given access to legal representation?

Penny Mordaunt: I was coming to that. Mr McNeilly remains on duty as a serving member of the Royal Navy. He is not under arrest or in custody. Any restrictions that were initially placed on him for his own welfare—namely, his having to seek permission before leaving base—were lifted as of Tuesday. He is not under arrest, in custody or charged. Our prime concern throughout the process has been his welfare.

The right hon. Member for Gordon raised wider issues regarding the fuel element breach at Vulcan. The issue with the reactor at the naval reactor test establishment was classed by the International Atomic Energy Agency as a level zero below scale incident, with no safety significance. Workers remain safe and the local community is not at risk. There was no leak outside the reactor circuit.

The MOD has made the Scottish Environment Protection Agency aware of the issue. The key point is this: had there been any safety issues, the MOD would have been the first to inform the Scottish Government

and the local community. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the MOD works closely with SEPA, and continues to do so, given its responsibility for regulating environmental discharges from the site. Vulcan is subject to close monitoring by SEPA, and there is a robust and public formal agreement between the MOD and SEPA to ensure that we are compliant with the Radioactive Substances Act 1993.

Alex Salmond: Will the Minister undertake to revise and review whether Crown immunity should prevent SEPA from releasing information to the public?

Penny Mordaunt: The incident to which the right hon. Gentleman refers was a non-incident—there were no safety issues. I give him the reassurance on the Floor of the House that, if there were such concerns, the Scottish Government would be informed. I am going to make progress because I am running out of time.

Figures on discharges are not secret. The information is published annually in the "Radioactivity in Food and the Environment" publication, which is available on the SEPA website. The naval reactor test establishment at Vulcan is safe and remains a low-risk site.

On the wider issues that the right hon. Gentleman raises, the protection of the UK is the Government's first duty. We are committed to the future of defence in Scotland, the capabilities based there, and the industry that supports and generates those capabilities. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has said, we must plan for a major and direct nuclear threat to this country or to our NATO allies that might emerge over the 50 years during which the next generation of submarines will be in service. We know that there are substantial nuclear arsenals, and that the number of nuclear states has increased. Russia is modernising its forces, actively commissioning a new class of eight SSBN vessels, and preparing to deploy a variety of land-based intercontinental ballistic missile classes. It is planning to reintroduce rail-based intercontinental missiles. North Korea is carrying out nuclear tests and threatening more. It is carrying out ballistic missile tests in defiance of the international community.

The Government are firmly committed to renewing continuous at-sea deterrence. That capability is as relevant today as it has ever been. It is highly regrettable when inaccurate commentary leads to public concern about the deterrent. When such comments are made, we will investigate them thoroughly. When a member of our armed forces has concerns or questions, there are appropriate channels in the chain of command through which they can be raised. That must be encouraged.

I mentioned other channels that are perhaps more appropriate for the deep dive that the right hon. Gentleman seeks. I know from my experience of serving on the House of Commons Defence Committee and our work on the security and safety of the base that that is one such channel. I thank him once again for securing the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

5.30 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 28 May 2015

DEFENCE

Safety at HM Naval Base Clyde

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): I am informing the House at the earliest opportunity on the investigation of each of the claims made by Able Seaman William McNeilly about the operational effectiveness, safety and security of our nuclear deterrent.

Having now completed our investigation, and having consulted with the appropriate regulatory and operating authorities, I can assure the House that neither the operational effectiveness of our continuous at-sea deterrent nor the safety of our submariners or members of the public have been compromised.

The naval service operates its submarine fleet under the most stringent safety regime, which is subject to independent scrutiny. The naval service does not put a submarine to sea unless it is safe to do so, and there are appropriate procedures in place to deal with any issues that may arise during its deployment. There are robust regulatory mechanisms, both within the Ministry of Defence (MOD) but independent of the Royal Navy and, externally with the Office of Nuclear Regulation, to ensure this. The MOD is also held to wider account by Parliament.

Able Seaman McNeilly published his comments following his first submarine deployment. He was under training, and his access and exposure to activities and material on board were appropriate to his security clearance. We have found no evidence that he raised any concerns with colleagues on board or with the chain of command: had he done so, the more senior and experienced submariners would have been able to explain how the boat operated and why McNeilly's concerns were unfounded. A number of the issues he raised did not occur during his patrol.

Most of McNeilly's concerns proved to be either factually incorrect or the result of mis- or partial understanding; some drew on historic, previously known, events none of which had compromised our deterrent capability and, where appropriate, from which lessons had been learned to develop our procedures as part of a continuous improvement programme. Only one of the allegations remains to be fully examined—the allegation that e-cigarettes were being used within the submarine. No independent corroboration of this has been found but even if it were true, there is clear evidence that their use did not put the safety of the boat at risk.

Able Seaman McNeilly was arrested having not reported for duty after a period of leave. He was released the next day, but confined to a specified location in Portsmouth while interviews were conducted. He is being afforded the duty of care that we give all our personnel, is in contact with his family, and is still in the employ of the Royal Navy.

[HCWS4]

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Government's Legislative Programme

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): Following yesterday's State Opening of Parliament, and for the convenience of the House, I am listing the Bills which were announced yesterday:

Armed Forces Bill
 Bank of England Governance Bill
 Buses Bill
 Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Bill
 Childcare Bill
 Cities and Local Government Devolution
 Bill Education and Adoption
 Bill Energy Bill
 Enterprise Bill
 European Union (Finance) Bill
 European Union Referendum Bill
 Extremism Bill
 Full Employment and Welfare Benefits Bill
 Housing Bill
 Immigration Bill
 Investigatory Powers Bill
 National Insurance Contributions Bill
 Northern Ireland (Stormont House Agreement) Bill
 Police Reform and Criminal Justice Bill
 Psychoactive Substances Bill
 Public Services Ombudsman Bill (Draft)
 Scotland Bill
 Trade Unions Bill
 Votes for Life Bill
 Wales Bill

The High Speed Rail (London-West Midlands) Bill is also carried over from the last Parliament.

Detailed information about each of these Bills can be accessed from the No.10 website at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/prime-ministers-office-10-downing-street>.

[HCWS5]

NORTHERN IRELAND

Government's Legislative Programme (Northern Ireland)

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): The first Session UK legislative programme unveiled in the Queen's Speech on 27 May contains measures of relevance to the people of Northern Ireland.

The following is a summary of the legislation announced in the Queen's Speech and its proposed application to Northern Ireland.

The list also identifies the lead Government Department.

The following Bills will extend to Northern Ireland, in whole or in part, and deal mainly with excepted/reserved matters. Discussions will continue between the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that, where provisions that are specifically for a transferred purpose are included in any of these Bills, the consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly will be sought for them:

Finance Bill (HM Treasury)
 National Insurance Contributions (HM Treasury)
 Bank of England (HM Treasury)
 Immigration (Home Office)
 Scotland (Scotland Office)
 Wales (Wales Office)
 Northern Ireland (Stormont House Agreement) (Northern Ireland Office)
 EU (Referendum) (Foreign and Commonwealth Office)
 EU (Finance) (HM Treasury)
 Investigatory Powers (Home Office)
 Psychoactive Substances (Home Office)
 Armed Forces (Ministry of Defence)
 Votes for Life (Cabinet Office)

The following Bills may extend to Northern Ireland to varying degrees. They may require the consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly in relation to provisions in the devolved field:

Full Employment and Welfare Benefits (Department for Work and Pensions)
 Energy (Department of Energy and Climate Change)
 Enterprise (The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)
 Policing and Criminal Justice (Home Office)
 Extremism (Home Office)

Discussions will continue between the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive on those Bills that might include provisions that require the consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly

The following Bills will have limited or no application to Northern Ireland:

Housing (Department for Communities and Local Government)
 Education and Adoption (Department for Education)
 HS2 (carried over from last Parliament) (Department for Transport)
 Buses (Department for Transport)
 Cities and Local Government Devolution (Department of Communities and Local Government) Charities (Social Investment and Protection) (Cabinet Office)
 Trade Unions (The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)
 Childcare (Department for Education)

[HCWS2]

SCOTLAND

Government's Legislative Programme (Scotland)

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): Seventeen of the 24 new Government Bills for this Session of Parliament contain provisions that apply to Scotland, either in full or in part.

The Government's ambitious programme of legislation will help to create jobs and support working people. It will reduce the tax burden on the lowest earners and will ensure there are no rises in VAT or national insurance contributions for the next five years, and no rise in the income tax levels for which the UK Government have responsibility.

Bringing the different parts of the United Kingdom together is a priority for the Government. For Scotland we will meet our commitment to deliver in full the recommendations of the cross-party Smith commission on further devolution. The new Scotland Bill will give the Scottish Parliament wide-ranging new powers, including greater flexibility to make its own decisions and making it more accountable for raising the revenue it spends, while keeping the advantages of being part of the United Kingdom.

Other measures affecting Scotland include a focus on energy security and support for the North sea oil and gas sector and moves to tackle extremism and strengthen counter-terrorism. The legislative programme also includes measures to control immigration and to hold a referendum on membership of the European Union.

This statement provides a summary of the Government's new legislative programme and its application to Scotland. It does not include draft Bills.

At present the only Bill that triggers the need for a legislative consent motion under the Sewel convention is the Scotland Bill. However, it is possible that the need for consent may arise as Bills are prepared for introduction.

The Government are committed to the principles of the Sewel convention, and we will continue to work constructively with the Scottish Government to secure consent for Bills that contain provisions requiring the consent of the Scottish Parliament.

The Bills listed in section 1 will apply to Scotland, either in full or in part, on introduction. Section 2 details Bills that will not apply in Scotland at introduction. In addition to the new Bills listed below there will also be a Finance Bill and the HS2 Bill from the last Session will be taken forward.

Section 1: New legislation applying to the United Kingdom, including Scotland (either in full or in part);

Scotland Bill
 Full Employment and Welfare Benefits Bill
 Energy Bill
 Immigration Bill
 Enterprise Bill
 Trade Unions Bill
 Wales Bill
 Northern Ireland (Stormont House Agreement) Bill
 EU Referendum Bill
 Investigatory Powers Bill
 Psychoactive Substances Bill
 Extremism Bill
 National Insurance Contributions Bill
 Bank of England Bill
 European Union (Finance) Bill
 Votes for Life Bill
 Armed Forces Bill

Section 2: New legislation that will not apply in Scotland

Childcare Bill
 Housing Bill
 Education and Adoption Bill
 Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill
 Police Reform and Criminal Justice Bill
 Buses Bill
 Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Bill

[HCWS1]

WALES

Government's Legislative Programme (Wales)

The Secretary of State for Wales (Stephen Crabb):

The Government's first session legislative programme announced in the Queen's Speech on 27 May contains a wide range of measures that will apply to Wales, either in full or in part.

The following Bills and draft Bills will extend to Wales in whole or in part:

- Wales Bill (Wales Office)
- Scotland Bill (Scotland Office)
- Northern Ireland (Stormont House Agreement) Bill (Northern Ireland Office)
- Psychoactive Substances Bill (Home Office)
- European Union Referendum Bill (Foreign and Commonwealth Office)
- Charities (Protection and Social Investment Bill) (Cabinet Office)
- Full Employment and Welfare Benefits Bill (Department for Work and Pensions)
- Finance Bill (HM Treasury)
- National Insurance Contributions Bill (HM Treasury)
- Energy Bill (Department of Energy and Climate Change)

- Immigration Bill (Home Office)
- Enterprise Bill (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)
- Trade Unions Bill (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)
- Extremism Bill (Home Office)
- Investigatory Powers Bill (Home Office)
- Police Reform and Criminal Justice Bill (Home Office)
- Armed Forces Bill (Ministry of Defence)
- European Union (Finance) Bill (HM Treasury)
- Bank of England Bill (HM Treasury)
- Votes for Life Bill (Cabinet Office)

The following Bills will not extend to Wales:

- Housing Bill (Department of Communities and Local Government)
- Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill (Department for Communities and Local Government)
- Childcare Bill (Department for Education)
- Education and Adoption Bill (Department for Education)
- Buses Bill (Department for Transport)

Discussions will continue with the Welsh Government on Bills that might include provisions that require the consent of the National Assembly for Wales or Welsh Ministers.

[HCWS3]

Petition

Thursday 28 May 2015

OBSERVATIONS

TRANSPORT

Train Services at Silverdale train station

The Petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that the Petitioners believe that there should be more train services stopping at Silverdale rail station. The Petitioners believe that the trains to Barrow and to Manchester Airport that pass through Silverdale should all stop at the station.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to take steps to support Silverdale station in any further franchise applications in the area.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by David Morris, *Official Report*, 21 July 2014; Vol. 584, c. 1215.]

[P001374]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Transport:

The Government secure passenger rail services through franchise competitions—a process through which private companies submit rival bids to run specified services on the network. The Department for Transport designs, awards and manages franchise contracts. This includes ensuring franchisees meet their contractual obligations and overseeing fares and ticketing policy. This approach enables long-term investment from the private sector, encourages innovation and harnesses the operational experience and efficiencies characteristic of private franchisees for the benefit of passengers, taxpayers and industry.

Silverdale station is managed and served by the Northern Rail franchise on the Lancaster-Barrow line, on which the longer-distance services are provided by the TransPennine Express franchise (TPE). It currently receives a service pattern of slightly less than one train per hour and has a passenger footfall of around 45,000 passengers per year (which is not particularly high). Under the franchise schedule set out by Secretary of State in March 2013, and most recently updated in October 2014¹, both the Northern and TPE franchises are in the process of being re-let, with the new franchises expected to start in April 2016.

In line with the schedule, the Government set out the franchise specifications for the Northern and TPE franchises in the invitations to tender for each franchise, both published 27 February 2015². These specifications set out Government's minimum requirements for the franchise, including in terms of service patterns. To ensure that the views of passengers and stakeholders were taken into account in the development of these franchise specifications a public consultation was carried out in relation to both the Northern and TPE franchises. A summary of the responses to this and the way that the

Government took account of them in developing the specifications are set out in a Stakeholder briefing document³.

The specification for the franchise sets out a number of areas that will have an impact on Silverdale station. In terms of service patterns to the station, the specification preserves the current levels of service, however, the longer-distance services on the Barrow line it is situated on are being remapped from the TPE franchise to the Northern franchise. This means that Silverdale station could benefit from the specification of additional through trains between Barrow and Manchester airport, though it is not guaranteed that the extra airport trains will necessarily call at Silverdale; this would be a decision for the operator. This remapping also means that passengers at Silverdale station may benefit from the requirement for bidders on the Northern franchise to provide 120 new build carriages, though details of where these will go on the network will be left to bidders for the franchise. The Barrow line will continue to be part of the Community Rail partnership under the new specification and will benefit from additional funding as a result. It is important to remember that the specification in relation to services is a minimum one. Bidders are encouraged to provide services over and above this specification where it is appropriate and this could include those services to Silverdale station.

The specification includes a number of requirements across the franchise that may be of interest to the petitioners. The franchise will have stringent targets related to the National Rail passenger survey, which will be monitored throughout the franchise term and should lead to improvements at stations and on board services. For stations particularly we will be introducing a service quality monitoring regime, to ensure that they meet our quality standards and we will also introduce a £30 million station improvement fund in the Northern franchise, half of which has to be spent at smaller stations like Silverdale, to improve quality.

The shortlisted bidders for Northern are: Abellio Northern Ltd; Arriva Rail North Limited; Govia Northern Limited; and for TransPennine Express: First Trans Pennine Express Limited; Keolis Go-Ahead Limited; Stagecoach Trans Pennine Express Trains Limited and they are currently developing their bids. As part of this they may wish to hear from you and petitioners about your aspirations for Silverdale station so that it can inform their bids. The bids will be submitted to the Department for Transport later this year, after which we will evaluate them against the criteria set out in the Invitations to Tender. Following this evaluation, we expect to announce the successful bidder for the franchise in the Autumn of 2015, with the new franchises expected to begin in April 2016.

1-<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rail-franchise-schedule>

2-Northern: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/northern-franchise-2015-invitation-to-tender> ; TPE: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transpennine-express-franchise-2015-invitation-to-tender>

3-<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-northern-and-transpennine-express-rail-franchises>

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 28 May 2015

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PETITION

Thursday 28 May 2015

	<i>Col. No.</i>
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