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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 3 June 2015

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: It will be for the convenience of Members to know that the private Members' Bills ballot book is open in the No Lobby today until the rise of the House, when the ballot for 2015-16 will close. The ballot draw will be held at 9 am tomorrow morning in Committee Room 10. The draw will be open to Members, media and the public. As soon as possible, the results will be displayed in the No Lobby and made available in the Vote Office and on the website.

I also remind Members that the ballot for the election of Deputy Speakers is taking place until 1.30 pm today in Committee Room 6. The result will be announced as soon as practicable after the count has been completed.

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Occupied Palestinian Territories

1. **Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. [900060]

2. **Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. [900061]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening): I would like to start by paying tribute to Charles Kennedy, who died a few days ago. Like many Members of this House, I not only found him to be a kind and generous man but had a huge amount of respect for him politically, and I and many others will mourn his passing.

The United Nations assesses that the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is a protracted crisis with humanitarian consequences. Even before the latest conflict in Gaza, 57% of the population were food-insecure and 43% were unemployed.

Richard Burden: First, may I endorse everything the Secretary of State has said regarding Charles Kennedy? He was a gifted politician and a genuinely friendly and funny man, and we will miss him.

Some 46 Palestinian Bedouin communities face displacement from their homes in the west bank to make way for illegal Israeli settlements. The Deputy

Foreign Minister of Israel says it has the right to build anywhere in the west bank it chooses. My question to the Secretary of State is not whether she opposes that but whether she agrees that European companies have no business trading with illegal settlements east of the green line.

Justine Greening: The hon. Gentleman is right that we oppose that illegal building of settlements, and he is shining a light on some of the decisions that companies themselves have to make about whether they will be part of that activity. It is up to them to speak for themselves, but the Government's position in relation to those settlements is very clear.

Paul Flynn: May I welcome the right hon. Lady back to her post, which she fulfilled with great distinction in the previous Parliament?

We are all aware of the terrible situation in Gaza, where more than 100,000 people have had their homes destroyed and not one of them has been rebuilt. Will she use her office to persuade the Israelis that, from the point of view of humanitarian need and future peace, provisions should be brought in to rebuild the houses?

Justine Greening: The hon. Gentleman rightly highlights some of the challenges in getting construction materials into the Occupied Palestinian Territories, particularly Gaza, to rebuild homes that have been destroyed. The Gaza reconstruction mechanism gives us a way to do that, and he will be pleased to hear that just under 90,000 people have now been able to get the equipment they need to rebuild their homes.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): As my right hon. Friend knows, there is an urgent need for reconstruction in Gaza, but how can she ensure that materials such as concrete and scaffolding are not used to construct weapons that can be used against the state of Israel and its citizens?

Justine Greening: We have been particularly concerned to play our role in managing that issue. DFID is helping to support the materials monitoring unit. That means we can check materials as they enter Gaza and check where they are stored, how they are used and how they are reused. So there absolutely are good controls in place to ensure the materials are used for rebuilding people's homes and helping them rebuild their lives.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Does the Secretary of State welcome Israeli President Rivlin's call for an urgent international effort to rebuild Gaza, but on the understanding that the hostilities perpetrated by Hamas against Israel must cease? Does she also agree that the continued incitement to violence by Palestinians against Israel must end?

Justine Greening: Clearly, the only way people in Gaza, particularly children growing up there, are going to have a better future is if we have a two-state solution. That requires Israel, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and its transitional Government, to be prepared to do what it takes to get a long-term settlement. That also means not doing things that get in the way of peace talks getting going again.

Illegal Migration

3. **Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): What assessment her Department has made of the root causes of illegal migration to Europe by boat. [900062]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening): According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 80,000 migrants have arrived in Europe by sea already this year. Some are fleeing conflict, such as that in Syria, or persecution elsewhere; others are economic migrants searching for a better life. Addressing the root causes, not just the symptoms, involves bringing peace and stability, good governance, development and jobs to their countries of origin.

Daniel Kawczynski: My right hon. Friend will have seen the terrible suffering in the Mediterranean as people are being trafficked from Libya to Lampedusa. What concrete steps is her Department taking to help the Libyan coastguard to police its ports better?

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend will know that this is an international problem that requires an international co-ordinated solution, not least from the EU, and the UK is part of that. Getting a stable Government in Libya is a crucial part of how we can start to clamp down on the traffickers who trade in human misery, and I assure him that both DFID and the Foreign Office are a part of that work.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab) *rose*—

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Ah. The Vaz sibling rivalry lives on. I call Mr Keith Vaz.

Keith Vaz: Thank you, Mr Speaker. [HON. MEMBERS: “Wrong choice!”] You made the right choice.

The hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) is right, in that 92% of the 170,000 who have travelled from north Africa to Italy came through Libya. The Khartoum process is clearly not working, and the humanitarian crisis starts in north Africa, goes to Italy and will end in Calais. What further steps can we take to help the people of north Africa?

Justine Greening: There are several steps, one being immediately to make sure that the Khartoum process does deliver. It is crucial because it brings together destination countries, transit countries and countries of origin to work more collaboratively. The other key thing is to work upstream, as the situation shows that we cannot simply assume that countries that are not developing and do not have prospects for their young people will deal with the problem. People see the better lives being led in countries such as ours and want to have the same thing for themselves. In the long term, the only real solution is development.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): Is not part of the problem that a lot of people are moving up from central Africa? Does the Secretary of State have any plans to apply more of her overseas aid budget to helping people stay in their own countries?

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and over the past couple of years DFID has dramatically increased the amount of our work that is going on, including on economic development and creating jobs and livelihoods. A World Bank report in 2013 estimated that 600 million jobs will be required over the next 15 years for young people entering the labour market, many of whom are in Africa. It makes sense, and it is crucial, that we provide opportunity for them to fulfil their potential there.

Valerie Vaz: What implications are there for the UK as a result of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations conference on 29 May in Bangkok?

Justine Greening: The hon. Lady rightly points out that while we in Europe grapple with the challenges we face on migration, comparable challenges are being faced by other countries. It is absolutely right that Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia are now working far more carefully together, and the UK will be playing its role to support them in doing that.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Can we see illegal migrants to Europe first and foremost as human beings and give them all the dignity, care and respect we can, especially by ensuring the availability of rescue facilities as they cross the Mediterranean?

Justine Greening: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we need to see the people behind many of the statistics that we read in the paper. That is one reason why we sent HMS Bulwark and Merlin helicopters—so that this country can play our role in providing search and rescue services to help those people. They are literally putting their lives on the line to get a better life, and we should never forget the stories of the people behind those terrible numbers.

Mr Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): May I begin by welcoming the Secretary of State back to her post and welcoming the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps) to his new post? We look forward to working constructively with the Secretary of State in this very important year for development.

We welcome the reintroduction of search and rescue in the Mediterranean—it was a shameful decision to withdraw it, and the Prime Minister was right to make a U-turn—but we know that the most vulnerable Syrian migrants will not make it to a boat, or get here on a plane; they will die in a camp. Given that the whole world community has come together to relocate those most vulnerable people through the UN, why does the Secretary of State insist on running her own scheme?

Justine Greening: We are working collaboratively with the UNHCR. In fact, we have helped just under 200 people through that scheme. The hon. Gentleman should be aware that, through the asylum system, we have received 4,000 asylum applications from Syrians. Critically, what this all shows is that we need to support people where they are. Some 99% of the refugees from the Syrian crisis are still in the countries that border Syria, and the UK has put £800 million into helping them build their lives there and educating their children.

Palestinian Authority (UK Aid)

4. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of UK aid to the Palestinian Authority. [900063]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Desmond Swayne): Our support has enabled the Palestinian Authority to carry out state-building reforms in public financial administration and security. The international community has recognised that the PA is now ready for statehood.

John Howell: I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Is the Minister aware of reports that the Palestinian Authority continues to pay convicted terrorists, and will he investigate whether UK payments are being used for that purpose?

Mr Swayne: I assure my hon. Friend that no UK payments are made for that purpose. Our support to the Palestinian Authority is paid through a World Bank-controlled trust fund to named civil servants and then independently audited.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): More Palestinian civilians were killed last year than in any year since 1967, and the crisis gets worse and worse in the occupied territories, especially in Gaza. I see today that the Foreign Office has called for the Rafah crossing into Egypt to be opened, but what are Ministers doing to ensure that the goods and passenger crossings into Israel are opened? What pressure is DFID putting on the Israeli Government to do that?

Mr Swayne: We make representations at every level all the time to enable goods and services to be exported into and out of Gaza. There can be no future for Gaza until there is a complete transformation in that process, and for that to proceed, a peace process is required.

Sustainable Development Goals

5. **Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): What recent progress has been made in negotiations to agree the sustainable development goals. [900064]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening): Since January, UN member states have discussed all aspects of the post-2015 outcome document for September: the political declaration, goals and targets, means of implementation, and monitoring and review. As the hon. Lady may be aware, we have literally just seen the first zero draft of that document. We are looking through it to assess what the UK's negotiating stance will be.

Kate Green: Last year, I visited Rwanda with Voluntary Service Overseas—I draw Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests—and I saw for myself the enduring impact that the collapse of its healthcare system 20 years ago has continued to have on levels of disability and poor mental health. Will the Secretary of State tell us what the Government have

done to ensure that universal health coverage remains an underpinning principle of the sustainable development goals and the aid agenda?

Justine Greening: We have advocated very strongly for universal health coverage that truly makes a difference to people and puts them in a position to be able to play a role in helping to develop their country. I assure the hon. Lady that the UK is a strong advocate of that. She is quite right to point out the dramatic progress that has been made in Rwanda. What it shows is that when we make the investment, development happens.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Given the important role the Prime Minister played on the high-level panel on sustainability, will the Secretary of State tell the House what progress has been made in getting a concrete goal on the food, water and energy nexus?

Justine Greening: My right hon. Friend is right to point out the Prime Minister's pivotal role as a co-chair of the UN Secretary-General's high-level panel. It very much shaped the debate that then happened, which has got us to where we are today. Clearly, the interlocking issues of food security, nutrition and sustainability need to be addressed as part of the new sustainable development goals. One of the main changes that we want to see is sustainability, and the early indications are that we will have a good outcome.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): What role does the Secretary of State see for the Scottish Government in the ongoing SDG negotiations? Will she commit to ensuring that her counterpart, the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs or the Minister for Europe and Internal Development, will be part of the UK delegation to the UN SDG summit in September?

Justine Greening: Of course, the hon. Gentleman will know that international development remains a reserved matter, but I am proud of the fact that our joint headquarters is up in East Kilbride. I very much welcome him and his expertise to the House. I have no doubt that Scotland has a key role to play in helping to shape the outcomes, and I look forward to discussing them with him.

11. [900070] **Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): In 2011, British climate scientists said that the famine in Somalia was caused in part by low rainfall, to which climate change contributed. Does the Secretary of State agree that tackling climate change as a single, stand-alone target should be included in the SDGs, or will the Government continue to treat it as an afterthought?

Justine Greening: I do not think that the hon. Lady is right to characterise our approach that way. For many years, the UK has been a leader in the debate and the challenge of tackling climate change, which is included in the SDG negotiation that is under way. We have argued for tough targets, and of course we will be arguing for them in the Paris summit that is coming up later this year, so I can reassure her that we are playing a leading role in making sure that the next set of development goals are sustainable and that they include tackling climate change.

Burma

6. **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): What support her Department is giving to the Rohingya people in Burma. [900065]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Desmond Swayne): The Department for International Development is one of the biggest international donors in Rakhine state. We have just increased our support by a further £6.2 million, bringing our support since 2012 to £18 million.

Kerry McCarthy: Does the Minister agree that the time is long overdue for Burma to address the persecution and poverty that force the Rohingya to flee? Does he think that the time is now right for the UN Secretary-General to lead the negotiations, so that humanitarian non-governmental organisations can gain access to Rakhine state?

Mr Swayne: Yes, and a director general of DFID is in Rakhine state as we speak, and we take every opportunity to push forward these matters.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Surely, the plight of thousands of Rohingya people adrift in the bay of Bengal must call for greater leadership from not only the United Nations but the United Kingdom. Should we ensure not only that we make representations in meetings with ambassadors but that our taxpayers' aid and access to our diplomatic doors are made contingent on ensuring proper recognition of the Rohingya and full respect of human rights?

Mr Swayne: Absolutely. I have taken every opportunity to raise this matter with Burmese Ministers. My caution with respect to my hon. Friend's suggested course of action is that I am not prepared to withdraw British aid from poor people simply because of the regime under which they suffer.

15. [900074] **Paul Scully** (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): What is the UK doing to encourage a co-ordinated response to the south-east Asian boat migrant situation?

Mr Swayne: Our ambassador attended the recent conference with Malaysia and Bangladesh. We participated with a *démarche* of Burmese Ministers, along with the United States and the French, and we are doing everything that we can precisely to make this a regional response.

Topical Questions

T1. [900050] **Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening): Following the devastating earthquake in April, I visited Nepal last month to see for myself the work that the UK is doing and announced £10 million in funding for a new health programme, so that children can continue to be immunised, women can continue to deliver babies safely and we can start rebuilding damaged health facilities. We are now providing more than £33 million to that response, making us the largest donor to the relief operation.

In addition, I can today confirm that the Department for International Development has approved more than £9 million to support Burundian refugees in Tanzania, and those funds will help to provide essential shelter, water and sanitation infrastructure, healthcare and food rations. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I understand the sense of anticipation but we must be able to hear the Secretary of State's replies and I want to hear what might be the first topical question from Christina Rees.

Christina Rees: From Doha to Rana Plaza, workers all over the world risk exploitation, abuse and violence, but the Secretary of State's Government cut support for the International Labour Organisation. Will she admit that her Government got it wrong and reverse the decision now?

Justine Greening: The hon. Lady will be reassured to hear that we are still working with the ILO. In fact, in Bangladesh, we have a very effective programme that is helping to improve workplace security and health and safety. That was introduced in response to the Rana Plaza tragedy. Therefore, I can reassure her that we take those matters seriously and we are actively working with the ILO.

T6. [900055] **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): What assistance does her Department give to Indian ocean islands such as the Maldives and Seychelles in tackling climate change issues?

Justine Greening: The UK provides support through a number of multilateral organisations, including Climate Investment Funds and the Global Environment Facility, as well as through contributing to EU programmes that support affected countries.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): May I begin by paying tribute to Charles Kennedy and by sharing the sadness of Members on both sides of the House about his untimely death? He was a brilliant man, a great orator and wit and his death is a huge loss to his party and to his country. Our thoughts are with his family at this time.

The whole House will welcome Sepp Blatter's resignation as FIFA president and the Swiss authorities' investigation into the awarding of the 2022 World cup to Qatar. There have been horrific human rights abuses of the migrant workers who are working on the infrastructure there. An estimated 1,200 have died. What steps will the Secretary of State take to support those migrant workers and prevent their brutal exploitation?

Justine Greening: The most important thing we can do is to help those people's countries develop successfully so there are opportunities where these young people are growing up. It is aspiration that is driving them to try to make a better life for themselves and to find work in other countries. The best thing we can do is to get behind the economic development work that DFID is ramping up to ensure that there are jobs in the countries where those young people are growing up.

Mary Creagh: The Secretary of State talks about aspiration, but those workers' aspirations have led them to a life of bonded labour and modern slavery. That is what is happening. Workers' rights are human rights. The whole House will welcome the news that the owner of the Rana Plaza complex, along with 42 others, is going to be prosecuted for the deaths of the 1,100 workers who died when that building collapsed, yet two years after that tragedy the victims compensation fund is still \$8 million short of its target. Fourteen fashion brands, including Lee Cooper, Carrefour and JC Penney, which sourced garments from that complex, have not yet paid into the victims fund. What action will the Secretary of State take to ensure that they do?

Justine Greening: The hon. Lady will be aware that after the Rana Plaza tragedy we got many of the UK companies that are working in Bangladesh into DFID to talk to them about these very issues. I think we should be proud of the role that our companies are playing in improving working conditions in Bangladesh. She is right to highlight other companies that are not playing the role they should in solving these issues.

T10. [900059] **Mark Spencer** (Sherwood) (Con): We made a manifesto commitment to lead on the humanitarian response to emergencies, as we have demonstrated to the people of Nepal. Has the Secretary of State had the opportunity to visit Nepal to see the devastation and the response of the UK?

Justine Greening: Yes, I have. I was able to go there a couple of weeks ago. Unique to the UK's response is that it leverages the whole of our Government to help people in a country such as Nepal. Not only is that led by DFID, but there has been fantastic work by the Foreign Office in providing consular assistance and by our amazing Gurkhas and armed forces in helping us to get supplies to some of the remotest areas. We should be proud of the work we are doing as a country and realise that we are valued across the world for the role we play in helping people in their hour of need.

Mr Speaker: Order. I fear that the microphones are not working as well as they should today, so Members probably need to speak up a bit.

T2. [900051] **Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): Up to 18,000 civilians are cut off in Yarmouk camp on the outskirts of Damascus. This week, the UN co-ordinator described the situation as absolutely critical. What are the Government doing either to get assistance into Yarmouk, or to get more civilians out of Yarmouk?

Justine Greening: There are two pieces to this. We must make sure that the Security Council resolution on humanitarian access remains in place so that we have the right structures to be able to get aid across the border. But it is absolutely key that the UK should continue to play our role in enabling UN organisations and NGOs, which do incredibly dangerous work to try to reach these people, to get the food, medical supplies and shelter that are so desperately needed. The only thing that will truly alleviate the situation is a political settlement, but we all recognise that that is some way off.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Last but not least, I call Sir Alan Duncan.

Sir Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): It is fair to say that my right hon. Friend's Department led the world in putting together an earthquake preparedness plan for Nepal. She will be looking at what worked and what did not when the inevitable happened. Will she conduct a full review of what did and did not work, so that we can be ready for the inevitable repeat of this tragedy?

Justine Greening: We always look at the lessons that can be learned from our response to all tragedies. My right hon. Friend should be very proud of the role that he personally played in putting the programme in place. It meant that tarpaulins, food and medical supplies were already pre-positioned for when the earthquake hit and that we enabled hospitals to get back up and running quickly. Critically, it also meant that there was a humanitarian staging area close to the airport that prevented the airport from getting even more clogged up than it already was. As the World Food Programme said, all that brought forward the relief effort by three weeks, which undoubtedly saved lives.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [900035] **Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 3 June.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Alec Shelbrooke: During the general election, my blue-collar conservatism resonated very well with my constituents in Elmet and Rothwell. They are very keen that the economic recovery continues on track. Does my right hon. Friend agree that in this Parliament we must achieve lower taxation for working people and a higher minimum wage and that we must ensure that the lowest paid are taken out of tax altogether, to show that we are a true one nation Government?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his return to the House, having doubled his majority. There were a number of results in his part of Yorkshire in which I took a particular interest and was pleased to see happen. He is absolutely right that at the heart of our plan is making work pay: that is the best way to help people out of poverty and give them more security—creating jobs, cutting taxes, seeing increases in the minimum wage and legislating so that people working 30 hours on the minimum wage do not pay income tax. That is our plan for working people.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): We all agree about the importance of home ownership, and the Prime Minister has said that he is going to increase it. Can he tell us whether, since he became Prime Minister in 2010, the percentage of people owning their own home has gone up or down?

The Prime Minister: It has been a very challenging time for people to buy their own homes, but what we are responsible for is almost 100,000 people being able to buy their own homes because of the right to buy and Help to Buy—two schemes opposed by Labour.

Ms Harman: The answer is that since the right hon. Gentleman became Prime Minister the percentage of people who own their own home has fallen. He mentioned his plan to extend the right to buy to housing association tenants. He has promised that, under this new scheme, sold off properties will be replaced on a one-for-one basis. He promised that on council homes in the last Parliament. Can he remind us whether he kept that promise?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. and learned Lady is complaining about home ownership, will she confirm that she will support the extension of the right to buy to housing associations? Will she support that approach? *[Interruption.]* There we are. There we have it: a landmark manifesto commitment—let us expand the right to buy to housing associations—but, as ever, the enemies of aspiration in the Labour party will not support it.

Ms Harman: We support more people owning their own homes, which is not what happened in the last five years, during which the right hon. Gentleman has been Prime Minister. We support more people having an affordable home as well, but that did not happen in the last five years, when he has been Prime Minister, either. He promised that for every council home sold another one would be built. That did not happen: for every 10 sold, only one has been built. Less affordable housing means that people have to be in more expensive private rented accommodation, which means a higher housing benefit bill. Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that for every affordable home sold and not replaced, the housing benefit bill goes up?

The Prime Minister: We built more council homes in the last five years than were built under 13 years of the previous Labour Government. I say to the right hon. and learned Lady that she cannot ask these questions about supporting home ownership unless she answers the simple question: will you back housing association tenants being able to buy their homes—yes or no?

Ms Harman: The Prime Minister broke his promise on the replacement—one for one—of affordable council homes. He broke that promise, and as a result housing benefit has gone up. At the same time, he says he wants to take £12 billion out of welfare, so where is it coming from? Earlier this week, his spokesperson confirmed that the Government would not make any changes to child benefit, and that is a commitment for the whole of this Parliament. Will he confirm that now?

The Prime Minister: We made very clear our position on child benefit in the election, and I confirm that again at the Dispatch Box. Let us be clear—absolutely no

answer from the Labour party about housing association tenants. We are clear: housing association tenants should have the right to buy. We can now see that the new Labour backing of aspiration after the election has lasted three weeks. That is how long they have given to aspiration. Let me give the right hon. and learned Lady another chance. We say housing association tenants get the right to buy. What does she say?

Ms Harman: The Prime Minister's commitment not to cut child benefit during the course of this Parliament has not even lasted a few days. That is what his spokesperson said, and he has not been committed to it. Will he tell us about another issue of importance to families, which is whether he is going to rule out further cuts to working families tax credits?

The Prime Minister: Again, we have said we are freezing tax credits in the next two years because we need to get the deficit down and we want to keep people's taxes down. But is it not interesting that, for the whole of the last Parliament, Labour Members came here and opposed every single spending reduction, every single welfare saving, and they have learned absolutely nothing. Labour is still the party of more spending, more welfare, more debt. It is extraordinary: of the two people responsible for this great policy of theirs, one of them lost the election and the other one lost his seat—the messengers have gone, but the message is still the same.

Ms Harman: The Prime Minister promised £12 billion of welfare cuts, and I am asking where those welfare cuts are coming from. Before an election, it is about promises; now they are in Downing Street, it is about the delivery. The Prime Minister spent the last five years saying everything that was wrong was because of the previous Prime Minister. Well, he cannot do that for the next five years because the last Prime Minister was him. I hope he will bear in mind, when things go wrong over the next five years, that there is no one responsible but him.

The Prime Minister: First, we are still clearing up the mess the right hon. and learned Lady's Government left behind. She asked for an example of a welfare cut; let me give her one. We think we should cut the welfare cap from £26,000 per household to £23,000 per household. In her speech in reply to the Gracious Speech, it sounded like she was going to come out and support that. Let us see how Labour is going to approach this: will you support a cut in the welfare cap?

Mr Speaker: The right hon. and learned Lady has had her six questions. [HON. MEMBERS: "More!"] Everyone should be clear about that.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be well aware that there is considerable concern on both sides of the House at the proposition that Britain might withdraw from the European convention on human rights. Will he take the opportunity today to make it clear that he has no plans for us to do so?

The Prime Minister: We are very clear about what we want: British judges making decisions in British courts, and the British Parliament being accountable to the British people. The plans that were set out in our manifesto do

not involve us leaving the European convention on human rights, but let us be absolutely clear about our position if we cannot achieve what we need—I am very clear about that. When we have these foreign criminals committing offence after offence, and we cannot send them home because of their “right to a family life”, that needs to change. I rule out absolutely nothing in getting that done.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): May I begin by expressing my sadness at the untimely death of Charles Kennedy? I know that we will pay tributes a little later.

It is a stain on the conscience of Europe that thousands and thousands of refugees have been dying in the Mediterranean, when many lives could have been saved. Does the Prime Minister agree that the role of the Royal Navy, the Italian coastguard and the navies of other European countries is making a profound difference? However, much more needs to be done, including offering refuge and asylum to those who need it.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is right to mention Charles Kennedy. We will rightly have those tributes after Prime Minister’s questions.

The hon. Gentleman is also right to praise the role of the Royal Navy in dealing with this tragedy in the Mediterranean. HMS Bulwark, the flagship of the Royal Navy, has been playing a key role in saving lives. However, I part company with him on his next suggestion. We need to do two things to solve this crisis. First, we need a Government in Libya that we can work with, so that it is possible to return people to Africa and stop this criminal trade. Secondly, we need to break the link between getting on a boat and achieving residence in Europe. That is what needs to be done. In the meantime, everything that Britain can do as a moral and upstanding nation to save lives, we will do, and we should be proud that we are doing it.

Angus Robertson: Eighty years ago, that is what the United Kingdom did, when it offered refuge and asylum to those who were being pursued by the Nazis. We all know about the Kindertransport and the children who were accepted and given refuge in the UK. Now, in contrast, the UK has an appalling record on the resettlement of Syrian refugees and is not prepared to co-operate with other European nations on accepting refugees who have been rescued in the Mediterranean. Why does the Prime Minister think it is fair for Sweden, Germany and other countries to accept those refugees, while the UK turns its back on them?

The Prime Minister: I take issue with the hon. Gentleman. This country has an asylum system and a record of giving people asylum that we should be proud of. When people are fleeing torture and persecution, they can find a home here in Britain. But let us be clear: the vast majority of people who are setting off into the Mediterranean are not asylum seekers, but people seeking a better life. They have been tricked and fooled by criminal gangs. Our role should be going after those criminal gangs, sorting out the situation in Libya, turning back the boats where we can and using our generous aid budget—this Government achieved 0.7%—to mend the countries from which these people are coming. That is our moral responsibility and one that I am proud to fulfil.

Q2. [900036] **Julian Sturdy** (York Outer) (Con): Thanks to the careful financial stewardship of this Government, York’s economy continues to grow, with unemployment a fraction of what it was five years ago. Will the Prime Minister assure me that his offer of devolution will percolate right through the great county of Yorkshire, empowering rural communities, as well as cities such as York, to deliver a Yorkshire powerhouse that rivals Manchester and London?

The Prime Minister: I certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. He talks about the strength of the Yorkshire economy. The claimant count in his constituency—the number of people claiming unemployment benefit—has come down by 74% since 2010. We see the northern powerhouse as the linking of the great northern cities as a counterpoint and a counterpoise to the strength of London. We are making good progress on that, but we certainly want more money, resources and powers to be devolved to those cities. The York, North Yorkshire and East Riding local growth deal, for example, is creating at least 3,000 jobs and allowing 4,000 homes to be built. We have made good progress, but there is more to be done in this Parliament.

Q3. [900037] **Huw Irranca-Davies** (Ogmore) (Lab): In March, the Prime Minister rightly apologised for successive Governments who had failed to address properly the claims and the righteous indignation of the families whose lives were torn apart and of those who lost their lives in the contaminated blood scandal. He also said in response to a question that he would deal with this matter as a priority if he was re-elected. Can he update us now on his commitment to and progress on that issue, so that it is dealt with finally and fully for all those people who have lost their lives and for those who live with the damage caused by this scandal?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue. All of us as Members of Parliament have come across people who, through no fault of their own, were infected with blood with either HIV or hepatitis C, which has had very serious consequences for them.

In terms of what we are going to do about it—as the Scottish National party Member, the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), shouts from a sedentary position—I said very clearly before the election that we have made available £25 million to help those families, and there will be a full statement by the Government before the summer recess to make sure that we deal with this issue in the best way we possibly can.

Q4. [900038] **David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): A national health service free at the point of use was at the heart of the Conservative general election campaign. Will the Prime Minister confirm that he will continue to deliver the shorter waiting times, better ambulance response times, better access to cancer drugs and more funding that make the NHS the envy not just of the world but of my constituents in Monmouthshire?

The Prime Minister: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for what he says. I absolutely say to him that under this Government the NHS will remain free at the

point of use, and, more to the point, we are backing the Simon Stevens plan with an extra £8 billion of spending, a commitment that the Labour party still refuses to make. That is not surprising given the Labour record in Wales, where it has cut the NHS, in stark contrast to the decision we made to increase investment in the NHS. That is why we see in the Welsh NHS performance worse figures on A&E, on waiting times and on cancer, and I urge the Labour party in Wales even at this late stage: “Change your approach. Do a U-turn. Put the money into the NHS like we’re doing in England.”

Q5. [900039] **Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): The fragility of our economic recovery in my constituency is demonstrated by the impending closure of Dixons Carphone in the area, with the loss of 500 jobs and £8 million to the local economy. Will the Prime Minister intervene to keep Wednesbury working—to save these jobs—or at the very least ensure that the company provides appropriate compensation and support for employees to secure alternative employment?

The Prime Minister: I shall look very closely at the case that the hon. Gentleman mentions. Obviously, everything that Jobcentre Plus can do to find employment for those people should be done. He talks, though, about the “fragility” of the economy. In his constituency, the claimant count has fallen by a third over the last year, so jobs are being made available. But as I say, where Jobcentre Plus can help with finding people work, we will certainly make sure that it does.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): The UN Secretary-General has described the refugee situation in Jordan and Lebanon as

“the worst humanitarian crisis of our time.”

What more can Britain do, in tandem with other countries, to help relieve the suffering, and to learn from the lessons of history to ensure that poorly resourced refugee camps do not become breeding grounds for extremism?

The Prime Minister: The first thing that we can do is to continue our investment, using our aid budget as—I think—the second largest bilateral donor in providing refugee support and refugee camps, whether in Jordan or elsewhere in the region. We should continue with that, but clearly the answer to this problem is to allow those people to go back home, whether to Iraq or to Syria, so what we need is a Government in both those countries that can represent and work with all their people.

There is some progress in Iraq with the Abadi Government in Iraq, and we need to make sure that they can represent Sunnis as well as Shi’as. In Syria, the situation is far, far worse, but we should still continue, with others, with the plan of training the moderate Syrian opposition and trying to bring about a transition, so we get rid of the Assad regime and Assad himself, who is one of the biggest drivers of terror in the region, because of what he has done to his people. That is the strategy we should pursue, for however long it takes to succeed.

Q6. [900040] **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister inform the House when he expects the UK to regain its triple A credit rating?

The Prime Minister: I welcome the hon. Lady to her place and congratulate her on her election success. The first question she asks is about fiscal responsibility and sustainability. I take that as a sign of progress. I would say to her: there is a leadership election on, throw your hat in the ring. In that one question she has made more sense than all the rest of them put together—go for it!

Q7. [900041] **Mrs Flick Drummond** (Portsmouth South) (Con): A push for greater diversity in employment is a key part of my plan for Portsmouth. Can the Prime Minister assure my constituents that the leasing of part of the dockyard to Magma Structures will be confirmed in due course, as we look forward to welcoming yet another high-tech company to the city?

The Prime Minister: First, may I congratulate my hon. Friend on her election success and on standing up already for Portsmouth, on all the work she did as a candidate and all the things I know she will do as a Member of Parliament? We are absolutely committed to ensuring that the Portsmouth ship hall is used in the most effective way to deliver capability, to create jobs and to boost growth in the region. The developments in Portsmouth at the moment are exciting, whether in ship servicing, welcoming the carriers when they come to Portsmouth or the Ben Ainslie centre that is being constructed with Government support. May I just say how good it is that Portsmouth is going to be represented in this place by strong Conservative women?

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): In Her Majesty’s Gracious Speech last week, the Government made a commitment to legislate to implement the Stormont House agreement. As the Prime Minister knows, the agreement has the Democratic Unionist party’s full support. The agreement was signed by all five main parties in Northern Ireland, and by the British and Irish Governments. Now that it has been reneged on—certainly the welfare reform aspect—by Sinn Féin, with vulnerable people being hurt, public services hit as a result of the implementation of £2 million-a-week fines and a black hole in the Northern Ireland budget, does he agree with his Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, following the talks yesterday, that all parties that signed up to the agreement, including the SDLP and Sinn Féin, should implement it? If they fail to do so, will he take steps to preserve the integrity of the agreement?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that everyone who was party to those talks—they were exhaustive and lengthy talks, ending in an agreement—should implement that agreement in full. The agreement did include welfare reform. That is the first point and he is absolutely right. Whatever happens, we need to make sure that Northern Ireland and the Assembly have a sustainable and deliverable budget, so I hope that even at this late stage people will look at what they can do to make sure that happens.

Q8. [900042] **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): Last year saw record numbers of adoptions and prospective adopters, but there are still more than 3,000 children in care waiting to be adopted, with half of them having waited for more than 18 months. What plans does my right hon. Friend, who has a strong commitment on this issue, have to enable more children to be placed in a loving, stable family home sooner rather than later?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this issue. Speeding up the rate at which adoptions take place, and making sure more adoptions can take place, is absolutely key to giving more children a better start in life. In the past three years we have seen a 63% increase in adoptions, so we have made progress. In the Gracious Speech and in the Bill being published today there are the plans to create regional adoption agencies, bringing together the many agencies there are in this country. I think that is right because it matters far more that a child gets a loving home than whether that home is in a particular county council area. Let us get on and create these agencies and make sure more adoptions take place.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): The UK steel industry is a key foundation industry for Britain, but it is in crisis. Will the Prime Minister join me and the rest of the all-party group for the steel and metal-related industry to call on the leadership in Mumbai to intervene directly in this situation and get their colleagues in Tata Europe to get back around the table and avoid potentially the worst crisis in the steel industry in 35 years?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is very important that the Government talk intensively to the leaders of the steel industry, Tata in particular, about what we can do to try to make sure that we safeguard the growth and the jobs that there have been in the steel industry over previous years. We have started those discussions—we have had discussions, for instance, about the steps we are taking for high energy-intensive industries and the help that we can give—but at the heart of a successful steel industry is always going to be a successful economy and a successful construction industry, which is why we should stick to the long-term economic plan.

Q9. [900043] **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): Today, Tidal Lagoon Power, headquartered in Gloucester, announces that China Harbour Engineering is the preferred bidder for a £300 million investment in the world's first ever tidal lagoon, in Swansea bay. There will be high UK content in the supply chain and there is a commitment to pursue tidal projects together in Asia. This confirms our ability both to attract Chinese investment and to create new export opportunities. Does my right hon. Friend share my hope that the Energy Secretary will soon agree the development consent order needed and also agree soon on the pricing of power from this exciting example of British innovation and engineering?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to raise this specific case, and also the general case of wanting to attract Chinese investment to Britain. We have seen something like a 73% increase, between 2010 and 2013, and that is partly because this Government have pursued Chinese investment and attracted it to Britain. On the specific case of the Swansea tidal lagoon, it is obviously subject to a planning decision, but I think tidal power has significant potential. I have seen some of the plans for myself and I hope this is something we can make progress on; and obviously, attracting investment to this country to help make it happen is a win-win for both countries.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The devolution of powers to our nations, our regions and our great cities will be one of the themes of this Parliament, but does the Prime Minister accept that Londoners, under their elected Mayor, will expect at least the same powers that are being devolved to the northern powerhouse?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady makes a powerful point, and there has been an ongoing discussion with the Mayor of London about what more powers can be—[HON. MEMBERS: “Where is he?”] He is running London, that's where he is, and he is doing a very, very good job. He is doing an excellent job—very good. But I think the hon. Lady is right: we have devolved powers to London and we are very happy to go on having discussions, about transport and about other economic powers. London has created half a million more jobs over the last five years. It is a staggering performance and we want that to continue.

Q10. [900044] **Glyn Davies** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree that any onshore wind farm proposal not already granted planning permission should not expect to receive any public subsidy?

The Prime Minister: I am very glad to see my hon. Friend back in his place. He campaigned very hard on this in the last Parliament, and in our manifesto we made it very clear that there should be no more subsidies for onshore wind farms. It is time to give local people the decisive say. That is what will happen in England; in Wales, obviously, the subsidy regime will be changed because it is a reserved issue, so I think that his desire has been met.

Q11. [900045] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): The Prime Minister might be aware of the ongoing case of my constituent Dr Steve Forman, who, despite his immense contribution to the music and creative scene in Glasgow, Scotland and around the world, the Home Office is seeing fit to try to deport back to the United States. Will the Prime Minister tell the House why people such as Dr Forman do not seem to be welcome in this country? If the Prime Minister cannot run an immigration policy that works for Scotland, I know a Government up the road that would be very happy to take on the job.

The Prime Minister: First, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his election. I am not aware of the specific case that he raises, but I will look at it urgently after Prime Minister's questions and see what I can do.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree that one of the ways forward in the European Union is to have two pillars, the first being countries that want a single currency, a common fiscal policy and ever closer political union, and the second being countries that want none of those, but instead want a free trade area—a common market?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a good point. One of the arguments going on in Europe is about trying to get people to accept what is already the case, which is that there are countries like Britain at the heart of the single market but not involved in the

Schengen agreement or likely to join it, and not involved in the single currency, which, in my view, we should never join. We should accept that this sort of flexibility is here to stay. I think the challenge for Europe is to build a European community that is flexible enough for the single currency countries to be happy that their problems and issues can be sorted out, while also flexible enough for countries like Britain at the heart of the single market, but not wanting to be part of the ever closer union, to be comfortable with their membership, too. That is the aim of my renegotiation, and it will be followed by an in/out referendum.

Q12. [900046] **Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): I welcome the Prime Minister's confirmation that there will be no cuts in the rates of or eligibility conditions for child benefit, but will he also confirm the commitment he made during the election that there will be no cuts in the benefits paid to disabled people?

The Prime Minister: What we have actually done is to increase the benefits paid to disabled people by bringing in the personal independence payment, which is more generous to those who are most disabled. May I say how much I enjoyed meeting the right hon. Gentleman during the general election when we both addressed the Festival of Life in the ExCeL centre in his constituency? I do not know about him, but it is certainly the only time in my life that I have talked to 45,000 people at the same time, and I suspect the same goes for him.

Q13. [900047] **Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): The Prime Minister referred to Libya earlier. We have exchanged views and had many debates on Libya since our military involvement in that country in 2011, yet the situation is getting worse and worse. What new steps and initiatives is the Prime

Minister going to bring, in conjunction with the allies of Egypt and Italy, to ensure that the situation is resolved?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this, and there will be some discussions at the G7 in Germany this weekend. We have got to a position in which Special Representative León from the UN has been bringing everybody together to try to form a national unity Government. We need to give everything we can to support that process, so that there is some prospect of Libya having a Government, from which can flow some security, from which can flow the ability to start to deal with this migrant crisis in the way I discussed earlier.

Q14. [900048] **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Under the right-to-buy plan, three social houses will need to be sold to generate enough revenue to build one new one, leaving 1,500 families in York without a home for well over two years. Is that what the Prime Minister means by aspiration?

The Prime Minister: First, let me welcome the hon. Lady to the House and congratulate her on her election victory. There are two things we are doing to provide these replacement houses. One is obviously that for every housing association that sells a home, it has that receipt and is able to build a new house. We are also making sure that councils sell off the most expensive council houses when they become vacant. In parts of London, there are council houses worth over £1 million, with which many more houses can be built. What is clear from this Question Time is that Conservative Members understand home ownership, aspiration and people wanting to get on. Labour Members, after the most catastrophic election defeat in years, cannot even begin to spell aspiration.

Tributes to Charles Kennedy

12.34 pm

Mr Speaker: I informed the House yesterday that there would be an opportunity today for Members to pay tribute to the right hon. Charles Kennedy. I shall—I hope with the House's understanding—deploy the Chair's prerogative to begin that process.

Charles Kennedy spent almost his entire adult life as a Member of Parliament. He was assuredly at home in this place, yet perhaps happiest beyond it. He was a man of deep progressive principle, but a man also blessed with the popular touch. He was a good talker, but an even better listener. Above all and perhaps most strikingly, Charles had the rare ability to reach out to millions of people of all political persuasions and of none across the country who were untouched by, and in many cases actively hostile to, politics. In this seminal sense, therefore, Charles was the “boy next door” of British public life. We salute him; we honour his memory; and we send today our sincere, heartfelt, and deepest condolences to his family and his friends.

12.35 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): The whole House will have been shocked, and so deeply saddened, by the sudden news yesterday morning of the death of Charles Kennedy. As you said, Mr Speaker, it is a tragic loss for his family, not least his son Donald, who is just 10 years old, and I know that the thoughts and prayers of the whole House are with his family and his friends at this time.

It is right that the House should come together and pay tribute to a man whose character and courage inspired us all, and who served his constituents so well for almost 32 years. There was something very special about Charles. As his good friend Alastair Campbell put it yesterday,

“He spoke fluent human, because he had humanity in every vein and every cell.”

Charles Kennedy will be remembered for his success, for his principle and intellect, and above all for his incredible warmth and good humour. I will say a word about each. Charles was elected as the youngest Member of Parliament in 1983, at just 23 years old. It was a remarkable victory. Standing for a new party while studying in America at the time, he went from fourth place to first, defeating an established Conservative who had been in the House of Commons for 13 years. From there, his political career took off. Just a year earlier, he had been asked by his careers adviser what he was going to do in his life. He had replied that he could be a teacher or a journalist, but if all else failed, there was always politics. On his election, his old careers adviser wrote to congratulate him, saying, “I can only presume that all else failed.”

The new Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye, as he then was, faced a number of challenges at the beginning of his parliamentary career. His arrival at Westminster was only the third time that he had been to London in his life. Arranging to stay in a friend's spare room in Hammersmith, he remarked that he did not know how to get from Hammersmith to Westminster. In fact, it was worse than that: he did not even know how to get from Heathrow to Hammersmith.

Charles Kennedy played a pivotal role in bringing together two parties, the Social Democratic party and the Liberals, becoming president of the Liberal Democrats in 1990 and party leader from 1999 to 2006. As leader, he took the Liberal Democrats to the best election result for a third party in British politics for nearly 100 years. Back in 2003, he told Sue Lawley on “Desert Island Discs” that his ambition for his party was for it to find itself part of the government of the country. His achievements laid the foundations for that to happen, and, while he was never the greatest fan of the coalition and, indeed, voted against its formation, he never spoke out against the Liberal Democrat participation in it; for, as much as he was a man of strong views, he was also a man of great loyalty. He equally resisted any overtures from the Labour party, dismissing rumours that he would rejoin it by saying:

“I will go out of this world feet first with my Lib Dem membership card in my pocket.”

As ever with Charles Kennedy, he was a man of his word.

Charles Kennedy was also a man of great principle and great intellect. At the heart of his political views was a deep commitment to social justice. He passionately believed in Europe as a way of bringing people together, but his most outspoken contribution in recent years was the principled stand that he took against the Iraq war. Looking back, it is easy to forget just what a stand that was. He was taking abuse from the major parties on both sides of the House, and adopting a position that was not even supported by the previous leader of his own party. But there was something about the deeply respectful way in which he would conduct an argument: he did not believe in making enemies out of opponents, and he did not, as he put it,

“waste time just rubbishing everybody else.”

He made friends, even with those who disagreed with him, and I think that that was one of the reasons he was so liked and so widely supported in taking on the personal challenges that he faced. I had the privilege of getting to know him a little bit when I was a new MP back in 2001. We both frequented the Smoking Room, and, while we disagreed about many things, we both mourned its passing.

I find myself thinking today about just what an extraordinary talent Charles Kennedy was. All the while that he was battling his demons, he could make amazing speeches, delight a television audience, inspire his followers, take out his opponents with his brilliance in debate, and crack jokes—all at the same time. Above all, it is his warmth and good humour for which Charles will be remembered most fondly. He had a way of connecting with people—even those who did not know him well or even at all. In the tributes to Nelson Mandela in this House 18 months ago, Charles told us the story of their first meeting. He said he was introduced by his friend Lord Redesdale as a colleague from the House of Commons called Nigel Kennedy. As Charles remarked at the time:

“The President's characteristically firm handshake and jovial welcome confirmed two things for me there and then. First of all, he had never heard of Nigel Kennedy, but far more distressingly, he sure as hell had not heard of me either.”—[*Official Report*, 9 December 2013; Vol. 572, c. 20.]

He was the most human of politicians.

[*The Prime Minister*]

In the words of Charles Kennedy himself:

“The vast majority of people think there’s a hell of a lot more to life than just politics. And you’ve got to bear that in mind—because you’re actually trying to represent them.”

At his best he was the best that politics can be, and that is how we should remember him.

12.40 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): We all felt so saddened to wake up to the news yesterday of the death of Charles Kennedy, and the Prime Minister expressed the feelings of the whole House in his generous tribute, as did you in your comments, Mr Speaker.

As we come together to mourn his death and to pay tribute to his extraordinary qualities, there is much that all of us in political life can learn from Charles Kennedy. He was an outstanding parliamentarian and dedicated his whole life to politics. That is a powerful reminder to all of us that giving your life to politics, being a career politician, can be an honourable not an ignoble thing.

He took a philosophical approach to the ups and downs of political life. Despite the adversity that he faced, he never became bitter, because he cared more about his political cause than he did about his personal career. He had a deep seriousness of purpose and great intellect, but he wore it lightly. He could be the most intelligent person in the room but still be warm, funny and generous, which made him convincing and engaging in equal measure. He showed that there could be profound disagreement on matters of serious political judgment while still accepting the good faith of those who take a different view. He disagreed with the decision to go to war in Iraq, and he was right, but he never felt the need to denigrate those of us who got it wrong. He was strongly committed to his own party, but that did not stop him having friendships across party lines. He was partisan, but he was still generous enough to admire people in other parties.

History will show that he was one of a great generation of Scottish MPs, at a time when Scotland gave this House some of the finest politicians of the era. Exceptional politicians such as John Smith, Donald Dewar, Gordon Brown, Menzies Campbell, Robin Cook—he stands tall in a Scottish generation who were head and shoulders above their peers.

I remember when he first came to this House, aged only 23—the golden boy from the highlands. He shone in this Chamber. He was elected so young, and it is a tragedy that he has died so young. All our thoughts are with his family.

12.43 pm

Mr Nick Clegg (Sheffield, Hallam) (LD): A few days ago I got in touch with Charles because I was looking for a telephone number of someone we both knew. His friends will not be surprised to learn that we were texting each other. He was notoriously bad at actually answering his phone, but famously fluent in SMS. He said he did not have the number on him but he would get back to me this week, because he was spending time with his beloved son, Donald, during his half-term break.

While we all remember Charles as a formidable parliamentarian and a much loved politician, it is worth remembering that he retained his greatest pride and devotion for his family. He lived next door to his parents and, latterly, his brother in his grandfather’s croft house near Fort William, and cared for them through sickness and old age. Much though he was wedded to politics all his life, I think Charles would have wanted to be remembered first as a kind and loving father, brother and son, and as an accomplished politician second. My thoughts and condolences are with all his family—especially Donald—and friends today.

That enduring humanity—people always came before politics for Charles—is reflected in the heartfelt tributes over the past 24 hours paid by so many from outside the world of politics who did not know him directly but somehow still felt that they did know him and could relate to him. He had—and still has—that rare gift for someone in public life: when people think of him, they smile. He saw good in people, even his staunchest political foes, and that always brought out the best in people in return. He was the polar opposite of a cardboard cut-out, points-scoring party politician: brave, yet vulnerable; brilliant, yet flawed. As he would often say about people he admired most, he was a fully signed-up member of the human race.

And he was funny—he was very funny. But his good humour must not obscure the fact that there was a steely courage about him, most memorably on display when he took the principled decision to oppose the Iraq war. Just because that might seem now an obvious thing to have done, it most certainly was not at the time. Charles was often a lone voice in this House, standing up against a consensus on all sides in favour of war. The fact that he was proved so spectacularly right is a tribute to his judgment and his intuitive common sense.

I think Charles would be the first to admit, cheerily, that he was not exactly a details man when it came to policy. He treated the necessary but often tedious detail of policy discussions within the Liberal Democrats with the same attitude he viewed Ben Nevis in his own constituency: something to be admired from afar, but a trial to be endured by others. One of his earliest decisions when he became leader of the Liberal Democrats was to end the long-held convention that the leader of the party should attend all the regular and invariably lengthy meetings of the Liberal Democrat federal policy committee. It was a characteristically wise decision, for which I was for ever grateful during my time as leader.

Again, however, his disregard for the undergrowth of policy making should not obscure his unusually instinctive and deadly serious appreciation of the bigger picture in politics. Whether on Europe, constitutional reform, his arguments against nationalism and the politics of identity, or his lifelong belief in social justice, Charles had a gut instinct about the big challenges and the big choices we faced, not the daily twists and turns and sleights of hand that dominate so much of Westminster politics. He understood, above all, that politics is at its best when it speaks to people’s values in their hearts, and is not just the dry policy debates of the head.

There is so much that I will miss about Charles—his wit, his warmth, his modesty—but I suspect many of us will feel his absence most keenly when our country decides in the next year or two whether we belong, or not, in the European Union, because, of all his convictions,

his internationalism endured most strongly. He was a proud highlander, a proud Scot and a man who believed in our community of nations within the United Kingdom, but he was also a lifelong believer that our outward-facing character as a country is best secured by remaining at the heart of Europe rather than retreating elsewhere. As the debate becomes dominated, as it no doubt will, by the noise of statistical claim and counter-claim, I will miss the lyrical clarity of Charles's belief that our future as an open-hearted and generous-spirited country is at stake and must be defended at all costs.

A couple of years ago, Charles and I found ourselves cowering under the shelter of a parasol on the terrace of the National Liberal Club in the pouring rain, for what he called, "A wee bit of fresh air"—a wonderfully inappropriate euphemism for a quick smoke. We talked at length about the difficulties that the Liberal Democrats were facing within the then coalition Government. It is a measure of the man that, even though he was almost alone in our party in not supporting the decision to enter into coalition in May 2010, there was never a hint of reproach or "I told you so" in the advice he gave to me both then and in other conversations. He remained unstintingly loyal, no matter what the circumstances and no matter how strong the temptation must have been to blow his own trumpet and say that events had proved him right. He was far too subtle for that. He had made his views clear at the outset, but respected in good faith what his party colleagues were seeking to achieve in government and provided support and advice every step of the way, which is why it was no surprise when he said, after being challenged about his loyalties after the 2010 election, and as the Prime Minister has already cited:

"I will go out of this world feet first with my Lib Dem membership card in my pocket."

I am just devastated that it has happened so soon.

Our Liberal political family has lost one of its most admired advocates; British politics has lost one of its best storytellers; this House has lost one of its warmest wits and most loyal parliamentarians. If we could all carry ourselves with a little more of the honesty, wisdom and humility of Charles Kennedy, politics would be held in much higher esteem than it is today.

12.51 pm

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): I am grateful for this opportunity to make a very brief addition to the tributes already paid by the party leaders, with which I wholly agree.

I too am one of those who remember Charlie Kennedy first arriving in the House of Commons in 1983, when he made a startling impression. He was very young—he was a student; he looked like a schoolboy—but people rapidly realised that in addition to all those striking attributes he was highly intelligent, very articulate, very self-confident, and capable of addressing this House in a very fluent and eloquent way, with that jokey, relaxed charm which was his distinctive style and which I do not recall anybody else quite achieving in that way. As he was such an unexpected and unique figure, he rapidly became very prominent not only in Parliament, but nationally, and he looked as though he would have been destined for a brilliant national career but for the limited expectations of the Social Democrats and the Liberal

party with which he then associated himself. Well, he did achieve a good national career, and he eventually took his party to electoral heights that would have been unimaginable when he first arrived. I believe that his own distinct personality made a very great contribution to that.

People have said that his great moment was the Iraq war, and I agree, but he took many other strong, principled positions. On Europe, he was wrong sometimes, as he was on the coalition, but he always expressed his views with candid sincerity and always came to clear and principled conclusions for which he was prepared to argue.

We will all miss him. His personal attributes we all know; but they never made him unpleasant, if sometimes they made it a little difficult; it made him a more rounded character. He was one of the last of that great tradition that said we should best address political problems in the atmosphere of a smoke-filled room, which has been lost today. If I may, I will agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman): my main memories of Charles, apart from the pleasure of always being on good terms with him, demonstrate that in making a life in politics one can meet some remarkably decent, honest, very highly principled people. People such as Charlie Kennedy will leave their mark on this House for many years to come. My sympathies also go out to his family and friends.

12.54 pm

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I first met Charles Kennedy on his first day in the House of Commons, when I entered the Members' Dining Room and saw a young man looking forlorn and lost, wandering around and wondering what to do. I asked him to join me for lunch and I found out who he was. As the youngest Member of the House of Commons, he was not going to assert himself at that stage, but he knew why he was here: to stand up for certain principles about which he felt strongly. He stood up for those principles in the House and outside it from that first day right through to the end. He had strong views, but he was never vindictive and never malevolent in expounding them. He knew where he stood, he worked out where he should stand, and you knew that when Charles Kennedy spoke he had thought it out and thought it through, and that he would not budge unless you could argue him out of a position—and his positions were pretty strong.

It has rightly been mentioned again and again that he opposed the Iraq war, which at that time was not an easy thing to do, and it was not the view of the overwhelming majority of the House of Commons, but if Charles had worked out a position and he believed that position to be right, he would not budge.

He was always genial, always fun, and it was good to be in his company. You rarely saw him without a smile on his face, but that smile was not a smile of appeasement; it was a smile of geniality and it was a smile of good will. I knew him over the years and always valued his company and his opinions. I join with the rest of the House in expressing my profound sympathy to his family. We shall miss him.

12.57 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): May I begin by expressing my sadness and that of all Members of the Scottish National party at the untimely death of Charles Kennedy?

Most people in the political village knew he had been unwell for quite some time. During the last Parliament our offices were just around the corner from one another on the third floor of Portcullis House and we would bump into each other regularly coming to the Chamber or returning from Committees. It was clear that he was still having to battle his challenges, but not in my worst dreams did I ever imagine he would be taken from us at the young age of 55.

Politics is a hard business and while I and my colleagues were delighted that the SNP won Ross, Skye and Lochaber, I was saddened that Charles Kennedy would no longer be in Parliament. It is a mark of the man that when I got in touch with him after the general election, he readily agreed to meet up and share his experience of his leadership of the Liberal Democrats when it was the third party in the House of Commons.

People across politics will attest to the generosity of spirit that Charles Kennedy showed to people on all sides of the party divides, and I strongly urge those who have not yet had the opportunity to do so to read the blog by Alastair Campbell, illustrating their friendship. My predecessor as Member of Parliament for Moray, Margaret Ewing, and Charles Kennedy were also very good friends, and I know that others in this House and elsewhere enjoyed such friendship and mutual respect tremendously.

We all know that Charles Kennedy was a formidable and witty debater, and his skills were honed long before he came to this Chamber at the age—unbelievably—of 23. His skills were honed at his beloved Glasgow University. As anyone who has ever debated against anybody from Glasgow University will attest, the prodigious talent that has come through the Glasgow University Union and the Dialectic Society is in a league of its own, and has won more world championships than Oxford and Cambridge combined. In the Observer Mace, Glasgow has won 15 times—significantly more than any other university. Charles Kennedy was one of the top-drawer debaters. He won the Observer Mace, an accolade that he shares with the former leader of the Labour party, John Smith, the former Secretary of State for Scotland and First Minister Donald Dewar and my hon. Friend the Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson).

My abiding memory of Charles Kennedy in this Chamber is his powerful condemnation of the Iraq war—a position that was shared by the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National party. Charles Kennedy forensically and repeatedly questioned the Prime Minister of the time on the case for war, the lack of evidence for weapons of mass destruction and the role of the United Nations and international law. His speeches and questions at that time have stood the test of time and underline that his convictions were right while others trooped through the Lobby in support of what was an illegal war.

Charles Kennedy was a giant in Scottish and UK politics. He was a lad o'pairts from Lochaber, an area of Scotland of which he was very proud. He led his party to historic successes while remaining rooted in the real

world. He was liked by people of all political persuasions—there are few people in politics who can live up to that. It is such a tragedy that he died so young. Our condolences go to his family, his friends, his son Donald and all his party colleagues in the Liberal Democrats.

1.1 pm

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): I had the honour and pleasure of knowing Charles for some 37 years. When I first went to Glasgow University Union, he was already the star of the debating chamber there—in fact, he was the pre-eminent debater of his generation. He was terrifying to speak against, but a positive joy to compete alongside. He had tremendous debating skills, with which he regularly enriched the Chamber and it is a pity that those Members who were elected just last month will never have the joy of seeing how enriching he could be to the House of Commons.

Charles was a man of considerable wit, as has been mentioned, and of great charm and phenomenal intelligence. He was absolutely passionate about his politics and he had deep-seated views, but however passionate he was, there was never a hint of malice or threatening behaviour from him. He was one of those great politicians who would absolutely love to have a blazing row with you in the House of Commons and a chirpy pint with you in the Strangers Bar half an hour later. He was a man of great authenticity. In an era when the public feel that politicians are moulded to be as colourless as possible, he was a man of great integrity who spoke from the heart about the issues he cared so much about.

Charles loved this place from the minute he came here, and I remember coming to see him a few weeks after his election. He absolutely loved the House of Commons, but however important he became in this place, he was never self-important. I will remember him for integrity, humanity and decency, and I wonder how many of us in this House will have that accolade. I am very sad for his family for their untimely loss, but I am sad for us all, because our entire public life is poorer for his passing.

1.3 pm

Dr Alasdair McDonnell (Belfast South) (SDLP): I reiterate the words of the previous speakers: it is a sad day for all of us in this House. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to express my condolences and those of my party, the Social Democratic and Labour party, to the family and friends of our good friend and colleague, the late Charles Kennedy.

From a distance, I first became aware of Charles when, as something of a boy wonder, he stormed to election as a Member of this House way back in the early 1980s. Later, I had occasion to meet him at various events, and he was always generous, warm, humble and humorous. In a word, he was very human, and that has been reflected by the comments of others here today. Charles reached out to everyone, listening as much as talking, as has been remarked.

When I was elected to this House, I got to know Charles better, and he was always kind, considerate and helpful—he was a genuine, great human being—and I am heartened to hear so many warm comments from Members from all parts of the House today. Honourable

colleagues have referred to his wisdom on Iraq and the perils that would follow that decision. He was a formidable politician and a great colleague, not only on Iraq, but across a whole range of issues, including Europe, which was a great passion of his. Today, we are all much the lesser for his going. He has gone to his eternal reward much, much too soon, and I extend my deep sympathies to his family and friends. I pray that God in his mercy will look kindly on Charlie's gentle soul.

1.5 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): If I may, I would like just to say a few words. I walked into this House for the first time as a Member with Charles almost 32 years ago to the day, and among our new intake he was already quite a celebrity. We were just another large Tory intake—you know, Mr Speaker, they come and they go—but he had fought and won his highland seat. For all the 32 years that I served with him in this House and on the Council of Europe, although I was always a political opponent, in a way I always felt we were soulmates. Sometimes he had to go against the groove and I had to, but there was something powerful there. I think his faith was very powerful, and I like to think that in some previous life he and I might have marched together in some hopeless highland cause, perhaps as Jacobites—I do not know.

Charles's causes were never hopeless, and his legacy will live on. Let me talk for a brief moment about that. For instance, it has been said on the Iraq war that he wanted to place his party as a radical alternative to Labour, but I think it went much deeper than that and was more powerful. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) and I would not have listened to his arguments and followed him into the Lobby if we had not been convinced by what he was saying—that there were limits to liberal imperialism, and that he was a true Liberal and understood those limits and understood what a difficult part of the world that is. He understood the difficulties that we have met ever since, and so he has been proved right on that.

If Charles was still here, or if he was in the other place shortly, he would have been a powerful advocate for our Union, because his was a gentle patriotism, not some narrow-minded nationalism. He would also have been generous in terms of the participation of the Scottish National party in this place, which is important. We must welcome that participation and recognise that those Members must take part in all our debates. He would have been a powerful voice in that, too. He would also have been a powerful voice and influence in other areas, for instance his opposition to the coalition—I rather agreed with him on that. I thought it would be disastrous for our party, but I was proved wrong—it was disastrous for his own. But his opposition was principled. It was not just that he recognised that it is difficult for a party of protest to become a party of power; as on Iraq, there was something much more principled than that. I think he instinctively believed that politics is not just about the pursuit of power; it is also about the pursuit of truth. He was always a powerful advocate for that.

Lastly, when I saw him operate in the Council of Europe, I felt that was Charles's true *métier*. Let us not be too serious: Strasbourg is a convivial place. But there was more to it than that. He was determined to extend

freedom and democracy to eastern Europe, and he played a powerful part in that body. All those years I admired him and it is truly said that when we die, we can only take with us what we have given away. This man gave everything to our House. There never was a braver and a truer spirit.

1.8 pm

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to speak today as we pay tribute to the previous Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber. Charles was a man who was clearly loved by many in this House, but he was also deeply loved by many in his constituency. The Prime Minister spoke about Charles winning the seat in 1983, when he came from fourth place to first. I suspect that many of his then colleagues in the Social Democratic party did not expect that Mr Kennedy would win that seat. There are legendary stories around Ross, Skye and Lochaber on the campaigning that took place back in 1983. Charles travelled around the constituency with his father, with his father playing the fiddle. What truly happened in that election campaign is that Charles charmed the constituents, just as he charmed others when he came into this House, when he burst on to the political scene and when he became a big figure, not only in Scotland, but on the world stage, as leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Charles loved campaigning. We saw in the recent general election campaign his desire to appear in front of the electorate at both his own public meetings and at hustings, where we saw that debating style that has been referred to by so many. It was an absolute privilege to campaign against him. When I look at the strength of the Scottish National party in the Chamber today—56 SNP members were elected—I see that truly the national tide meant Charles lost the seat of Ross, Skye and Lochaber.

Many have referred to Charles as that cheeky chappie, as we would call it in highland terms—they refer to that highland bravado that was demonstrated in his debating style—but we should also reflect that highland characters tend to be complex. While Charles had that exterior of wanting to engage in debate and to be jovial, there was also the private Charles, a man who had many traditional highland characteristics—he was a rather shy character as well, so there was a contrast between the two faces.

Much has been said about the humanity and the humility of the man himself. He was robust in debate, but had respect for those of all opinions, whether on the Iraq war or anything else. My abiding memory of Charles is not from the recent period, but from the first election to the Scottish Parliament in 1999. I can recall that evening that Charles and I were in the television studios. Unlike the recent election, it was not a wonderful night for the SNP—it was not as great as we had hoped on that occasion. There were a number of seats that we would have liked to have won but did not. I was getting a hard time in debate. I remember Charles turning to me and consoling me. Rather than putting the boot in—if I may put it that way—he recognised the kind of evening we were having. That was the mark of the man: a decent, human man, who saw the struggles that others were going through.

I deeply regret, as my constituents will, the passing of this supremely talented man. Rest in peace.

1.12 pm

Mr Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): I want to pay a short, personal tribute to a remarkable man. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), I came into the House on that very hot day in June '83 with Charles Kennedy. In those days, there was no induction programme, the Whips Office did not do HR, and Members were not given offices for many months, so we got to know all the other new MPs.

We spent a lot of time finding our level in the House, mainly on the Terrace. I went to many all-party groups with Charles Kennedy during those months. After yet another brilliant, incisive performance of his, I remember saying to him, "Charles, I think we have just seen a future party leader." He said, "Don't be so ridiculous, Henry. My only ambition is to represent my constituents—and have a good time."

He did have a very good time in those early weeks, because it was not until 15 July that he made his maiden speech. I remember him sitting on that Front Bench below the Gangway, sandwiched between Roy Jenkins and David Owen. It was one of the most brilliant maiden speeches of that intake. I recommend that anyone who has not read it does so. It was a remarkable maiden speech.

Charles had that extraordinary quality, whenever he met people, of making them feel that much better about themselves. I last met him about four days before the House dissolved. He asked me how things were going in Norfolk, and about the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). We talked about the highlands and I wished him well. He had that amazing ability to make everyone feel better about the day, better about their lives.

His four passions were obviously his family, above all else, and Donald; the highlands; Glasgow University; and Europe. I will miss him no end. A quite remarkable person has left our lives. All the people who knew him well will be the poorer for it, but many others will as well.

1.14 pm

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): On an occasion like this, our thoughts are first and foremost with the family of Charles Kennedy, and especially with his young son, Donald. On behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Democratic Unionist party, we offer them all our sincerest condolences. Their loss is immeasurable, but I hope they find some comfort in the depth, the extent and the tone of the tributes offered in the House today to the man they loved dearly, and whom the country as a whole now mourns.

Charles Kennedy was that rare thing. He was a professional politician from almost the start of his career—he was a politician to his fingertips—but he was one who the public saw as one of their own. They did not see him as someone apart from them or distant from them, but as someone who embodied the very point of why people vote and campaign, and why they become passionate about causes, and why they believe in politics.

Others have charted Charles's wit and skills as a public speaker from early youth, but the man I saw in this place stood out most of all for his sincerity and his

honesty. Following the loss of the leadership of his party, there was nothing but public, professional loyalty to his successors. The party he handed on to them—the party he led to its greatest electoral heights in almost a century—was in enviably good political health.

Charles's personal tragedy was to be the victim of a terrible disease, the effects of which are intermittent and especially cruel, in that it momentarily robs the sufferer of the ability to be himself. The real Charles Kennedy was the man we remember today and admire, and mourn. He believed utterly in the causes he stood for, without hating anyone else for believing in theirs. He approached each day—I remember meeting him on many mornings—with good-natured relish, free from any contempt for his political foes but absolute in his convictions. From his youth in the House to a far-too-premature passing, the greatest memories he leaves with me and, I suspect, with most of us, are his immense warm heartedness, his tremendous likability and his great good humour.

May God bless all his loved ones and comfort them at this tragic time of bereavement.

1.17 pm

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): Many colleagues have spoken today of Charles's great talents in this place and his great ability as a parliamentarian, but I rise to speak very briefly because, in common with the new hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), I had the good fortune to spend a year in Ross, Cromarty and Skye, as the constituency was then known, as did Mary Macleod, our much lamented colleague, the former Member for Brentford and Isleworth, on whose behalf I also speak.

My experience of campaigning against Charles during the 1982 general election resounds well with the warm speech that his successor made a few moments ago. Charles could easily have very much resented this English-looking and English-sounding Scot that I am, turning up in his beloved highlands, trampling all over them and turning up at every single event. I remember taking part in a sponsored walk. A very good photograph appeared in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, with the magnificent headline: "The Tory is miles ahead". I saw Charles that evening. I said, "I'm awfully sorry, Charles." He said, "Don't worry, James. The *Aberdeen Press and Journal* gets everything wrong." I am extremely glad that, on that occasion, the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* did get that wrong.

Charles was warm and magnanimous in every single dealing I had with him. During the election campaign itself, we met at church hustings and public meetings. He was always kindness personified. He used to turn to me and say, "I can't remember what the Liberal Democrat policy is on this, James. Can you just remind me?" and I would fill him in on a few details.

Five years later, when I arrived in the House to represent what is perhaps my more natural home of North Wiltshire, Charles was the first to welcome me with open arms. He remained a close and good parliamentary friend ever since. His warmth and magnanimity of personality spoke for him. He was a highlander through and through: he had a highland warmth and a highland welcome; a highland lack of interest in party politics; and a highland friendship for people of every kind.

Every time he spoke, he spoke for ordinary people. Ordinary people understood and sympathised with him. Even the true blue Tories, of whom at that time there were still a few in the north of Scotland, none the less liked Charles enormously. The people of Ross, Cromarty and Skye absolutely loved their Charlie. He will be greatly missed in this place. He was a fine parliamentarian and a true friend.

1.19 pm

Mr Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): I knew Charles through Sarah Gurling and got to see beyond the public figure and party leader. He was shy, but always polite. He was kind, engaging and a good dad. I enjoyed his wry humour. He used to joke about how we shared the same private investigator from the *News of the World*. He had an ability to bring levity to the dark corners of British political life that made the bad days at the office easier to cope with, yet as many Members all too painfully know, politics often takes a toll on the lives of our loved ones in a way that we never properly know or understand. Through you, Mr Speaker, I would like to direct my words at Donald, son of Charles and Sarah.

Your father was a very great man; he stood up for what he believed in. He led a party of the centre-left with dignity and compassion. When you are older, you will know that your mum and dad believed in a cause greater than themselves and you will be proud.

1.21 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): Charles Kennedy was an immense talent, and it says so much about the man that so many Members in this House have spoken about him with such complete genuine warmth. He had the extraordinary ability to reach out beyond the narrow confines of his own party to make genuine friendships with people of other political persuasions and to achieve an extraordinary affinity with people beyond this place, speaking in a language that people understood—not in the language of the Westminster village. That was a remarkable talent not shared by very many people here. I guess, overall, we probably all share this overwhelming emotion, and our hearts go out to young Donald and his family on this day, and that is the most important thing. Our thoughts are very much with them.

I had the privilege of working as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Charles in my first Parliament here, between 2003 and 2005. I saw at close quarters his extraordinary ability, his compassion and his never ceasing courtesy to people. He never lost his temper in dealing with people; he was always polite. He used the power of argument to win his case.

Tragically, he suffered from an illness that afflicts too many people in our country. There is still a stigma attached to mental ill health and addiction, and all of us here and beyond still have a lot to learn about how we combat that stigma and treat the condition as a genuine illness and try to offer help to the individual as much as we possibly can.

There are three things in particular for which I remember Charles. The first one, which defined him among many members of the public, was his courageous stand on the war in Iraq. The Prime Minister was absolutely right to reflect on the strain that he must have been under when

he spoke in this House with the massed ranks of the Labour Government and the Conservative Benches against him, but he was steadfast. He knew what he believed. He articulated the case very strongly and effectively and he reached out to our country at a very critical moment in our history.

The second thing that defines him for me was his internationalism. His total commitment to the European cause came not from any narrow economic case but from a belief in the real power of the European Union in bringing countries together, turning its back, as a continent, on conflict, working together, trading together and bringing people together. His politics was about uniting people, not dividing people; that is what made his commitment to the European Union so strong.

Finally, there was his complete commitment to social justice. He challenged injustice wherever he saw it. Everyone will know that the Liberal voice in our country has been diminished as a result of the general election result, but I and the rest of my party must unite together to do everything we can to ensure Charles's legacy and to rebuild the Liberal voice in our country. I am sure that everyone in this House, whatever their political persuasion, will recognise the force of liberalism and its importance in these Houses of Parliament.

1.25 pm

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): I am grateful for this opportunity to pay tribute to Charles Kennedy on behalf of the current Plaid Cymru group and also on behalf of my former colleagues from the 2001 Parliament: Simon Thomas, Adam Price and particularly Elfyn Llwyd, who was Charles Kennedy's friend and who worked alongside him to oppose the war in Iraq.

We opposed the war from the very start, and for us it was very straightforward; we were united in our opposition. For Charles Kennedy, though, it was a bigger challenge. He took the brave decision to lead his party against the war, against prevailing opinion here and in the media, and he had to fight to get some of his leading colleagues to follow.

Standing against the war was not easy for any of us. It was not a comfortable place to be. But we have come to this place not to be comfortable but to do what we think is right. Charles Kennedy took that path and it is a fitting tribute to him that he prevailed.

Today, our thoughts are with his family. As for his legacy, the well known couplet from the Welsh poet Hiraethog inevitably comes to mind:

“Segurdod yw clod y cledd,

A rhwd yw ei anrhydedd”—

idleness is the glory of the sword, and rust is its distinction.

Charles Kennedy achieved many things, but his opposition to the war in Iraq will prove to be his distinction. Heddwch i'w lwch.

1.26 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I was elected to this House on 5 May 2005, and Charles Kennedy was my party leader. In the weeks running up to that election, he was meant to pay a visit to Westmorland and Lonsdale—to the University of Cumbria, Ambleside—but in the event he had a very good excuse for missing that appointment, which was the birth of Donald. I remember

[Tim Farron]

the immense pride we felt in having Charles as our leader, and the immense pride he felt in becoming a father.

I won my seat at that election by 267 votes. When a candidate wins by that small amount, everything counts. I am quite sure that the additional publicity of Donald's birth contributed to the capturing of Westmorland after 96 years of Tory rule.

As the months went by, I did not get a phone call. There were a good number of us and many were appointed to positions in junior shadow ministries and junior junior shadow ministries. Then in September I got the phone call from Charles. He said, "I'm sorry I haven't given you a job. I just completely forgot about you." He asked me whether I would like to be the youth affairs spokesperson, which was obviously an entirely natural fit. That was the only time I ever felt forgotten by Charles. A year before that, I lost my mother—she was a year younger than Charles at his passing—after a long and pretty horrific illness. I remember seeing him when I was among dozens of other candidates, and he knew exactly about the situation that I and my family were going through, and he showed immense compassion. He never stopped asking me about the situation. When she passed away, he asked me how I was. That was the measure of the man. He went through some very difficult things in terms of his personal health, but he was always primarily concerned about the wellbeing of others.

Charles was a persuader; he was able to reach people in their gut. People make up their minds on the basis of all sorts of things, but generally speaking we can only move people if we can get them in the gut. He was the only Social Democratic party MP ever to gain his seat in a general election. Four years later, when the SDP and the Liberals merged, he argued on the conference floor against his own leader, David Owen. We could see the faces of people in that hall as they changed their minds. Charles Kennedy had reached into their hearts and turned them.

To my mind, what Charles was so good at was his ability to communicate and get to people, and it was not contrived. People say that Charles Kennedy was human. Yes, he was, but he was not contrived. The first time that I went on, I think, "Any Questions" a few years ago, he gave me a piece of advice. He just said, "Be yourself." Charles was successful because he was himself. If any hon. Member is ever invited on to "Have I Got News For You", my advice is, "Say no, unless you want to be made out to be a prat or unless you are Charles Kennedy."

Charles had a natural ability to communicate with people, because he was absolutely himself. That humanity is one thing; his principle has been spoken of several times, but it cannot be said enough that his stance against the Iraq war seems like the populist and right thing to do today. Twelve years ago, it was not. He was surrounded by people baying at him as though he was somehow Chamberlain or an appeaser of Saddam Hussein, and *The Sun* had a front-page picture of Charles Kennedy the anti-patriotic rattlesnake. By golly, someone must be doing something right when that happens!

Charles Kennedy was principled and he changed people's minds, and he was right. He was human; he was principled; and he was effective. He led our party to the largest number of Members of Parliament since

Lloyd George's day. I suggest that that humanity, that principle and that effectiveness—those three things—are connected. If we want to understand why Charles Kennedy was great, we should realise that it was because he was himself. People say that politicians should have a life outside politics before they become Members of Parliament. Maybe. Charlie was elected at 23. It is hard to argue that he did. The reality is that it is not what you have done, it is who you are, and Charles Kennedy was a very, very special man. Donald, you should be really proud of your daddy. I am proud of your daddy. I loved him to bits. I am proud to call him my friend. God rest you, Charlie.

1.31 pm

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Charles Kennedy was an associate editor of the *House* magazine, of which I am the editor, and we would have meetings every Tuesday morning for an hour to discuss what happened during the week and where we would go the following week. Charles made some of the meetings and he did not make others, but it was always very clear that we had extraordinary, indiscreet exchanges of opinion that never, ever left the room. For something like 15 years, what was said in that room stayed in that room, and the discussions were always enlightening, because Charles would come up with points of view that simply had not occurred to me. It shows his extraordinary generosity that, even when people were not just stabbing him in the back—it was quite clear that they were stabbing him from the front—he would nevertheless always be generous towards them.

I want to say something very briefly, given that people outside here will hear this as well. I think that Donald should read a book "The Little Prince" by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, where the Little Prince explains why he is about to die and says, "I will be a star, and every time you look up in the skies you will see that star, and it is me smiling and you will end up being glad to have known me." I think that we will all end up saying that we were glad to have known Charles. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

1.33 pm

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): Charles Kennedy was one of those people everyone remembers meeting for the first time: his distinctive look, his very attractive highland accent, his unusual and warm manner as a politician. I remember meeting him very excitedly as a new prospective parliamentary candidate, and I was touched at how genuine this great figure of liberalism who I was finally getting to meet actually was. He wanted to know how I was and how things were going in Leeds.

I was very lucky during the 2005 election campaign to have not one but two visits from Charles. The first was to an older people's residence, Teal Beck Court and Teal Beck House in Otley. The second was a rally at Headingley stadium towards the end of the campaign, when it appeared that I might make the breakthrough for the Liberal Democrats in Leeds. On both occasions, Charles lit up the room when he walked in. At the rally, he inspired people to go out and do that bit more over the last 24 hours to win the seat. But it was the ordinary people, not the party activists, who were particularly touched by Charles and his natural style and the way

that he engaged so humbly with the older residents, the hard-working care staff at the home and people at the rugby and cricket ground. Everyone commented, “Isn’t he such a nice bloke?” and they were surprised that a party leader could be such.

I am very proud that I was elected in 2005, with Charles Kennedy as a great leader of my party, in what was the best ever result for the Liberal Democrats—something that we will not forget. I was doubly overjoyed when Charles became a new father, with the joyous news, albeit rather inconveniently timed, of Donald’s birth in the general election campaign. A few months later, I had my first child, my daughter Isabel. Charles and I would meet and chat and, sometimes a little tired from having been up, would talk new-father talk about how we were getting on, and Charles always asked and always cared.

Charles was a truly genuine, warm and humble man, and he always asked how people were and how their family was before he got on to politics. My sincere condolences go to his family and his friends and all who knew him. They are in our thoughts and our prayers, and as has already been expressed, I hope that the genuine outflowing of tributes to Charles is some comfort at this very difficult time. As one of the eight Liberal Democrat Members of Parliament, rather than 62 in 2005, I want to say that we now have the job of restoring the Liberal Democrats to where Charles took us in 2005. That is what Charles would have wanted, and it is what we will work and strive to do.

1.36 pm

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): Many hearts broke yesterday morning when we heard the news; it came as such a dreadful shock. It is equally heartbreaking that Charles Kennedy, our friend and fellow parliamentarian, cannot be aware of this great outpouring of affection that has swept across the whole nation and, in fact, wider than the shores of these islands. Perhaps we could have done more to help and support Charles and to let him know how loved he was, because it may be too late now, but it will be comfort to the family to know that this was a man who was loved and adored right the way across the political spectrum, across the national spectrum and across the world. Certainly, all those who came into contact with him grew to love him and to hold him in great affection. We should perhaps cherish those who are with us now and never forget that we owe that support and friendship.

Charles Kennedy set the industry standard for humour and wit in politics, and I have to say that that was rather distressing to some people who aspired to the foothills of that great Ben Nevis of wit that was Charles Kennedy. For many years, he and Austin Mitchell and Julian Critchley enlivened the airwaves with a three-way commentary on current affairs. They were known as “Critch, Mitch and Titch”, which was unfair. Mitch was obviously for Austin Mitchell, Critch for Julian Critchley, but Titch for Charles Kennedy—no! He was a fine figure of a man in every sense, and my memories are not just of him absolutely creasing the sides of the nation until our ribs ached with the humour, not just on the radio or on television. To comment on the earlier remark made about “Have I Got News for You” that you either had to be prepared to be a prat or Charles Kennedy, I appeared on “Have I Got News for You”. Demonstrably, I am not Charles Kennedy. [*Laughter.*]

There was another side to Charles. He was a man of very great and deep faith, who drew great strength from the well of that faith. Some people in the Chamber today will know that on Wednesday evenings, when we celebrate mass here in the Undercroft, he would be there, very quietly, very much in the background. I appreciate that it is a Roman Catholic tradition to stand at the back of the church in case there is a collection, but Charles would be there very quietly just worshipping and communing with his God, from whom he drew such strength. I hope you will forgive me, Mr Speaker, for pointing out that tonight, mass will be celebrated for the repose of his soul and for the comfort of his family in the Undercroft chapel.

Charles Kennedy—the words must give us pause to realise how much we have lost, but how blessed we were to have known that great man. Charles Kennedy—may light eternal shine upon him and may he rest in peace.

1.40 pm

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): It may be too sentimental to describe political parties, some big, some perhaps rather too small these days, as families. We could describe this House as a family perhaps today. Today, this family is mourning one of its finest sons. Much more important than that, our thoughts must first and foremost be with the Kennedy family, as all hon. Members have said throughout this very moving set of tributes to a great man.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland), I was immensely proud to be elected in 2005 under the leadership of Charles Kennedy. I was proud to be one of his foot soldiers. I think back to the time when he ceased to be our leader. It was a particularly harrowing time. In later years, some of us still looked to Charles as the leader of our particular brand of Celtic liberalism.

In 2005 I won by just 219 votes. I have often reflected on what the determining factor was. I have no doubt it was Charles Kennedy’s principled and brave stand on Iraq. When I once attributed my win to him, he told me with characteristic modesty, humility and generosity that I was talking utter nonsense. But I was right. His leadership of our party at that time was engaging, inclusive and inspirational. So too, we must not forget, were some of the perhaps not as frequent as we would have liked appearances in this Chamber in recent years. I still think of the doors opening, Charles arriving to sit down there in the corner in one of those flash light suits, glasses perched on the end of his nose. We knew we were in for a treat and that Charles Kennedy was going to say something of significance and importance. How good it was to rush home on a Thursday night to ensure you were there in time for Charles Kennedy on “Question Time”. Charles the great communicator, Charles with his great capacity, as everyone said, to put everyone at ease, including the nervous, new, unexpected MP, as he had been in 1983 and many of us were subsequently—everyone, from every walk of life.

When he came to Wales, whether he was meeting students, health managers or party activists in Ceredigion, or farmers in the mart in Newcastle Emlyn, whether he was canvassing during the by-election at Tredegar or Blaenau Gwent, he had the same effectiveness with people. Those who know their psephology know that there are not many Liberals in Blaenau Gwent or Tredegar,

[Mr Mark Williams]

but it did not matter. Charles Kennedy, knocking on doors, would enjoy meeting people, and he left an impression that would stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Charles Kennedy—dignified, compassionate, principled, honest, yet somehow vulnerable. Above all else, as others have said, he was a fully signed-up member of the human race, a rare breed—a politician who was universally liked if not loved.

1.43 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to pay tribute to Charles Kennedy. As we have heard, he was a politician with all the talents, but as one of the MPs who were here at the time of the Iraq war and as one of the small group of Labour MPs that voted against the Iraq war, I remind the House that it was not just remarkable that Charles Kennedy was the one party leader who took the correct position against the Iraq war. Those of us who opposed the war from the beginning were very worried that in the end Charles Kennedy would not be able to lead his MPs through the Lobby because he was under pressure within his own party. We cannot understate the judgment and courage he showed.

We had the biggest rally in London ever against the war. I remember Charles Kennedy on the platform addressing the crowds and how excited and happy they were to hear him speak. His position on the Iraq war was the right position for him, and it was the right position for his party because he led it to its greatest ever victory. It was also the right position for Westminster politics because the public like nothing better than to see a politician stand on principle. He exemplified that.

Sometimes the people who pay the price for the personal ambitions of MPs are our families and our children. I would like the message to go out to his son that he should never cease to be proud of his father—the best of the political class and the best of men.

Mr Speaker: I thank all colleagues for what they have said and the way in which they have said it. We must, I

am sure, all hope that the warmth of the sentiments expressed and the demonstrable unity of the House on this occasion will offer some, even if modest comfort and succour to the family in the harrowing period that lies ahead.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, we have a lot of pressing business. Perhaps we can come to it later.

BILLS PRESENTED

EDUCATION AND ADOPTION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Nicky Morgan, supported by Secretary Elizabeth Truss, Mr Oliver Letwin, Matthew Hancock, Nick Boles, Mr Nick Gibb, Edward Timpson, Caroline Dinéage and Mr Sam Gyimah, presented a Bill to make provision about schools in England that are causing concern, including provision about their conversion into Academies and about intervention powers; and to make provision about joint arrangements for carrying out local authority adoption functions in England.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 4) with explanatory notes (Bill 4-EN).

EUROPEAN UNION (FINANCE) BILL

Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by Mr Secretary Hammond, Greg Hands, Mr David Gauke, Mr David Lidington, Damian Hinds and Harriett Baldwin, presented a Bill to approve for the purposes of section 7(1) of the European Union Act 2011 the decision of the Council of 26 May 2014 on the system of own resources of the European Union; and to amend the definition of “the Treaties” and “the EU Treaties” in section 1(2) of the European Communities Act 1972 so as to include that decision.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 5) with explanatory notes (Bill 5-EN).

Debate on the Address

[5TH DAY]

Debate resumed, (Order, 2 June).

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.

Devolution and Growth across Britain

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected amendment (c) in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

1.47 pm

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): I beg to move an amendment, at the end of the Question to add:

“but regret that the Government has offered piecemeal measures which threaten to leave some areas behind; recognise that devolution needs to be part of an ambitious UK-wide plan not simply a limited series of one-off deals done by the Chancellor; note that the Government has failed to offer an economic growth package including new powers in transport, housing and skills for all areas, including for county regions; further regret that the Government is not offering all combined authorities in England the ability to retain all business rate revenue growth; further note that the Government has failed to offer a comprehensive strategy to build the homes, including the badly needed affordable homes, that our country needs; note that the Government has pledged a funding floor for Wales, but is concerned that fair funding will be contingent on an income tax referendum; note that, whilst the timeline of the cross-party agreement reached through the Smith Commission has been met and the Scotland Bill will make the Scottish Parliament one of the most powerful devolved parliaments in the world, the Government has failed to confirm that the Barnett formula will be protected and welfare provisions do not go far enough; and resolve that devolution should be delivered without leaving Scotland worse off.”

May I associate myself with the comments that you, Mr Speaker, made about Charlie Kennedy? Our thoughts go out to his family, his loved ones and his friends.

It is good to see you, Mr Speaker, back in your place not only re-elected to serve the people of Buckingham but re-elected as Speaker of this House. We meet this afternoon to discuss the Queen's Speech and, in particular, its impact on devolution and growth across the UK.

Before I dive in, I would like to welcome the Business Secretary and his new ministerial team to their places. I congratulate him on his appointment. I am glad that, while the Business Secretary has changed, the right hon. Gentleman carries on the tradition that I and his predecessor appear to have set for those doing this brief in having little or no hair. I also welcome the new Communities Secretary and his ministerial team to their posts. Finally I would like to welcome all new Members to this House. I look forward, in particular, to hearing those who will deliver their maiden speech today. It is an honour and privilege to serve in this place, and all the more pleasurable when one gets to deliver a speech without intervention—my advice would be to savour the moment.

I turn to the Queen's Speech and the relevant Bills. Of the 21 Bills, clearly, the cities and devolution, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland Bills are all of direct relevance to this debate and, when exploring growth, the enterprise and housing Bills too. Arguably, the European Union Referendum Bill, the tax lock Bill, the energy Bill and high speed rail Bills are also of relevance to our debate today, but there have been opportunities and will be another tomorrow to discuss those issues. For the purposes of our debate this afternoon, we will focus on the six primary Bills that I have mentioned; in closing, the shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government will go into more detail about housing in particular.

I start by setting out the rationale for the official Opposition's position on devolution. Why devolve? We are one of the most centralised countries in the western world. Some 70% of spending is done by central Government, compared with the OECD average of 48%, and the GDP per capita of all but one of our largest eight main cities is below the national average, which serves to show how we are missing out on the full benefits that every region can bring.

It is fair to say that in the last Parliament a growing consensus evolved around the need to change and devolve more power down. Some see devolution as a useful vehicle for shrinking the state. They are happy to cut what the Government do at the centre, but they are not too keen on Government action at any level. Devolving power is not really their goal; they simply want to hack off chunks of what Government do to support people and provide them with a platform to get on. That is not our approach.

Some talk a good game on devolution, and a shrinking state is not the be all and end all for them. However, when it comes down to it, they are happy to devolve power, but less happy to provide the resources to make such power meaningful. In the last Parliament, we heard a lot of talk about localism, but that came with a 60% cut in the Communities and Local Government budget. The Communities Secretary's predecessor sought to park blame for the lack of resources with our local authorities, when blame properly rested with the last Conservative-led coalition and will rest with this Government if they press on with the extreme cuts that, during the election campaign, they said they would pursue. Again, that is not our approach.

Finally, some see devolution as simply a stop on a journey towards breaking up the United Kingdom and pursuing independence. If that were not the case, why do we hear so much about devolving power to the Scottish Parliament, but so little about devolving power from that Parliament to the regions and localities of Scotland? Double devolution is what is required in Scotland; that is why in the last Parliament my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) brought a private Member's Bill to devolve immediately the job creation powers mentioned in the Smith agreement and ensure double devolution to local authorities, which are best placed to grow local job markets.

None of the approaches from the Scottish National party or the Tories reflects our position.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): The hon. Gentleman made an interesting point about the need for the SNP to devolve power to local authorities in

[David T. C. Davies]

Scotland. He forgot to mention the possibility of the Labour-run Welsh Assembly devolving powers to local authorities in Wales. Does he think that is also important?

Mr Umunna: In this House, we generally argue for subsidiarity within Europe. We should not stop at Europe; we should have subsidiarity in our own country, too—in all the different parts of the UK.

During our time in office, we pioneered much of the devolution that we now see across the United Kingdom. It was not perfect, but given the creation of the Greater London Authority, the Mayor of London, the Scottish Parliament, and the Welsh and Northern Irish Assemblies, we did much to devolve power down. We also established regional development agencies in England, which did important work. We are proud of that record.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I am sure that this was just a slip of his mind, but the issue of English votes for English laws was not on the list that the hon. Gentleman presented. The Labour party was the stoutest defender of Scottish voting rights in this House. Will he back us in insisting that, rather than simply changing the Standing Orders, the Government bring forward a Bill for something as significant as the voting rights of hon. Members?

Mr Umunna: As has been discussed during the series of debates held since Her Majesty delivered the Queen's Speech, we do not want two tiers of MPs to be created in the House of Commons.

We devolved power then and we support the principle of devolving more power now, in the Bills that I mentioned, for two principal reasons—one economic and one democratic. I turn first to the economic case. Decisions on how to grow our economy are often best made at a sub-regional and local level. Local actors, whether policy makers, business people or trade unions and others, best understand the unique combination of history, geography, demography and institutions that give their area a niche—a competitive edge, a comparative advantage—in the global marketplace.

The fact is crucial because in this era of globalisation, nations and regions need to concentrate their efforts on producing the services and goods that they are best at and then to trade them to generate the good, secure, well paid jobs of which we want more all over the UK. That matters because we have a higher incidence of low paid work than other developed nations. Despite the fact that our people work among the longest hours in Europe, output per worker in the UK lags behind that of our competitors.

To address the issue and raise productivity levels, areas need to harness their specific local skills and strengths and use them to become clusters of expertise and innovation. The simple fact is that one-size-fits-all policies devised in remote departmental silos are simply incapable of nurturing specific local strengths. It is the different players in our local areas and regions that are best placed to do that. We have to give them the tools to be the masters of their own destinies.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): I want to ask about devolution within Wales. Swansea Bay city region, the conglomerate of Neath, Port Talbot, Swansea and Carmarthenshire, is the biggest urban footprint in

Wales. It projects the international brand name of Swansea, thanks to the city's football success, on the back of two universities plus Tata Steel and a confederation of local government, industry and academia. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is the way forward in a global marketplace—perhaps along with regional banking, which we have not yet got from the Government?

Mr Umunna: I completely agree. That is a fantastic example of what I am talking about. I had the pleasure of visiting Swansea Bay earlier this year to see that fantastic work.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be a mistake to confuse London as a whole with the City of London, which is of course hugely powerful and wealthy? People in London would not understand if other city regions such as the northern powerhouse got devolved powers, particularly over health, that were then denied to Londoners.

Mr Umunna: I agree with my hon. Friend, who, of course, does not have an interest in being the Lord Mayor of London, but may be looking for another post in the short term.

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): The Government insist that areas such as the north-east can have further devolution only if they have a mayor. Does it strike my hon. Friend as a strange anomaly that so-called devolution should insist on one way of doing things and deny local people a say on whether they want a mayor in the first place?

Mr Umunna: I completely agree. I will come specifically to that point in a moment.

We have talked about some of the examples of where the approach works. Chicago's Mayor Rahm Emanuel has turned the city into a hotbed of innovation that attracts the best graduates. A good European example is Eindhoven in the Netherlands. It has rebooted its innovation and, as a city comprising only 4% of the population, now generates 37% of Dutch patents.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) mentioned the example from Wales. Many of our colleagues in local government are doing pioneering, innovative stuff across the UK. In Oldham, Labour has introduced enterprise hubs in every secondary school; in Plymouth, it is working with housing associations to build 1,000 homes; in Leeds, it is setting up an apprenticeship brokering service for small and medium-sized businesses; and in Lambeth, where I am, it is using council buildings to provide a home for small businesses. We need to promote such ways of working if we are to address the ongoing structural imbalances in our economy. We may have achieved 2.8% growth last year, but our economy is still seriously imbalanced. We need look only at the Office for National Statistics regional gross value added figures to see the uneven distribution of growth. The Queen's Speech talked about the Government's desire to build a northern powerhouse, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). In truth, we should seek to make every single region a powerhouse, not just have the northern powerhouse.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a very powerful speech. Bearing in mind that the UK trade deficit widened from the last quarter of 2014 to the first quarter of this year, does he not agree that local authorities and local enterprise partnerships play a very important role in helping to support businesses to take advantage of export opportunities, so that Britain's businesses can meet their maximum potential in the world?

Mr Umunna: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. The current account deficit is at its highest ever level at the moment, and she is absolutely right about the approach that we need to adopt.

Beyond the economic argument, which I have talked about, there is a bigger argument to be made for devolution. We know that levels of trust in politics are low, but we also know from research that policies formulated and delivered locally command far greater trust than those made in Westminster.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that west midlands manufacturers felt completely neglected for 13 years under the previous Labour Government and have enjoyed a renaissance only since the coalition Government? Is it not true that the severity of the financial crisis was much greater for the United Kingdom because our economy was so unbalanced in 2008?

Mr Umunna: I would say two things to the right hon. Lady. First, when I was in her area, I heard so many complaints, particularly during the last Parliament, about the abolition of Advantage West Midlands, the regional development agency. Secondly, those involved in the renaissance in the automotive sector in particular—the likes of Jaguar Land Rover and so on—tell us how helpful and important it was that the previous Labour Government established the Automotive Council.

As I was saying, I want to move beyond the economic case to make the democratic case. We know that levels of trust are higher in decisions made locally, but we also know that the contempt people have for politics is fuelled not only by a sense that we are all in it for ourselves, but by a sense of powerlessness—a sense of citizens' powerlessness in shaping what the system does for them and a lack of confidence in politicians' power to change things in the face of powerful global forces. What better antidote to that sense of powerlessness is there than to give people more power in their localities and communities?

This is very much my personal view of what we in this House are all guilty of, but people are desperate for an end to the partisan point scoring we sometimes see in this place. There is an increasing desire for politicians to transcend the partisan bickering that characterises a lot of debate here. On that point, I should refer to the last hour in the Chamber. We all mourn the loss of Charles Kennedy, the former Liberal Democrat leader and former Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber. He was a great and brilliant parliamentarian. He was so popular, and there has been such a huge outpouring of affection since his sad passing, in part because he could transcend the Punch and Judy of this place. If we are honest, it is fair to say that our colleagues in regional and local government are often far better than us in putting aside

party political differences and working together. An example often cited is the way in which Lord Heseltine, a Conservative, collaborated with our Labour colleagues in Liverpool over the years. That led to his being awarded the freedom of the city by the Labour administration there in 2012. Let us look at the work of the cross-party London Councils body, which has rolled out its successful apprenticeship scheme across the Labour and Conservative-run boroughs of the capital. That is another reason for devolution, and it would actually help our democracy.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a very powerful democratic case for re-energising democracy through devolution to local authorities and local communities, and certainly through trusting local people to make decisions over their own spending at local level, but should we not also trust local people to have the ability to raise more of their own taxes at local level? That is a place where those on neither Front Bench have so far wanted to go, but is not fiscal devolution just as important in the total approach to devolution as the devolution of spending powers?

Mr Umunna: I believe—this is my view—that fiscal devolution is important, and I will say a little more about that shortly.

I have been clear that we support devolution across the UK in principle. It cannot, however, be devolution for the sake of it; it must be a devolution of powers for the purpose of creating a fairer and more prosperous society for everyone. As our amendment sets out, we want an ambitious UK-wide plan to devolve powers, not a series of piecemeal measures or one-off deals, and those powers must cover transport, housing and skills for all areas.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making some very good points. In the spirit of cross-party working, I am sure that he, like me, would welcome the concordat between the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and central Government to devolve more powers to the north-west of England. Would he join me in encouraging other large councils, such as Lancashire County Council, to come forward to the Government with plans to ensure that more powers can be devolved to the constituents I represent in Lancashire?

Mr Umunna: I certainly want more councils to follow Manchester's example. I think that it is a good thing, so I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Umunna: I will make a little progress if I may, but I may come back to the hon. Gentleman later.

What of the Government's proposals in the Queen's Speech that we are debating? We are told that the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill will provide the legislative framework necessary to deliver the Greater Manchester deal and other future deals in large cities in England that choose to have elected mayors, as my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson) mentioned, and in other places. Shortly before the general election, devolution

[Mr Umunna]

deals were announced in relation to Sheffield and West Yorkshire. In addition to Manchester, we were told that the Government will pilot allowing councils in Cambridgeshire and Cheshire to retain 100% of the growth in business rate revenue so that they can reap the benefit of decisions to boost growth locally.

To pick up my hon. Friend's point, however, why limit these arrangements to those areas? Why not give every region the opportunity to reap the benefits of the decisions they make to boost growth locally through such deals and through the devolution of business rates? Although I am a big fan, what about areas which, as she said, choose not to have elected mayors? Why should they be denied the benefit of greater local freedoms? Combined authorities, with or without a mayor, can provide a useful vehicle through which to do all this, but one important point for the Government to consider as they proceed with their legislation is this: what about areas which do not have or do not desire a combined authority, and how will they get more powers? My criticism of what has been proposed—I accept that we need to see the Bill—is that it does not seem to go far enough and is rather piecemeal. The Government need to find a way of ensuring that all areas can enjoy greater autonomy.

The Government say that their Scotland Bill aims to deliver in full the Smith commission agreement, to which the five main Scottish political parties signed up in November 2014. We are absolutely committed to ensuring that the vow—a promise made and a promise to be delivered—made on the eve of last year's referendum is delivered in full to make the Scottish Parliament one of the most powerful devolved Parliaments in the world. As we set out in our manifesto, we will work to amend the Bill to give the Scottish Parliament the final say on social security and the power to top up UK benefits. This settlement must recognise the strength and security offered by being part of the UK, which means retaining the pooling and sharing of resources that flow from the Barnett formula. It is imperative that that is protected and, for the sake of the Scottish economy and public services, one hopes that the SNP's economically illiterate plans for full fiscal autonomy are dropped. The worst-case scenario for Scotland would be the hon. Members of the SNP in this House pressing for full fiscal autonomy and the Tory Government delivering it.

Jonathan Edwards: The Labour amendment equates fair funding with the so-called Barnett floor, yet the hon. Gentleman has just said that he is committed to the Barnett formula for Scotland. If Wales had the same level of investment as Scotland, it would be worth an extra £1.4 billion a year. Would that not be fair funding? If that were in the Labour amendment, I would be more than happy to march through the Lobby with him. As it is, we cannot.

Mr Umunna: Perhaps I will help the hon. Gentleman shortly, because I am coming straight on to Wales.

We are told that the Wales Bill will deliver a clearer, more stable devolution settlement for Wales and devolve important new powers to the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government. We understand that a funding floor is to be introduced to protect Welsh relative funding and provide certainty for the Welsh

Government in planning for the future. We support measures to put Welsh devolution on a stronger statutory basis, as is the case with Scotland. We agree with taking forward proposals from the Silk commission and extending the power that the people of Wales have over their transport, elections and energy.

To come to the point made by the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards), let me be clear that Wales must not be unfairly disadvantaged by the Barnett formula. The Conservative-led coalition cut the Welsh budget by £1.5 billion. This Conservative Government must ensure that there is a fair funding settlement for Wales by introducing a funding floor. That funding floor should not be contingent on an income tax referendum.

The Queen's Speech refers to legislation to implement the Stormont House agreement in Northern Ireland. This issue was raised in Prime Minister's questions. The legislation will provide the architecture to deal with the past, institutional reform at Stormont and certain economic measures, including the devolution of corporation tax. In view of the concerning escalation of the dispute over welfare reform, we urge the Government to do all in their power to work with the Northern Ireland parties and, where appropriate, the Irish Government to avert this serious threat to political and economic stability in Northern Ireland.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that if the impasse is not resolved and the hole in the Northern Ireland budget of 6% for the remainder of this year is left unresolved, the only answer is for the Government to take over the welfare reform powers from the Northern Ireland Executive, because some parties have clearly shown themselves to be incapable of dealing with them?

Mr Umunna: Without wanting to fuel the dispute, I would say that the important thing is that it does not get that far. It is important that all the parties manage to find a resolution to the dispute. I know that the talks are ongoing today.

I have talked a lot about growth, but before I conclude, I want to turn to the specific growth measures in the Queen's Speech. I sincerely hope that this Government have more success than the last one in the delivery of their policies on regional growth. In the last Parliament, having hastily and mistakenly abolished the regional development agencies that we established, the Government asked local enterprise partnerships to do basically the same things as the regional development agencies, but without the powers or the resources. Local enterprise partnerships have had mixed success. We want this Government to resource them properly and give them the support that they need to do the job that is being asked of them.

The last Government's flagship regional growth fund was mired in chaos and delay from the start. Eventually, it managed to get moneys to successful bidders, although I suspect that a substantial amount is still gathering dust in Treasury coffers. We wait to see what further measures there will be in that respect in the Budget.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): On the hon. Gentleman's point about LEPS, in the 13 years of the Northwest Regional Development Agency, why did Labour not come up with the idea of the northern powerhouse to give power to those great northern cities?

Mr Umunna: I could ask the hon. Gentleman why, in the 18 years beforehand, his party did not come up with the ideas of the Mayor of London, the Welsh Assembly or the Northern Ireland Assembly.

We will, of course, hear a lot more about the Government's plans for growth in the Budget, but in the Queen's Speech we had the enterprise Bill. To the extent that it promotes growth and supports businesses, we will support it. I see the new Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise in her place. I am pleased that the Government propose to extend the primary authority scheme, which we established, to reduce the regulatory burden on business. That is good.

I would like the Business Secretary and his new deputy to go much further in the Bill than they have indicated they will in order to clamp down on the national scandal that is the late payment of small and medium-sized businesses by their large customers. We will press the Government on that during the passage of the Bill through this House. A conciliation service is all well and good, but what small businesses want is a regime with teeth that will impose sanctions on late payers automatically, without their having to have a row with their customers. That must be the Government's goal.

To reform our economy, we must invest in our infrastructure. The key thing is to ensure that people in every part of the UK have a decent, affordable place to live. The shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government will say more about that later.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that economic devolution must include mending our broken banking system, which is sucking money into London? Does he agree that, although the Government are about to announce, I imagine, the selling off of RBS at a massive loss to the taxpayer, we should instead use our investment in RBS to create a local banking network to support small businesses and rebalance the economy?

Mr Umunna: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that when we look at economic devolution we should consider reform of the way banking works. I am a big fan of regional banking.

I am conscious of time and I know that many Members want to make their maiden speeches, so I will finish where I started and return to the rationale for devolution. Often, people dismiss debates such as this as not being high up the list of concerns for the public. It is true that the turnout in the referendum on whether to establish the Greater London Authority and the Mayor was just 34.6%, and that the referendum on the establishment of the Welsh Assembly was carried with just 50.3% of the vote. However, I leave this thought for hon. Members to consider: if any Government now proposed to abolish the institution of the Mayor of London, not only would my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) go crazy, but there would be a public outcry. The same would be true if a Government proposed to do away with the Welsh Assembly or any of the new institutions we have set up. That reinforces my view that, when it comes down to it, people want more power, so we should ensure that they have it. For that reason, I commend our amendment to the House.

2.17 pm

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid): I echo the tributes that were paid to Charles Kennedy earlier today. I was not fortunate enough to know him well, but his reputation for courage, his principles and his humour were well known to all. My thoughts are with his family and friends.

I extend a warm welcome to all new Members of the House and to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, upon your return. I also welcome back the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna). I look forward to our many encounters over the coming months. The hon. Gentleman and I have an unusual connection. Soon after I was elected back in 2010, as was he, it came as a great surprise to be recognised so frequently by members of the public. I later discovered, after a particularly excited individual took a selfie with me, that they thought I was the hon. Member for Streatham. [*Laughter.*] I consider that to be a compliment, but I am not sure whether the same is true of him.

The title of our manifesto promised three things if we were returned to government: strong leadership, a clear economic plan and a brighter, more secure future for our country—our whole country. After Labour's record-breaking recession, the British economy is experiencing record-breaking growth. Maintaining that growth will be at the heart of everything this Government do over the next five years. Because the Conservatives are the party of the many, not the few, we will deliver that growth in a way that benefits all of Britain's people: creating opportunity for everyone, rebalancing our economy, devolving power to every corner of the United Kingdom—a one nation party; a one nation Government.

The Scottish and Welsh Governments already have more powers than they did five years ago. The Scotland Act 2012 contained significant new financial powers for the Scottish Parliament, all of which will be enforced by April 2016. The Wales Act 2014, introduced last December, moved various tax and borrowing powers from Westminster to Cardiff. Legislation introduced earlier this year paved the way for the devolution of corporation tax to Northern Ireland. Now we will go further.

Jonathan Edwards: The Secretary of State just mentioned the powers—including some minor taxes—devolved to Wales in the Wales Act 2014. Therefore, the principle of fiscal devolution seems to have been conceded. Why are he and his Government still insisting on a referendum about income tax devolution to Wales?

Sajid Javid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question and I assure him that I will come to just that point in a moment, but I hope he will please allow me to refer to Scotland first.

Of course, Scotland has had its referendum and its people chose to stay in the United Kingdom, which was the right decision. However, the referendum also sent a clear message that Scotland wanted a greater say over its affairs and greater control over its economic destiny. That is why we will deliver the Smith commission agreement in full.

Pete Wishart: The right hon. Gentleman may be one of the many in England, but in Scotland the Conservatives are most definitely the few, with their one Scottish MP

[Pete Wishart]

and their 14% of the vote, their lowest share of the vote since the 19th century. Will he listen carefully to the clear demands from the Scottish Government about strengthening the Scottish Bill to give us the job-creating powers that our Scottish Parliament wants and the Scottish people voted for?

Sajid Javid: I remind the hon. Gentleman that although the Scottish National party did remarkably well in the election—and I congratulate it—still almost half the Scottish people did not vote for it, and there are all sorts of voices across Scotland that need to be represented in this Chamber.

Once the Smith commission agreement is in place, the Scottish Parliament will have additional powers on income tax and air passenger duty. All told, more than half the money spent by the Scottish Government will be raised in Holyrood. This package is an historic one for Scotland, which will soon possess arguably the strongest devolved Government anywhere in the world, empowered to build on the progress made over the past five years. Yet Scotland will retain the huge benefits of remaining part of a strong United Kingdom: the economic benefits; the social benefits; the defence benefits; and many more besides.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): As we have seen with revenue issues on the Irish border, the decision to give control of air passenger duty to the Scottish Parliament, which I well understand, could have massive implications for regional airports in England. What protections will the Secretary of State build in to protect the jobs and the economies involved?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and we need to consider such issues carefully. However, the decision to devolve air passenger duty has been made.

I note that the Opposition Benches have adopted an entirely new look since the last Parliament. The SNP enjoyed unprecedented success, and I congratulate it on earning the trust of so many Scottish voters. However, the SNP should enjoy this honeymoon period, because the hard work is about to begin.

I turn to Wales. We will deliver a clearer, stronger and fairer devolution settlement, implementing in full the St David's day agreement, led by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. The Wales Bill will make devolution clearer by introducing a reserved powers model, which is the system already in place for Scotland. It will make Welsh devolution stronger by devolving more powers to Cardiff, especially those covering energy, transport and the environment. We will also agree the precise level of a funding floor for Wales, and the mechanism to deliver it. That will be done with a clear expectation that the Welsh Government will call a referendum on income tax powers.

Northern Ireland does not fall within the scope of this debate as defined by the party opposite. However, we will take forward legislation to give effect to the Stormont House agreement and we look forward to working with colleagues in Belfast to make the devolution agenda benefit all the people of Northern Ireland, including, of course, Northern Ireland's First Minister, to whom I wish a full and speedy recovery.

Sammy Wilson: Central to the Stormont House agreement was the implementation of welfare reform. If that proves to be impossible because of the intransigence of both the Social Democratic and Labour party and Sinn Féin, who agree to the Stormont House agreement, will the Government take on responsibility for introducing welfare reform in Northern Ireland?

Sajid Javid: I am aware that there is a very delicate situation in the Northern Ireland Assembly at the moment, but we remain committed to introducing the Stormont House agreement.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most significant decisions that the previous Government made in their final year was to devolve corporation tax to Northern Ireland—to ensure that Northern Ireland was able to compete on a far more equal footing with the Republic of Ireland—and that that should be celebrated?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight that decision; as he has alluded to, it took into account the unique situation of Northern Ireland, with its larger neighbour and the tax situation there. It demonstrates what this Government will do to bring about further devolution.

I turn briefly to England. No matter where people live, our intention is that they have a Government that is on their side and that represents their interests. As we have heard, devolution is strengthening the voices of Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as that of Scotland, within our Union. That should be just as true for England.

Mr Betts: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sajid Javid: I will give way in a moment.

As a one nation Government, we will revise the Commons rules to make the law-making process fair, bringing about constitutional reform that serves people living in all parts of the United Kingdom. The introduction of English votes for English laws will do just that for England. Our proposals will balance the principle of English consent for English measures with the process of MPs from all parts of the UK continuing to deliberate and vote together.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State define what he means by an English-only matter, because I represent a seat in Wales that uses hospital services in England, transport in England—[*Interruption.*] No, it is because of geography. It uses employment in England, airports in Manchester, and it has people employed at Vauxhall in Ellesmere Port. These are big issues. Will he tell me why I cannot speak or vote on them?

Sajid Javid: The right hon. Gentleman should be reassured that he will still be able to speak out on behalf of his constituents on any issue he wishes to speak upon.

I am the MP for Bromsgrove; I was born in Rochdale; I was raised in Bristol; and I went to university in Exeter. I barely set a foot in London until my early twenties.

David T. C. Davies: May I just add to the point that the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) made by suggesting to him that there are many people living in England who rely on getting their health service in Wales, and their MPs are unable to speak about it? Does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agree with me—a proud Welshman and a proud British subject—that there is a strong Unionist case for having English votes for English laws?

Sajid Javid: As ever, my hon. Friend makes a very powerful point, and I think that he is referring to the same Welsh NHS that has seen its funding cut by 10% over the last five years and that has some of the worst performance statistics of any part of the NHS in the United Kingdom.

I know all too well that England does not begin and end at the M25. Up and down the country, businesses of all shapes and sizes make an incredible contribution to our nation's economic growth. All too often, however, they are held back by the age-old regional divides between the north and the south, and between the capital and the rest. For too long, politicians have shrugged their shoulders and claimed that these so-called divides are inescapable realities—an inevitable part of life. We do not accept that; we believe that every corner of the country has the potential to deliver economic growth and personal prosperity. We will take the steps necessary to boost local growth in England, devolving powers to cities, towns and counties, and allowing local people to take control of the economic levers in their areas.

Mr Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry North West) (Lab): We in the west midlands look forward to the greater devolution the Government are promising, but these are just fine words. The reality is that the Government refused to sanction the multimillion pound gateway project. It was supported fully by our local enterprise partnership, and would have created jobs and growth in Coventry and the west midlands. Can the Secretary of State reconcile the two in his own mind?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman claims that these are just words, but it is partly because of the devolution measures we have already taken, which I will come on to in a second, that he has seen a more than 50% decline in unemployment in his constituency. I would have thought he would welcome the measures we have already taken.

This work started in the previous Parliament with the creation of 39 local enterprise partnerships, chaired by business leaders and covering the whole of England, and 27 city deals revitalising the English regions by enabling private sector-led growth. This approach is bearing fruit. Last year, more jobs were created in Birmingham than in the whole of France. In the last quarter, the north-west created a new job every three and a half minutes.

The Chancellor has taken the work of economic rebalancing to the next stage by outlining his vision for a northern powerhouse. The cornerstone is the devolution deal already reached with the elected leaders of Greater Manchester. They will elect their own mayor, who will be responsible and accountable for making Greater Manchester greater still.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Given that the interim Greater Manchester mayor is an equal partner on the Greater Manchester combined authority, will the Secretary of State outline what will be in his cities and devolution Bill, and whether that will place the newly elected mayor of Greater Manchester above the combined authority? What powers will the mayor have that the combined authority currently has as its own?

Sajid Javid: The mayor will become the chair of the combined authority. I hope that helps to answer the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State not accept that the Conservatives' much trumpeted and heralded idea of English votes for English laws is an irrelevance and a red herring, because the Scottish National party practises that anyway? Rather than tie the House up in constitutional niceties, he should rely on the good judgment of the Scottish National party.

Sajid Javid: It might be an irrelevance to the SNP, but it is not an irrelevance to the people of England.

Manchester is not alone: Sheffield and West Yorkshire agreed deals under the previous Government. We are legislating to let other places elect an executive mayor and allow these cities, too, to raise, spend and save money. This is not simply devolution; it is a revolution in the way England is governed.

Graham Evans: Speaking as a north-west MP, the north-south divide grew in the past 20 or 30 years and accelerated under 13 years of the Labour Government. It is this Government who have done something to rebalance the economy. Under Labour, the City, London and the south-east grew. It is this Government who are rebalancing the economy for the first time. They should be congratulated.

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. By 2010 under the previous Labour Government, 33% of the jobs created were in London or the south-east. In the past five years, 60% of the jobs created were outside London and the south-east. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government deserves great credit for the progress already made on this agenda and I look forward to hearing his contribution a little later.

Mr Betts: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sajid Javid: I want to continue my speech.

Looking at the incredible success that much of the UK is already enjoying, it would be easy to forget just how far we have come. When this House reconvened in 2010 our economy was on the brink, reeling from the deepest recession in almost 100 years and burdened with the largest peacetime deficit in our history. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members do not want to know. They want the country to forget. We were struggling to pay for the world's largest bank bail-out. The turnaround achieved in the past five years has, by any measure, been remarkable.

Last year, Britain was the fastest-growing major advanced economy in the world. Just today, the OECD confirmed that in 2015, according to its projections, we will once again be the fastest growing major economy in the

[Sajid Javid]

advanced world. We have more people in work than at any point in history thanks to 2.2 million private sector jobs created by British business since 2010. In fact, the UK has created more jobs in five years than the rest of the European Union put together, giving us the highest employment rate in our history and the lowest claimant count for 40 years. We have cut the deficit as a percentage of GDP by half. We cut corporation tax to 20% and cut employer national insurance contributions. The British public have endorsed the Conservative's long-term plan, which has allowed this business-led recovery. They gave us a mandate to continue to implement it and that is exactly what we will do.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): In June 2010, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government said they would eliminate the deficit by 2015. Why did they fail?

Sajid Javid: There we have it: a resounding defeat in the election and not a single lesson learned. Labour Members come back to this Chamber and we still have arsonists throwing stones at the firefighters.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I welcome the devolution of powers and money to the north of England. We hear about Manchester, we hear about Leeds and we hear about Sheffield. What can the Secretary of State say to the people of North Yorkshire? How will we benefit from devolution to the north?

Sajid Javid: I welcome my hon. Friend to this Chamber and congratulate him on his election victory. We will keep on doing more of the same: more economic measures; more devolution; and more investment in local communities, for example through LEPs. We will help to reduce unemployment throughout Britain, including in his own constituency where, as he will know only too well, it has fallen by 60% in the past five years.

Jake Berry: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way on this important point. The northern powerhouse ideal, which is hugely popular across the north of England, must not be just about our cities, but our regions. I repeat my call for Lancashire County Council to come forward with a proposal that will see powers devolved to Lancashire, so that our economy can continue to grow in the way that this Government have delivered on in the past five years.

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is not just a programme for cities; it is for regions. He uses the example of Lancashire. If Lancashire comes forward with proposals, we will absolutely consider them. Our new Bill will allow us to give it more powers.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): May I encourage my right hon. Friend, in his one nation approach to growth, to remember that there are towns, such as Bedford and Luton in my county, with above-national levels of unemployment? May I also say how nice it is to have a Secretary of State for Business who understands entrepreneurship and is prepared to put small businesses at the forefront of his policies?

Sajid Javid: The Conservatives are backing business. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He was no doubt very keen during the election to point out to his constituents that unemployment in his constituency has fallen by more than 40%. We intend to make sure it keeps falling. That will be seen in black and white in some of the Bills we are introducing. Our new full employment Bill will help to create 2 million more jobs in this Parliament—a job for everyone who wants one. We will work with businesses, city regions, devolved Administrations and local enterprise partnerships to ensure that we develop the right skills for today's economy and for the future. Underpinning these efforts will be our commitment to create 3 million more apprenticeships in the next five years.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his appointment. Can he provide my constituents with some reassurance? We have an excellent local enterprise partnership in Basingstoke, the M3 enterprise partnership. It has done fantastic work in securing investment into our roads locally, but the thing we need now is investment in our rail system. Will he join me in suggesting to the Secretary of State for Transport that he needs to be doing more to support rail in our area, which is key to its growth?

Sajid Javid: I welcome my right hon. Friend back to the House. She is absolutely right that having the right infrastructure is hugely important to maintaining growth and the fall in unemployment. In her constituency, I think she has seen a record fall of 67% in unemployment over the last five years. We intend to continue that, and I am sure that infrastructure will have a big role to play.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I, too, welcome my right hon. Friend to his post. Those of us who know his business background will be delighted by the appointment. Will he consider whether more can be done to encourage the use of tax increment financing for significant infrastructure projects? We have one in London, promoted by the Mayor, but there is scope for more, with a genuinely free market approach to infrastructure provision.

Sajid Javid: I welcome my hon. Friend back to the House, and he again makes a very good point. I will help him to promote that. It is part of some of the city deals, but I think we can benefit from it a lot more.

I was talking about our commitment to 2 million jobs and 3 million more apprenticeships during the lifetime of this Parliament. These are not mere targets; the dignity of a job and the security of a pay packet are the foundations of our individual freedoms—freedoms powered by economic growth, through British business. Equally, British voters have shown their unwillingness to forgive the party responsible for plunging us into a generation-defining crisis—a party that has defined itself by seeking to punish, demonise and destroy business—but this anti-business approach from the Opposition was not a shock. Ultimately, Labour does not understand business; it does not understand enterprise. It never has and it never will.

The task ahead now is to cement Britain's position as the best place in Europe to start and grow a business. The enterprise Bill is resolutely, unashamedly pro-business.

It builds on the clear achievements of the past five years, when we cut red tape and slashed the cost of doing business by £10 billion. We made audits simpler for small businesses, removed pointless hurdles for house builders and exempted thousands of businesses from needless health and safety inspections. As a result, we now have the lowest burden of regulation among G7 nations.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I have been listening carefully to what the right hon. Gentleman has been saying and I have not heard him talk about productivity. Under his Government, British productivity now languishes well behind that of Germany and even France, which he likes to criticise. Is he proud of his record on productivity and does he think it is right that British workers should have to work longer hours and have more jobs to earn less?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady will know that productivity has been a challenge in our country for many, many years, and it is this Government who have been doing something about it. Her hon. Friend the Member for Streatham referred to the automotive industry. Productivity in the British automotive industry has grown significantly over the last five years, which has led to record sales both at home and abroad. Productivity is something we will continue to work on, but one thing I am sure of is that had we adopted the policies advocated by her party, productivity would be a lot worse in this country.

Our job is far from done. The enterprise Bill will enable us to save businesses at least £10 billion over this Parliament. Regulators will have to report their own compliance with better regulation requirements—a clear incentive to think carefully about the needs of business. More small businesses will be able to benefit from “primary authority”, stopping the cost and hassle of obeying multiple masters and allowing companies to focus on what matters: serving their customers and growing.

Caroline Lucas: Will the Secretary of State say whether his new enterprise Bill will ensure greater access to affordable credit for small businesses, in particular by setting up a network of local stakeholder banks? That is what works in so many other countries. Instead of flogging off RBS, will he look seriously at transforming it into a network of local banks?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady will know that we have taken a number of measures over the last five years to strengthen finance and access to finance, particularly for small companies, through the funding for lending scheme and the investment in credit unions, by relaxing some of the rules around credit unions—something I know she has supported—and through the British Business Bank and the more than £1.8 billion that it has helped to provide to some 40,000 businesses. We will continue to work on these measures, because where she is right is that access to finance is key to continuing to see a fall in unemployment.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sajid Javid: I have to make some progress. A number of Members want to speak.

The Conservatives have always been the party of small business. Our greatest leader grew up in a grocer's shop. I was raised by parents who juggled the demands of a family life with the stresses of managing a family business. We know first hand how important a successful small business sector is to a healthy, growing economy. We have seen for ourselves the unique struggles faced by sole traders and the owners of small companies, and we will continue to support the sector in every way we can. That is why we are setting up a small business conciliation service to help to resolve disputes between companies, especially over late payment. At the same time, we will improve the business rates system ahead of the 2017 revaluation, including through reform of the appeals system.

A thriving and growing economy must also be underpinned by democratic and fair industrial action. The trade union Bill will guarantee that strikes are the result of clear and positive recent decisions by union members. It will never be right to allow the actions of a few to hurt the hard-working majority. We will introduce a 50% voting threshold for union ballot turnouts. We will also require that, in the key health, education, fire and transport sectors, 40% of those entitled to vote must support strike action. If a union's members genuinely support a call for strike action, we wholeheartedly support that right, but we will ensure that businesses and the wider public do not suffer widespread, costly disruption when there is no clear backing among members.

Our message could not be clearer: we are putting the interests of business first, second and third. We are dismantling bureaucracy and devolving powers to local leaders. This is how we will rebalance our economy and create opportunity in urban Britain and in rural Britain, in every part of our great nation.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): Order. May I once again remind the House that maiden speeches, of which there will be many today, should be heard without interruption, even if they are from the Front Bench? Front-Bench spokesmen are not subject to the time limit, but after the next speaker, there will be a six-minute time limit imposed, as implied by the Speaker.

2.48 pm

Michelle Thomson (Edinburgh West) (SNP): Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to give my maiden speech—and, indeed, for reminding the House that I should be heard uninterrupted. That makes me feel a little more at ease. Within this speech I intend to give the House a sense of who I am, both as the new Member for Edinburgh West and also as the shadow Business, Innovation and Skills Minister. However, before I do so, I must add my own tribute to Charles Kennedy, who was a politician I greatly admired, including for his wit.

Edinburgh West's boundaries, like those of many other constituencies, are not strictly limited to the area in its name. They extend from the beautiful South Queensferry, with its iconic rail bridge, through Kirkcaldy and Ratho and into the city, encompassing Edinburgh airport, the headquarters of the Royal Highland Society and the Royal Bank of Scotland, and then into the west end of the city, past Edinburgh zoo—is it too early in

[Michelle Thomson]

my speech to get three for the price of one in panda jokes? Passing parts of Stenhouse, Carrick Knowe and Corstorphine, Edinburgh West includes Murrayfield, a beautiful place as well as the home of our Scottish rugby. On the other arterial route into town, it includes Barnton, Cramond and parts of Blackhall, as well as Drylaw, Pilton and Muirhouse.

For many, Edinburgh West is a place of comfortable living, and visitors would need to look hard to recognise the innocuous building in Drumbrae as a food bank, one of several in my constituency. It is easier to sense the daily struggle for many in Muirhouse, where chronic underemployment and social deprivation is apparent.

Throughout the constituency, as in many other areas, small businesses are endemic. Small and medium-sized enterprises form around 99.3% of Scottish businesses, and “small” businesses, meaning those with zero to 49 employees, form about 99.1%. They are indeed the backbone of our community.

Interestingly, though, Edinburgh as a whole demonstrates the parallel worlds of wealth alongside poverty. I am constantly reminded of the danger warnings from the world-renowned economist Stiglitz that an unequal society not only limits our ability to compete, but is

“both a cause and a consequence of volatility”.

My predecessor, Mike Crockart, was considered to be a hard-working MP, and many years ago we worked together as colleagues in Standard Life. I have to say that we often found debates about politics a lot more interesting than the debates about pensions. Despite a robust campaign, he was unable to resist the swing away from the Liberal Democrats, and the Scottish National party came from fourth in 2010 to first in 2015. I wish him well in his future career.

Let me say a little about myself. I started life as a professional piano player, and then spent many years delivering large-scale business and IT change in financial services. I then set up my own small business. Politics was always an interest, but it became a passion as I became involved in our debate about independence. I and many other business owners investigated the business case for independence, having gone through the numbers, having gone through the economics and having looked at the status quo and asked how we could grow our economy in new emerging markets. We looked at the risks, looked at the opportunities and concluded that that was the right way to go. I was joined by literally thousands of business owners in coming to that decision. Of course, we know that the strong economy that we all seek—we want targeted growth by the use of effective economic levers—underpins the public services from which we all benefit.

We have touched today on the forthcoming Bills, and I will personally watch with interest. My driver in this debate is about the ambition that must underpin what we want to achieve. I will therefore be watching to see whether there is an appropriate level of ambition and vision. Will the enterprise Bill provide measures that really encourage and support small businesses? Will it start to take steps to address the chronic lack of available liquidity for those businesses? Will the full employment and welfare benefits Bill really aim to deliver full employment, or will it focus on yet more cuts—the

self-same cuts that mean we have to support people, whether through housing benefit or working tax credits? I have to say, that does not make sense to me.

Will the housing Bill simply tinker around the edges of English planning laws, or will it really support affordable housing and new jobs to help the sector recover from what has been a very difficult time? Will the national insurance contributions Bill provide real reforms to incentivise business and, if not, will the Government devolve national insurance to Scotland so that we can do so?

Will the European Union Referendum Bill pander to the Eurosceptics, or will it allow the framework for a proper realisation of the benefits to business of the free movement of goods, services and people? We know that the EU is the main destination for Scotland’s international exports. *The Daily Telegraph* recently quoted Giles Merritt, head of the Friends of Europe think-tank in Brussels, as saying:

“Everybody is very aware that Britain is the next big problem on the horizon. The mood is that we’ve got to save the British from themselves”.

It may be that the austerity agenda will drive all that is presented to the House. The need for cuts was sold as being to decrease the debt and the deficit, but during the last Parliament, the Chancellor failed on all of his own measures. Arguments against austerity were trodden underfoot by what Paul Krugman, the Nobel prize-winning economist, calls “a bogus narrative”, and the Office for Budget Responsibility notes that the UK is the only country where the deficit has been reduced not by growing but by cutting. Growth must now be the focus, and it begins at the bottom in a virtuous cycle, as people spend money in their local communities and in their local businesses.

Much more importantly, will the Scotland Bill really offer the sort of power we need to grow our economy, to invest, to create jobs and ultimately to provide more sustainable and worthwhile wealth? To what extent will it support our drive for a culture of investment, innovation, research and development and increased productivity, for a renewed focus on manufacturing and new infrastructure, and for all the ambition the SNP promotes? We seek “powers for a purpose”. We seek to make a difference and to link the policies of economics, labour and welfare for better outcomes. Surely that is what good government must be about.

I fear that the Scotland Bill provides little of what we seek. It falls comprehensively short of fully implementing the Smith commission’s recommendations, which themselves fell short of the vow promised during the referendum.

The UK Government must honour the Smith commission promises in full. It is important to emphasise that the commission, which was a response to support for independence in the referendum, is a floor on new powers, not a ceiling. Those are the minimum powers, and we need an appropriate response to the number of new SNP Members we see here on these green Benches.

It is time for thought-leadership about our business and how we do business. We will seek to make progressive business alliances that encourage ambition, aspiration, investment in infrastructure and innovation. To do that, we must rebalance our focus on to smaller businesses, as it is them that will fuel growth. We must also seek to combat the relentless navigational pull of London, and

to that end we do indeed support devolution for cities across the UK and putting power back in the hands of those who understand best what is required.

Business is and always was an enabler for society. It is time to look afresh at our definitions of success and how we create the conditions for success. Crude measures of growth by GDP per capita are outdated. The leading economies use the so-called “happiness indices”, which provide a link with an holistic, embracing, rounded society of which business, innovation and the supporting skills form a part. I look forward to taking part in driving positive change for my constituents in Edinburgh West, for business, innovation and skills in Scotland, and across all of these isles.

2.57 pm

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): I welcome the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson), who shares with me the pleasure of having an airport in her constituency. I hope that she will forgive hon. Members, as I do, if they use her airport. I have definitely been through her constituency on many occasions in order to visit my family roots.

Representing a constituency in the west midlands conurbation, I have watched as Manchester and Leeds-Bradford have benefited from their collaboration, and I hope to see the councils in my area come together of their own free will to create a midlands powerhouse.

It is clear that trying to run the country from Whitehall has failed. The Government’s approach to devolution has the advantage that it does not impose a structure, as was the case with the regional development agencies, but lets the authorities choose who they want to work with. That is the key to the success of the local economic partnerships, and the one covering my area of Greater Birmingham and Solihull has been particularly successful. The old RDA’s actions resulted in money being sucked into Birmingham, with other surrounding authorities losing out. In a spirit of co-operation, I encourage the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna) to temper his views about the positive impression of RDAs by speaking to his colleagues from Coventry, who felt that they really lost out under Advantage West Midlands.

The sheer size of Birmingham City Council has been the sticking point for further collaboration. As the Kerslake report of December 2014 puts it, its size is

“both a badge and a barrier”

to its progress, and it faces

“significant budget difficulties...and does not yet have credible plans to meet these”.

It is no wonder that there is a degree of reluctance to combine.

The key to harmony in the Birmingham and Solihull LEP is the “one authority, one vote” policy for its governance structure. I believe that an explicit reference to that in the forthcoming Bill would give smaller local authorities the reassurance that they seek. The approach taken by Greater Manchester authorities of giving each authority a veto on sensitive policy areas such as housing and planning will also be key for councils such as mine. My area contains some of the most valuable regional and, indeed, national assets, including Birmingham airport and the National Exhibition Centre. There is also the Meriden Gap between Coventry and Birmingham, without which the area would simply be concreted over.

Birmingham’s willingness to give itself one vote on decisions, thus placing itself on a par with the smaller metropolitan and shire districts, will give other councils the confidence to join.

I am not totally convinced about the establishment of a “metro mayor” for the midlands powerhouse. Rivalries between the towns and cities are intense, not least on the football pitch. I am thinking of, for instance, Aston Villa, Wolverhampton Wanderers and Coventry, to name just a few. Perhaps, however, a smaller local authority could take the lead.

I was interested to read that healthcare might be granted to the new combined authorities as a competency, and I think that would be helpful. It would also speed up the integration of health and social care at local level. Solihull is certainly keen to be in the vanguard, given its coterminous boundaries.

As for education, there is a great opportunity to devolve more powers and to achieve fairer funding. Let me be specific. Solihull educates more than 7,000 pupils from across its borders in Birmingham and Coventry, and the funding gap has increased to £1,300 per pupil. Solihull schools enjoy an excellent reputation, and parents want their children to benefit from it, but the funding shortfall is now having adverse consequences. For example, schools in Birmingham are poaching Solihull’s teachers with a premium payment of several thousand pounds, which Solihull cannot match. As a result of the funding differential, head teachers are struggling to manage without cutting staff and other vital services.

Surely the health principle of the money following the patient should apply to education as well. The pupils who attract higher per capita funding because of where they live should be able to bring that funding with them to the place where they are educated. That is an easier principle to deliver than the wholesale change in the funding formula—which, incidentally, I support, but which will create both winners and losers. In a *reductio ad absurdum*, Birmingham would have to build at least six new schools for the pupils whom Solihull currently educates, which would be a very inefficient use of taxpayers’ money.

Some important considerations are necessary when it comes to this level of devolution. Lord Heseltine was right to point out in his report “No Stone Unturned” that our country is held back by its over-centralised structure. Devolution will bring diversification. It will not be possible to cry “postcode lottery”.

I welcome the principles of the devolution Bill. I believe that our great city should seize the opportunity to take new powers to better meet the needs of its citizens.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Before we continue the debate, I have a short announcement to make. The House will know that the election of Deputy Speakers took place today, and that the ballot was closed at 1.30 pm. The counting has now finished.

Before I announce the results, let me thank very warmly—and I hope the House will join me in thanking very warmly—the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) and the hon. Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) for serving as temporary Deputy Speakers during the debates on the Queen’s Speech. Let me also pay a warm personal tribute to Dame Dawn Primarolo,

[Mr Speaker]

who retired from the House at the general election after 28 years of service, and who served with distinction as a Deputy Speaker in the last Parliament.

I shall now announce the result of the ballot that was held today for the election of Deputy Speakers. Mr Lindsay Hoyle was elected Chairman of Ways and Means. Mrs Eleanor Laing was elected First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means. Natascha Engel was elected Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means. I congratulate all three colleagues who have been elected, and I greatly look forward to working with them.

The results of the count will be made available as soon as possible in the Vote Office, and will be published on the intranet.

3.5 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I, too, congratulate the Deputy Speakers, and congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your re-election. I also congratulate the new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, who I see is present. In the last Parliament, as planning Minister, he showed great willingness to listen to recommendations from the Select Committee, which I chaired, and to accept our proposals and amendments. I think that we can establish a similar relationship if I am re-elected as Chair of the Committee in this Parliament. The right hon. Gentleman has not only a principled commitment to devolution but a track record on it—which I think is recognised by Members on both sides of the House—as well as being willing to look for solutions that meet local needs, in the true spirit of devolution.

Let me begin by raising two issues relating to what the Government have proposed so far. The first was raised in an earlier debate by one of my hon. Friends, who challenged the Government to explain why, if we were really serious about devolving functions to communities and their elected representatives at local level, we had to tell those representatives how the arrangements should best be governed. Why must we insist on an elected mayor to enable powers to be devolved to combined authorities? Many communities may decide that elected mayors are the best way forward. Why are the Government saying, “If you do not have our version of governance at local level, you cannot have devolved powers in the first place”? That is not typical of the right hon. Gentleman’s track record. When he was responsible for city deals, he was prepared to tailor arrangements at local level, in discussions with councils, in order to meet specific needs. Can we not have a rethink about that?

As for the second issue—and I challenge my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna) on this—why are the Government committed to devolving spending powers? Why are they prepared to trust local communities with the right to spend money and make decisions in that regard, but not prepared to trust them with the right to raise taxes in the first place? Why is something that is good for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland not good for England as well? What is wrong with extending the principle? The Government have been reluctant to do that, and my party’s Front Benchers have been somewhat reluctant to do it as well.

There is cross-party support for such a move. I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) and the hon. Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) are present. They were both members of the Select Committee in the last Parliament. We produced a report on fiscal devolution to local government in England that received widespread support. The Local Government Association adopted it, and, along with the London Finance Commission, the Mayor of London—who I see in a reincarnated form as the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson)—produced very similar proposals.

The Front Benchers do not seem to understand that if we are to have real devolution in this country, it cannot simply be a matter of central Government handing out largesse and then reducing it, thus passing the responsibility for cuts to local authorities. That is not real devolution at all. Let us go a bit further, and be a bit braver. Does the Secretary of State not have an instinct—a real passion—to be the Secretary of State who delivers real devolution to England as well as to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?

Let me raise a third issue during my six minutes. I am passionate about housing. We must start to build a quarter of a million homes to meet demand, and I think that we shall have to spend some more Government money. We must remove the borrowing cap that restricts councils’ ability to spend. Housing associations are struggling as a result of the cuts in the amount of money that they have per unit of development. Many of them are not taking up social housing grant, as they did before; I think there was a shortfall in the last financial year.

I understand the Government’s commitment to build more on brownfield sites, but the problems with paragraphs 47 and 49 of the national planning policy framework and the issues of which the Secretary of State is aware from his previous role as planning Minister—the challenge regarding definitions of viability—are affecting local authorities’ ability to include brownfield sites in their local plan. The speech contains a proposal on the right to buy that the National Housing Federation says will cost £11 billion. We cannot trust the Government on that, because the intended one-for-one replacement of houses sold simply has not happened. According to the very best estimates, about one house has been built for every 10 sold.

The Government are going to take private assets into public control. They will direct private companies and charities on how to use their assets. If they do that, are they nationalising those assets and taking their debts on to the Government’s books? Have they looked at the report from the Office for National Statistics on whether they will include the entire debt of housing associations in Government debt? Have they listened to the National Housing Federation, which called for a review of this policy? Its members say that the concerns about the future of their finances, the right to buy, welfare reform, the rise in rent arrears and the introduction of universal credit are taking them to a place where they do not feel comfortable about developing in the future. This policy has not been thought through. It is a real challenge to the future viability and independence of housing associations, and it will affect whether they develop in the future. That matter of concern needs addressing.

3.11 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): It is a great honour to be called by you, Mr Speaker, a fellow son of Edgware, for my maiden speech, and a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts).

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Tim Yeo, who served in this House for 32 years, holding a range of positions in both opposition and in government, most notably perhaps in 2003, when he held the position of shadow Secretary of State for Public Services, Health and Education—an interesting brief. At a local level perhaps his most notable achievement, among many, was in helping us to deliver the brand new Sudbury community health centre, in our largest town, which will play a key role, as Sudbury is an early adopter in Suffolk's moves to integrate health and social care. Tim Yeo was very well respected on matters of energy policy as the Chairman of the Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change. I pay tribute to his length of service and to his passion for environmental issues, and I wish him well for the future.

South Suffolk is quite simply a gem. It is one of the most beautiful constituencies in England, and it is a huge privilege to be sent here to represent it. There is not time to mention all its most beautiful villages, but those that are most famous are known as “Lovejoy” country, because they featured in that very popular television series, which some hon. Members may remember. Many scenes in “Lovejoy” were filmed in my constituency, including in the antique shops of Long Melford, and the very last episode, “Last Tango in Lavenham”, was filmed in possibly our most famous village.

I say “last episode”, but you Mr Speaker may be interested to know that I recently heard on very good authority that a Mr Tony Jordan is putting together a new series of “Lovejoy”. My message to him is, “Please do come and film again in our constituency. It's a great boost to tourism, it gets the cash tills ringing.” And if he needs any extras, I am available—when the House is not sitting or with kind permission of the Whips Office.

We have a very fine artistic heritage in South Suffolk, being directly connected to two of our country's greatest painters, Gainsborough and Constable. Thomas Gainsborough was born in Sudbury, and his home has become what is known as “Gainsborough's house”, now a very successful art gallery that I support in its push for national lottery funding.

If you travel up the River Stour to East Bergholt, you come to what is called Constable country, where John Constable painted some of his most famous landscapes, including of course “The Hay Wain.” For those who do not know what it looks like, it is the backdrop to my Facebook and Twitter accounts.

We are also spoiled by the beauty of our churches. Again, there are too many to mention. Favourites include Clare, Denston and Stoke by Nayland, but there are two in particular that I wish to mention: one is St Mary's, Shotley, which looks out to sea and has the naval graves of many young sailors who gave their lives serving at sea; the other is my own church of St Edmund King & Martyr, in Assington. Members will recall that the Chancellor of Exchequer is fond of saying how on the economy we should fix the roof while the sun is shining. In the case of our church, we desperately need to fix the roof before it starts raining again. So, Mr Speaker, you will appreciate our great joy when in the Budget the

Chancellor announced further additions to the places of worship roof repair fund, including a grant of £37,600 to our church. One or two eyebrows have been raised, asking, “Is it not a coincidence that we should be the only church in the Babergh district to receive funding in the same year when a member of the congregation is standing for Parliament?” But I can assure the House the only lobbying that has taken place has been of a very discreet kind between the congregation and someone even more powerful than the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The past 12 months have been challenging for all of us as candidates, but in our household we thought we would make it a little more interesting, as my wife gave birth to twins last June. We had a fantastic result in the Babergh council elections in May, so it means for the second year running we have seen incredible results in labour wards—[*Interruption.*] They don't like that!

Raising in public the subject of my twins enables me to say two very important thank yous: first, to the fantastic staff of Ipswich hospital maternity unit, whose care was absolutely incredible; and the other, to Philips Avent, the makers of those famous baby bottles, which we have relied on for the past year. Parents up and down the country will be familiar with those bottles and their teats, but they will not know—[*Interruption.*] It is not sponsorship! They are not made in the far east; they are made in Glemsford, in my constituency.

I conclude with this key point. We have a very great history as a constituency, but I am confident that we have a great future as well, and the key to it is the diversity of our economy, which includes not only tourism to “Lovejoy” country and the rest of it, and acres and acres of arable agriculture, but seriously top-end manufacturers and exporters like Philips Avent and Celotex in Hadleigh. I took great pleasure in seeing in the Gracious Speech measures that will help our firms go forward, cutting red tape, cutting taxes and continuing to push for full employment, because I am a one nation Conservative, and for me that means not going back to dark and divisive days of high unemployment.

I look forward to being a strong voice for all my constituents, speaking for them from the Floor of this great House of Commons.

3.17 pm

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I sincerely thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me to speak in this debate on what I believe will be one of the defining issues of this Parliament. I commend the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) for his excellent maiden speech. I can assure him that I have recently been using Avent bottles, for my newborn baby, but I must confess that we are a Tommee Tippee household.

I remember my maiden speech five years ago, which focused heavily on regional development, a subject to which we return once again today. For cities like Newcastle and regions like the north-east, the way in which we devolve meaningful powers and real funding from Whitehall to local areas is absolutely key to better supporting and funding private sector growth and creating skilled, sustainable jobs. While our region has so much to offer the UK, we still have the highest regional unemployment levels and the highest number of young people out of work. It is little wonder that far too many of our young people still sadly feel they need to leave Newcastle and our region to fulfil their potential, despite the opportunities

[Catherine McKinnell]

they should have. That is one of the things that drove me to stand for Parliament back in 2010, to ensure that children in my part of the world and, indeed, my own children—I now have a third since I last spoke in this Chamber—have the same opportunities as children in any other part of the country. As the North East Chamber of Commerce emphasised:

“Whitehall has shown itself to be incapable of delivering an approach that benefits the whole county and that is why we must ensure the North East has the chance to make those decisions for itself.”

That view is clearly shared by local people. When the *Chronicle* asked readers about general election policy, they said that their No. 1 priority was more devolved spending.

What is the Government’s response to that pressing call for change? We have heard many warm words from the Chancellor about a northern powerhouse, but we are yet to find out whether it means anything at all for north-east England. The Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Stockton South (James Wharton), is the Minister for Local Growth and the Northern Powerhouse, to give him his full title, and I hope he will be able to convince the Chancellor that the north of England extends north of the Pennines.

The Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill was announced in last week’s Gracious Speech and its headline measure is to

“devolve powers and budgets to boost local growth in England”, but—and it is a pretty hefty but—only for those cities that agree to have a directly elected, so-called metro mayor. Indeed, the Chancellor set out how deadly serious he is about this condition in a speech in Manchester last month, saying:

“So with these new powers for cities must come new city-wide elected mayors who work with local councils. I will not impose this model on anyone. But nor will I settle for less.”

He is clearly ignoring the 68% of voters in Newcastle who voted against a mayor only three years ago. That is an interesting take on localism by centrally mandated diktat. We will be allowed to find a mayoral model that works for us, but only as long as it involves

“a city-wide elected executive mayor.”

The famous Henry Ford phrase,

“You can have any colour as long as it’s black”,

springs to mind.

Given the Government’s determination on this issue, it would be really helpful if the Minister set out how he sees it working for the north-east. The Chancellor talks of devolving power to cities, but does he mean cities or areas covered by local enterprise partnerships? He goes on to describe city-wide, directly elected mayors, but how would that operate in the North East LEP area, which has three cities—Newcastle, Sunderland and Durham—as well as the conurbations of Gateshead, North Tyneside and South Tyneside? The Chancellor frequently refers to metro mayors, but how does that proposal apply to those other areas that the North East LEP encompasses—Northumberland and County Durham—which include some of the most rural and sparsely populated parts of England? Some clarity is needed on those issues, and it is needed quick.

Meanwhile, in a development that appears to have slipped under many people’s radars, the Government have agreed to remove a significant amount of power from regions in the very policy area under consideration. Like many other parts of the UK, the north-east benefits significantly from European Union money through the European regional development fund and the European social fund. However, until very recently, we faced the prospect of losing £724 million, because the coalition removed regional development agencies without ensuring that something was put in their place. Hundreds and millions of pounds of funding intended to address unemployment, support business growth and provide training in the north-east were put in jeopardy because the LEPs lacked the appropriate powers, resources and accountability necessary to unlock that funding. Instead, in order to prevent further hold-ups, it was agreed by the Government that, while LEPs will now have an advisory role, the actual decisions on how that money will be spent will have to be taken in Whitehall. That is a complete contradiction of the idea of decentralisation and empowering local areas.

Of course, that is set against the backdrop of massive cuts to local government, which I spoke about at length in the previous Parliament and I will continue to do so in this Parliament. Who are these powers for? They are for the communities and people we represent, who risk being so hollowed out by the cuts to local government funding that, even if they have those powers, they will not be able to deliver on them.

3.23 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), but it has been uplifting to hear the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge). He has unashamedly given us a speech full of ambition, pride and hope for the future of his constituency, and he also delivered it entirely without notes. It was somewhat reminiscent of your own style, Mr Speaker, and perhaps that is something for the future.

It is a sense of ambition, pride and hope for Britain that comes through so clearly in this Queen’s Speech. It continues the work to tackle the most important problem this country faces, which is the recovery of our economy. Without a strong economy, we simply will not have the money to ensure a stronger NHS, to invest in our education system or to support the most vulnerable in society, but because our plan for Britain has been a plan for recovery, we are already starting to see the fruits of it.

Last year our country grew faster than any other G7 country—a trend that looks set to continue—and we have also seen record levels of employment. Wages and living standards are now rising, and it is clear that the economy is mending. The Queen’s Speech also underlines that, if we are to build a true recovery for the long term, it is important that we continue to tackle the issue of productivity, because that is the most important driver of prosperity in this country.

Britain is a natural nation of entrepreneurs. I saw that at first hand during my childhood, with a father who built a business to be able to support his family, and I believe that that strong work ethic pervades our

society. There is no lack of ambition or hard work in Britain, but we need to tackle the issue of productivity. It is a problem for most mature markets, including the US, Japan and, indeed, most of our European neighbours. The difference in Britain is that, for too many years, there was under-investment in our infrastructure and over-regulation of our business. That quite simply put us at a disadvantage, which makes it all the more important that this Government are taking action now.

The Government have already done much to increase our productivity over the past five years, giving priority to investment in infrastructure, particularly roads. However, as I touched on earlier in an intervention on the Secretary of State, I want to challenge the Government to go further with their investment plans for infrastructure and make sure that they also include rail infrastructure, because that will help us continue on the path to success.

We have also built strong foundations with regard to skills, nowhere more so than in the excellent work being done on expanding apprenticeship programmes. There have been more than 3,000 new apprenticeships in my own constituency in recent years. On innovation, the Basingstoke College of Technology has to be applauded for leading the way in working with university partners to develop a new work-based university centre to promote a degree-level apprenticeship in the digital, engineering and construction industries. Such innovation is so important for the future.

It is right that increased productivity continues to be at the centre of this Government's thinking. I urge the Minister to celebrate the fact that the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill will give cities control of the levers of growth to rebalance our economy; that the enterprise Bill will help to tackle problems of over-regulation; and that the Education and Adoption Bill will continue the progress that has already been made in driving up standards in our schools, which is so important in tackling the problem of productivity. That drive to improve productivity rightly pervades the Gracious Speech.

Infrastructure, skills, technology and regulation are all important ways to tackle productivity, but any country will maximise its productivity only when it can use the full entrepreneurial talents of all its people. We are already seeing record levels of employment, particularly among women, but we must ensure that our ambition for Britain is high and that at the heart of that is a high ambition for British citizens, with no individual being held back from reaching their potential because of prejudice or a lack of opportunity to succeed. That is one nation Conservatism: maximising the talents of every child in school; making it possible for parents to go to work and balance their family commitments—the Childcare Bill is welcome in that area; providing support for those who take the risk and create their own businesses, but making sure that gender, ethnicity, religion and sexuality do not hold people back. We need to unleash the spirit and potential of our nation. The Gracious Speech is full of ambition for Britain and it deserves the full support of this House.

3.29 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): It is truly an honour to be representing the constituency of Aberavon, where we are surrounded by the stirring spectacle of the upper Afan valley and the gentler rural beauty of

Margam and Skewen. Looking out from our magnificent Aberavon beach, we survey the Celtic sea and, further, the Atlantic ocean, symbol of my constituency's long, proud, and productive engagement with global trade and industry. It is hardly surprising that Aberavonites have drama in their blood when one considers the drama of the landscape in which they are born. Anthony Hopkins and Michael Sheen are just two of the local lads made good, but perhaps the most famous of Aberavon's sons is Richard Burton, who is said to have mused that "the Welsh are all actors, it's only the bad ones who become professional." I am of course relieved to say he is not on record as having said the same thing about the Welsh and politicians.

I was born about 30 miles to the north-east of Aberavon in Tredegar, as was my father. My mother is of course from another country altogether known as north Wales. They have always worked tirelessly to combat injustice, and their dedication to public service has inspired me throughout my life.

When I left south Wales as a young man, I took that spirit of public service with me. I have been lucky to have lived and worked in Brussels, St Petersburg, Sierra Leone, Switzerland and a number of other exotic foreign lands, including England. Having returned to my roots, I am very proud to describe myself as a global Welshman. I believe that Wales is a nation with the ability to punch far above its weight, and I hope I will have an opportunity to contribute to that worthy cause.

I must take this opportunity to pay tribute to my predecessor Dr Hywel Francis. He is, as the House will know, a noted historian and respected parliamentarian. His work on the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004 was truly life-saving.

In Aberavon we like to connect our proud history to our promising present and ambitious future. It is in that spirit that I wish to join those calling on the Ministry of Justice for the posthumous pardon of Dic Penderyn, a miner and son of Aberavon hanged in 1831 for his part in the Merthyr uprisings.

Since the time of Dic Penderyn it is the steel industry that has come to shape the landscape, the economy and the hopes of Aberavon, and the Port Talbot steelworks is the beating heart of our community. Sadly, that plant is now at the centre of a serious dispute due to the unjustified action of Tata Steel in proposing changes that would greatly weaken the workers' pension scheme. I must therefore take this opportunity to urge Tata Steel to return with urgency and good faith to the negotiating table, and to exhort the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State to engage with the management of Tata in Mumbai and Europe, for I fear that if Tata does not act rapidly now, we will see the first strike action in the steel industry in 35 years.

The topic of today's debate is devolution and growth and, as we know, this Government claim to be focused on creating the conditions for sustainable economic growth by rebalancing the British economy and broadening our manufacturing base. I therefore wish to use the platform accorded to me today to urge the Government to understand that they must do more to support the British steel industry. To this end I call upon the Secretary of State to implement policies that will revitalise UK supply chains, reduce the cost of energy and reform business rate valuations to encourage, rather than penalise, investment.

[Stephen Kinnock]

I also call upon the Secretary of State to do everything in his power to enhance foreign investment, which can be guaranteed only by Britain staying in the European Union. The prospect of the UK leaving the EU is already casting a long shadow of uncertainty over the British economy. There is a real and present danger that our withdrawal from the EU would trigger Tata Steel's withdrawal from the UK, and the impact of such a move on the lives of my constituents would be truly disastrous.

I was wondering whether anyone in this House might recall what a pro-European Tory looks like. Well, I have managed to find one, and he is Lord Geoffrey Howe of Aberavon, no less, and he said:

"We have done best when we have seen"

Europe

"as an active process which we can shape, often decisively, provided that we allow ourselves to be fully engaged in it, with confidence, with enthusiasm and in good faith."—[*Official Report*, 13 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 463.]

It is with that attitude that I, as the representative of Aberavon, will strive always to get the best deal for my constituents. My realistic vision of that deal includes the green jobs created by such projects as the Swansea bay tidal lagoon, the creative innovation coming from the Bay Studios and the cutting-edge research coming from Swansea University's Bay Campus. Funded by the European Investment Bank and made possible by the Labour Government in the Welsh Assembly, the campus is an inspiring example of the tangible work that government can do to catalyse regional economic development for the future. That is a future for which I shall fight relentlessly.

3.35 pm

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), who follows in illustrious footsteps, not only in terms of his parentage, but in terms of the previous incumbents of his seat, such as Lord Morris and my good friend, Dr Hywel Francis. It was a great pleasure to be present for the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge), who made a tremendous impact on his first outing here.

The Gracious Speech contained a ringing declaration that the Government will adopt a one nation approach and bring the different parts of our country together. That approach is highly welcome. Although the economy is recovering from the crash of 2008, it is clear that some parts are doing better than others. London and the south-east have long been the most affluent parts of the country. Without wishing to see that affluence diminished, it is right that other parts should be given every opportunity to catch up. That is why the northern powerhouse agenda is so important, and I am delighted to see that it has been entrusted to the hands of the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (James Wharton), fresh from his stunning victory at the general election.

Devolution of powers to the great cities of our country, starting with Manchester, is an intensely Conservative policy. It will ensure that powers to encourage economic growth are exercised at the most appropriate level—closest

to the businesses, families and communities that stand to benefit most from that growth. That is important, not only to the great cities, but to the surrounding areas, some of which are wide. For example, even in this post-devolution era, we in north Wales look economically not to Cardiff, but to Liverpool and Manchester. The trading corridors in Wales run east to west, not north to south. North Wales's most important industrial area is Deeside, where a large industrial estate has been built and where a new enterprise zone has been created by the Welsh Government. Deeside is important not only to the rest of Wales, but to the north-west economic region, of which in reality it is part. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor recognised the synergy between north Wales and the north-west last year when he provided the funding to upgrade the Halton curve railway line, which will create a direct fast link between north Wales and Liverpool.

More needs to be done, however, and I strongly welcome the Government's commitment in the Gracious Speech to legislate for high-speed rail links between the different parts of our country. North Wales can benefit enormously from that proposal, too. Colleagues from all parties are now working with the North Wales Economic Ambition Board on the business case for upgrading the north Wales coast line, which is essential for the region to benefit from the northern powerhouse agenda.

The Government also want further to empower local enterprise partnerships. In Wales, I suggest that they consider working with the Welsh Government to empower the Mersey Dee Alliance, the most natural vehicle for developing the potential of that important cross-border area. I also mention the commitment in the Queen's Speech to seek to change the Standing Orders of the House so that decisions affecting England only or England and Wales only can be taken with the consent of only Members representing those parts of the country. I strongly approve of that commitment, since it will restore fairness that has been eroded in the wake of the 1999 bout of devolution. However, I agree with what the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) said, and we should treat that proposal with caution. What is of paramount importance is defining what are English, and English and Welsh, issues.

Ian C. Lucas: I am listening to the right hon. Gentleman's speech carefully, and he will understand why. He is a lawyer. Does he think that an appropriate and effective definition is possible?

Mr Jones: It is important to achieve that definition. The hon. Gentleman will share my concerns. For example, the right hon. Member for Delyn mentioned his constituents' use of hospitals in the north-west of England. Further west in my constituency, my constituents rely on the Walton Centre for neurosurgery, on Alder Hey for paediatric services, on Gobowen Hospital for orthopaedic services, on Clatterbridge and Christie's for cancer care, and on Broad Green for heart surgery. The list goes on.

The people of north Wales have an absolute right to expect that their representatives in this place speak in the House on the issues that concern them. I say to my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench that that is extremely important if the fairness we seek to achieve

by creating English and Welsh votes for English and Welsh laws, or English votes for English laws, is not to be brought into disrepute. Similarly, many English patients rely on services provided in Welsh hospitals. I suggest that the proposed Wales Bill gives us an excellent opportunity to provide for representatives of English constituents to have a more direct say on the services delivered in Wales that affect them.

Overall, the Queen's Speech is ambitious for the people of each and every part of our country. It has a great deal to commend it, and deserves the support of every Member of the House.

3.41 pm

Mr Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry North West) (Lab): I have very limited time, but it is appropriate to say what a pleasure it is to hear so many maiden speeches in the House, as we have over the past few days. Far too many have been from Opposition Members who are not Labour Members. What we have heard in quality from Labour Members has more than made up for the noticeable lack of quantity. I compliment my new hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), who made a remarkable speech. He brings a fine tradition not just of Labour representation, but of family representation. I am delighted to see family representation both on the Opposition Benches and elsewhere in the Chamber. I should also mention my new hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher), who made her maiden speech yesterday—it, too, was a remarkable speech. I am pleased to compliment her on her joining us in the House.

If I may be very sharp, direct and to the point—I am sure you will appreciate that, Mr Speaker—we are talking about devolution in principle. The worrying thing is that we do not yet have a clear idea what the Government have in mind. If the House will forgive me for saying so, they are adopting the position of the whore through the centuries—the phrase was used to describe the British press about 100 years ago. We do not know what the Government want, yet they will use their huge influence and power over local authorities but take no responsibility for what emerges. The likely outcome is that they will create a bigger muddle than the one they are trying to sort out—a cumulative muddle from successive reform attempts, starting with the right hon. Edward Heath and his Government back in 1970. They issued a diktat for a total strategic reorganisation of local government, which, as some Members may remember, ended in the total muddle that we are living with today.

We need to know why the Government are obsessed with the idea of metro mayors. The Minister did not answer pointed and good questions from my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna). He refused to answer or was incapable of answering the question of what the real position of metro mayor will be. What are their powers? We need a clear description of those powers. We need to know what the alternatives to those powers are.

Coventry is in an invidious position. It is already linked to, and has developed limited strategic arrangements with, Warwickshire, most notably through the local enterprise partnership, which the Government set up by way of an inadequate substitute for Advantage West Midlands, which Opposition Members have regretted many times in the past five years. We nevertheless have

that LEP, but it will be cut in half, because half of its responsibilities are in Warwickshire and half in Coventry. Where does it stand? What are the alternatives? I want to put this directly to the Minister to see whether he can answer. What are the chances of having a Coventry and Warwickshire strategic or combined authority—we can use whatever term we want, but “combined authority” is the most acceptable in Coventry at this stage? Which powers would that authority gain from the Government? Does it need a mayor?

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government must be aware that, barely three years ago, we had referendums in no fewer than 11 cities throughout England and Wales. Only one city—I think it was Bristol—decided in favour of a mayor. In the other cities, most notably in Birmingham and Coventry, the idea was resoundingly rejected by the electorate. Now it has been put to us again, quite insidiously, by the Government. This came out at a meeting that he attended earlier this week with the leaders of the midlands powerhouse, which is how the Government are attempting to describe us.

Manchester has a totally different set of circumstances, and the authorities that are coming together in the northern powerhouse are very different from Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton. Three cities will be included in the new midlands powerhouse, which is another difference. I am prepared to say that the whole idea serves a useful purpose in giving us all a kick up the backside to get on with things. Indeed, that is the message that the Secretary of State brought to the midlands, but nobody knows what we are meant to get on with. I know that the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) is actively promoting in the west midlands the concept of a Coventry-Warwickshire combined authority, which will stand in its own right and will represent 1 million people. What sort of backing can we expect from the Government? What sort of powers are the Government prepared to devolve to the new authority? That question will not go away, and we need an answer before we go any further down the route.

If we go down the route of the combined authority with the other six authorities, which the Secretary of State met during his visit this week, do we have to have a metro mayor? Why is he being so prescriptive about that one aspect? He quite rightly says that we should go with the grain and that we should encourage local governments to come up with their own ideas and find their own solutions. On the other hand, he says that no solution will be acceptable unless it has one critical element, which is the metro mayor. But that idea has already been rejected by the electorate of Birmingham and Coventry. Can the Minister be clear on that? Can the Government step back a bit and get rid of this feeling that they can exercise this huge power and influence and yet not take any responsibility for what emerges? The danger is that we have another top-down reorganisation inflicted on the region, which will create an even bigger mess. Clearly, the Government must come clean on what they are offering.

3.47 pm

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): I should like to thank you, Mr Speaker, for ushering in my first speech so speedily. It is a pleasure to follow the

[Mr Ranil Jayawardena]

hon. Member for Coventry North West (Mr Robinson), who makes his point forcefully, although I am pleased to rise in support of the vision outlined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills in saying that this Government are keen to give more powers back to our shires.

It may strike right hon. and hon. Members as odd that I am making not only my maiden speech but the first maiden speech for my constituency. It is said in the King James Bible that

“for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day”.

Meanwhile, the creation of North East Hampshire out of the ashes of Aldershot, Basingstoke and East Hampshire took the Boundary Commission a little longer—from 1991 until 2007. It was first contested at the 1997 general election on different boundaries and won handsomely by my predecessor, James Arbuthnot, who represented my constituents admirably until he retired. Once described as “a Conservative MP of a species nearing extinction...with a patrician accent redolent of his party some decades ago”,

his contribution to Government and Parliament should silence any critic. Having served as a Whip, Social Security Minister and Defence Minister in government, he was then appointed as Opposition Chief Whip. But it was his service to this House, as Chairman of the Defence Committee, that he told me was the best job he had ever had. He served this House and his constituency with enormous grace, skill and dedication, and it is a privilege to follow in his footsteps.

Indeed, I should like to thank the people of North East Hampshire for giving me the privilege, honour and opportunity to represent them in Parliament with a very strong mandate. North East Hampshire is home for me. I grew up there; I went to school there; and I continue to live there today with my wife and baby daughter.

The constituency includes the wards of Sherborne St John, Bramley and Sherfield, and Pamber and Silchester to the north of Basingstoke. This has been home to people for centuries: the once-animated Roman town of Calleva can be seen today, still part of the peaceful villages that surround it.

The constituency continues east, including the lion's share of Hart district—the wards of Hook, Hartley Wintney and Odiham, and the larger communities of Yateley, Fleet and Church Crookham. North East Hampshire then heads south, around and past Basingstoke into the ward of Upton Grey and the Candovers. Travelling along the highways and byways there, and indeed across the constituency, any visitor will be delighted by astonishingly pretty villages, straight out of a child's story book, complete with thatched cottages, village greens and ponds. One village, Rotherwick, boasts a house where the original bay window was the model for the picture on Quality Street chocolates. This is the original chocolate-box village.

My constituency is home to RAF Odiham. Britain's fleet of Chinooks is based here. Their contribution to the defence of our freedom is hugely valued and respected. Odiham's association with freedom is profound. King John rode from his castle there to Runnymede, where he met the barons to sign Magna Carta. The principles

enshrined in Magna Carta—the primacy of the rule of law, that none shall be taxed without representation and, importantly, the freedom of the English Church—are seen as the first glimmers of human rights. They are the principles that bolstered my desire to enter public service.

The House will be aware that human rights were not conceived in 1998. They have existed for centuries, but they did not exist in a vacuum. Rights were balanced by responsibilities. In this, the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, it is right for us to consider how to balance and thereby strengthen justice in our country. A former Prime Minister once said:

“I am in politics because of the conflict between good and evil, and I believe that in the end good will triumph.”

I am firmly of her opinion.

I want to see the kind of equality before the law that Magna Carta promised, matched by equality in opportunity. Education holds the greatest hope for a life rich in promise. The consequences of its failure are housed in our jails and hospitals. We must always strive to improve education because it is there that we set up children with the ability to look after themselves and their families in later life and, indeed, to contribute to our society and economy.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills said, with hard work, with determination and with energy, we can create a country in which everyone who wants to work can get a job, in which people keep and spend more of their own money and in which people know that they and their families will be safe and free.

North East Hampshire is a great place. Britain is a great country. Our best days lie ahead.

3.52 pm

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): It is pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena). I congratulate him and other colleagues on their excellent maiden speeches. In my brief remarks, I will speak about devolution. May I ask your permission, Mr Speaker, to miss part of the winding-up speeches so that I can attend the special mass for Charles Kennedy and family? I would very much appreciate that and shall come to the Chamber immediately afterwards.

I am delighted that the Government are continuing to pursue the strong devolution agenda that the coalition Government set in place. The coalition finally stopped talking about devolution and actually started to deliver it. I am proud of the Liberal Democrats' role in that, including in devolution—though not as much as we would like—for Leeds and Yorkshire.

It is slightly strange, however, that the Liberal Democrats, having always been the party for devolution, are now listening to the Conservative and Labour parties saying how passionately they support devolution. That is extremely welcome, but it is certainly the opposite of what was pursued during the 18 years of Conservative Government and the 13 years of Labour Government—the two most centralising Governments in British history. I welcome that trend and this new-found passion for devolution that seems to be found across the House. As for what is on offer, I would like the proposals to go further. Indeed, I would like the Liberal Democrats as a party to be far more radical on devolution. I do not think that

our manifesto was sufficiently radical or clear. I strongly urge the two contenders for the party leadership and the wider party to put us back at the forefront of the devolution debate by arguing strongly for real devolution across the whole of the UK and by dealing with the West Lothian question as well as regional devolution.

Devolution is clearly linked to economic growth. The Local Government Association has pointed out that radical reform would help to deliver £11 billion in savings for the taxpayer, generate £80 billion in growth, create 700,000 new jobs and enable us to build half a million new homes, which we clearly need. The thorny issue in Leeds and Yorkshire has been whether we need to have a mayor. As hon. Members have said, that was rejected in Leeds, as it was elsewhere, but we now accept that that is the Government's policy whether we like it or not. Clearly, we want to have devolution. If there is to be a push towards having an elected mayor, my challenge to Ministers and their team—I would warmly welcome positive and proactive discussions with them, with other colleagues in the House and with council colleagues—is this: instead of doing it on the basis of artificial metro areas, why can we not do what is the more obvious thing for our region and do it on the basis of the powerhouse of Yorkshire?

Yorkshire is the real entity. It is Yorkshire that is the brand and that has the huge economic potential for growth. It would be artificial to split the region. I am a very proud Leeds MP and Leeds is a huge economic driver of the country as well as our region but, to echo earlier comments, we need to ensure that devolution works for the rural areas as well as the towns and cities of Yorkshire. Yorkshire's population is identical to that of Scotland and its GDP totals over £100 billion, yet we have nothing like the powers given, rightly, to Scotland and have no ability, bar what councils have, to raise our own taxes and to make transport decisions. We still have to come cap in hand to the Department for Transport to ask for the much needed rail link to Leeds Bradford airport. I will continue to champion that until it happens. We should not have to come cap in hand to the DfT for that. Given the fairly modest cost, we should be able to deliver that ourselves. Similarly, with the rather poorly thought through new generation transport trolley bus scheme, we want the power locally to make bold decisions about 21st century transport solutions. To do that, we need real fiscal autonomy.

I urge Ministers genuinely to look again at the historic county of Yorkshire. The carve-up of Yorkshire is generally regarded as a mistake. Why not reunite Yorkshire and give us the opportunity to have a Yorkshire powerhouse that would fit with the Government's agenda but would also deliver real powerful devolution for one of the biggest and most important economic regions of our country?

3.58 pm

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): May I say what a pleasure it is to follow the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland)? I am a sentimental sort of bloke, and I rather think we need to have the Liberal voice heard in this place. I observe that there is not a single Liberal in what used to be the Lib Dem heartland of the south-west, but I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has been returned and I look forward to his contributions in the months and years ahead.

It is a particular pleasure to follow the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena), who spoke exceptionally well. He is the new James Arbuthnot, which are very big shoes to fill.

We have spoken a lot today about the northern powerhouse. We need also to speak about the west country powerhouse. I confess my interest as a rural rustic from the south-west. I note that in recent years the Government have invested heavily in infrastructure in my part of the world, and I look forward to their continuing to do so. I am thinking in particular of the upgrading of the A303, which is vital for prosperity in the west country, and of investment in superfast broadband, which is clearly necessary for the rural businesses that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills is particularly keen to promote.

While considering the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill, we should be a little careful. I know that it would not be the Government's intention to disadvantage the shire counties in any way, but it is vital that we get the balance right and do not inadvertently disinvest in rural parts of our country because of our understandable enthusiasm for investing in our great cities.

We have heard today about local enterprise partnerships and regional development agencies. In my part of the world, the transformation following the introduction of LEPs and the abolition of RDAs has been huge.

We have to admire the Opposition's nerve in tabling an amendment attacking the Government's record on housing; never was there a better opportunity for a political party to draw a discreet veil. In supporting the aspiration for low-cost housing laid out in the Queen's Speech, I make a plea for the integrity of the core planning process that lies at the heart of the Localism Act 2011. In Warminster, which I represent, residents feel with good cause that they are being taken for a ride; the Minister for Housing and Planning knows that very well, as I have been to see him about the issue recently. I do not want public money or my constituents' time to be wasted on core strategies that turn out to be worthless. I do want the right housing to be in the right place with the right level of supporting infrastructure.

The late Charles Kennedy suggested that this Parliament would be about two Unions: the United Kingdom and the European Union. I very much welcome the inclusion of the European Union Referendum Bill in the Queen's Speech, and I look forward to its Second Reading next week. Devolution and subsidiarity must mean removing powers from Brussels as well.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is an operator. I am sure he will return from Europe like Moses from Mount Sinai, with a prospectus that I can recommend to my constituents. They would expect a British exception that will exclude the UK from ever closer union, which has only one destination: union. They will expect parity of esteem among EU currencies and the reaffirmation of the trading and commercial deal that my constituents, their parents and grandparents thought that they were signing up to in 1975.

My constituency has a heavy defence interest. I declare my own interest as an ex-regular and current reservist. I welcome with due trepidation the inclusion of the strategic defence and security review in the Gracious Speech.

[Dr Andrew Murrison]

During the general election campaign, many of my constituents expressed puzzlement at the fact that we have committed to statute the OECD 0.7% of GDP development target without having committed to NATO's 2% defence target, notwithstanding the progress made last year at Celtic Manor. They are also puzzled at the licence given to our unequal partners who enjoy NATO's fully comprehensive cover while paying a third-party premium.

There can be no development without economic prosperity, and there will be no prosperity without security. The engineers of that security—Britain's soldiers, sailors and airmen—are a distinct force for good in a troubled world. Despite the progress made by the coalition Government, the link between outcome and input in Britain's international development effort since 1997 has been far less clearcut. If a country's military deploys to a country whose inhabitants pose little direct threat, it operates in a space between altruism and enlightened self-interest. Britain's military contribution to making the world a better and safer place must be properly referenced in the upcoming SDSR and in our development returns.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): I agree entirely with my hon. Friend about the issue of aid versus defence. Does he share my concern about recent remarks from General Odierno, the head of the US army, and the US Secretary of Defence, Ash Carter, who are very concerned about Britain's refusal to commit to 2% of GDP on defence?

Dr Murrison: We of course need to listen very carefully to our biggest and closest ally. Since the continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent is now contained within the Ministry of Defence budget, we need to be particularly mindful of the fact that the room for manoeuvre is limited. My hon. Friend and I both welcome the commitment to maintaining headcount, which is important to my constituents and to the security of our country. That, however, means there is very little room for manoeuvre on other cost drivers in defence, which is very much a concern for our American allies.

I welcome the intention in the Queen's Speech to improve GP access, which was definitely an issue on the doorstep throughout the election period. So much general practice is actually social care, and in my constituency, I see the consequences of two systems running in parallel, not in series. That political failure is hugely wasteful and demands fresh thinking on how we pay for and provide care for an ageing demographic.

I welcome the Queen's Speech, which sets a powerful programme for Government, and I look forward to supporting it in the months and years ahead.

4.5 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), and, indeed, so many excellent maiden speeches from Members on both sides of the House. From listening to them, I am confident that the 2015 intake of MPs will add much to the experience, wit and verve of this Chamber.

I am proud to say that the north-east overwhelmingly returned Labour MPs in the general election. Unfortunately, the rest of the country did not see fit to follow suit. [HON. MEMBERS: "London!"] Apart from London, yes. As a consequence, rather than the English devolution Bill that Labour had promised, we are now debating measures to crack down on trade unions and human rights, and the abolition of the Human Rights Act, which will hardly build up the north-east's economic competitiveness. It is not enough simply to repeat the talk about the northern powerhouse when the Tory party actively dismantled the northern powerhouse we had in the 1980s. The Prime Minister may try to rebrand the Tory party as that of the working people, but we remember it as the party of putting people out of work.

I congratulate the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, who is not in his place, on his elevation. I hope that he will prove to be a Secretary of State who works with councils, rather than against them. As I am an optimist, I urge Ministers to consider a fair and long-term funding settlement in the north. During the last Parliament, we lost disproportionately: £650 million was effectively transferred from the north of England to the south, and the cut in spending in Newcastle was £266 per person, compared with £130 per person on average nationally. Ministers must not hamper devolution by crippling councils with further unsustainable reductions in spending power. It is not only that money was moved south; despite the rhetoric, power and budgets were brought back to Whitehall in the past five years. Now that the Government clearly have no mandate in the north-east, we demand the powers we need to build the kind of economy that matches our aspiration and our values.

The Minister for Security (Mr John Hayes): I am most grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way to me, in the absence of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. In the spirit that she normally adopts in our affairs, I know that she will want to welcome the Government's work on city deals, including in the north of England—the now Secretary of State championed them—and, indeed, the innovative work in Manchester. Surely that is something to welcome.

Chi Onwurah: I normally enjoy the right hon. Gentleman's interventions, but I must say, in a spirit of as much graciousness as I can summon, that he is entirely on the wrong track. Such matters as have been devolved have not really made a difference. Particularly when it comes to Newcastle and north-east, which I shall talk about, there have been words, but not substance. We want substance, and we want real powers.

For example, why are decisions about the regional growth fund taken in SW1, not in the north-east? Why should we depend on civil servants in London to put the north-east's £500 million of European funding to work properly? Why can we not take control of that ourselves? Why is the Work programme run out of the Department for Work and Pensions, when local programmes like Newcastle Futures are much more successful in getting youngsters and the long-term unemployed into work? Why can we not have our own housing investment fund to deliver on the plans that have been set out by our combined authority? Why can the north-east not run its

own buses, as London does? Why can we not have an integrated transport system? Why does the Minister for Security, who used to have a skills brief, think that London knows better than the north-east what kind of skills we need to build an economy that matches our values and aspirations?

Scotland is to be given more powers as part of the referendum settlement. It will compete with the north-east for every investment, every tourism trip, every pound of foreign investment and every new job. However, while Scotland will blow its own trumpet, we have to rely on Whitehall to blow ours. Less than 10% of inward investment inquiries from firms that are interested in locating in Newcastle come from UK Trade & Investment. That is just not good enough.

The Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill, which will receive its Second Reading in the House of Lords on Monday, is supposed to devolve powers to large cities that choose to have mayors, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) said. Newcastle was one of the nine out of 10 cities that chose to reject an elected mayor. Is it the Government's intention to free the north-east at the cost of a top-down reorganisation of local government? I believe that we need to improve the accountability and transparency of combined authorities like the North East Combined Authority, but I hope that Ministers will work with our local authorities to come up with something that we can agree on, rather than impose something.

In conclusion, the north-east has so much to contribute to the economy. It has consistently had a balance of payments surplus and, I should add, is the only region in the country to have one. We are home to many emerging innovative, green and digital industries; we have world-class universities; and we have a passion for making and building things. We have a passion to build the economy of the future. Yet our region was neglected by the previous Government and is being neglected by this Government. Now is the time for the north to take control of our destiny with the powers that we need to build our economy in a way that reflects our values. That must not come with strings attached or with more centrally imposed vicious cuts to local services. That is what we need and that is what I will fight for in this Parliament.

4.12 pm

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to make my maiden speech as the new Member of Parliament for Aldridge-Brownhills in today's debate, having listened to some eloquent maiden speeches this afternoon.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Sir Richard Shepherd, who represented Aldridge-Brownhills with a great sense of duty and purpose, and who from day one was a strong and independent voice. Never one to shy away from a controversial debate, Sir Richard may be remembered by some Members in this House as a Maastricht rebel back in the 1990s. In holding true to his views on the European Union, he remained fearless. He was the last remaining Member of Parliament to have voted against Maastricht before he stepped down this year—a fact that I am sure he will forgive me for saying may bring comfort to some and sadness to others.

Either way, his principled stance is to be celebrated. His record in defence of whistleblowers and his fight for a more transparent and accountable Government and for freedom of information must also be applauded.

Sir Richard stood firmly as the champion for his constituents and the wider public. He believed that by highlighting flaws and irregularities, we may work towards improvement. Courage, vigour and dedication defined Sir Richard's 36 years of service. His record of service is an inspiration to me as I look humbly to follow in those great footsteps.

Aldridge-Brownhills is a wonderful and very special constituency. It sits between Cannock Chase to the north, Birmingham to the south, Sutton Coldfield to the east and Walsall to the west, and it is crossed by that great Roman road, Watling Street. It is also a very warm and a very welcoming place.

Aldridge itself is an award-winning Village in Bloom, which we are very proud of. It is also the birthplace of Charles Bonner, better known locally as Gus, who was awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery in the first world war. The Bonner memorial, which was unveiled earlier this year, is a fine reminder to us all of those brave men and women who serve our country.

Aldridge can also lay claim to sporting achievements. One of the first British Tour de France cyclists, Charles Holland, was from Aldridge, and in more recent times our golden postbox, celebrating Olympic gold medallist Ellie Simmonds, has inspired a new generation. In Brownhills, we have our mining heritage and Jack "Jigger" Taylor, our local landmark, keeps the light shining on local history, which we must never forget.

Forgive me, because this is a somewhat whistle-stop tour around my constituency for my hon. Friends today. There are many gems I wish to mention, but alas I have little time. However, Rushall, Shelfield, High Heath, Pelsall, Streetly and Walsall Wood, as well as our much-loved green spaces and commons, are all part of the patchwork that makes up my constituency, and each one is equally important. Each community has an identity, and a uniqueness to recognise and celebrate. There is the Canalside festival of Brownhills, Rushall's May fair and a wealth of community organisations, such as the Pelsall community centre, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. Run by the community and for the community, these events and groups, and many others, are fine examples of the spirit of our area.

As a believer in the power of communities, I know that as we seek to celebrate the past, we must also look to secure the future. In the same way, in Aldridge-Brownhills echoes of the industrial spirit and heritage that built modern-day Britain survive alongside many new industries, including established businesses such as Whitehouse Cox and Castings, and of course we should not forget the many newer businesses that together form the backbone of our local economy.

I wanted to make my maiden speech today during the debate on the Queen's Speech because I am committed to supporting enterprise, entrepreneurship and the creation of jobs. I want to see education, skills and business drive our economy. I want to see more support for apprenticeships, and encouragement for aspiration. From my own experience, I know the challenges of taking that first step and going it alone in the business world.

[Wendy Morton]

Start-up businesses need a framework that supports, not hinders; that works to reduce red tape and Government bureaucracy; that backs enterprise initiatives and apprenticeship schemes; and above all a Government that truly back business. That is why I am pleased to read that the enterprise Bill includes measures to reduce regulation on small businesses, so that they can create jobs.

My passion for social action and community action, and my belief in hard work, enterprise and opportunity for all, remain my drivers. If we truly want communities to lead communities, and businesses to flourish, we must continue to support them. Above all, like my predecessor, I am dedicated to serving my constituents—the communities and the people of Aldridge-Brownhills.

4.18 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me to give my maiden speech today. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) and I congratulate her on her maiden speech. I also add my sincere condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Charles Kennedy, a truly compassionate and decent man.

I am proud to have been elected to serve as the MP for Dulwich and West Norwood, the area that has been my home for almost 20 years. Dulwich and West Norwood is a wonderful constituency south of the river, encompassing parts of Brixton, Camberwell and Crystal Palace, Dulwich, Herne Hill and West Norwood. It is a diverse constituency in every respect; a microcosm of London. And it is a place of firsts: the first public art gallery in England, Dulwich Picture Gallery; the first London teaching hospital, King's College hospital; and the home to the first large Caribbean community to settle in London, the Windrush generation. We are a community formed and sustained by our diversity and I will always celebrate the contribution that people from many different parts of the world make to my constituency.

It is a great pleasure to be able to pay tribute to my predecessor, Dame Tessa Jowell. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Tessa was elected as MP for Dulwich in 1992 and for the new Dulwich and West Norwood constituency in 1997. Tessa was a fantastic constituency MP and I know she is much-loved in this place, as she is in Dulwich and West Norwood. She was an MP who delivered for her constituents, transforming education and healthcare in Dulwich and West Norwood with four new secondary schools and the rebuilding of King's College hospital. She has delivered for the country throughout her distinguished ministerial career, setting up Sure Start and, of course, bringing the 2012 Olympics to London.

At the heart of both Tessa's politics and mine is the belief that, while working tirelessly to represent everyone, we have a particular responsibility to address disadvantage, especially for children born into poverty. In a society that can be very unequal and where people can easily be divided, we need our community organisations and public services to be the glue that binds us together. I wish Tessa every success in her bid to become Mayor of London. She is just what London needs.

Today, I want to speak about one of the most significant issues facing residents in my constituency: housing. The average cost of a flat in Lambeth and Southwark is £450,000. There are 20,000 people on the waiting lists for a council home in each of those boroughs, while the Government spent more than £10 million in my constituency last year on housing benefit for working households renting privately. Many who live in parts of my constituency where young families could previously afford to settle are deeply worried that this is not a future that their children or grandchildren can look forward to. In recent weeks, I met a family of six, with both parents working and the oldest children studying for exams, living in a two-bedroom privately rented flat; an NHS nurse sleeping with her new-born baby on her grandmother's sofa; and a cancer patient evicted from her privately rented home by a landlord who simply wanted to increase the rent. Resolving the housing crisis needs a big vision and a comprehensive approach.

After a significant worsening of the housing crisis under the previous Government, I am dismayed that the Gracious Speech offers so few solutions. The central proposal is to extend the right to buy to housing association tenants. I support fully the aspiration for home ownership, but as someone who, running a small business, has worked as a town planner with communities across the country for the past 18 years, I know that there are better ways to achieve it. Extending the right to buy will: deliver home ownership for relatively few, while limiting the aspiration of a decent home for many more; reduce the prospect of getting an affordable home to rent for those who are on council waiting lists; reduce the ability of housing associations to deliver new homes; and place further pressures on an already overheated private rented sector.

I am proud to have been a member of Southwark council, which has a bold and ambitious programme to build 11,000 new homes. The proposal to fund the extension of the right to buy to housing associations from the sale of council homes would, quite simply, decimate this programme and force the sale of Southwark's new homes before they have even been let to the first tenant.

We have a crisis. We need political leadership and a fully formed plan to address it, not a piecemeal approach that looks at only one aspect of the housing sector. We need short-term measures, especially in London, to regulate the private rented sector. We need every local authority in London, irrespective of political colour, to make a full commitment to delivering new genuinely affordable homes and to be held to account for doing so. We need new ways for the public and private sectors to work together to deliver homes across a range of different tenure types, including shared ownership and rent to buy. We need to hold developers to account for building out the planning permissions they hold. We need a plan for engaging and involving communities in this process. Homebuilding must deliver better outcomes for everyone, including existing residents.

I will work tirelessly with and on behalf of my constituents and with our local councils to address the housing crisis in Dulwich and West Norwood, and I call upon the Government to support us in this endeavour.

4.24 pm

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): It falls to me to lower the tone, after the pleasure of listening to two excellent maiden speeches, from my hon. Friend the

Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) and the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes). They both paid admirable tribute to their predecessors. Sir Richard Shepherd was an old friend of many of us and was well regarded and much loved across this House. Dame Tessa Jowell was somebody I knew and worked with in London politics for a long time. I wish Sir Richard well in his retirement; I wish Dame Tessa well in most of her retirement, which I hope will be a suitably restful one. They both deserve it, and I am delighted to welcome their successors to the House. They both bring great experience, from the voluntary sector and business in my hon. Friend's case and from local government in the hon. Lady's case. I know that they will be of great value. I ought to say to the hon. Lady that Chislehurst now brands itself as the new Dulwich. With the development of local plans, if she could simply source me a picture gallery, we will be well away.

At all events, I very much welcome the content of the Queen's Speech, particularly the measures for devolution, which give me an opportunity to say the final thing I wanted to say by way of welcome, which is to the new Communities and Local Government ministerial team, most of whom, at any rate, are on the Front Bench, and to the Secretary of State in absentia. I know every one of them to be committed localists and people who understand local government. Many of them have a direct track record in local government and are taking on what I promise them from experience is a very worthwhile job indeed. I wish them well. The Secretary of State was a great colleague when I was in government and he will be a great friend to local government, because he is a genuine and committed localiser.

I would not want this opportunity to pass without making a reference to the Secretary of State's predecessor. My right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr Pickles) was a transformational Secretary of State, who started on the work of localism and devolution, under difficult financial circumstances, and put in place the initial, critical building blocks that we can now take forward, with proposals such as the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill and the housing Bill. I very much welcome the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill. It is logical that if we are looking to have devolution within the constituent parts of the United Kingdom it must be balanced with proper devolution to the English local authorities, which are potentially great drivers of growth, wealth and social enterprise in our country.

I welcome what is in the Bill. I would gently say that I hope that that, too, is a starting point, because not only must we have the sort of legislative devolution to the major cities and the combined authorities that we have seen; we must also have real fiscal devolution. I am sorry that the Opposition have been so churlish about metro mayors and combined authorities. I was a sceptic about having a Mayor of London, but at the end of the day, it has delivered in a very diverse and varied city, and if it is good enough for Toulouse, Berlin, Frankfurt, New York and Chicago, there is no reason why it should not be good enough for the great cities of this country. What we need to do though—I think this is recognised by other hon. Members who have spoken—is to ensure that we can find a light means of devolving real fiscal power down to our shire counties as well, because there has to be a proper balance.

I very much hope, therefore, that when we reform the business rates, which has also been part of our party's manifesto, we can look at moving to a complete devolution of business rates to local authorities. The Mayor of London set up the London Finance Commission, which gave very cogent arguments about why property taxation was the obvious first step for straightforward devolution to local government. Business rates, stamp duty land tax and so on are areas that I hope we will look at. That is important, because it is not healthy in the long term if local government is overly dependent on the centre for grant. Those areas can reflect the varying housing and other property markets of particular localities. They can create a direct link with the role of local government as, increasingly, a driver of enterprise and growth, so there could be a direct and sensible reward from that devolution.

The other important point, which I touched on in my intervention on the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, is that such growth of revenue streams to local government could enable a greater degree of prudential borrowing and the further development of tax-increment financing to deliver major infrastructure projects without local authorities always having to go cap in hand to the Treasury. It would also boost what we are already seeing—although it is perhaps not sufficiently reported—which is a valuable extension of the municipal bond market. All those are important areas that we can take forward in this Parliament.

Finally, let me say a few words about the planning system, because delivering housing is partly about resource, but it is also about making sure that the system works well. We made significant improvements, and the Secretary of State was at the forefront of them, but there is more that can be done, so if I may I shall make a final plea. The one area that we have not yet reformed in the area of planning and land law is the compensation and compulsory purchase regime. That is now archaic; it is well out of date. It is a major piece of work, but it would greatly speed up the delivery of both homes and much needed infrastructure. I hope that, in the course of this Parliament, we can make that a priority, too.

It has been a pleasure to welcome all those Members who have made their maiden speeches today. I look forward to working with honourable colleagues in the coming days of the Parliament.

4.30 pm

Dr Alasdair McDonnell (Belfast South) (SDLP): I welcome the opportunity to make a small contribution to today's Queen's Speech debate on the topic of devolution and growth. I would like to put the emphasis on the growth.

We heard in the Queen's Speech that there will be renewed focus on the Stormont House agreement, which we very much welcome. The SDLP, along with four other Northern Ireland parties, had useful meetings with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Irish Foreign Affairs Minister Charlie Flanagan yesterday afternoon. In that regard, we are all well aware of the current very difficult issues Northern Ireland is facing, particularly over the vexed issue of welfare reform. We are fully aware that other regions share the problem, but we believe that it will have a particularly harsh and devastating effect on those with disabilities, the vulnerable and those in the margins of our society.

[Dr Alasdair McDonnell]

For the benefit of the House, I would like to remove any doubt and reaffirm that the SDLP will continue to engage with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the four other main parties in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government on all the challenges and issues linked to, and flowing from, the Stormont House agreement. We support devolution, and we constantly work to make Northern Ireland work within that devolution framework. The SDLP will continue to build on the strong elements of that Stormont House agreement and to improve the elements that are weak. That was our pledge when the agreement was made at Christmas on the conclusion of the talks, and it is our pledge today. We have remained true to that promise and will continue to propose progressive amendments and improvements to the current package of welfare reform in ways that we feel will best protect the vulnerable in Northern Ireland society.

The issue of welfare reform opens up a much wider debate on the current perilous, vulnerable and unsustainable economic state in which Northern Ireland survives. The need is for a radical economic agenda to address that problem. For me and my party, this is a problem that will not solve itself.

We are told that we in Northern Ireland generate tax revenues somewhere in the region of £14 billion a year, and we are said to consume almost £24 billion in public services. That is a deficit of £10 billion a year in subventions, and it is a deficit covered in part by the block grant and other subventions through the Barnett formula. We need that subvention, but we must also create some ambition and some parallel aspiration and hope for a better economic future for our children and our grandchildren.

My comments should not be taken in any way as accepting automatic reductions to the block grant or cuts, which can be avoided. Rather, I am advocating that something extra is needed—some sort of economic booster—if we are to achieve the decent economic balance that we deserve and hope for.

For many people, the situation is fiscally unsustainable, because the deficit is growing while the revenues remain flat. It is politically unsustainable, because the dynamic of political elements and developments here at Westminster are moving against us. It is socially unsustainable, because it does not encourage real political responsibility to counter the ever-present risk of social unrest in the streets. It is a problem, in short, that we all have to address. It first has to be honestly recognised and acknowledged.

Sammy Wilson: I hear all the hon. Gentleman's fine words, but does he accept that the action that his party took, along with Sinn Féin, in blocking the Stormont House agreement has led to an increased deficit in the Northern Ireland budget this year? There is a hole of £600 million in the budget, which we must try to finance in the remaining nine months of the year.

Dr McDonnell: The hon. Gentleman has missed the thrust of what I am trying to say. There is an economic problem in Northern Ireland. We had a peace process, and a political process that flowed from it. The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that there was to be a peace dividend, which never quite arrived. We need to

find ways and means of establishing that dividend. It is not enough to have welfare reforms without jobs for people to go to.

We must recognise the problem, and acknowledge that a problem exists. If we do not acknowledge that a problem exists, how can we tackle it? It is impossible to tackle a problem if we do not clearly understand its size and severity. We need a new consensus between the two sovereign Governments—the British and Irish Governments—all the parties in Northern Ireland, the business community and society at large on a meaningful programme for economic development. If that does not happen, we will end up with instability. We need everyone on board. In fact, in some respects we need a re-engineering of our whole economic outlook.

Our problem is compounded by the fact that only about 37% of the revenue produced in Northern Ireland is generated by what might be described as the private sector. Everything else is generated, in one way or another, by Government spending, and most people agree that that is not a sustainable position. The proportions are astounding. Almost the exact reverse of what is happening in Northern Ireland is happening in the Irish Republic, a few miles away. We are subsidised, and we have subsidy politics—which means that we have politics without much ambition, without much social development, and without much economics. We want a future, and our people want a future. They want a sustainable future for their children. That is why we in the SDLP are proposing a social transformation, perhaps on a par with the peace process—it could be described as a prosperity process—which will create a normal, sustainable economy.

This is not just about rebalancing the economy; it is about transforming the economy. Everyone pays lip service to the idea of transforming as well as rebalancing the economy. The Prime Minister himself paid a great deal of attention to it before the last election, but even he had to admit that it would take a generation to sort it out. Since then, little meaningful has happened except the cuts. A more balanced economy is something that cannot be wished into existence. It will not happen by accident, and it will not happen magically. We cannot make sense of cutting corporation tax and cutting higher education and training places at the same time. We cannot solve the problem by firing public sector workers. In fact, the problem is not in the public sector at all.

4.38 pm

Byron Davies (Gower) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech during this particularly important part of the debate on the Gracious Speech. I shall return to the issue of devolution in the United Kingdom shortly.

I pay tribute to all the Members who have made their maiden speeches this week. Let me also say that it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Belfast South (Dr McDonnell).

Today is my wedding anniversary, and I forgot to send a card. I do hope that this will make up for it.

The Gower constituency was first contested in 1885, following a Boundary Commission review that year, and was won by none other than a Liberal, Mr Frank Yeo, who served as its representative until 1906, when Mr John Williams became Gower's very first Labour

Member of Parliament. Gower remained a Labour seat from 1906 until May 2015, when, I am delighted to say, the electorate of Gower voted for a change. I am extremely proud and honoured to be here as their representative, and as Gower's very first Conservative Member of Parliament. I am the first since it was formed in 1885 and after 109 years of continuous Labour representation.

I am doubly proud of my election to this House as my constituents' representative, as I was raised in Port Eynon on the southern side of the Gower peninsula and educated in the constituency. What is more, we have three brand new Members from Wales, all called Davies—but I am assured that we are not related. So you can now travel the length and breadth of Wales and be represented by a Davies.

Returning to the history of the constituency, I should like to touch on notable Labour former Members. In 1922, Mr David Rhys Grenfell was elected Member of Parliament. Prior to his election, he worked as a coal miner until the age of 35. Eventually, in 1951, he was appointed a Privy Counsellor and acted as Father of the House of Commons between 1953 and 1959. There are those in Gower who can still recall his being a representative, although I am not one of them.

More recently, from 1997 Martin Caton served as Labour Member of Parliament for Gower, and I should like to pay tribute to Mr Caton for his 18 years of very professional service to this House. Martin Caton, in the brief dealings I have had with him in recent years, can be described as a quiet and perhaps somewhat reserved person, but he served his constituency with great distinction and is widely referred to by those who called on his services as a particularly good constituency MP. He was anything but reserved when pursuing issues for his constituents, and many people have told me of his tenacious approach to authority when addressing their individual problems. In Parliament he chaired many Committees, and prior to entering the House he served the people of Swansea as a county councillor. I am delighted to say he is now one of my constituents.

The constituency of Gower combines the magnificent beauty of the peninsula and the powerful local communities of north Swansea. The peninsula, designated in 1956 for its classic limestone coast and the variety of its natural habitats, was the first area of outstanding natural beauty in the UK. Rich and diverse, Gower's scenery ranges from the northern dunes of Llangennith and Broughton, through to the salt marsh also in the north and the dramatic limestone cliffs along the south coast. From Mumbles to Worm's Head, it is inter-cut by sandy beaches, and I am often to be found there walking my Labrador.

Inland the hills of Cefn Bryn and Rhossili Down dominate the landscape of traditional small fields, wooded valleys and open commons, and I pay tribute to the farmers of Gower, who have maintained the land and secured the peninsula's lasting beauty. The award-winning beaches, the dramatic coastline, the rolling downs and the traditional villages make this area one of the greatest tourist attractions in Europe.

Devolution has brought about many changes, particularly the creation of a National Assembly for Wales, of which I was a Member prior to being elected to this House. The burning question for me has always been, "What added value does devolved government bring to the people of Wales?" It certainly brings decision making

closer to the people—a principle that I passionately believe in. But on the doorstep it was clear this time around that there is much discontent after 16 years of devolution in Wales.

There are, however, some aspects of central Government which I believe cannot and should never be considered for devolution. I refer in particular to policing, despite calls from the other end of the M4. I shall not dwell on the issue, but I speak as a former Metropolitan police officer and National Crime Squad officer of 32 years, several of which were spent working in the shifting political sands of eastern Europe. I believe that maintaining a unified and cohesive approach to policing is crucial in the current world of terrorist and organised criminal activity which we find ourselves living in. It is an area that I will pay particular attention to during my time in this House.

Finally, let me say how much I am looking forward to representing Gower's constituents in Parliament; tackling their problems; representing their views; challenging and scrutinising Governments at all levels, both in Westminster and in Wales, particularly with reference to the issues I have raised; and challenging the inadequacies of those charged with providing essential everyday services to the people of Wales. Enhancing the quality of life for the people of Gower is what I am about, and I am very honoured to serve in this House in order to achieve that.

4.44 pm

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I pay tribute to the hon. Members for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena) for South Suffolk (James Cartledge), for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) and for Gower (Byron Davies) for their maiden speeches. They were confident, and they will play a full part in this House in due course. I also very much welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), who made a very strong maiden speech and supported the position that I would take on the steel industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), in particular, has made a confident start in this Chamber.

I have fought seven elections in my constituency and have now been returned for the sixth time, so I pay tribute to my constituents for their continuing support in what was a Conservative seat but is now—and has been for six elections—a Labour seat. That is important, because I love this place. I love its traditions, its work, its ability to hold the Government to account and the fact that we can change people's lives and make a difference. I am worried, however, that one particular aspect of the Gracious Speech—the proposal for English votes for English laws—will change the nature of the House of Commons dramatically. It will change it for our colleagues from Scotland—where, with 56 of the 59 MPs, the Scottish National party has, I admit, won a mandate—but it will also change the nature of the mandate we hold in this House as a whole. We will now have to have pre-qualification to speak on issues that matter to our constituents, including those in Scotland.

It does not matter whether I have a majority of 27, like the hon. Member for Gower, or of 34,000, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth). Before I speak in this Chamber, nobody asks me what

[Mr David Hanson]

my majority is, how long I have served, which region of the United Kingdom I come from or whether I have been a Minister—which I have been—or whether I have been or want to be a Committee Chair or something else in the House. What gives me validity to speak in this House is the votes of people in north Wales and your calling me from the Chair, Mr Speaker. This Gracious Speech will change that situation dramatically.

This matters to me because I represent a constituency in north-east Wales. If the tide is out in my constituency, I am able to walk to England and the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders). That is how close we are. Constituents of mine work at Vauxhall in Ellesmere Port and receive business support grants from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. I have constituents who were born in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Chris Matheson), whom I am very pleased to see in his place. My constituents use rail services in Crewe, where HS2 is extremely important, and work in the fire service, the health service and as teachers in England. However, under the proposals, the Government will decide, in a committee, through a change of Standing Orders—not even through legislation—whether I, as a Welsh MP, will be able to contribute on those issues that matter to my constituents. That is important because I feel strongly about a range of issues.

Ian C. Lucas: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. Yesterday I heard that the main road from Chester to my constituency of Wrexham will be closed for 55 hours this weekend. Will the Government's proposals prevent me from holding to account Transport Ministers for that decision?

Mr Hanson: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. I want clarity from the Government about what English votes for English laws means, because, in a border constituency such as mine, things that happen in England matter to my constituents. They work there, use services there and travel there, and their constituency is part of the United Kingdom Parliament. What happens in—dare I say it?—Scotland matters considerably to my constituency. The current funding settlement for local government in England, as well as spending on culture and transport there, matters to my constituents in Wales, because we have the Barnett formula. Yet, because of English votes for English laws, I might not be able to participate fully, as an equal Member of this House, in certain debates. That is important.

There are real problems and challenges. Devolved Administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own mandates. I understand the need to ensure that people in England cannot have a say on some of those issues, but I ask the Government to consider our election proposal for a constitutional convention to narrow down the issues and to get consensus and focus. The real concern is that, from the Conservative and Unionist party, we are driving our way forward to an increased nationalist, independent, inward-looking agenda. What would have happened to the many Members of Parliament representing constituencies in Wales or in

Scotland who have served as leaders of their parties, and who in the past have led the United Kingdom and have sat in the Cabinet as Prime Ministers—for example, James Callaghan in Cardiff South East, Lloyd George in Carnarvon, Andrew Bonar Law in Glasgow Central, Gordon Brown in Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, or Winston Churchill in Dundee? Are the Government saying those that Members of Parliament, elected on equal terms to every Member in this Chamber today, cannot contribute as Prime Minister in this Chamber on such issues—because they represent constituencies in Scotland or Wales, for instance, they could not answer questions on the health service in England?

This is about driving forward an agenda to divide, not to build public services. I say to the Government: please think this through, and please look at the definition of these issues, because they matter. Currently, all Members of this Parliament speak as equal Members, regardless of majority, region, experience and whatever they bring to this House. If this Government plan goes forward, we will not speak as equal Members. If the SNP wishes not to take part in debates, it is part of its democratic mandate not to do so, but if its Members are forced not to take part, this Conservative and Unionist party will be pushing Scotland—and Wales—to further independence, and it will do so over my vote and over my voice.

4.51 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I would like to add my welcome to my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Byron Davies). He made an excellent speech and brings a lot to this Chamber, and I look forward to hearing his future contributions.

I, too, welcome the Department for Communities and Local Government team to its place and in particular the Secretary of State, whose Parliamentary Private Secretary I once was, and whose localist tendencies I fully share.

I want to concentrate on the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill and ask what localism looks like under a majority Conservative Government. The last Government established that the Conservative party was localist to its fingertips, and it is appropriate to ask that question now in the context of that Bill.

It is a shame that in the last Parliament we called what was essentially a planning Bill the Localism Bill. It achieved the planning things, but we have taken the localism agenda much further over the past few years, and the Secretary of State has been responsible for many of the city deals. I also remind the House of what his predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles), said:

“Localism should go hand in hand with greater transparency, local accountability and robust democratic scrutiny.”—[*Official Report*, 26 March 2015; Vol. 594, c. 166WS.]

Those things are very important and while we can talk about the transfer of Whitehall powers to cities, we also need to remember that in rural areas the lowest common denominator for the transfer of those powers is individual neighbourhoods, and of course neighbourhood planning is only now being fully recognised on the ground as ever more communities take on the responsibilities of deciding where the housing should go, what it should look like and what open green spaces should be preserved.

The importance of this in the context of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill is in looking at the structures of local government that we need, to show how powers can be devolved down—or transferred across—to the lowest level, not just to upper-tier authorities. That needs to be part of the analysis in every Government policy and we need to keep that emphasis on democratic accountability throughout.

The starting point of this Bill is a recognition that the old model of running everything from Whitehall is not working, and that we need to liberate our cities and, crucially, free up our rural areas in a way that reflects their needs and is appropriate to them. I will give an example of that. Devolving powers that cities need is crucial, particularly in respect of integrating the NHS and social care, but this is also necessary for rural areas. We have some move towards that in Oxfordshire, where the county council shares some of its senior staff with the clinical commissioning group. That integration is crucial in the town of Henley, where at its Townlands hospital the CCG is trying to replace the traditional hospital model with one of greater social care at home, taking away hospital beds on the strength of promises on what social care in the home can deliver. I fail to see why it is necessary to have an elected mayor to achieve that, when instead we might think about what would be appropriate for that local community to have.

Localism is not just about devolving powers; it is also about democratic accountability and devolving responsibilities, so we need to look at the issue again. We cannot go back to a system of central control from Whitehall of anything, including of housing numbers. Equally, we cannot move back to a system where the town hall or a quango takes up control of where that housing should go—the same applies to growth. I suspect that the model being proposed will be taken up by cities, but its application to rural areas needs to be worked on a little more, because the problems there are just as acute, if not more so, and there is a need to get governance right.

On growth, we need to ensure that we see the LEPs for what they really are and what they can do. It is no secret that I have a fractured relationship with my LEP, which has practically never come to my constituency, despite requests to do so. We should ensure that we are not creating a back-door way of establishing faceless quangos, which were so loved by Labour, or of giving them, God forbid, unaccountable planning powers by taking powers from district councils. LEPs are there to show that business can help in delivery, and we can use them as a resource.

In conclusion, I emphasise the need to foster apprenticeship schemes and to ensure that the relationships with good trainers are right. We need to ensure that the schools are focused on apprenticeships, not just as an academic alternative, but as a real alternative to the sort of education that we have come to expect.

4.57 pm

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I am most grateful to the House and to you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech in this Gracious Speech debate, which has important implications for my constituency, in which I live and which it is the greatest honour of my life to represent. The Redcar constituency

lies at the mouth of the River Tees, where the North sea brings its cargo from around the world and ships queue to bring their goods to the third largest port in the UK. From the port, steel forged in the blast furnaces of Redcar has sailed forth to build the world. In 1924, Dorman Long won the contract to build the Sydney harbour bridge. Since then, the Birmingham Bullring, Heathrow Terminal 5, Canary Wharf and the new Wembley stadium have all been built by Teesside steel. Steel from our beam mills will also be building the Freedom Tower in New York on the site of the World Trade Centre. Just around the corner from this place, Lambeth bridge was built by Redcar steel in 1932.

The steelworks are the beating heart of my constituency. When the blast furnace was threatened with closure in 2010, local people came together to take up the fight for its future and to save the steelworks from permanent closure by finding a buyer in SSI. I want to take a moment to thank SSI and to mention the role of the Community union and its members, particularly one individual, Geoff Waterfield, who it could be said gave his life to the struggle for Redcar steelworks. His legacy is a strong future for steel on Teesside, with the plant now in profit, having reopened in April 2012.

The industrial economy of Redcar constituency is also powered by Wilton International, a world-class manufacturing and chemical processing site. The complex provides employment for approximately 8,000 people and is one of the largest research and development facilities in Europe. The site has huge potential to drive our local economy and create jobs. When I organised a jobs fair with the local council and businesses earlier this year, 774 people came through the doors in one day, looking for construction work on the site. It is vital that the opportunities on industrial sites such as this one are accessible to our fantastic local workforce, and that decent pay and nationally agreed terms and conditions are not undercut by recruitment from overseas.

As we continue the debate this afternoon on devolution and growth across the UK, I remind this Conservative Government, whose Prime Minister does not seem to know his Tees from his Tyne, that we already have a northern powerhouse in this country—it is called Teesside. I will do my bit in the House to put us once more at the beating heart of the UK's industrial economy.

The impetus for the development of the proud industrial communities of Grangetown, Eston and South Bank was the discovery of ironstone in the Eston hills in 1840, and the subsequent development of the iron and steel industry along the river banks. These industrial communities are proud and resilient. South Bank has a rich history. It was once home of what could be the oldest football club in the north-east, for whom the great Wilf Mannion once played. It now heralds a lively and diverse community. The residents of Eston have a fantastic record in the Britain in Bloom flower contest. In Grangetown, the youth and community centre provides hope and aspiration for young people from the most deprived backgrounds.

Of course, the Redcar constituency is not just an industrial powerhouse. Redcar is a lively seaside town, with miles of golden sanded beaches, donkey rides, amusement arcades, a boating lake, our fabulous racecourse, the world's oldest-surviving lifeboat, kitesurfing championships, the love-it-or-hate-it Redcar Beacon, and of course the finest lemon tops in the world.

[Anna Turley]

Just down the coast is the lovely village of Marske, with its quaint fishing boats. It was once home to Captain W. E. Johns, the author of the Biggles books, who was based at Marske during the first world war, when the Royal Flying Corps had a landing strip there. We also have the historic communities of Dormanstown, Coatham, Kirkleatham, Normanby, Yearby and Ormesby, all with unique histories and identities, whom I am deeply humbled to represent and serve.

I am looking forward to working with Labour-controlled Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, for the benefit of the vulnerable, and for the economic and social development of our communities. Those communities, which built Britain's industrial glory around the world, are still struggling from the destruction and decline that the last majority Conservative Government unleashed. The coalition Government were little better. The bedroom tax has scarred street upon street with rows of empty properties in those communities, driving people out of family homes in which they had brought up their children or lost loved ones.

The much feted economic success has not reached the streets of many of my communities. A quarter of children live in poverty, and unemployment is more than double the national average. My priority will be to bring much needed employment to those areas, particularly for our young people, who deserve the very best opportunities to get on. However, they must be decent and secure jobs. Too often, people have told me on their doorsteps that they are struggling to get by on zero-hours contracts, low pay, and insecure and part-time work.

It is at this point that I want to mention one of my predecessors, as is conventional in a maiden speech. In 1925, Ellen Wilkinson—"Red Ellen"—Member of Parliament for Middlesbrough East, as the constituency was then called, said:

"If only the Minister would realise the battle of a man's self-respect when he is insulted at every works gate when he tries to get some evidence to prove that he is genuinely seeking work! What legacy are we piling up for the future of these men who have tried, and who at every turn are met with some Clause or some way of forcing them down still lower."—[*Official Report*, 31 July 1925; Vol. 187, c. 860.]

Those battles continue. With zero-hours contracts, we are back to the days of people turning up at the gates hoping for work, only now they sit at home the night before waiting for a text message. Others lose their financial support despite genuinely seeking work. Today's sanction traps are Ellen's clauses, forcing people down still lower. Our fight continues.

I pay tribute to others whom I am honoured to follow. Ian Swales made a big contribution both to the constituents of Redcar as a diligent and hard-working constituency MP, and in the House, most notably in his role on the Public Accounts Committee, where he led the corporate tax avoidance hearings involving Starbucks, Amazon and Google.

I thank the people of every corner of my constituency who put their faith so decisively in me to stand up and fight for them in this place. I sincerely hope I can repay that faith. I hope I can make the people of Redcar as proud of me as I am of them.

5.4 pm

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), who made a superb maiden speech. We have a connection—our interest in steel. Tata Steel is located just outside my constituency, and I started my career as an office boy at British Steel many years ago, back in the 1980s. Perhaps she and I will share a future interest in ensuring that the costs of producing steel in this country are brought down. That will require all parties to think about the policies they introduced that increased the costs of energy for large manufacturers, such as steel companies, because of misplaced concerns about climate change.

I wish the company that the hon. Lady mentioned all the very best in building further extensions to airports across the United Kingdom. We desperately need more airports in the United Kingdom. Air travel is vital for Britain's future as a global economy. I do not know whether the extension will be to Heathrow, Stansted, Gatwick or somewhere else, but I very much hope that it will happen somewhere and that the decision comes soon.

During this debate, I have felt some connection with members of the Scottish National party, because I, too, have been on the losing side of a referendum on the future of our nation on no fewer than two occasions. In my case, I was opposing the Welsh Assembly and then opposing further powers for the Welsh Assembly. I suspect that, at some point in the near future, I may well be opposing further attacks on Wales, which is quite a catchy phrase for a campaign that I would be happy to front up if there is a referendum on tax-raising powers for the Welsh Assembly.

Each time I have lost, I have decided that the best thing to do is simply to accept the will of the public and get on with the job at hand. That is why in 1999 I was proud to be one of the first Members of the Welsh Assembly—the only Conservative at the time elected to a constituency. Since then, I have been proud of the way in which the Conservatives, while not embracing the Assembly, have decided that we have a duty to work with it and to do the best for our constituents. We have quite rightly highlighted the problems over the health service in Wales, where we have longer waiting lists, longer ambulance response times, less access to cancer drugs and less funding than constituents in England have.

We have quite rightly taken up the issue of education. It is a disgrace that Wales has the lowest PISA—programme for international student assessment—results in the whole of the United Kingdom and that there is no sign of improvement. I welcome the fact that Labour Education Ministers have recognised that fact. If anyone wants to google "education apology", they will read that, a year or so ago, Labour's own Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis, issued an apology on the front pages of the *Western Mail* for his own colleagues' lamentable failure to drive up education standards in Wales.

We have worked constructively over the need to improve transport links with Wales, and we will want to work constructively with the Economic Development Minister in the Welsh Assembly to support a new M4 relief road, which is vital for people in my constituency. We also want to have discussions with Ministers in the Welsh

Assembly and in this Government about the future of the Severn bridge. I was absolutely delighted to hear the announcement that the bridge will be nationalised—yes, as a pragmatist, I support nationalisation on occasion.

Nationalising the Severn bridge will mean that VAT is no longer payable, owing to some obscure EU regulation that I do not have the time to go into at the moment. The Government could be even more generous. The costs of maintaining the bridge could be covered by tolls of only about one third of what they currently are. The Government may want to look at some sort of decrease in those tolls as that would drive forward economic growth in Wales, leading to even more people paying more taxes.

May I assure the hon. Member for Redcar that we want to see everyone across the country having access to good, well-paid jobs? That is why we delivered 1.9 million extra jobs over the past five years, and our commitment in that regard will continue as before.

A number of Members have expressed concern about the issue of English votes for English laws. As someone who is proud to be a Welsh-speaking Welshman and who has served Welsh politics for 16 years, I say that I absolutely support the principle of English votes for English laws and believe that there is a strong Unionist case for doing so. Members of the Opposition talked about people working in one country and living in another, and using the health service on different sides of the border. I raised those issues 16 years ago. There are many constituents of my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) who have to use the health service in Wales, but are unable to raise their concerns about it with their local Member of Parliament. There is a strong argument for saying that MPs across both sides of the border should be able to raise issues with the Health Minister in the Welsh Assembly. If someone would care to come up with a plan to do so, that would be good, but the problem is that we have a Parliament for Scotland, an Assembly for Wales and nothing at all for England.

The arguments for an Assembly for Wales and a Parliament in Scotland were intended to keep the genie of nationalism in the box. I would therefore take that argument and say that, if we want to keep the genie of English nationalism in the box, we have to recognise that English voters have exactly the same right to have exactly the same say over issues that affect them as people in Wales and Scotland do. That is why, as a Welshman, a Unionist and a Conservative, I fully support my Front-Bench colleagues' drive for English votes for English laws and look forward to seeing the details shortly.

5.10 pm

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I congratulate new hon. Members to this House from both sides of the Chamber on making such distinguished maiden speeches today, particularly my hon. Friend the new Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), who made a passionate speech about her constituency and the relevance of steel, where there is a bond between us: steel from Redcar was used to build the Bullring in my city of Birmingham. While talking about Birmingham, I thank the people of Birmingham, Northfield for electing me for a sixth successive time, despite quite unprecedented financial amounts being spent by the Conservative party

in trying to secure a different result. Not only did Labour win the parliamentary seat, but we won a council seat in that constituency off the Conservatives at the same time, so things did not go quite according to their plan.

It is good to see the new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in his place. He will know that those of us who have argued for devolution to the regions and sub-regions of England for many years will be pleased that this is now becoming mainstream thinking across the Chamber. It is good to see that the Chancellor was in the west midlands just this week, and I certainly welcome the progress that is being made towards a combined authority in that area, but I want to make three points to Ministers in the time that I have available today.

First, if devolution is to work in England, it must involve a shift of power, not simply a shift of responsibility. I ask the Secretary of State and his colleagues to take seriously what my right hon. Friend the acting Leader of the Opposition said in her initial response to the Gracious Speech, when she said that no one empowers local authorities by impoverishing them. That is an important point, but we need to identify new local funding streams. Again, I ask the Government to pay serious regard to the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) about identifying those new funding streams and, in particular, looking at revenue raising as well as revenue devolution.

Secondly, if devolution is to stimulate growth in the way we want and make a real difference to people's lives, a one-size-fits-all approach is not good enough. A good argument is being made for elected mayors in many areas, but what is right for one metropolitan area is not necessarily right for another, let alone for non-metropolitan areas. Often travel-to-work areas and economic activity clusters and so on do not fit neatly into political boundaries. That is why, if devolution is to work, the Government need to listen to ideas coming up from below as well as putting their preferred solutions down from on high.

Thirdly, the challenge of devolution within regions, sub-regions or cities is as important as devolution to those regions, sub-regions or cities. We all know that the politics of identity is important in all our areas. It is an issue in my part of Birmingham. I represent a constituency on the edge of Birmingham, where people often feel on the edge of decision making in their city as well as on the edge of decision making nationally.

My constituency is the worst low-pay blackspot in the country. We have the highest number of people paid less than the living wage of £7.85 an hour: more than 50% of working people, reaching up to 63.1% of women in the area. Long-term unemployment remains a real issue in my constituency. People sometimes say that that is the kind of environment that drains aspiration, but as a local teacher told me recently, it is not that people do not aspire to have the best for their children; the point is often that people do not have the expectation that things will change for them and their families. If devolution is to work, it must offer the prospect of that real change. It does mean that, in education, listening to what is needed in local areas will be important; we should not simply get one-size-fits-all academisation or free schools. We need to look at school funding streams for areas, particularly white working class areas, where extreme

[Richard Burden]

deprivation exists alongside relative affluence. The pupil premium, even though it does good things in some areas, does not necessarily meet the needs in those areas.

We also need to look at what the barriers to skills development are that lie behind some of the low-pay statistics in Northfield that I quoted earlier. Simply quoting statistics about how many apprenticeships have been created does not address those problems. It is about adult skills, too. Just before the election, the Government announced a massive cut in the adult skills budget. Turning that around will also be important if we are to turn around the life chances of people in my area.

What I am saying is that the test for the Government is to listen. The test for any new combined authority in my area will be to listen. Unless devolution reaches out to people who feel on the edge of our country, our regions or cities, we will not transform the life chances that they deserve to have transformed and devolution will not achieve what it says in theory.

5.16 pm

Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) and to stand up as the Member for Cardiff North. As a Welsh Member, it is especially appropriate for me to contribute to the section in the Queen's Speech debate on devolution and growth across Britain. I pay tribute to my predecessors, first and foremost to Jonathan Evans, from whom I took over. Those are big shoes to fill. I am sure everyone in the House will recall that Jonathan represented not just one constituency for one term, but two constituencies for two terms and did great service in the European Parliament, having led our group.

I also pay tribute to Julie Morgan, who was on the Labour Benches but was a fantastic constituency Member for a number of years. I will continue to work with her because she is now the Assembly Member for Cardiff North. I also pay tribute to Gwilym Jones, who has been a great friend of mine and a great Member of Parliament and Minister. All three of them are still very much involved in public life and will have roles to play in Cardiff North and in public life in general, especially Jonathan, who is committed to public service and I have no doubt will pop up in different ways over many years to come.

Cardiff North is a great constituency. Today I have heard in many maiden speeches how great each constituency is, but Cardiff North is especially great. I am now its advocate, and it is a constituency that I would like to sell to Members over the next four minutes. It ranges from Whitchurch high street and the great folly at Castell Coch at Tongwynlais, to Rhiwbina and across to Old St Mellons and the reservoirs of Lisvane and Llanishen. Sadly, Llanishen reservoir is still empty, but I hope over the next five years to switch on the tap and refill it. We also have some great businesses. GE Healthcare has a terrific research and development and manufacturing facility in my constituency. That is world-leading research in Wales.

What do I want to achieve in the next five years? My primary ambition, and something I will work incredibly hard to achieve as a member of the Government and with the Secretary of State for Wales and other members of the Government, is the city deal for Cardiff. I wanted to mention that especially in the debate on devolution and growth. The city deal is connected to both those. It is about empowering local communities and delivering that growth for Cardiff.

I pay tribute to the work already being done on the ground both by the Secretary of State and other Ministers and by the Cardiff Business Council, ably led by Mr Nigel Roberts. He is already delivering on the ground for Cardiff and for the region. I look forward to working with that body to deliver what I see as the Cardiff bay corporation version 2. Lord Heseltine delivered that for Cardiff and really put us on the map. To steal the great selling point of Cardiff Business Council, I should say that Cardiff is the closest European capital city to London. We are going to capture that spirit and really deliver.

I started my first week as the new Member of Parliament for Cardiff North in a style that I want to continue: I visited The Pineapple pub in Llandaff North. I had a chat with Julie, the landlady. We talked about a subject very pertinent to this debate: trying to protect the pub's skittle alley, which is due to be knocked down to make way for development. If the pub was located in England, we could apply to get the alley registered as a community asset under the Localism Act 2011. Sadly, under devolution, the Welsh Assembly was not minded to sign up to the 2011 Act. There are great opportunities from devolution, but I will be shining a light on areas where I think it is failing my constituents and the people of Wales.

Anyone who has seen the new Welsh Conservative intake will notice a theme: the name Davies. I did what I could to reassure myself that nobody would ask me to change my surname; I am a Williams and I stand out. I did a bit of research—I thought, "What can back me up here?" I want to talk briefly about Oliver Cromwell, who in the 1500s resided in Llanishen in Cardiff North. The family's surname was originally Williams, but they changed it while in Cardiff. Historians have two theories about that. One is that they wanted to ingratiate themselves with Thomas Cromwell, who in 1535 was appointed Visitor-General of the Monasteries; the other is that the King said that he wished it so. Nobody has wished it so for me to change my name to Davies yet, which I am terribly relieved about. It is good to see that Cardiff North has such distinction going back many years.

In conclusion, I should say that it is a huge privilege to be the hon. Member for Cardiff North, and I do not take it lightly. I look forward to working with the Government for the next five years as a governing party Member. I am conscious that, although I secured 42% of the voting electorate's support, there is a bit of work to do to convince the remainder that I am a powerful voice and a strong advocate for Cardiff North. I shall seek their support again in five years' time.

5.22 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Craig Williams) on his election and an excellent maiden speech. I also congratulate the hon. Members for Redcar

(Anna Turley) and for Gower (Byron Davies) on their maiden speeches; I should say to the hon. Member for Gower that although his speech was exceedingly good, I am not sure that it will compensate for the anniversary card—if I were him, I would still go and get it.

I should like briefly to add my sincere condolences on the death of Charles Kennedy—a man of incredible principle, passion and humour. He will be hugely missed by us all.

Like many other hon. Members, I had hoped that the outcome of the general election would be rather different and that there might now be some sort of progressive alliance against austerity. Instead of that more positive outcome, the Gracious Speech hammers home the harsh reality: we are faced with another five years of cruel and counter-productive Conservative cuts. My party will continue to oppose those cuts on the grounds that the Government's austerity agenda is not only socially destructive but economically misguided. If we are serious about the theme for today's debate—growth across Britain—continued austerity is not the way to achieve it.

To counter the chief of the austerity myths, I say again that the cause of the deficit was not and is not spending on schools, hospitals, public services and social security, but the result of a global financial crisis. The evidence is clear: averaged over its first six years in office, between 1997 and 2002, Labour kept the budget in balance. Between 2003 and 2007, the deficit rose at 3.2% of GDP a year, which was still perfectly manageable. More importantly, the rise in deficit over those years was not due to increased welfare spending; social spending as a proportion of GDP was more or less constant at about 9.5% of GDP a year. It is a crying shame that those facts are not being heard more loudly and effectively. That has allowed the Government to reframe an international financial crisis as one of public spending and to offer up the idea of cuts as a solution.

Government investment can cut public debt much faster in the long run if that investment is directed towards infrastructure, R and D and other areas that stabilise the economy, raise revenues and lower social spending. Let me briefly outline three areas where that investment should be directed.

First, we need to drive down energy bills for every family in Britain permanently. That should be done with a programme to insulate every home in Britain to energy performance certificate band C by 2035. According to a report by Cambridge Econometrics, it would cost £2.3 billion a year in public expenditure, stimulate £3.7 billion a year in private investment and pay for itself through tax revenues by 2024. In addition, it would significantly reduce the cost of cold homes to the NHS, which currently stands at £1.3 billion a year. More than 100,000 net jobs would be created over the decade from 2020 to 2030, and every household in Britain would be protected from the volatility of global fuel prices by a significant reduction in the need to purchase gas.

Secondly, given the enthusiasm for decentralisation and community empowerment in at least parts of the Gracious Speech, the Government should recognise and act on the huge potential for locally owned energy, with has benefits such as lower energy prices, new jobs and skills. One problem is that energy market rules currently make it impossible for community groups to sell the wind, solar and hydro that they generate directly

to nearby homes. If they could do so, it would give the sector an enormous boost and really help to reduce fuel prices further. I hope that the Communities Secretary, who was a great advocate of decentralised energy in the past, will work with his equivalent in the Department of Energy and Climate Change to make that happen.

Thirdly, the housing crisis in Brighton, Pavilion is acute. Average house prices in the city increased by nearly 10% last year, nearly double the average increase for England and Wales. A mass social and council house building programme is essential, but, yet again, the Government have got everything back to front: 95% of Government expenditure on housing is on subsidising rents, and just 5% on building more homes. We need to put that the other way round, and the best way to get housing benefit bills down is to pay a living wage in the first place. Those are the kinds of housing policies that we needed in the Gracious Speech, not the widely criticised pre-election bribe to extend the right to buy to housing association properties, which will only further deplete our decimated social housing stock.

Finally, the low-carbon, resource-efficient economy that we need cannot be built only from the top down; there must also be a powerful drive from the bottom up. That can be built only in our cities and regions: they must be granted more freedom from central control to innovate and experiment. I strongly believe that the Greater Brighton city region should be given far more powers, including the power to determine how that investment can best be spent locally. Crucially, we must also be aware that the Government need to devolve not just powers, but, significantly, budgets and revenue-raising powers. We cannot allow the decentralisation agenda simply to be a Trojan horse for the Government successfully to outsource a cuts agenda to local authorities. Yes, powers must be devolved, but the budgets must be devolved with them and, crucially, the powers to innovate financially. For example, why cannot we have a whole programme of issuing local bonds to enable investment in the kind of infrastructure that our cities need so much?

I am afraid that this Gracious Speech was very disappointing, but Members on the Opposition Benches will still be fighting to make it a lot better.

5.28 pm

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con): I congratulate all new Members from both sides of the House on their excellent maiden speeches. I am obviously far too young to understand what my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) was talking about when he mentioned something called "Lovejoy". To get in my own plug, people in Calder Valley refer to me as the MP for the Happy Valley after the excellent show written by Sally Wainwright—filmed in the Calder Valley and called "Happy Valley"—series 3 of which will air later this year.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in this debate on devolution and growth across Britain. We all know and have experienced decisions made at grass-roots level, and devolution does make absolute sense. Who better to take decisions than those very professionals who make and deliver our services at first hand? In the recent referendum on Scotland, we saw at first hand the passion and interest that people have in their own regions and countries. It is only right in a

[Craig Whittaker]

civilised society that people have a real say in what is important to them and an opportunity to shape the long-term decision-making process in their area—local voices with local accountability.

In respect of the northern powerhouse and, more specifically, the Yorkshire powerhouse, people tell me all the time that they want more of a say in determining their own future. After all, why should Scotland have a say on its future when Yorkshire is denied the same opportunity? Our economy is similar to Scotland's, our population is similar in size to Scotland's and our county is as beautiful as Scotland, but, of course, Yorkshire is a better place to live than Scotland.

The fabulous Calder Valley not only contributes to the northern powerhouse, but plays a significant role in the northern powerhouse, as do many areas of Yorkshire. More than 19% of my constituents work in manufacturing and Calder Valley manufacturers punch above their weight with exports. The figures are outstanding. A further 22% of my constituents work in the financial services sector and contribute greatly to that massive national sector, which puts billions of pounds per annum into the tax coffers of the nation and pays for vital services like the NHS and education.

Devolution would allow great areas around the UK to make their own decisions and determine their own priorities, but there are also fears. We need to ensure that there is good governance around great swathes of power, and that centrally distributed funds are spent wisely and with accountability. There must be a system of governance that is open, honest and transparent, and models that are designed to be accountable. More specifically, it must be possible for people to be held to account. The elected mayoral system proposed by the Chancellor seems to be a step forward both in governance and accountability, but we have to be careful not to do things just as a knee-jerk reaction to public opinion of the day. Let us not forget that only a little over a decade ago, the people of the north-east rejected the notion of a regional assembly via the ballot box. Let us not make the same mistake and introduce a system by stealth under the guise of a quango.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Will the Minister explain to my constituents—who, in a referendum just three years ago, rejected the idea of an elected mayor—why the Government feel it is right to impose that model on our area and many other cities?

Craig Whittaker: I do not believe for one minute that it is being imposed. As the hon. Lady knows, because her constituents rejected that model, they do not have the mayoral system.

People want the devolution of power, decision-making processes and money, but they do not want enlarged government and the further expense involved. Governance and accountability—yes; more government—no.

Then there is the question of the Union. While the intention of devolution is to give decision-making powers to local areas and countries, we must ensure that we do not unintentionally undermine the Union. We are better and stronger together as a Union, so I would like to see an overarching plan to ensure that we make the Union stronger, not weaker—a long-term devolution plan.

Has the Secretary of State considered the endgame of a federalist United Kingdom, where the national Government cover certain areas and individual nations or regions cover other areas, where everyone knows and understands their areas of responsibility, and where people know exactly who is responsible for what and can hold those who are entrusted with responsibilities to account?

There are several models of federalism around the world, including in great nations such as Australia, where I grew up, Canada and the United States, to name just a few. Each has the same basic model, and some are even based on the traditional governance of Westminster. What is important is that there are clearly defined areas of responsibility. Those great nations often fall out in lumps because they cannot decide who has each area of responsibility. We have a great opportunity to start with a blank piece of paper and learn the lessons from those great ex-colonies around the world. When it comes to the EU, we balk at the word “federalism”, but we need to have a debate on the merits of federalism within the UK. Can the Secretary of State confirm that we have a long-term devolution plan and not just an ad hoc version that takes us down into the dark abyss of no return?

On the whole, though, the outlook for areas such as the northern powerhouse is great. Our Government have already started the process, with transport moneys, health responsibilities and school responsibilities. We have seen a commitment to expanding rail capacity with High Speed 2, and the great announcement on High Speed 3 to connect Hull to Liverpool via Manchester and Leeds. We have seen investment in renewable energy in the Humber, plans for electrification of the trans-Pennine rail routes and widening of the trans-Pennine motor routes, to name just a few projects.

All these developments contribute to making the huge cogs and gears of the massive northern powerhouse not just fire up but run in top gear. It is a powerhouse that has been held back by the shackles of decades of under-investment. The tools that we need are in the form of devolution. Do not give us the fish; give us the fishing rods to fish. Give us a plan—a proper plan—so that we can not only contribute to the UK economy but be an equal part of it.

5.35 pm

Jo Cox (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker; it is a great privilege to be called to make my maiden speech in this most important of debates, and I congratulate many others who have made outstanding maiden speeches today.

I am sure that many right hon. and hon. Members will claim that their constituencies consist of two halves or numerous parochial parts; I am another in that respect, and Batley and Spen is very much that kind of constituency. It is a joy to represent such a diverse community.

Batley and Spen is a gathering of typically independent, no-nonsense and proud Yorkshire towns and villages. Our communities have been deeply enhanced by immigration, be it of Irish Catholics across the constituency or of Muslims from Gujarat in India or from Pakistan, principally from Kashmir. While we celebrate our diversity, what

surprises me time and time again as I travel around the constituency is that we are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us.

My constituency is also home to Fox's Biscuits and Lion Confectionery, so I am sure you will not think it an indulgence, Mr Speaker, if I describe Batley and Spen as a constituency with an industrial heart wrapped in a very rich and pleasant Yorkshire landscape—geographical, historical and cultural.

The spirit of non-conformity is as prevalent now in my part of west Yorkshire as it was in the time of my two immediate predecessors, Mike Wood and Elizabeth Peacock. They were both known for offering their own brand of independent, non-conformist service, albeit in very different ways. I intend to maintain that established tradition in my own unique style.

Of course, Batley is a town that has sent Labour MPs to this place for the best part of a hundred years. One of them, Dr Broughton, is of course famously credited with bringing down a Government, so I respectfully put the right hon. Members on the Front Bench opposite on notice. The Spen valley has a far more chequered political history, alternately sending Labour and Conservative MPs here to Westminster for much of the 20th century. Nothing made me prouder on 8 May than to be sent to this place with an increased Labour majority, proving again that in my neck of the woods non-conformity is what we do best.

As I have already alluded to, we make things in Batley and Spen; we do so now, just as we did historically. Batley and Spen has a high proportion of people working in manufacturing, and we can boast the full range of industries, including high-skilled, precision engineering. We manufacture all sorts, from beds to biscuits, and from carpets to lathes. We also have some of the best fish and chips in the country, and some of the best curries in the world.

However, what many of our businesses are lacking is confidence: confidence to expand; confidence to borrow; confidence to grow; and the confidence to fuel a real economic recovery that benefits everybody, offering decent jobs, paying decent wages and bridging the skills gap. Key to changing that situation is a fundamental shift in attitude towards regional economic regeneration. It is time to give city and county regions the powers and resources they need to promote growth, and I will happily work with all of those who are genuinely committed to building an economic powerhouse in the north. This agenda has to have at its centre a commitment to connect towns and villages in constituencies like mine to thriving city hubs, and to deliver a financial offer in the forthcoming July Budget that gives this worthy goal a real chance of success. Yorkshire folk are not fools: talk about devolving power to cities and regions, while simultaneously stripping them of the resources to deliver and subjecting northern councils such as Kirklees to the harshest of cuts, is not compatible with a worthy commitment to building a northern powerhouse to drive growth and prosperity.

Businesses in my constituency want help to address the skills mismatch at local level which leaves employers with staff shortages and young people without jobs. They want access to reliable sources of finance, including a network of local banks. They want to connect to a regional infrastructure that works for them, not rail price hikes of more than 126% and endless delays to key

transport projects such as the electrification of the line from Manchester to Leeds. Many businesses in Yorkshire want the security and stability of Britain's continued membership of the European Union, a cause I look forward to championing passionately in this place and elsewhere.

The key question is: will the Government's actions match their northern powerhouse rhetoric? HS2 is not the only acid test. There are two bigger challenges. First, will the Government really devolve all the powers and decisions that could and should be taken locally and regionally? My test will be this: if there is a compelling reason for this to be a national decision then so be it; if not, it should be devolved. Secondly, will the Government really take the whole range of their decisions—on transport, research and development, planning, education and skills—in the interests of rebalancing the economy and growing the north?

I am Batley and Spen born and bred, and I could not be prouder of that. I am proud that I was made in Yorkshire and I am proud of the things we make in Yorkshire. Britain should be proud of that, too. I look forward to representing the great people of Batley and Spen here over the next five years.

5.41 pm

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): It is an absolute pleasure to follow the hon. Member for the great constituency of Batley and Spen (Jo Cox). I spent many a happy night out there in something called the Frontier club. I do not know if it is still going—and that misspent youth is perhaps a conversation for somewhere else. In the Evans household Friday night is fish and chips night, or, as my kids call it, chippy tea night.

I am absolutely delighted to speak in support of the Gracious Speech and the measures to promote growth in my constituency, in particular those in the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill. Growing up on a council estate, the value of a job is not lost on me. A job is not just nine to five, a cheque at the end of the month or a statistic on a press release. A job is so much more than that: a job provides a sense of identity and worth, fostering self-confidence and nurturing God-given talents. The moral case put forward by the Government in striving for full employment is every bit as strong as the economic case and every bit as important.

Apart from a short spell of stacking shelves in my local Co-op, prior to joining this House I spent my entire adult employment life in manufacturing and industry. We have seen a real renaissance in the past five years, stimulated and encouraged by the Government's vision for a northern powerhouse, for rebalancing our economy and for putting the north—specifically in my case, Weaver Vale in the heart of Cheshire—back at the heart of Britain's economic engine room. Analysis by the Treasury has shown that realising the ambition to rebalance the UK economy would be worth an additional £44 billion in real terms to the northern economy—or £1,600 per person. The northern powerhouse will be underpinned by a fast and efficient transport system operating hand-in-hand with the roll-out of superfast broadband and matched with investment from the private sector.

The northern hub rail plan is key to a fast, efficient and effective transport system. The northern hub will improve dramatically connectivity between northern

[Graham Evans]

cities such as Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and Sheffield. It will make life considerably easier for huge numbers of commuters across the region, improving the rail network and easing road congestion—the hon. Member for Batley and Spen will know all about the M62 and getting over the Pennines. Such improvements do not just make our cities more attractive places to do business and encourage external investment; they help to improve the quality of life for many of our constituents.

Lilian Greenwood: I am listening with interest to the hon. Gentleman's comments about investment in transport in the north. Is he not concerned that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Jo Cox) said, rail fares in the north of England have been hiked, in some cases by as much as 162%, and that electrification of the TransPennine Express is delayed into the 2020s?

Graham Evans: I am very concerned about the cost and the amount of time it takes my constituents in Weaver Vale to get into Manchester and Liverpool. For example, it can take as long to commute to Manchester on the line from Chester as it did when the Victorians built it 150 years ago. We have to invest in those lines and in the rolling stock and the stations.

Last year, work began on the Mersey gateway project. For those who do not know what it is, it is a project that will deliver a magnificent new six-lane bridge over the Mersey estuary, linking Runcorn and Widnes. It also connects the M56 with the deep-water port in the great port of Liverpool and will generate an estimated £62 million in added value to the area by 2030, as well as providing much needed relief from the congestion on the ageing Silver Jubilee bridge, making life a bit easier for the constituents of Weaver Vale and Halton. The fact that the project is now under way is a testament to this Government's commitment to Runcorn, Cheshire and Weaver Vale and to the north-west region as a whole.

Further to that, owing to the £10 million upgrade announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor last year, the Halton curve is now going to be reinstated. The scheme has a clear, positive business case and would reinstate and re-signal a section of railway between Frodsham and Runcorn, allowing trains to travel from Frodsham, Helsby and Halton to Liverpool and John Lennon airport, as well as into Chester and onwards to north Wales, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) mentioned earlier. To link those projects we need the modern, high-speed line that High Speed 2 will deliver. The benefits of HS2 go far beyond the new line itself. I know I have said this over many years, but it is vital to remember that it will also free up capacity on existing commuter lines, bringing about an improved service for millions of commuters. It will also free up capacity for rail freight, which will help to facilitate the rebalancing of our economy away from the City of London and financial services, towards more northern manufacturing bases, now flourishing under this Government.

As for attracting private sector funding, the regional growth fund has seen phenomenal success in attracting investment into SMEs and job-creating initiatives. For every £1 invested in the regional growth fund, the private sector has matched it with a further £5.50, with investments

in manufacturing topping over £1.1 billion. Over the next two years, the fund is being expanded further still, potentially unlocking a further £1.5 billion of private sector investment in job-creating projects. That is why unemployment in Weaver Vale has been reduced by 60% in the last five years. On top of that, enterprise zones, such as Sci-Tech Daresbury in my constituency, have been central to the success of this Government's economic reforms and led the way in reshaping and rebalancing the economy. Sci-Tech Daresbury works with great universities such as Liverpool, Manchester and Lancaster. Alongside SMEs, IBM will be signing a new contract to work with the Science and Technology Facilities Council, which can only mean good news for future jobs, growth and wealth creation.

Finally, let me say that, collectively, the enterprise zones, capital investment in the Mersey gateway, the northern hub and High Speed 2, as well as the reinstatement of the Halton curve, are all key to encouraging growth throughout Cheshire and the north-west. This is a debate about how we see Britain's future. Britain was once described as the workshop of the world, and I think it can be again. Weaver Vale is that workshop—a great place to live, work, invest and grow a business.

5.49 pm

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Birmingham is a great city, with a great history, at the heart of England. It is the city of Chamberlain—the city that saw the foundation of municipal governance and municipal enterprise; the city of a thousand trades; the workshop of the world. It is a city with great strengths to this day—world-class companies such as Jaguar Land Rover, world-class sectors such as life sciences and world-class universities—but it is a city that has been hard hit. It was hard hit in the 1980s by Thatcher's closures, when half our industrial base went. It is a city that still has high unemployment, and one in which too many are on low wages: about 24,000 are on the minimum wage, and in my Erdington constituency, average earnings are £60 less than the national average. It is a city now suffering the biggest cuts in local government history, with every single household losing £2,000 as a consequence of what this Government did in their first term. But, together with the region, it is a city that is ambitious for the future and determined to transform the west midlands into an economic powerhouse. It is determined also that we will not end up like the Ohio of Britain—a place that people fly over, but never touch down in.

My appeal to the Government is this: England cannot succeed without its heart beats, so that all of England succeeds. It is likewise with Great Britain, as all of Scotland and Wales must succeed.

Labour was the party of devolution—for Scotland, Wales and London. I welcome the more recent conversion of many Conservative Members, although the new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, a man of great integrity, has been a long-standing supporter of this agenda. The Government's approach, however, is still characterised by a poverty of ambition. There is still a reluctance to ensure a settlement for all of England, Scotland and Wales. There is a real danger of dividing our nations, as mentioned in a brilliant speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson).

There is also a fundamental inconsistency. The Secretary of State will remember that when we debated the Localism Bill, I said that the Government were sometimes more Leninist than localist. How can the Government say, “All power to the people” and “Let the people decide”, and then say about the issue of mayors three years on, when people in the west midlands have decided—Birmingham and Coventry did not want mayors—“It does not matter what you have decided. We are going to decide for you, and if you want that radical devolution deal, you will have to embrace what we want, whether or not you want it”? That cannot be right.

There is another key problem about the new settlement: the Government cannot both empower and impoverish. What we have seen, following the general election, is a damascene conversion. What is the mantra now? It is “One nation, working people and compassion”. One nation? How can it be right that every household in Birmingham has lost £2,000, while in Cheshire East, which includes the Chancellor’s constituency, spending power has gone up? How can it be right that the west midlands has seen cuts to our police service twice as severe as those in leafy Surrey?

Still on the notion of one nation, how can it be right that carers and the disabled fear what the announcements might be when the Government finally spell out where they are going to get the £12 billion of benefit cuts at the very same time as this Queen’s Speech includes a Bill on tax that says to millionaires, “You need not worry for the duration while we are in power”? The broadest shoulders should bear the biggest burden, but that is not a characteristic of this Government.

As for the Conservatives being a “party of working people”, it is a party that would rob working families of benefits, rob workers of their rights and attack their trade unions in the world of work. A party of working people? Do not make me laugh! As for being a “party of compassion”, this Government will never be able to call themselves that, so long as the scandal of the bedroom tax remains on the statute book.

In conclusion, I saw the Chancellor today with a cock-sure Cheshire cat grin on his face. To be frank, he is out of touch with the uncertainty of the country, blandly asserting that the long-term economic plan is working. Millions of people are still struggling. There is uncertainty for them and uncertainty for our country now, with the European Union referendum ahead. Is it working? We have the biggest housing crisis in a generation, with home ownership falling and housing benefit bills booming, not least because so many people on low pay and in insecure work are paying high rents and cannot survive without housing benefit. Is it working? We also have a major problem with productivity in this country.

One thing I learned a long time ago in the world of work is that we can never succeed as a low-wage, insecure-employment, bargain-basement economy. What works for companies and countries is a high-wage, high-productivity economy. Ours, therefore, is a very different vision: a vision of a dynamic, devolved Britain where everyone has a chance to get on, where no one is left behind, and where there is true compassion. We are our brothers’ keepers. We will never abandon those obligations, no matter what the Government say or do.

5.55 pm

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): It is a pleasure to be able to speak in the debate, which was opened by a Worcestershire colleague—the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), whom I am delighted to welcome to his new role—and which will be closed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, who visited Worcester during the general election campaign. I thank them both greatly. Disappointingly, the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna), who opened the debate for the Opposition, did not visit Worcester, but he may have got lost while looking for Wichita, which, apparently, he had visited on previous occasions.

I congratulate all Members on both sides of the House who have made maiden speeches. We have heard some excellent speeches from Members who will speak up for their constituencies with great ability in the years to come.

There is much to welcome in the Gracious Speech. As a one nation Conservative who has always been proud to call himself that, I was particularly pleased to note that the phrase “one nation” ran through it. Recently, while reading Douglas Hurd’s biography of Benjamin Disraeli, I was delighted to discover that it was not, in fact, Disraeli who came up with that phrase. He talked about the division between two nations and the need to bring them together, but it was actually a Worcestershire Member of Parliament, Stanley Baldwin, who coined the phrase “one-nation Conservatism”, and I am delighted to be speaking in that tradition.

I was pleased that the very first line of the Gracious Speech referred to the need to bring opportunities to the most disadvantaged, because our party has always been the party of opportunity. The speech was right to focus on making work pay. I particularly welcome legislation that will raise the income tax threshold, and will take many workers on the national minimum wage out of tax altogether. I supported that in a speech that I made three years ago in the Chamber. I remember being heckled by Liberal Democrat Members in front of me who said that I was supporting their policy. I look forward to seeing a Conservative Government deliver that policy, showing that the Conservatives are on the side of working people.

I welcome the ambition to deliver full employment. In that respect, the progress we are seeing in Worcester is a good example to the rest of the country. Before I became an MP in 2010, we had 2,700 people unemployed in Worcester. Since then, unemployment has declined to less than 1,300 today. Youth unemployment in the city has fallen by almost two thirds, and the number of apprenticeships has doubled. However, we need to see a continuing increase in both the number and the quality of apprenticeships. I was pleased that the Gracious Speech included plans to increase their number from 2 million to 3 million in the country as a whole. I have challenged Worcestershire, which last year celebrated hitting its target of 10,000 apprenticeships, to achieve a total of at least 15,000 in the years to come.

The Gracious Speech was right to back small businesses by removing red tape, but we also need to get finance flowing, and to reform business rates. Having served on

[Mr Robin Walker]

the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee during much of the last Parliament, I was keen for our recommendation for root-and-branch reform of business rates to be adopted, and I was pleased to hear what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said about that in his opening speech.

It is right to give more people a chance to work by extending free childcare. It is also right that the Gracious Speech focused on improving productivity, thus addressing one of the points raised by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey). However, it is also right that we consider devolving more power to local communities. Devolution and localism can work. I am an unashamed fan of the concept of Total Place, which means looking at things from the bottom up rather than from the top down. That can be done not through artificial regions, and not only through big cities, but through our counties, which are a key part of England's and of Britain's make-up. My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) has done important work in promoting the right of counties to be treated as part of such deals, and I look forward to seeing how he can work with the ministerial team to deliver that in the years to come.

Worcestershire has never done well when it has been lumped in with a region, and where Birmingham has called all the shots. We missed out during the time of Advantage West Midlands, and we have done much better with our own local enterprise partnership. It was noticeable, even in recent years, that Labour-led Birmingham city council sent officers to object to the south Worcestershire development plan, on the basis—unbelievably—that it created too many jobs in our part of the world. That approach did not endear the Labour party to people in Worcestershire.

To make devolution work across our counties, we need fair funding, and I am delighted that fair funding for schools is a core manifesto commitment of the Conservative party. I look forward to working with the Education team on the delivery of that commitment, but we also need to see fairer funding in health and in local government for our counties and our rural areas. We need infrastructure delivered across the UK—linking not only north and south, but all our great cities, giving them better connectivity to the capital. We need local authorities incentivised to provide affordable housing on brownfield land, and I am delighted that as a result of the election we are going to keep the new homes bonus and Help to Buy, which will continue to make a real difference to my constituents' ability to buy affordable homes in which they can live.

I welcome colleagues from across the UK, and I recognise the need to meet the aspirations of every part of our United Kingdom, but that needs to include England and England's shire counties. We need to restore balance to the Union, and I look forward to supporting English votes for English laws to achieve that. We can go together as one nation under one flag, as a United Kingdom, as we did on the battlefields of Waterloo all those years ago in 1815. The Duke of Wellington described that battle as the “damned...nearest-run thing” he had ever seen in his life. My constituents in Worcester can now apply that epithet to the victory of the Worcester Warriors in the championship, after 160 minutes of

spectacular rugby and by only one point. Worcester is rightly back in the premiership; I look forward to this Gracious Speech taking us into the premier league with our economy.

6.1 pm

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I welcome this commitment in the Queen's Speech:

“To bring different parts of our country together, my Government will...bring about a balanced economic recovery.”

That is, first of all, essential economically, because, if we are to avoid certain parts of the economy overheating while resources lie idle in others, we will need to take that balanced approach. Secondly, as a Unionist, I believe it is essential politically, because nationalist parties in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are good at exploiting economic grievances—or perceived economic grievances. Therefore, it is very important that together we have an economy that is growing.

Unfortunately, the Government's record over the previous five years has not been one of promoting a balanced economy. Yes, there have been successes—we have seen economic growth and an upturn in the economy—but it has not been universal across the United Kingdom. There are still parts where unemployment is high, where there is huge dependency on welfare and where there is still very little economic growth. It will be interesting, therefore, to see how that promise is put into practice.

Devolution is one of the ways it can be done. In Northern Ireland we have been working at coalition government with five parties—which makes the coalition Government here in Westminster look like a love-in, because we have been dealing with people who are, quite frankly, almost impossible to work with. Despite that, with the powers we have had we have kept unemployment in Northern Ireland at this stage of the economic cycle at a level that would not have been experienced in the past. We have promoted the best inward investment of any region in the United Kingdom, and we have built more social and affordable housing, despite the cuts in capital budgets, by using resources and selling assets.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): All that is threatened by the abstentionist policy of Sinn Féin, who do not take their seats here, and by the SDLP, who do. They object to the welfare reform proposals that have been introduced. Does our economic course in Northern Ireland depend on the settlement of that process in Northern Ireland?

Sammy Wilson: It is jeopardised by some actions of the coalition partners, and I want to get a commitment from the Government on that issue.

In my experience over the past five years, when a case has been made for additional powers for devolved government, the Government have responded. We have seen the limited devolution of air passenger duty to the Northern Ireland Executive; the promised devolution of corporation tax, which my hon. Friend says is now being put in jeopardy; the exemption from the carbon price floor because of the structure of our energy market; flexibility over budget spending; and carry-forward powers. All those things have been good, positive ways in which the Government have responded in the past. I look forward to working with them, given the commitment shown in the Queen's Speech.

During the election, we presented our Northern Ireland economic plan. It includes a range of measures, some of which require additional spending, changes in legislation and co-operation between central Government and the devolved Government, but they are all designed to help Northern Ireland reduce its dependency on the public sector, grow the local economy and increase the private sector. I look forward to working with the Government in implementing those plans and testing their commitment to using devolution to promote uniform growth across the United Kingdom.

Although some central Government policies might make sense in the wider UK context, they have a disproportionate impact on parts of the economy that, because of our structural differences, the historical difficulties we have experienced and our geographical disadvantage, are not robust or that are different and therefore require different treatment.

I am interested in the promise in the Gracious Speech to introduce legislation to give effect to the Stormont House agreement in Northern Ireland. It is a very important agreement because it is about not just implementing welfare reform, but devolving corporation tax and giving the Northern Ireland Executive the power to borrow in order to effect structural changes in the public sector. It is also about getting additional funding for infrastructure developments and the ability to pay off previous loans by having flexibility in our spending arrangements.

A lot is at stake with the Stormont House agreement, and yet it has been put in jeopardy by the refusal of the Social Democratic and Labour party and Sinn Féin to implement one important aspect of it, namely welfare reform. Despite the fact that, in an Assembly vote, the vast majority of Members voted to put through the agreement and welfare reform part of it, because of our constitutional arrangements in Northern Ireland and the requirement for a cross-community vote, it has been blocked. As a result, not only have many of the important things that would have been available to the devolved Government been stopped, but we have a hole in this year's budget of more than £600 million—or 6% of the budget—which is fiscally impossible to repair at this time.

If the situation persists, there is one power that the Government must bring back to this House. It will disadvantage the people of Northern Ireland because the concessions will be lost, but we cannot afford for welfare reform to be a blockage to all the other changes. Although we are talking about devolving more powers, if parties persistently refuse to implement the welfare reform package—which I suspect most Members of this House would be jealous of because of the concessions Northern Ireland has been given—I appeal to the Government to take that power back.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. In an attempt to accommodate a greater number of colleagues, I am afraid I have now to reduce the time limit for Back-Bench speeches to five minutes. I am extremely grateful to those colleagues to whom the point has been mentioned and who have accepted it with very good grace.

6.8 pm

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): It is a particular pleasure to follow so many fine maiden speeches today and the contribution of the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson).

The drive for greater devolution of powers from Westminster to the regions is of keen interest to my constituents in Solihull. First, however, in the time-honoured tradition of maiden speeches, I would like briefly to pay respect to my predecessors. Consideration for one's opponents in both defeat and victory is a strong element of our national character and of this place. I may disagree with what others say, but I have no doubt as to their good intentions and their integrity. So it goes for my immediate predecessor, Lorely Burt, who represented Solihull in this place for the past decade. Mrs Burt was a strong champion for Solihull and women in business, and passionate about the rehabilitation of offenders. Mrs Burt took Solihull in a shock result in 2005 from John Taylor. From the moment of my selection in 2013, Mr Taylor pledged his full support to me and, as a former Whip, Mr Taylor's word was very much his bond. His friendship has been invaluable over the past two years.

I am also looking forward to working with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), as his father, Percy Grieve, represented Solihull with great distinction from 1964 to 1983. In fact, on rooting through our constituency offices in the spring we managed to unearth some “vote for Percy Grieve” placards. However, having achieved a majority of 32,000, he clearly did not need them.

Solihull has changed a great deal since that time, but it remains a place of unique character and civility. In fact when I say I live in Solihull, I sometimes get an envious reaction. No doubt the listener has read the report from comparison service uSwitch, which in 2013 deemed Solihull to be the best place to live in the UK. I am sure that there are 649 other hon. Members who would disagree with this assertion, but from my perspective the facts speak for themselves.

According to some, Solihull first emerged as a clearing in the forest some 1,000 years ago where trading took place, and it is still about trade and business. It enjoys incomes well above the national average and full employment. In the vanguard of this is Jaguar Land Rover. Jags and Land Rovers are seen so often on Solihull's roads that some wags from Birmingham joke that in Solihull a creche is something that happens between two Land Rovers.

JLR's tremendous success is crucial to our economy and our country, but our local economy is not just based on car production. The Touchwood shopping centre is a go-to destination for the region and at a time when high streets are struggling to compete—something the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), will no doubt be looking to tackle—Solihull's Touchwood centre is planning an expansion.

However, Solihull and its twin, Shirley, are not just centres for exports and job creation. Many people choose to move to Solihull for its excellent schools. School uniforms are everywhere and the academic achievements

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of our kids are among the best in the country—despite our receiving £1,000 a year less from central funds per pupil than our bigger neighbour Birmingham.

There is also a strong tradition of volunteering in Solihull and Shirley. We cannot move for lions clubs, scouts and faith groups and other fantastic voluntary bodies. I would go so far as to say—in what is, after all, national volunteers week—that Solihull sits on a sea of volunteering.

This aspect of our town marks it out as a very special place to live; a growing town that can still feel small and nestled by beautiful green belt, hence the town motto of “Urbs in Rure”—town in country. This uniqueness makes Solihull guard its independence keenly. As we face the challenging and exciting prospect of devolution, Solihull stands ready to play its part, happy to co-operate on big-ticket items such as infrastructure, potentially policing, transport and skills for our young people, but it does so as a strong independent town. I intend to be a strong voice for the town I represent.

6.13 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) on his maiden speech. I am sure he will be an excellent representative of the people of the area.

I am absolutely delighted to give the first maiden speech from an Aberdeen SNP Member of Parliament. Since 1935, Aberdeen North has been represented in the House of Commons by the Labour party. My predecessor, Mr Frank Doran, represented the people of Aberdeen; indeed, he represented Aberdeen South, Aberdeen North and the former Aberdeen Central constituency during his time in Parliament. Mr Doran represented the city over a 30-year period before taking the decision to retire. I did not know him well, but he was an able parliamentarian who was known for sticking to his principles and was highly regarded here. I wish him well in his retirement.

It is an absolute pleasure to represent the beautiful, urban constituency of Aberdeen North. Aberdeen is a city famed for its granite and its oil. Its folk are known for being thrifty and incomprehensible. Although it is true that the Doric takes some learning—it is less a dialect and more a language in its own right—thrifty we are definitely not. Aberdonians are hugely generous, regularly featuring in top 10 lists for charitable giving.

My constituency is bounded to the north by that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond). It covers part of Bucksburn and a little of Bridge of Don, including the stunning Brig of Balgownie. Moving on a wee constituency tour, down through Seaton, we have Pittodrie, the home of Aberdeen football club—the Dons—where Sir Alex Ferguson is best known as a former Aberdeen manager. He led us to great success in the 1980s, but we have not quite been able to reach those heights again.

The constituency follows the freezing North sea down to picturesque Footdee, and the bustling Aberdeen harbour, one of the UK’s busiest ports. There, the Aberdeen North constituency meets the Aberdeen South constituency. The boundary sweeps up to Union Street, a mile-long triumph of engineering and architecture, although it is

a street that has seen better days. Aberdeen City Council had the opportunity to draw people back into the heart of the city by creating a bustling city square where St Nicholas House once stood but, in clear and complete disregard for the will of the people, it chose to press ahead with the horrendous Marischal Square project, which will hide views of the city’s finest historical buildings, including Provost Skene’s House and Marischal College.

Moving on in our constituency tour, Rosemount has a thriving set of wee businesses, each filling a niche that cannot be found on the high street. Through Midstocket and King’s Gate, you can see why Aberdeen is called the granite city—granite is gloriously abundant. Kingswells is a thriving community with a strong community council working hard to improve the area. In Summerhill and Sheddocksley, there is post-war housing and the Somebody Cares food bank, which is doing great work that it should not have to do. The Lang Stracht is the home of the famous Aberdeen Journals, where the *Evening Express* is made and where *The Press and Journal* has the highest circulation of all Scotland’s regional papers.

Mastrick, Northfield, Heathryfold and Middlefield are areas where regeneration is a buzzword, where members of the community are working so hard to improve their areas. There, folk in our oil-rich city are struggling to make ends meet. Cornhill, Stockethill and Ashgrove are full of older people and young families living in council housing and ex-council housing. In Aberdeen, we are in the midst of a housing crisis. Decades of Tory right to buy have decimated our housing stock. Elected representatives in Aberdeen receive more casework from those struggling to find a home than they receive about anything else. Surely a right to a secure tenancy is more important than a right to buy? Thankfully, the Scottish Government have taken affirmative action; the manifesto that I stood on backed a big increase in investment in housing in Scotland and across the UK.

Rosehill, Hilton and Berryden are a mix of student living and comfortably-off families—three-storey townhouses, granite tenements and the recognisable Aberdeen four-in-a-block. Then we have Woodside and Tillydrone—and another food bank. Instant Neighbour had to make appeals to the public earlier this year as, in Scotland’s third city, a food bank had run out of food. Lastly, there is Old Aberdeen and Aberdeen University, which was founded in the 16th century. In 1593, there were two universities in Aberdeen. At the same time, England only had two.

My constituency is hugely varied. Throughout the campaign, I spoke to many people on the doorstep, and I met the most informed, most engaged and most interested electorate I have ever been faced with in Scotland. We are not at some post-referendum saturation point with politics. People in Scotland have a clear vision for the future. They clearly voted for the anti-austerity SNP and our progressive politics, and they have a clear vision for the future of Scotland.

6.18 pm

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I start by congratulating you on your re-election to the Chair. I look forward to serving under you in many debates to come. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman)

and all the other Members who have made their maiden speeches this afternoon. The standard has been incredibly high, so the debates we have in this Parliament will be very well informed, and that is a credit to everyone who has spoken today.

To refer briefly to my maiden speech five years ago, I have Bletchley Park, the wartime decoding centre, in my constituency. In that debate, I mentioned the wish to put right a historical wrong and cleanse the historical criminal record of Alan Turing. Doing so was one of the proudest achievements of the previous Government. I am pleased that the Conservative party manifesto and the manifestos of other parties had in them a pledge to extend that to other people who were wrongly convicted of those so-called crimes. I hope that measure will be introduced during this Parliament.

Bletchley Park is just one of the great parts of my constituency. When Milton Keynes is host to the rugby world cup later this year, I hope visiting fans take the time to visit Bletchley Park and many of our other attractions. Should the machinations of FIFA result in a re-awarding of the location of the 2018 or 2022 World cups, Milton Keynes has a wonderful new stadium ready and waiting to play host to many great matches.

Milton Keynes is coming to a crossroads. In early 2017, we will celebrate our 50th birthday. We have reached our planned size as a new city—a new city that has topped the growth league tables over the past few years. That does not mean that we can just keep expanding without a proper vision of where we want to go. I want to use my time in this Parliament to help to shape the next 50 years of Milton Keynes.

In that respect, I look forward to the Government's devolution agenda giving us the additional powers we will want to shape what comes next. Many other Members have asked, "Why restrict devolution to the city regions of England?" That is an important first step, but we cannot divide England in a rigid structure. Different parts of England have different needs and different aspirations. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) made a powerful point about the need for shire counties to have more powers. Milton Keynes does not sit neatly in any region. We are on the boundary of three: the south-east, the east of England and the east midlands. We want to shape our own destiny, both for ourselves and in partnership with neighbouring authorities. The point is that what is best for Milton Keynes will be determined locally. We must take a bottom-up approach, not have a top-down division of the country into different parts. There will be different voices in the debate on the future of Milton Keynes. I want to help to facilitate that discussion—there is no monopoly of wisdom.

I congratulate the Government on introducing their measures on high-speed rail on the east-west rail link, which will put Milton Keynes at the epicentre of the nation's transport infrastructure and give us unique opportunities to develop and expand our economy. I hope we will be able to retain more of our business rates locally, so that we can be rewarded for developing our economy in future. When I studied politics at university, I was taught that Britain is the product not of revolution, but of evolution. That is very much the spirit in which I hope we go forward.

Lastly, I want to mention the important issue of English votes on English laws. As a Unionist, I believe that is essential to the long-term health of the Union. As some

have alleged, it is not a wish to stop any Member from any part of the United Kingdom from contributing to debates or voting on measures, but it does mean putting an English shield on matters that affect only England. Whatever devolution arrangements come forward, that will still be necessary, and I will enthusiastically support it in this Parliament.

6.23 pm

Mr Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): I heartily congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your re-election today. I am delighted to make this contribution thanks to my electors in Blackpool South, who returned me as their MP with an increased majority for the fifth successive time. It is a huge privilege to be a Member of Parliament for a town that is loved by millions of visitors every year, and that has played a huge part in the social, leisure and cultural life of this country for well over 100 years. It has stamped its mark on Britain as firmly as the lettering that goes through Blackpool rock.

Blackpool has many hard-working small businesses and enterprises, but, like many other seaside towns, it is a town that continues to face great challenges in housing, low part-time pay, significant pockets of deprivation, health, education and a highly transient population. Bread-and-butter questions are what matter to the people of Blackpool: how do we ensure that devolution delivers and fuels growth properly; and how does it strengthen our town's social cohesion?

I warmly congratulate the Secretary of State on his new post. I do so not out of convention but because of the respect that I hold for him personally. He has already shown in discussions about Blackpool an empathy for our needs in terms of our local enterprise partnership and the local growth programmes. The challenge is to recognise that, for structures that work with the grain of local need, it is a question not just of expanding economic growth in the region but rebalancing it. We need strategies that do not exacerbate divisions within and between regions. Where the best laid plans or structures are based is important, as is the way in which change is delivered. The coalition Government did us no favours with the big-bang abolition of regional development agencies and the setting up of a regional development fund, which has had little local input. As shadow regional growth Minister, with my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna) and his predecessor, the former Member for Southampton, Itchen, I saw that at first hand.

Some degree of humility is needed from the new Government over conduits for further change. Rhetoric about a so-called northern powerhouse can seem very thin in a town such as Blackpool where we have endured funding cuts of nearly 40% over the past four years. This Government must tell us how their devolution plans will deliver not just for big cities but for the smaller towns and the seaside and coastal towns. I am talking here about towns such as Blackpool, Bradford, Swindon and Stevenage. This is not just a north-south issue.

As someone who grew up in and around Manchester, I yield to no one in admiration for what has been done there through enlightened local government and business. But the Chancellor has been insisting that powers—even lesser powers—can be delivered only if a directly elected mayor is accepted. That is despite the fact that some of those areas have previously elected not to have such a role.

[Mr Gordon Marsden]

The Chancellor seems to be adopting the approach of Henry Ford, who, when asked about his cars said, “You can have any colour you want as long as it’s black.” Perhaps he is beginning to recognise that plurality is important, because I saw a picture in the *Financial Times* of him in Derby talking about a poster that said that the midlands was the business engine of Britain. It reminds me of the old story about the American politician who praised a city—let us say St Louis—and then said, “Why do I say this?” only to receive the reply, “Because you are in St Louis.”

We know that the RDAs delivered £4.50 of long-term benefits for every £1 spent. The LEPs were intended to work with the new structures, but LEP members are entitled—we all are—to know what their future will be if their remit is not dovetailed properly with local authorities or elected mayors.

As a Blackpool MP and a shadow transport Minister, I know that there are potentially many areas for greater collaboration. Transport is one such area. It is essential that there is legitimate democratic oversight of spending. Some time ago, I wrote in a Smith Institute pamphlet that the art of localism is getting the balance right between the maximum amount of democratic accountability and the maximum amount of entrepreneurship. People’s aspirations in the 21st century are more complex than they were in the past, so local needs must be addressed by local communities. Devolution will only produce good growth if the interests of communities are supported. Spending on and investment in sustainable housing is an issue that this Government need to address.

Those are the challenges on which the Chancellor needs to be held to account. If we are to have sustainable growth, this Government will not be forgiven if they simply devolve money to cities—

6.29 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): May I add my congratulations to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your re-election to your position? I am most grateful to you for allowing me to make my first contribution in the House. It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to follow the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Mr Marsden).

It is the greatest honour of my life to stand in the House, representing the people of St Austell and Newquay—a place that is not only where I was born and raised but where I have lived and worked my whole life and where I have raised my family. The constituency of St Austell and Newquay was a new one in 2010, and it was thought for a while that my predecessor, Stephen Gilbert, would be the only Member of Parliament for St Austell and Newquay, as our constituency would have been lost if the boundary changes had gone through. I suspect that I am probably one of only very few Conservative Members who was actually quite grateful that the changes did not go through because I would not have had a seat to contest at the election if they had.

I wish to pay tribute to Stephen Gilbert for the work that he did for our constituency during his five years in office. Many people have told me of the excellent work he did and help he gave to them personally on a wide range of issues. I wish to acknowledge his work in securing the previous Government’s support for the

public sector obligation funding that secured our daily air link from Newquay Cornwall airport to Gatwick, which is absolutely essential to our local Cornish economy.

St Austell and Newquay is a wonderfully unique, diverse and special part of Cornwall. We are one of only three constituencies that have two separate coasts: from the rugged beauty of the Atlantic coast to the north, which draws thousands of tourists to Cornwall’s premier resort, Newquay, every summer and creates the best surfing opportunities in Europe, to the picturesque south coast and the historic harbours of Fowey, where we still export the finest quality china clay in the world, and to Mevagissey, which is now Cornwall’s second-busiest fishing port—not forgetting, of course, the ancient world heritage port of Charlestown, near my home town of St Austell, which has now become renowned as the backdrop to many scenes in the BBC’s recent “Poldark” series. There is no doubt that “Poldark” has been a huge boost to the local Cornish tourism industry, but it has also produced a revival of a much-loved Cornish tradition, that of cakey tea. I am told today by our local newspaper, the *St Austell Voice*, that cakey tea wars have broken out between Fowey and Mevagissey. Of course, as the newly elected Member of Parliament, I feel that it is only my duty to go and sample both and decide for myself which is the best.

We are debating devolution and growth across Britain. I particularly want to speak about growth across Britain. There has been a widely held view in Cornwall that we have often been overlooked, ignored and neglected by successive Governments. Dating back as far as 500 years, Cornishmen have marched on this place in protest because we have felt neglected. It is a sad fact that the issues that face Cornwall today have not changed or been addressed for many years. In fact, I looked up the maiden speech of one of my predecessors, the late and considered by many great David Penhaligon. He made his maiden speech in 1974, and its content is striking. In his speech, he raised issues of low pay in Cornwall and the fact that we are one of the poorest areas of the United Kingdom. He referred to our over-reliance on tourism and the need for us to create different types of better-paid jobs. He raised the issue of creaking infrastructure and the lack of investment in our roads, schools and health services. They are still the big issues that face Cornwall today, but times are changing.

The last Government started to address some of those issues and invested in our roads and increased the funding for our schools and health services. Clearly, we now have a new opportunity to create a better, more positive and more constructive relationship with the Westminster Government. For the first time in our history, we have six Conservative MPs in a Conservative-majority Government. I am delighted that both my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have made it clear that this Government will not neglect Cornwall and that we will deliver the investment that Cornwall needs.

6.34 pm

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): It is an honour to deliver my maiden speech in the debate on our nation’s economic growth. The drivers of growth are the smaller enterprises that inject our economy with creativity and energy. Behind each of those businesses are people with the skills to solve problems, to take decisions and to have the courage

to lead. Entrepreneurs and the enterprises that they create, both private sector and charitable, play a uniquely large role in Hove's economy, too. They also played a big role and a crucial part in my family's history.

In the last week, I have enjoyed listening to and learning from the maiden speeches of other new Members. Each has laid claim to representing the best and most beautiful part of our country, so, at the risk of offending Members on both sides of the House, it is with conviction and evidence that I explain why I represent the most attractive place to live and work. Hove and its older sibling Portslade enjoy a coastal location that is fully exploited by several miles of unbroken promenade, but my constituency has a double helping of natural beauty. To the north it extends into the south downs, a testament to the beauty of the south of England and a credit to the last Labour Government, who wisely protected that landscape by granting it national park status. Brighton and Hove has two world-class universities and a fantastic social life. It is fuelled by the largest number of restaurants and bars per head of population outside London.

All that explains why our city has been voted the best place to live, the happiest place to live and the coolest place in Brighton—in Britain. [*Laughter.*] However, we do have a problem with immigration—that is, people flocking from London, buying our property and clogging up our commuter trains. Such is the burden of living in the coolest place in Britain.

My predecessor, Mike Weatherley, championed the importance of performance rights and licensing and introduced to Parliament the much loved music competition Rock the House. I know that Members on both sides of the House will wish him the best.

In 1973, another of my predecessors, Sir Tim Sainsbury, rose to make his maiden speech having won the seat in a by-election. He joined the Tory Government Benches and used his speech to make the following plea to his party:

“We must continue to search for ways by which our economic life can be regulated so that those who are not strong enough to join in the fight are not the first to suffer”. —[*Official Report*, 18 December 1973; Vol. 866, c. 1225.]

Those words still ring true today. Then it was pensioner poverty. Now it is the disabled and the asset poor who suffer most and who I set out to champion.

I had just turned three years of age when Sir Tim made his maiden speech. When at the age of 26 I came to live in Brighton and Hove, he was still serving as the Member of Parliament. The year before, my friend and mentor, Dame Anita Roddick, became the first person to suggest that I go to university, but my application to Sussex University was rejected—understandable, considering I left school with no useable qualifications.

Therefore, at the age of 25, I returned to Felpham comprehensive school and started all over again. From there, I became the first in my family to get an A-level, a degree and then a PhD. I co-founded a Brighton-based film company with my great friend Rob Claisse and went on to become the deputy chief executive of one charity and ultimately the chief executive of another.

All of this was possible because I was given a second chance. Public services were there at the time and place I needed them most. But I stand here today fully aware that youngsters do not get the second chance that I did. How many businesses, charities and PhDs do not exist

because young people leave school unskilled or under-qualified? I do not just believe this—I know that every young person has the potential to succeed, but some like me need the occasional support of others to get there. That is why I have undoubted ambition for our public services, especially education, and that is why I will vent anger and frustration if failure in our public services is ever excused due to the challenging nature of the people who need them the most.

There is an aspect of my family life that is also central to my political outlook, and that is the path taken by my father, Les Kyle. He grew up in post-war Liverpool, in conditions of poverty thankfully not seen any more in this country. He left school at 16 and served in the Royal Navy. After he left the service, he took several jobs, including door-to-door salesman. He wanted to better himself and his future family and that meant working during the day and learning at night. When opportunities arose, he took them, like taking a job for a market-leading fibreglass company in Portsmouth. By the time he retired, he was the owner of that company.

“Aspiration” is a word that has been exalted and derided in equal measure and it has rightly become part of the debate about why the Labour party lost the election, but for me it is not an abstract. It delivered my family from poverty and ultimately me to this great place.

6.39 pm

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): I congratulate you on your re-election today, Mr Deputy Speaker. I also congratulate the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on his promotion; he brings a great deal of experience and expertise to his new position. I know that his Conservative colleagues are relieved that they do not need the Liberal Democrats to form a Government this time, but I also know that the Secretary of State's old Social Democratic party colleagues are delighted that there is still one liberal left in the Cabinet.

We have had an excellent and wide-ranging debate. Given the time constraint, I will focus my remarks on devolution in England and housing, but first I congratulate all new hon. Members, from both sides of the House, on their maiden speeches: from the Conservative Benches, the hon. Members for South Suffolk (James Cartledge), for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena), for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), for Gower (Byron Davies), for Cardiff North (Craig Williams), for Solihull (Julian Knight) and for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double); and from the Scottish National party Benches, the hon. Members for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) and for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman).

I warmly welcome the maiden speeches of my hon. Friends on the Labour Benches. My hon. Friends the Members for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) and for Batley and Spen (Jo Cox) both rightly argued that our EU membership is vital for jobs, investment and economic growth. My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) stressed her determination to secure better and more affordable housing for her constituents. I had the pleasure of visiting my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) a few weeks ago in her constituency. I am delighted at the Labour gain there. She is right to prioritise bringing more jobs and investment to her area. My hon. Friend the Member for

[Emma Reynolds]

Hove (Peter Kyle) spoke of the two world-class universities in his constituency and convinced us all that it is the best, happiest and coolest place to live in the UK.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna) set out in his opening speech, the Labour party wants an ambitious and forward-looking devolution agenda that hands to the local level resources and power over areas such as transport, housing, skills and other levers to drive economic growth. We are one of the most centralised countries in western Europe and our cities, towns and counties have not had the opportunities, which many of their European counterparts have benefited from, to shape their own agenda and destiny and to drive their own economic success.

We want the Government to go further and faster on devolution. Rather than a series of one-off deals done by the Chancellor, we want a comprehensive plan for devolution to every part of England. Many county councils are worried about being left behind. The Conservative leader of Devon County Council has rightly warned against a piecemeal approach to devolution that focuses only on city regions and excludes our counties.

Will the Secretary of State explain why the so-called Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill does not actually devolve any power or resources and does not give local areas a choice on metro mayors? As my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) and for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) powerfully argued in their speeches, if the Government were committed to real devolution and localism they would surely let local communities choose for themselves, rather than putting obstacles in the way of devolution.

We know, after all, what councils can achieve when they are given the means and power. Councils across the country are working together and innovating to deliver better public services for less. To do more, local areas must have the resources that they need. Devolution must not be a smokescreen for bringing local government to its knees. The test for the new Secretary of State will be whether he can devolve power from Whitehall and deliver a fairer funding settlement for the whole of local government. His predecessor's negotiating strategy could be summed up in three words: "more cuts please". As a result, local government suffered deeper cuts than any other part of the public sector. The only thing that the Secretary of State's predecessor devolved was the blame for decisions that he made in Whitehall.

The new Secretary of State must secure a change in how funds are distributed to local government and, crucially, restore the link between resources and need. In the last five years, the Government have hit with the biggest cuts the most deprived areas with the greatest needs. No part of the country has faced bigger cuts to local authority budgets than the north of England. That is why, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Mr Marsden) said, the Opposition remain deeply sceptical about the Government's boasting about their role in bringing about a northern powerhouse.

The other key test for the new Secretary of State is whether he will set out serious plans and reforms to tackle the housing crisis. The scale of the challenge

must not be underestimated. We are not even building half the number of homes that we need to keep up with demand in this country.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the tragedies and sadnesses of this Queen's Speech is the ludicrous attack on housing associations, which amounts to nationalisation followed by liquidation through sequestration? Does she agree that the inevitable logic, if the Government wish to extend home ownership, is to extend this to private tenancies—and see what private landlords have to say?

Emma Reynolds: I am not entirely sure that I agree with everything my hon. Friend has just said, but I will say this: the real test for any of the housing policies put forward by this Government is whether they ease or deepen the housing crisis, and from what we have seen so far, they are failing that test.

Under the previous Government, we saw the lowest level of house building in peacetime since the 1920s. [Interruption.] In terms of completions, they are bang to rights: I will take our record over theirs any time. Home ownership under this Tory Government is now at its lowest level for 30 years, and a record number of young people are living with their parents into their 20s and 30s. When I was shadow Housing Minister, I lost count of the number of people who complained to me about not benefiting from empty nest syndrome because their children simply could not get on the housing ladder.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): The hon. Lady is right to say there is a housing problem. During the general election, I met people who are still living at home at the age of 34 because they cannot find anywhere. Does she agree that the real answer is to make it much easier for an ordinary person to get a piece of land and to build their own dwelling, or to commission somebody to do it for them, as is now allowed by the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015, which she supported?

Emma Reynolds: We need radical plans and a big vision to solve the housing crisis, and this Government, like the one over the past five years, lack that vision.

There are 1.4 million families on council waiting lists. Let us be clear: the challenge we face in housing is one of massive under-supply, but the reforms that the current Government have set out are not equal to the scale of that challenge. They have proposed a half-baked programme to deliver starter homes at a 20% discount, without any idea of how they are going to deliver it—so much so that the then chairman of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), could not quite explain it.

There is also the right to buy proposal, which seems to be unravelling before a draft Bill has even been printed. Opposition Members want as many people as possible to fulfil their aspiration to buy a home of their own, but housing experts and even the former head of the civil service and permanent secretary from the Secretary of State's own department, Lord Kerslake, have said that the proposals are unworkable and that the numbers do not stack up. Yesterday, a Member from the Secretary of State's own party said so, and even the Mayor

of London, the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), has expressed serious concerns about the proposals. There are many unanswered questions about how the proposal will be paid for, and about how the Government will deliver the one-for-one replacements that they committed themselves to in the last Parliament. As I have said, the test we will set this Government is whether their housing policies tackle the housing crisis, rather than deepen it.

We call on the Government to bring forward an ambitious and comprehensive plan for devolution to all parts of the country—to our cities, towns and counties—and we will hold the new Secretary of State's feet to the fire to deliver a better and fairer deal for local government and real plans to tackle, not deepen, the housing crisis. For those reasons, I urge all hon. Members to vote for our amendment.

6.48 pm

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): It is a pleasure to see you back in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker. I congratulate you on your election.

It is an enormous pleasure to respond to what on the whole has been a debate of the highest quality, although I have to say that it was marked by some slightly eccentric interventions. I am looking directly at the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), who said that the Government were “out of touch” with the electorate of the country. I do not know whether he was around when the results came in on 8 May, but I think the electorate have had their say.

This is an important day for the Members who made their maiden speeches. They made distinguished contributions and their words will ring out from this place in the years ahead.

I welcome the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) to her post and congratulate her on her promotion. There is a tradition in her seat of radicalism. Indeed, the Member who was considered to be Britain's first Trotskyist MP was one of her predecessors. I hope that she will follow in a different tradition of radicalism. I am sure that she will, given her position of support in the Labour leadership contest.

I pay tribute to my good friend and predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles), for his outstanding work as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. The House knows him as one of its most unique personalities. I had the privilege of working with him—as did some of my colleagues—when I was his Minister of State for our first two years in government, and I had the pleasure of learning from one of the most capable administrators in government.

My right hon. Friend was the architect of the Localism Act 2011, which dismantled the costly regional apparatus that has been discussed in today's Queen's Speech debate. He ended the ring-fencing of grants to local government—something that had been called for and was long overdue. He delivered the savings that were necessary to get our country's public finances back on track. He ushered in a new era of transparency in local government. He created the troubled families programme that has turned around the lives of more than 100,000 families. He did a magnificent job and I am honoured to follow in his footsteps.

The theme of today's debate, devolution and growth across Britain, is broad enough, but the debate has ranged even beyond that. Let me, in the short time that I have, comment on some of the maiden speeches that have been made from the Back Benches before commenting on some of the other speeches and concluding with some observations of my own.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) has made rapid progress to the Front Bench of her party in a very short space of time. I can see why, given the informed and articulate speech that she gave on economic matters. I was pleased to hear her recognise something that Government Members believe strongly: that a strong economy is essential to underpin our essential public services.

I pay a warm tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartledge), who spoke without notes. He had in mind the record of his predecessor in holding down three shadow Cabinet jobs at the same time. I do not know whether the Whips have marked that as a sign of his ambition, but the quality of his speech was significant. I am sure that he has a great future in this House.

It was a delight to hear the speech of the new hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock). He made a warm and amusing speech, of which his father and mother who were in the Public Gallery will be very proud. He talked a lot about the steel industry and its importance to Port Talbot. As a Teesside lad, I share his enthusiasm for doing everything we can to make sure that that great industry, wherever it is in our United Kingdom, prospers now and in the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena) made an elegant speech in which he revealed that the original chocolate-box village is in his constituency. He was right to point out that human rights were not conceived in 1998, and no doubt presaged discussion in future debates in doing so. I look forward to his contributions in those debates.

It is fantastic to welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) to the House. I got to know her in Tyneside, where she was a very effective leader of the local community. She will draw on that experience and her business experience in supporting the enterprise Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Byron Davies), for whom I had the delight of campaigning in Mumbles during the general election campaign, will bring considerable experience of the Welsh Assembly and his experience as a police officer to the House. He has a wonderful manner in this House and on the doorstep, which will commend itself to hon. Members.

The hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) rightly paid tribute to her predecessor, Dame Tessa Jowell, who enjoyed a great deal of support from all parts of the House. If she channels the approach of her predecessor, she will go down very well here.

I was particularly interested in the speech of the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) because I went to school in the shadow of the steelworks she described in South Bank, Eston and Grangetown. I share her enthusiasm for ensuring that the success that Teesside is contributing continues. With unemployment falling, businesses being created and now a Minister for the northern powerhouse in the Government, Teesside is on a roll, and I look forward to her support in championing that.

[Greg Clark]

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Craig Williams) gave a very fluent, poised and gracious speech to sell his constituency to the House; he did so very well. He mentioned the support of Lord Heseltine in years past for the redevelopment of Cardiff bay. We want to build on that legacy and to go forward to make Cardiff even more successful in the years ahead.

The hon. Member for Batley and Spennings (Jo Cox) observed that there is more that unites her constituents than divides them. On this agenda of devolution, I hope she will find that that is the case in this House as well, and she will find in me someone who is prepared to work across party lines to do the best for every part of the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) is very welcome to the House. He is a representative—an embodiment, indeed—of the midlands powerhouse that exists alongside the northern powerhouse. It is probably a relief that the slogan of one of his predecessors, who is the father of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), was, “Vote for Percy Grieve”. The alternative is “Grieve for Solihull”, which would probably not be the best electoral slogan; he would want to avoid that.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) painted an enticing picture of Aberdeen; this is probably the time of year that it is looking at its best, and it is best that we visit it now rather than in the dead of winter. However, I am sure that all of us will have a great deal to contribute there.

It is fantastic to see my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) in his place. He is Cornwall born and bred. Cornwall is a county that is familiar to many of us. When he talked about reviving a tradition in Cornwall exemplified in “Poldark”, I was relieved that he was talking about cakey tea rather than skinny-dipping; I thought he might be inviting us to join in.

Finally, the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) gave what was clearly a very well received speech. The “coolest place in Brighton” is a matter of some competition in itself; not everywhere in the country can say that. He gave a very thoughtful speech and his own journey is particularly impressive; I commend him.

It is not possible to cover the entirety of the content of the Queen’s Speech, but I would point out that all the maiden speeches from all parts of the House today were unique. No one could possibly confuse Redcar with Newquay, or the west midlands with Hampshire, and it seems to me that that is the principle that embodies the devolution reforms in our Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill. I confirm to the House that that Bill applies as much to our counties and towns as it does to our cities. I am afraid our predecessors did the opposite. Over decades—indeed, building up to a century—and despite making maiden speeches that were paeans of praise to their local distinctive places, they came here and passed laws and regulations and backed Governments who took power away from those places and invested it in central London.

The project that we have before us started in the previous Parliament. I have been grateful for the cross-party support that I have received for it—from leaders of

Labour authorities as well as those of Conservative authorities. We have changed the direction; the question now is not whether we should localise but how much and at what pace. That is a significant change in direction and we all have the opportunity to extend it much further in the years ahead.

The question that will be put to all of us is how we can ensure that all parts of the country—north, south, east and west—can make their contribution to realising the potential of our country in the years ahead, so that the legacy of every Member of this Parliament will have been to have built a stronger economy, a stronger Britain and a stronger United Kingdom. I invite all Members to join us in that during the months ahead.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 275, Noes 331.

Division No. 1]

[6.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Abrahams, Debbie	Champion, Sarah
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina (<i>Ochil and South Perthshire</i>)	Chapman, Douglas (<i>Dunfermline and West Fife</i>)
Alexander, Heidi	Cherry, Joanna (<i>Edinburgh South West</i>)
Ali, Rushanara	Clwyd, rh Ann
Allen, Mr Graham	Coaker, Vernon
Anderson, Mr David	Coffey, Ann
Arkless, Richard (<i>Dumfries and Galloway</i>)	Cooper, Julie (<i>Burnley</i>)
Ashworth, Jonathan	Cooper, Rosie
Austin, Ian	Cooper, rh Yvette
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Corbyn, Jeremy
Bardell, Hannah (<i>Livingston</i>)	Cowan, Ronnie (<i>Inverclyde</i>)
Barron, rh Kevin	Cox, Jo (<i>Batley and Spennings</i>)
Beckett, rh Margaret	Coyle, Neil (<i>Bermondsey and Old Southwark</i>)
Benn, rh Hilary	Crawley, Angela (<i>Lanark and Hamilton East</i>)
Berger, Luciana	Creagh, Mary
Betts, Mr Clive	Creasy, Stella
Black, Ms Mhairi (<i>Paisley and Renfrewshire South</i>)	Cruddas, Jon
Blackford, Ian (<i>Ross, Skye and Lochaber</i>)	Cummins, Judith (<i>Bradford South</i>)
Blackman, Kirsty (<i>Aberdeen North</i>)	Cunningham, Alex
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Blenkinsop, Tom	Danczuk, Simon
Blomfield, Paul	David, Wayne
Boswell, Philip (<i>Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill</i>)	Davies, Geraint
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Day, Martyn (<i>Linlithgow and East Falkirk</i>)
Brennan, Kevin	De Piero, Gloria
Brock, Deidre (<i>Edinburgh North and Leith</i>)	Debbonaire, Thangam (<i>Bristol West</i>)
Brown, Alan (<i>Kilmarnock and Loudoun</i>)	Docherty, Martin John (<i>West Dunbartonshire</i>)
Brown, Lyn	Donaldson, Stuart Blair (<i>West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine</i>)
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Dowd, Jim
Bryant, Chris	Dowd, Peter (<i>Bootle</i>)
Buck, Ms Karen	Dromey, Jack
Burden, Richard	Dugher, Michael
Burgon, Richard (<i>Leeds East</i>)	Durkan, Mark
Butler, Dawn (<i>Brent Central</i>)	Eagle, Ms Angela
Byrne, rh Liam	Eagle, Maria
Cadbury, Ruth (<i>Brentford and Isleworth</i>)	Edwards, Jonathan
Cameron, Dr Lisa (<i>East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow</i>)	Efford, Clive
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Elliott, Julie
	Ellman, Mrs Louise

- Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fellows, Marion (*Motherwell and Wishaw*)
 Ferrier, Margaret (*Rutherglen and Hamilton West*)
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen (*Coventry North East*)
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky (*Lewisham, Deptford*)
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gethins, Stephen (*North East Fife*)
 Gibson, Patricia (*North Ayrshire and Arran*)
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick (*Glasgow North*)
 Grant, Peter (*Glenrothes*)
 Gray, Neil (*Airdrie and Shotts*)
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret (*Wirral West*)
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise (*Sheffield, Heeley*)
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harpham, Harry (*Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough*)
 Harris, Carolyn (*Swansea East*)
 Hayes, Helen (*Dulwich and West Norwood*)
 Hayman, Sue (*Workington*)
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mr Mark
 Hendry, Drew (*Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey*)
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodge, rh Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollern, Kate (*Blackburn*)
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Hunt, Tristram
 Huq, Dr Rupa (*Ealing Central and Acton*)
 Hussain, Imran (*Bradford East*)
 Irranca-Davies, Huw
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald (*Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney*)
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kerevan, George (*East Lothian*)
 Kerr, Calum (*Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk*)
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Kinnock, Stephen (*Aberavon*)
 Kyle, Peter (*Hove*)
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris (*Dundee West*)
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive (*Norwich South*)
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Long Bailey, Rebecca (*Salford and Eccles*)
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly (*Halifax*)
 MacNeil, Mr Angus
 Brendan
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin (*Ellesmere Port and Neston*)
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob (*Wolverhampton South West*)
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael (*York Central*)
 Matheson, Chris (*City of Chester*)
 Mc Nally, John (*Falkirk*)
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum (*Aberdeen South*)
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart (*Glasgow South*)
 McDonald, Stuart C. (*Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East*)
 McDonnell, John
 McGarry, Natalie (*Glasgow East*)
 McGinn, Conor (*St Helens North*)
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Glasgow North East*)
 Meacher, rh Mr Michael
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol (*Glasgow North West*)
 Monaghan, Dr Paul (*Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross*)
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame M. (*Easington*)
 Mullin, Roger (*Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath*)
 Murray, Ian
 Newlands, Gavin (*Paisley and Renfrewshire North*)
 O'Hara, Brendan (*Argyll and Bute*)
 Onn, Melanie (*Great Grimsby*)
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate (*Edmonton*)
 Oswald, Kirsten (*East Renfrewshire*)
 Owen, Albert
 Paterson, Steven (*Stirling*)
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew (*Greenwich and Woolwich*)
 Phillips, Jess (*Birmingham, Yardley*)
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Rayner, Angela (*Ashton-under-Lyne*)
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina (*Neath*)
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie (*St Helens South and Whiston*)
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, Angus
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan (*Enfield North*)
 Salmond, rh Alex (*Gordon*)
 Saville Roberts, Liz (*Dwyfor Meirionnydd*)
 Shah, Naz (*Bradford West*)
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy (*Edinburgh East*)
 Sherriff, Paula (*Dewsbury*)
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip (*Hampstead and Kilburn*)
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth (*Stoke-on-Trent North*)
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat (*Lancaster and Fleetwood*)
 Smith, Jeff (*Manchester, Withington*)
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin (*Bristol South*)
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmer, Keir (*Holborn and St Pancras*)
 Stephens, Chris (*Glasgow South West*)
 Stevens, Jo (*Cardiff Central*)
 Streeting, Wes (*Ilford North*)
 Stuart, Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison (*Glasgow Central*)
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick (*Torfaen*)
 Thompson, Owen (*Midlothian*)
 Thomson, Michelle (*Edinburgh West*)
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turley, Anna (*Redcar*)
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine (*Hornsey and Wood Green*)
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa (*Central Ayrshire*)
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Corri (*Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock*)
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel (*Cambridge*)
Tellers for the Ayes:
 Stephen Doughty and
 Nic Dakin

NOES

- Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Mr Henry
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake

- Berry, James (*Kingston and Surbiton*)
- Bingham, Andrew
- Blackman, Bob
- Blackwood, Nicola
- Blunt, Crispin
- Boles, Nick
- Bone, Mr Peter
- Borwick, Victoria (*Kensington*)
- Bottomley, Sir Peter
- Bradley, Karen
- Brady, Mr Graham
- Brazier, Mr Julian
- Bridgen, Andrew
- Brine, Steve
- Brokenshire, James
- Bruce, Fiona
- Buckland, Robert
- Burns, Conor
- Burns, rh Mr Simon
- Burrowes, Mr David
- Burt, rh Alistair
- Cairns, Alun
- Cameron, rh Mr David
- Carmichael, Neil
- Cartlidge, James (*South Suffolk*)
- Cash, Sir William
- Caulfield, Maria (*Lewes*)
- Chalk, Alex (*Cheltenham*)
- Chishti, Rehman
- Chope, Mr Christopher
- Churchill, Jo (*Bury St Edmunds*)
- Clark, rh Greg
- Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
- Cleverly, James (*Braintree*)
- Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
- Coffey, Dr Thérèse
- Collins, Damian
- Colvile, Oliver
- Costa, Alberto (*South Leicestershire*)
- Cox, Mr Geoffrey
- Crabb, rh Stephen
- Crouch, Tracey
- Davies, Byron (*Gower*)
- Davies, Chris (*Brecon and Radnorshire*)
- Davies, David T. C. (*Monmouth*)
- Davies, Glyn
- Davies, James (*Vale of Clwyd*)
- Davies, Mims (*Eastleigh*)
- Davies, Philip
- Davis, rh Mr David
- Dinenage, Caroline
- Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
- Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
- Donelan, Michelle (*Chippenham*)
- Dorries, Nadine
- Double, Steve (*St Austell and Newquay*)
- Dowden, Oliver (*Hertsmere*)
- Drax, Richard
- Drummond, Mrs Flick (*Portsmouth South*)
- Duddridge, James
- Duncan, rh Sir Alan
- Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
- Dunne, Mr Philip
- Ellis, Michael
- Ellison, Jane
- Ellwood, Mr Tobias
- Elphicke, Charlie
- Eustice, George
- Evans, Graham
- Evans, Mr Nigel
- Evennett, rh Mr David
- Fabricant, Michael
- Fallon, rh Michael
- Fernandes, Suella (*Fareham*)
- Field, rh Mark
- Foster, Kevin (*Torbay*)
- Fox, rh Dr Liam
- Francois, rh Mr Mark
- Frazer, Lucy (*South East Cambridgeshire*)
- Freeman, George
- Freer, Mike
- Fuller, Richard
- Fysh, Marcus (*Yeovil*)
- Garnier, rh Sir Edward
- Garnier, Mark
- Gauke, Mr David
- Ghani, Nusrat (*Wealden*)
- Gibb, Mr Nick
- Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
- Glen, John
- Goldsmith, Zac
- Goodwill, Mr Robert
- Gove, rh Michael
- Graham, Richard
- Grant, Mrs Helen
- Gray, Mr James
- Grayling, rh Chris
- Green, Chris (*Bolton West*)
- Green, rh Damian
- Greening, rh Justine
- Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
- Griffiths, Andrew
- Gummer, Ben
- Gyimah, Mr Sam
- Halfon, rh Robert
- Hall, Luke (*Thornbury and Yate*)
- Hammond, rh Mr Philip
- Hammond, Stephen
- Hancock, rh Matthew
- Hands, rh Greg
- Harper, rh Mr Mark
- Harrington, Richard
- Harris, Rebecca
- Hart, Simon
- Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
- Hayes, rh Mr John
- Heald, Sir Oliver
- Heapey, James (*Wells*)
- Heaton-Harris, Chris
- Heaton-Jones, Peter (*North Devon*)
- Henderson, Gordon
- Herbert, rh Nick
- Hinds, Damian
- Hoare, Simon (*North Dorset*)
- Hollingbery, George
- Hollinrake, Kevin (*Thirsk and Malton*)
- Hollobone, Mr Philip
- Holloway, Mr Adam
- Hopkins, Kris
- Howarth, Sir Gerald
- Howell, John
- Howlett, Ben (*Bath*)
- Huddleston, Nigel (*Mid Worcestershire*)
- Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
- Hurd, Mr Nick
- Jackson, Mr Stewart
- James, Margot
- Javid, rh Sajid
- Jayawardena, Mr Ranil (*North East Hampshire*)
- Jenkin, Mr Bernard
- Jenkyns, Andrea (*Morley and Outwood*)
- Jenrick, Robert
- Johnson, Boris (*Uxbridge and South Ruislip*)
- Johnson, Gareth
- Johnson, Joseph
- Jones, Andrew
- Jones, rh Mr David
- Jones, Mr Marcus
- Kawczynski, Daniel
- Kennedy, Seema (*South Ribble*)
- Kinahan, Danny (*South Antrim*)
- Kirby, Simon
- Knight, rh Sir Greg
- Knight, Julian (*Solihull*)
- Kwarteng, Kwasi
- Lancaster, Mark
- Latham, Pauline
- Leadsom, Andrea
- Lee, Dr Phillip
- Lefroy, Jeremy
- Leigh, Sir Edward
- Leslie, Charlotte
- Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
- Lewis, Brandon
- Lewis, rh Dr Julian
- Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
- Lidington, rh Mr David
- Lilley, rh Mr Peter
- Lopresti, Jack
- Lord, Jonathan
- Loughton, Tim
- Lumley, Karen
- Mackinlay, Craig (*South Thanet*)
- Mackintosh, David (*Northampton South*)
- Main, Mrs Anne
- Mak, Alan (*Havant*)
- Malthouse, Kit (*North West Hampshire*)
- Mann, Scott (*North Cornwall*)
- Mathias, Dr Tania (*Twickenham*)
- May, rh Mrs Theresa
- Maynard, Paul
- McCartney, Jason
- McCartney, Karl
- McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
- McPartland, Stephen
- Menzies, Mark
- Mercer, Johnny (*Plymouth, Moor View*)
- Merriman, Huw (*Bexhill and Battle*)
- Metcalfe, Stephen
- Miller, rh Mrs Maria
- Milling, Amanda (*Cannock Chase*)
- Mills, Nigel
- Milton, rh Anne
- Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
- Mordaunt, Penny
- Morgan, rh Nicky
- Morris, Anne Marie
- Morris, David
- Morris, James
- Morton, Wendy (*Aldridge-Brownhills*)
- Mowat, David
- Mundell, rh David
- Murray, Mrs Sheryll
- Murrison, Dr Andrew
- Neill, Robert
- Newton, Sarah
- Nokes, Caroline
- Norman, Jesse
- Nuttall, Mr David
- Offord, Dr Matthew
- Osborne, rh Mr George
- Paisley, Ian
- Parish, Neil
- Patel, rh Priti
- Paterson, rh Mr Owen
- Pawsey, Mark
- Penning, rh Mike
- Penrose, John
- Percy, Andrew
- Pery, Claire
- Phillips, Stephen
- Philp, Chris (*Croydon South*)
- Pickles, rh Sir Eric
- Pincher, Christopher
- Poulter, Dr Daniel
- Pow, Rebecca (*Taunton Deane*)
- Prentis, Victoria (*Banbury*)
- Prisk, Mr Mark
- Pritchard, Mark
- Pursglove, Tom (*Corby*)
- Quin, Jeremy (*Horsham*)
- Quince, Will (*Colchester*)
- Raab, Mr Dominic
- Redwood, rh John
- Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
- Robertson, Mr Laurence
- Robinson, Mary (*Cheadle*)
- Rosindell, Andrew
- Rudd, rh Amber
- Rutley, David
- Sandbach, Antoinette (*Eddisbury*)
- Scully, Paul (*Sutton and Cheam*)
- Selous, Andrew
- Shannon, Jim
- Shapps, rh Grant
- Sharma, Alok
- Shelbrooke, Alec
- Simpson, rh Mr Keith
- Skidmore, Chris
- Smith, Chloe
- Smith, Henry
- Smith, Julian
- Smith, Royston (*Southampton, Itchen*)
- Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
- Solloway, Amanda (*Derby North*)

Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi (*Richmond (Yorks)*)
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek (*St Ives*)
 Throup, Maggie (*Erewash*)
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly (*Rochester and Strood*)
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael (*Mid Dorset and North Poole*)
 Tracey, Craig (*North Warwickshire*)
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie (*Berwick-upon-Tweed*)
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom (*Tonbridge and Malling*)
 Turner, Mr Andrew

Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David (*Somerton and Frome*)
 Warman, Matt (*Boston and Skegness*)
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen (*Faversham and Mid Kent*)
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig (*Cardiff North*)
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wilson, Sammy
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike (*Dudley South*)
 Wragg, William (*Hazel Grove*)
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Jackie Doyle-Price and
Guy Opperman

Question accordingly negated.

7.18 pm

The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Ordered, That the debate be resumed tomorrow.

Select Committees

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Hoyle): With the permission of the House, the motions on Select Committees will be taken together.

Before I call the Leader of the House to move the first motion, I should inform the House that I have selected the amendment to the second motion, in the name of the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen). The amendment may be debated along with the first motion, and the hon. Gentleman will be called to move it formally at the end of the debate if he wishes to do so.

7.18 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): I beg to move,

That with effect until the end of the current Parliament, Standing Order No. 152 be amended by the insertion of the following line at the appropriate point in the table in paragraph (2):

“Women and Equalities	Government Equalities Office	11”
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Mr Deputy Speaker: With this we will consider the following:

The motion on changes to Standing Order No. 146—

That the following changes be made to standing orders—

(1) Leave out paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 146 (Select Committee on Public Administration) and insert the following new paragraphs:

“(1) There shall be a select committee, to be called the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, to examine the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner for England, which are laid before this House, and matters in connection therewith; to consider matters relating to the quality and standards of administration provided by civil service departments, and other matters relating to the civil service; and to consider constitutional affairs.

(1A) The committee shall consist of eleven Members.”;

(2) Change the title of Standing Order No. 146 to “Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee”;

(3) In Standing Order No. 122B, line 9, leave out “Select Committee on Public Administration” and insert “Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee”;

(4) In Standing Order No. 143, line 69, leave out “Select Committee on Public Administration” and insert “Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee”;

(5) In Standing Order No. 152K, lines 10 and 15, leave out “Select Committee on Public Administration” and insert “Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee”.

The motion on the allocation of Chairs—

That, pursuant to Standing Order No 122B (Election of Committee Chairs), the chairs of those select committees subject to the Standing Order be allocated as indicated in the following Table

Select committees appointed under SO No 152:

Business, Innovation and Skills	Labour
Communities and Local Government	Labour
Culture, Media and Sport	Conservative
Defence	Conservative
Education	Conservative

Energy and Climate Change	Scottish National Party
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Conservative
Foreign Affairs	Conservative
Health	Conservative
Home Affairs	Labour
International Development	Labour
Justice	Conservative
Northern Ireland	Conservative
Science and Technology	Conservative
Scottish Affairs	Scottish National Party
Transport	Labour
Treasury	Conservative
Welsh Affairs	Conservative
Women and Equalities	Conservative
Work and Pensions	Labour
Other specified select committees:	
Environmental Audit	Labour
Petitions	Labour
Procedure	Conservative
Public Accounts	Labour
Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs	Conservative
Standards	Labour

Chris Grayling: Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your election this afternoon. We look forward to serving under your stewardship.

Let me take the motions in logical order. The first adds a new Committee, the Women and Equalities Committee, to the list of Select Committees appointed to examine Government Departments.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. A great many private conversations are taking place. If those conversations need to take place, could they take place outside the Chamber? I need to hear the Leader of the House.

Chris Grayling: The creation of the Women and Equalities Committee has been asked for by Members from all parts of the House, and I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), who has been instrumental in driving that agenda. If this Committee's formation is agreed to by the House tonight, it will have all the usual powers of a departmental Select Committee, as set out in Standing Orders. I have introduced this motion so that the House can make such a decision; I hope it will choose to do so. The Standing Order makes clear that the Committee will be established until the end of this Parliament; it will then be for the House to decide whether in the next Parliament the Committee becomes a permanent Committee. I imagine that that will be the case.

The next motion changes relevant Standing Orders so that the name of the Select Committee on Public Administration can be changed to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee and be given the power to consider all aspects of constitutional affairs. This is a simple consequence of the fact that in this Parliament there is no ministerial position of Deputy Prime Minister. The motion before the House takes us back to the position immediately before the election in 2010.

The final motion paves the way for the election of Select Committee Chairs by secret ballot of the whole House, introduced for the first time in the previous Parliament, by allocating each Chair to a specific party in accordance with the proportions that Mr Speaker has notified the party leaders of, in accordance with Standing Order 122(B). If this motion is agreed to, arrangements for a ballot will be made, under the supervision of Mr Speaker, in accordance with the remaining provisions of the Standing Order. I know that many Members from all parts of the House have put their names forward for election as Select Committee Chairs. I wish them all the very best in their campaigns.

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House explain why the Women and Equalities Committee is not going to be a permanent feature of the Standing Orders and will fall at the end of this Parliament? I hope it is not some sort of sop on this very important subject, because I think the House would take a dim view of that.

Chris Grayling: The Committee will be here for as long as the House chooses to keep it here. My expectation, as I said, is that it will be an ongoing feature, but, when a Committee is introduced for the first time, it is not unusual for it to be introduced for a Parliament and, then, for the next Parliament to choose whether to renew it. My expectation is that it will choose to do so.

Hon. Members may notice that the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee is not specified in the motion. That is purely because its Chair is not specified under the same Standing Order as the others, although they are elected under the same proceedings. The election of the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee will take place at the same time as the elections of the Chairs covered by the motions before us. I commend the motions to the House.

7.22 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your re-election to the post you are occupying now—by a majority that this Government could only have dreamed of.

I rise to support the three motions on the Order Paper concerning Select Committees. I will first address the motion in the names of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister and the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) on the allocation of Chairs, before turning to the remaining motions which create a new Women and Equalities Committee and bring constitutional affairs under the remit of the Public Administration Committee.

I know from my experience as a Minister and as a member of the Public Accounts and Treasury Committees that Select Committees are an important part of the work of this House. The previous Parliament was notable for having very active Committees which were an effective check and balance on the Government and other powerful interests. The work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge) was a particularly good example of how Select Committees can be used to speak truth to those in power. We therefore welcome today's motion which paves the way for the swift election of Committee Chairs by secret ballot of the whole House. Many of us will be relieved when the incessant canvassing, which is going on cross-party, all over the

place and in every corner of the building by aspiring Select Committee Chairs can finally come to an end, because we will have had the ballot and selected them.

The second motion will establish a Women and Equalities Committee, which is an extremely welcome addition that has been called for by Members from across the House for a number of years. As the 2014 report of the all-party group on women in Parliament notes, given that we have Women and Equalities oral questions and a Minister for Women and Equalities at the Cabinet table, a Select Committee is an important next step. It will also no doubt provide an excellent platform to hold the Government to account for any decisions that could roll back equality, and enable a new generation of parliamentarians to learn that they should never, “Calm down, dear.”

I look forward to the Committee being made a permanent part of the Select Committee system, and I certainly hope that our successor Parliament, in the early stages of its existence post-2020, will be able to make that decision. It is, however, up to those who are elected and appointed to the Committee in this Parliament to make the case for making permanent what I think will be a very important Select Committee.

Finally, I note the motion changing the remit of the Public Administration Committee so that it incorporates constitutional affairs. I pay tribute to all members who served on the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee in the last Parliament, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen), who chaired it so ably. I note his proposed amendment to the motion and know that he will continue to make a valuable contribution to debates on these issues as we on this side of the House scrutinise the Government’s proposals on constitutional change, which have far-reaching implications for the constitutional settlement—albeit not written down—in the UK. I urge the House to support the motions.

7.26 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): May I warmly congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on being returned as the Chairman of Ways and Means? Given that you had the enthusiastic support of my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil), it was almost certain that you would be returned to the position and I warmly welcome that.

I also warmly welcome the motions. Motions 1 and 3 deal with the new Public Administration and Constitutional Reform Committee. I feel the pain of the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) at the abandonment of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, particularly when there are so many big, meaty constitutional issues to consider in this Parliament. I am sure, however, that he will continue to contribute to the debate, and I know he will have a significant part to play in the ongoing constitutional debates in this House. I wish him well in that.

I warmly welcome the motion that states that, for the first time, the Scottish National party will chair a Select Committee in the House of Commons. It is like the proverbial bus: we wait for decades to secure a Chair of a Select Committee, and then two come along at once. May I congratulate the usual channels on the way in which this is being debated and decided? We are absolutely thrilled to be given the Chair of the Select Committees

on Scottish Affairs and on Energy and Climate Change. We will use due diligence and ensure that we approach them consensually and in a way that will be of value to the House. I look forward to being a part of this set-up, and the Scottish National party very much welcomes the opportunity to chair those Committees.

May I briefly turn my attention to a little issue that we are going to have to address—I am grateful that the Chief Whip is in his place—and that is the membership of the Scottish Affairs Committee? It is an issue because I believe that there is an expectation in Scotland that, as usual, the majority of members of the Scottish Affairs Committee should be Members of Parliament from Scotland. That has always happened and I believe that there is an expectation for it to continue. I know that the Government are keen to progress English votes for English laws through the House, so I think that, in return, we have to have Scottish affairs for Scottish Members.

I know that the Chief Whip will have a clear look at that, and I hope he will report back that he agrees that the majority of the members of the Scottish Affairs Committee must be MPs from Scotland. I know it is down to our success, with 56—

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: Yes, I will give way.

Andrew Percy: The Health Committee on which I had the privilege to serve in the previous Parliament largely dealt with—indeed, in its last year it only dealt with—matters pertaining to England and the English NHS. Will the SNP be taking its seat on the Health Committee on that basis?

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that question, and yes we probably will, because there are massive issues to do with that, but I also say to the hon. Gentleman that we will not be looking for places on the Communities and Local Government Committee, which has nothing to do with Scotland.

One thing the Chief Whip and the Leader of the House can do when we are considering the arithmetical distribution of places across Select Committees is acknowledge that there are some Committees that we might not have an interest in. We will have an interest in the Health Committee, however, because there are big financial consequences to do with the Barnett formula. We will continue to take an interest in that, and it is only fair that we look at some of the financial issues in health measures passing through the House of Commons.

This is a problem, and it has to be addressed. We have been a victim of our own success—56 out of 59.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): On some of the Health Committees on which I served there were issues that were pertinent to Northern Ireland—10 or a dozen—and there will be things relating to the NHS that affect Scotland and its MPs.

Pete Wishart: Of course. We are a one nation Parliament, as the Prime Minister tells us, so let us accept that that is the case.

The Government are entitled to their arithmetical majority on the Scottish Affairs Committee, but the question they have to ask themselves in that regard is a

[Pete Wishart]

legitimacy question, when almost all the Members for Scotland are from one party. I see that both the Chief Whip and Leader of the House are listening carefully to these remarks. There is an expectation in Scotland that this will happen—that there will be a majority of Scottish Members of Parliament on the Scottish Affairs Committee. Every other national Select Committee has such a majority of members, whether it is the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee or the Welsh Affairs Committee, and there has not been a Scottish Affairs Committee that has not had such a majority.

I ask the Leader of the House to address this point in his concluding remarks. Will he give us some comfort that he will at least look at this issue, and make a positive, progressive statement to ensure that we at least come close to, or get, a majority of Scottish Members on the Scottish Affairs Committee?

7.31 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I support the motions, in particular the establishment of the Women and Equalities Committee. Members on both sides of the House have campaigned for a long time for the establishment of such a Committee. The problem has been that the equalities brief has travelled from the Home Office to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport; it has sometimes been held by the Department for Communities and Local Government; and a bit of it has been with the Department for Work and Pensions. Now, for the first time, we will have a Select Committee that is able to scrutinise effectively women and equalities issues.

I too want to pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for the work she has done, and I welcome this motion.

7.32 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I was not planning to speak, but I want to respond to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) on an argument I actually have some sympathy with: the representation of Scottish Members on the Scottish Affairs Committee. The point I was making about the Health Committee was that its business is primarily concerned with the English NHS. However, I completely accept that there are knock-on impacts on the other health systems, and I hope we will see SNP Members on that Committee. The same thing applies to the Scottish Affairs Committee. Matters that affect Scotland, particularly on devolution, also affect my constituents. *[Interruption.]* I am not going to join the SNP—I think that was the offer just made. The Health Committee deals primarily with the English health service, but I hope Scottish Members will take their seats on it because there are knock-on effects, just as there are in respect of the Scottish Affairs Committee.

I apologise for speaking without notice, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I was unable to respond to the hon. Gentleman on this point earlier, and I just wanted to do so.

7.34 pm

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): I welcome your ascent once again to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. Your popularity is almost unrivalled in the House. I have to

say, however, that popularity is not exclusive to the Chair these days. With this system of secret ballots for the election of Select Committee Chairs across the parties, I can report that I have never been more popular in this House with Conservative and Labour Members. I am approached in all precincts of the House and asked for my views on a whole variety of things. Never before have I been in a position of being able to dispense such wisdom. Members whose names I do not know are approaching me. People I did not even know were Members are approaching me.

I just say to the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) that I hope he is not standing as Chair of a Select Committee.

Andrew Percy: No, I am not.

Alex Salmond: That is good, because that means he is a man of independent mind, although unfortunately it is a wayward independent mind. The reason why the Health Committee considers matters that affect Scotland is the Barnett formula. Through the Barnett formula, what happens in finance for the health service in England has knock-on effects for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. Perhaps I did not catch the hon. Gentleman correctly, but did he say that he served on the previous Health Committee?

Andrew Percy *indicated assent.*

Alex Salmond: I find it very strange, then, that he did not realise that, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) pointed out, issues debated in the Health Committee had implications for Northern Ireland. He must have been taken absent without leave during the proceedings, otherwise he would have known that.

Andrew Percy: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for calling me wayward—although I do not know whether it is a compliment. My point was that matters discussed in the Health Committee affect other parts of the United Kingdom, although our business is primarily English. For the same reason, English Members of Parliament have an absolute right to sit on the Scottish Affairs Committee, because the matters it considers affect my constituents in the same way.

Alex Salmond: I once heard the Barnett formula described as being like the Schleswig-Holstein question in European politics, in that only three people ever understood it: one is mad, one is dead and I have forgotten it, but I will try to remember enough of it to allow the hon. Gentleman to understand how it works. For example, additional public spending on health in England has a knock-on effect in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The reverse does not apply—it is not a question of allocating for Northern Ireland and then reverse-allocating England.

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): Move on.

Alex Salmond: Move on where? Luckily the right hon. Lady is on the Front Bench, so will not be standing to be a Chair of one of these Select Committees, otherwise she would have done her chances no good whatever. Members on the Treasury Bench should behave

better in these debates. She should be setting an example to her new Members, not cavorting about like some demented junior Minister. Behave yourself, woman!

My hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) asked me to say a few words in support of his argument. I happen to think it is necessary in this sense. He has put the argument very forcefully indeed: at a time when the Government are tinkering with the idea of EVEL—of having English votes for English MPs—and it is suggested that they will manipulate the Standing Orders of this House, perhaps to create English MP-only Committees, it will damage their argument, perhaps irreparably, if they stuff the Scottish Affairs Committee with a majority of English Conservative MPs. I say to the Conservative party that if it wanted to have Conservative MPs on the Scottish Affairs Committee, it should have gone to the trouble of getting more than one elected in Scotland in the recent general election. Alternatively, the Tories could immediately demote the Secretary of State for Scotland, make him a Back Bencher and exile him to the Scottish Affairs Committee.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Alex Salmond: I am strongly tempted, but those on the hon. Gentleman's Front Bench want me to move on. I say to the Government Whips: just think of all the problems that will be avoided—of having to exile hapless Members and put them on the Scottish Affairs Committee—if they accept the advice of my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire and do not try to gerrymander the Scottish Affairs Committee with a majority of English Conservative Members of Parliament. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Laing): Order. I know that the right hon. Gentleman is used to being heard and has a voice that is normally heard, but he must not be drowned out.

Alex Salmond: There is only a remote chance of the Conservative party drowning out the Scottish National party in this Parliament, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know the hon. Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) is keen, so I will extend to him the same courtesy that generations of Conservative Front Benchers have extended to me by not giving way to him on this occasion.

My argument is that the Scottish Affairs Committee should have at least a majority of Scottish MPs, and preferably should be completely made up of Scottish MPs, as it has been for some substantial time. If we reform or reconvene the Scottish Grand Committee, that should also be composed of Scottish MPs. If that is not to happen—the Leader of the House will give us an indication—and if the Conservatives are not prepared to extend the same courtesy to Scotland, I say to them that any argument whatever for their plan to have English-only votes on English-only Committees will be fatally undermined. An indication from the Leader of the House that that will happen will be greatly appreciated. I was going to say that that perhaps would do something to restore the Conservative party in Scotland, but it will not—it will take a lot more than that. At least it will stop the Conservative party from declining any further from the historical low it reached in Scotland three weeks ago.

7.41 pm

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): I should take this opportunity to welcome the hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) to his place—

Alex Salmond: Right honourable!

Mark Menzies: I am sorry—he is the right hon. Member for Gordon and a former First Minister. As a former First Minister, he should appreciate that, in this Chamber and this House, we debate and take interventions. It is not like the Scottish Parliament, where Members stand up and speak and nobody is allowed to intervene. That is not how we do things in this House.

The point I want to make is a valid one. I served on the Scottish Affairs Committee in the last Parliament—it was a great privilege to do so.

Alex Salmond: Why didn't you stand in Scotland?

Mark Menzies: The right hon. Gentleman cannot control his actions from his sedentary position.

I served on the Scottish Affairs Committee. We dealt with matters relating both to Scotland and to Scotland's place in the United Kingdom. The one person who was not there was the SNP Member. He did not take up his seat on the Committee.

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

Mark Menzies: In the great tradition of the SNP, I will not take the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

The SNP did not take up its seat, so it is bit rich—

Mr MacNeil: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. There are particular reasons why the SNP did not take its seat on the last Scottish Affairs Committee. They were to do with the behaviour of the then Chairman of that Committee.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Laing): I fully appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point, but he will appreciate just as well that that is not a point of order for the Chair to deal with at the moment. I am quite certain that there will be many times in debate over the next few months when he will have the opportunity to make the point he seeks to make.

Mark Menzies: My point is an important one. SNP Members cannot come to the Chamber and demand a majority. In the last Parliament, when they had a seat on the Committee, they did not exercise that right to speak for Scotland. They cannot have their cake and eat it. If they wanted to be on that Committee in the last Parliament, why did they not exercise their right to take up their seat? Why come to the Chamber tonight and try to pull the wool over people's eyes?

Pete Wishart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mark Menzies: No. In the good traditions of the SNP, I will not take the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

As a Scot who represents an English seat, I want to do the right thing by the Scottish Affairs Committee. I say to SNP Members: please do not come here and give us the heavy guilt trip, and say, "If you don't have a

[Mark Menzies]

majority of Scots on the Committee, you're letting Scotland down." In the last Parliament, they had a seat and did not take it up. Perhaps they were letting Scotland down. I will leave that point to rest.

7.44 pm

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): It is very nice to see you, Madam Deputy Speaker, in the Chair. I believe it is the first such occasion since your election. Even though we are to witness the death of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, your decision, as a former member of that Committee, to dress entirely in black was unnecessary but very welcome, and the message will have been received by many in the House.

The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee had a magnificent record in serving this House over five years. I do not know whether that is why its tenure has not been renewed. It is for the usual channels and the Leader of the House's Office to make it clear why the Committee's tenure has not been renewed. I will list one or two of our reports that may have caused some embarrassment to the then coalition Government. However, all of them were done and approved by an all-party Select Committee, which was elected by this House. The Chair, which was me, was one of the first to be elected by the whole House, because of the Wright Committee reforms. All the members of the Select Committee were, for the first time ever, elected by the individual parties in a secret ballot.

My anxiety, which I am sure the Leader of the House will allay, is that this could be the first of the changes—the rolling back—that will leave the Government completely in control without even a nod in the direction of parliamentary accountability, because I believe that parliamentary accountability will be lessened.

This was not a Committee packed by one party or another. In fact, it had a Conservative majority, but anyone attending the Committee would not have got that impression. The members of the Committee, including you, Madam Deputy Speaker, when you were in a less distinguished role, are among the most awkward bunch of people whom one could ever get together in one Select Committee. Perhaps that is another reason the Select Committee is being abolished tonight by the Government.

I should mention here some of the colleagues on the Committee: the hon. Members for Christchurch (Mr Chope), for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), and for Foyle (Mark Durkan), my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), the then Member for Chippenham, Duncan Hames, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton), the hon. Members for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris), and for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), the then Member for Vale of Clwyd, Chris Ruane, and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner). Many of those distinguished Members from all parts of the House are in the Chamber this evening.

There are also Members who were on the Committee who are very keen to be named, and quite rightly, for the great work that they did, including the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths), who served so well. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen

West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) was in the House just a moment ago, and has left. Then there was the then Members for Taunton Deane, Jeremy Browne, for Edinburgh East, Sheila Gilmore, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt), the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs Laing)—of course, Madam Deputy Speaker—my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi), and the then Member for Bristol West, Stephen Williams. Like you, Madam Deputy Speaker, they are people who, from this modest training ground of a Select Committee, have gone on to higher things.

Unlike some Select Committees, the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee took its job very, very seriously, and it never missed a quorum. New colleagues coming to the House may understand that as we get towards the end of a five-year Parliament, it is quite easy to want to drift off and go to our constituencies on a Thursday morning, which is when we used to meet. But we never missed a quorum.

Another interesting fact is that my Select Committee never went on a foreign trip. I do not know whether there is any other Select Committee that can say that. Perhaps that is another reason why we were abolished. Perhaps we were stepping out of line. [Interruption] I do not know whether our frequent visits to Scotland should be regarded as a foreign trip. We certainly did not see it that way. We also made frequent visits to the Senedd in Cardiff and to our good friends in Belfast.

As Members will gather from that roll call of Committee members, we were very serious about our work; indeed we could be nothing else. As I read my own obituary as the Chair of the Select Committee—certainly the Select Committee's obituary if not my own—I can say, I guess, that it leaves me free to operate in other means. I wish to commend Martyn Atkins, Steven Mark, Joanna Dodd and others who were part of the team. Any Select Committee lives or dies by the capability of its Clerks and those who assist it, and those individuals did a most magnificent job.

If anyone cares to read not even the reports but the list of reports that the Select Committee produced, they will see that it was at the sharp end of so many of the debates that will continue in the new Parliament and that it is perhaps rather strange that it is not enabled to continue its life to pursue some of those issues. We have heard some of them tonight. We have issues such as English votes for English laws—not disappeared and still requiring scrutiny—and human rights.

The Government may welcome a little assistance with their human rights legislation, which does not seem to be progressing smoothly. That is exactly the sort of thing on which, with a five-year Parliament, the Chief Whip does not have to ram everything through or hold every Second Reading in the next couple of weeks. That is the old days; things have changed. We now have a five-year fixed term. He could get the board in Mr Roy Stone's office—he runs the House of Commons—and plan proper scrutiny. One of our reports was on legislative scrutiny. Why on earth can we not have a steady, clear rolling forward of Bills to include pre-legislative scrutiny of every Bill? Is that not one of the roles of the House? Should that not apply to every Bill, wherever practical?

Have other issues—for example, parliamentary boundaries—gone away? I think not, and I suspect that with an impartial, all-party view, with serious scrutiny,

not done on the basis of the whim of the Chair or the majority of members but by a difficult, independent-minded bunch of people getting under the skin of some of these issues, the House could do the Government a great service, if only they realised that they should have a partnership with the House, rather than a relationship of domination and subordination, and it is a great pity that they do that.

We looked at devolution throughout our five years as a Select Committee, not to interfere with the Scottish and Welsh Affairs Committees and the Communities and Local Government Committee—they were doing very well—but in an overarching way to look at the constitutional implications and not just how this affects, say, Wales but how it affects the Union, how other nations in the Union could learn, as we learned when we visited the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Executive, and how things can be done better than they have been done here, often for many hundreds of years without reform.

We certainly need effective scrutiny of things such as English devolution. Can that possibly be given the focus that a dedicated Select Committee on political reform could give it? Had the House completed its consideration of all those democratic reforms, I would be the first to say that the House no longer needed such a Select Committee. That patently is not true; those issues still require scrutiny. I have great respect for the Chairs whom I have served with on the Liaison Committee—the Chairs of the Public Administration and Justice Committees and the Scottish and Welsh Affairs Committees and the Communities and Local Government Committee and others, all of whom were very capable—but they all had very full agendas. Unless they do not have a full agenda, how on earth can they give the sort of scrutiny to things that we gave focus to in the last Parliament?

Sadly, on some occasions, there was not always a relationship of joy. I am surprised that the Chief Whip smiles. He should bow his head in shame for the fact that his Government presented, for example, the gagging Bill, as it became known, one day before the rise of the House and gave it a Second Reading on one day when the House returned. That is not allowing Parliament to scrutinise effectively. Sadly, that is a Government who feel a lack of confidence in their ability to trust Parliament and an all-party committee to give a fair deal, hear witnesses and take evidence. I hope that the Leader of the House changes that tone and style over the next five years and gets the best out of the House of Commons, rather than treating it as a potential enemy to be suppressed, kept down and not talked to.

I said that my Select Committee members were an awkward and difficult bunch. When they were told that the Government were going to put the Bill before the House one day before the recess and have Second Reading one day after the recess, they obviously rolled over and went on their summer holidays—I don't think so. They insisted that we took evidence in the recess, before the House came back. We did our duty by the House. I do not know whether the House wishes to do its duty by our Select Committee tonight. That is another matter, but we did our duty by the House by reconvening and calling witnesses so that we could do a thorough job for the House. Anyone who witnessed the proceedings of the gagging Bill as it went through the House of Commons can do nothing but say that the Select Committee

did its job thoroughly. For possibly three or four days on the Floor of the House, we made sure that the Bill was properly scrutinised.

To give credit where it is due, the Government adopted many of the Select Committee's proposals. It was not done in a partisan or partial way. There were things that we discovered and could help the Government with to produce a better Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) called it a dog's breakfast. I think that through its work the Select Committee made that dog's breakfast slightly more palatable.

There were occasions when the Government were rather slow to respond to the Select Committee's proposals. As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is traditional for a Select Committee to produce a report and for the Government then to respond. Even after the general election, there are still outstanding matters, where the House has not received through its Select Committee a response from Government.

I will write to the Leader of the House listing the items that still need a reply. I should tell him that, on one occasion, the Government took a year to reply to a Select Committee report. But it was worth waiting for—the response was one page long and it did not address any of the detailed points made by your Select Committee, on your behalf, whichever part of the House you sit in.

Alex Salmond: The Standing Orders.

Mr Allen: Rather like the Women and Equalities Committee, which will I hope be established today, the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee was not in the Standing Orders, as departmental Select Committees are. I ask colleagues who have fought hard to get their Select Committees to remember the difficulties that can be put in their way and what can happen if it is a Select Committee that fulfils its duty to the House and in some cases over-fulfils it, but is not in the Standing Orders. It is much more difficult for a Government who feel they can run roughshod over the House of Commons to repeal the Select Committee if it is in the Standing Orders.

I see you, Madam Deputy Speaker, are shuffling in your place. I do not know whether that is because I am coming to the end of my remarks or whether you are moving in anticipation of the list of reports that the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee produced in the previous Parliament on behalf of the House. I will touch briefly on those and bring my remarks to a close before the hour is up.

For example, we did an extensive report on voter engagement. At the general election before last, 16 million voters did not vote; 7.5 million did not even register. That figure is higher than that for those who voted for both the major parties. We carefully examined a lot of evidence on what we could do about the situation, and more than 16,000 consultations were returned—a record for the Select Committee.

One of the features of the Select Committee on Political and Constitutional Reform was that it involved people outside the bubble. It went not only to the Assemblies and Parliament outside Westminster, but discussed through social media and other means the implications of some of the things we were proposing.

[Mr Graham Allen]

That is why we reported on votes at 16 and 17 at future general elections and on why online voting should be taken seriously. That is why before the last election we led, not least by portraying a ballot box on Big Ben, on the effort to encourage people to register to vote. We did many other things as well.

Unfortunately, we were not taken seriously on our proposals on political parties and their funding; that issue still needs proper scrutiny and it requires the House to come to a final settlement. There is still no formal process for the House to be consulted about going to war. A convention has arisen in recent years. I remember trying to get the House to sit to consider the Iraq war, and it took a great deal of effort for that to happen. The then Foreign Secretary stated that the Government would enshrine in law for the future the necessity of consulting Parliament on military action. That has not yet happened, and the Government have yet to respond to the report—even before the demise of the Select Committee, the Government had failed to respond to that report.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Laing): Order. While the hon. Gentleman is pausing slightly, I should say that I fully appreciate that he is illustrating his amendment by eloquently explaining to the House the importance of his excellent Select Committee's work in the last Parliament. However, I am afraid that I have to tell him that, in going through in detail—or indeed at all—all his Committee's reports, however excellent, he is not strictly in order. I know that he will wish to remain in order and tailor his remarks accordingly.

Mr Allen: I did say that we had some awkward people on my Select Committee, Madam Deputy Speaker; I did not realise that you would prove that so eloquently from the Chair. You are absolutely right to bring me to order and I will stick far more closely—for the next half hour or so—to the subject at hand. "I'm just getting my second wind", as Eric Forth used to say.

I am speaking to the amendment on the Order Paper—[*Interruption.*] I should say to the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) that it is at the top of page 10; I am glad that her reading is coming on. It would add "and political reform" to the title of what would now be the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. That is important because such important issues need to be scrutinised by Parliament and have to go somewhere; no doubt the human rights question will go to the Justice Committee. The so-called territorial Committees will be interested in these issues and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee will want to take a view. Such issues, including the Boundary Commission, are very important to our democracy.

The last reform I want to mention, in the context of the "political reform" stated on the Order Paper, is in respect of the House itself—the unfinished business of the Wright Committee, which did so much good work. I commend it to the Leader of the House, who is listening intently. One of his predecessors, Sir George Young, put before the House the necessary motions to ensure that the House could elect its Select Committees and could elect their Chairs from across the whole House.

One of the items of unfinished business would end this sort of pantomime, in which we pretend that Parliament has decided, but we know in reality that the Government have decided, pushed along by one or two officials when new Ministers and Whips are in place. They want above all to ensure that we do not have the mechanism to decide our own agenda in this House. The only institution that can do so is a House business Committee. The right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), who is now the Chief Whip, was a member of the Government who promised solemnly—it may even have been in the manifesto—to bring forward a House business Committee. Instead of manipulating the House through the usual channels—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is addressing a matter of importance and one that was considered at length by his excellent Committee, but that does not make it in order for the matter before us now. I am aware that other Members wish briefly to contribute to this debate, and that we have a maximum of 12 minutes left. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, who is a great constitutionalist, will respect the constitutional position of the Chamber and adhere very strictly to the matter in question.

Mr Allen: That is the first time I have ever been accused—it is an appalling accusation—of being a great constitutionalist. I am a democrat, as I hope most people in this Parliament are. The only way in which all of us in the House will be able to express our views openly and freely, without being told what to do by the incubus of Government that controls us here, is by having our own House business Committee.

I believe that those of us who served on the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee have a very proud record to look back on. I hope that some of the things we did and some of our reports are a legacy that people can dip into when they feel they have a problem on human rights or on codifying what the Union should look like in a devolved and federal United Kingdom. For example, they could look at our report on the Boundary Commission question, which we came up with very close to the end of our term. There is a lot of good stuff in the reports. It is just a little sad for the ability of this House to scrutinise the Government, who hold all the cards, that this Committee and its successors may not be able to scrutinise them and do the job that parliamentarians of all parties feel is the role of this Parliament.

Thank you for your forbearance, Madam Deputy Speaker. With that, I close the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee.

8.8 pm

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I rise briefly to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) who chaired the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee. I have to declare an interest: I hope to resume the chairmanship of the Public Administration Committee, which will now be the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. His speech lays down a very serious challenge for that Committee in carrying on the kind of work that he did so ably as the Chairman of his Committee.

I take the hon. Gentleman's points about workload very seriously. I fear that all Select Committees suffer from the characteristic that, whatever Committee it is, it will unavoidably find extremely important matters to

fill its time and which are beyond the capacity of the members and the staff to deliver. We will have to be very disciplined in the Committee, if I am fortunate to be elected as its Chair, to pick and choose the subjects of most importance. The future of the United Kingdom is possibly the most important issue facing that Committee. I will very much welcome a representative of the Scottish National party on the Committee to participate in those discussions. We should take the opportunity to ensure that there is calm and rational discussion about these matters. However, I do not want to stray out of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, by talking about what a future Committee might do.

I simply wanted to speak about the end of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee. The hon. Member for Nottingham North well knows that it was only created as a special measure to shadow the work of the then Deputy Prime Minister in the coalition Government. It was not cemented into the Standing Orders as a permanent feature. Even if it had been, it would have been just as vulnerable to repeal by a motion such as that on the changes to Standing Order No. 146.

I am pleased that something my Committee recommended—an equalities Committee—is coming into being. In our final report of the last Parliament, we foresaw the possibility that if the temporary measure of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee ceased, the Public Administration Committee would take back the constitutional responsibilities. I welcome that being expressed in the title of the Committee in the Government's motion.

Far be it from me to be over-enthusiastic in case I am seen as trying to carve out a greater role for myself, but I wanted to put on the record just how much respect the hon. Member for Nottingham North has earned across the entire House for his extraordinary seriousness and commitment to the subject matter. I hope very much that he will continue to contribute to this House in whatever capacity he can, perhaps even on the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, although I know how irksome that thought might be to him.

8.11 pm

Chris Grayling: I will wrap up the debate very briefly.

The hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) talked about his political obituary. Nobody believes that for a moment. He will undoubtedly find just as many ways to contribute to the debate in this Parliament as he has found throughout the years that we have both served in this House.

I reassure the hon. Gentleman about the attitude of the Government to Select Committees. He will note from the Order Paper that we will have more Committees in this Parliament that we did in the last. We will continue to listen carefully to Parliament, as is right and proper.

I say to the Scottish nationalists that the Chief Whip and I have listened carefully to their comments. We will, no doubt, have further discussions on these issues. The right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) was in the House when I was first elected. I always remember him bringing a quality to the debate in this House and his return has undoubtedly brought back a quality to the debate in this, the Union Parliament. In doing so, he brings strength to the Union.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That with effect until the end of the current Parliament, Standing Order No. 152 be amended by the insertion of the following line at the appropriate point in the table in paragraph (2):

“Women and Equalities	Government Equalities Office	11”
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CHANGES TO STANDING ORDER NO. 146 (SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION)

Ordered,

That the following changes be made to standing orders—

(1) Leave out paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 146 (Select Committee on Public Administration) and insert the following new paragraphs:

“(1) There shall be a select committee, to be called the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, to examine the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner for England, which are laid before this House, and matters in connection therewith; to consider matters relating to the quality and standards of administration provided by civil service departments, and other matters relating to the civil service; and to consider constitutional affairs.

(1A) The committee shall consist of eleven Members.”;

(2) Change the title of Standing Order No. 146 to “Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee”;

(3) In Standing Order No. 122B, line 9, leave out “Select Committee on Public Administration” and insert “Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee”;

(4) In Standing Order No. 143, line 69, leave out “Select Committee on Public Administration” and insert “Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee”;

(5) In Standing Order No. 152K, lines 10 and 15, leave out “Select Committee on Public Administration” and insert “Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee”.—(*Chris Grayling.*)

SELECT COMMITTEE: ALLOCATION OF CHAIRS

Ordered,

That, pursuant to Standing Order No 122B (Election of Committee Chairs), the chairs of those select committees subject to the Standing Order be allocated as indicated in the following Table

Select committees appointed under SO No 152:

Business, Innovation and Skills	Labour
Communities and Local Government	Labour
Culture, Media and Sport	Conservative
Defence	Conservative
Education	Conservative
Energy and Climate Change	Scottish National Party
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Conservative
Foreign Affairs	Conservative
Health	Conservative
Home Affairs	Labour
International Development	Labour
Justice	Conservative
Northern Ireland	Conservative
Science and Technology	Conservative

Scottish Affairs	Scottish National Party
Transport	Labour
Treasury	Conservative
Welsh Affairs	Conservative
Women and Equalities	Conservative
Work and Pensions	Labour
Other specified select committees:	
Environmental Audit	Labour
Petitions	Labour
Procedure	Conservative
Public Accounts	Labour
Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs	Conservative
Standards	Labour

—(*Chris Grayling*.)

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Laing): I can now announce the arrangements for the ballot for the election of Select Committee Chairs. The ballot will be held on Wednesday 17 June from 10 am until 5 pm in Committee Room 6. Nominations may be submitted in the Table Office from tomorrow at 9 am. Nominations will close at 5 pm on Wednesday 10 June.

In accordance with Standing Order No. 122D, I can also announce that the ballot and nomination timings for the election of the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee will be the same as those I have just described.

A briefing note with more details about the elections will be made available to Members and published on the intranet.

Business without Debate

ADJOURNMENT (SUMMER, CONFERENCE RECESS, NOVEMBER, CHRISTMAS AND FEBRUARY)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No.25),

That this House—

(1) at its rising on Tuesday 21 July 2015, do adjourn until Monday 7 September 2015;

(2) at its rising on Thursday 17 September 2015, do adjourn until Monday 12 October 2015;

(3) at its rising on Tuesday 10 November 2015, do adjourn until Monday 16 November 2015;

(4) at its rising on Thursday 17 December 2015, do adjourn until Tuesday 5 January 2016;

(5) at its rising on Thursday 11 February 2016, do adjourn until Monday 22 February 2016.—(*Julian Smith*.)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS)

Ordered,

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 11 September; 16, 23 and 30 October; 6 and 20 November; 4 December; 22 and 29 January 2016, 5 and 26 February 2016; and 4 and 11 March 2016.—(*Julian Smith*.)

Health Services in Staffordshire

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Julian Smith*.)

8.16 pm

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Thank you very much indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak, and I congratulate you on your re-election, which is much deserved. I welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer), to his post, which is also greatly deserved.

With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will take interventions from colleagues, as the subject of the debate affects their constituents.

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent face some serious challenges in the provision of healthcare in the coming months and years. Although some of these issues concern the County hospital in my constituency of Stafford, which, together with Cannock Chase hospital, was the subject of a trust special administration, I also want to examine the broader situation. I will touch on emergency and acute services, community provision, cancer and end-of-life care, general practice and the financing of the health service.

Accident and emergency services in Staffordshire have been under the spotlight in recent days, with reports of pressure on the A&E department in the Royal Stoke University hospital and statistics showing that the hospital has had the highest number of 12-hour waits in recent months. At the same time, the A&E department at the County hospital in Stafford has been treating patients in under four hours more than 95% of the time in many of the most recent weeks.

It has seemed both necessary and clear to my constituents for a long time that returning the County hospital's A&E department to a 24-hour service would both relieve some of the pressure on the Royal Stoke University hospital and improve overnight services for the 300,000 people in the County hospital's catchment area. So I welcome the Secretary of State's support in this House yesterday for restoring the 24/7 A&E service

"as soon as we can find a way of doing it that is clinically safe".—[*Official Report*, 2 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 439.]

Safety, of course, is paramount; I am the sponsor of the Health and Social Care (Safety and Quality) Act 2015, and it is absolutely right that safety is paramount. Therefore, will the Minister say what steps have already been taken and when we can expect to see progress on this issue?

However, the problems at the Royal Stoke are not simply the result of additional patients from the Stafford area. As I understand it, they also arise from the long-term trend in rising emergency admissions, particularly of older people, and difficulties in discharging patients to their home or to community beds.

I understand that last week's report about the possible closure of up to 100 community beds in north Staffordshire is not accurate. Nevertheless, there are real concerns about the future of our community hospitals. Any reduction in beds is likely to lead to further delays in the discharge of patients and have a knock-on impact on the A&E department at the Royal Stoke, which would affect my constituents as well as those of other hon. Members.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend for securing this debate and I share his concerns, particularly because these issues also affect my constituents in Congleton. One of them has written to me expressing concern that cardiac patients needing to be urgently “transferred to The Royal Stoke immediately on arrival at our local hospital A&E, Leighton” can be at serious risk as a result of the additional pressures on services. Indeed, he says that if this issue is not resolved “fatalities may be the consequence.”

Jeremy Lefroy: I thank my hon. Friend. She makes a point that I think will be echoed by other hon. Members in the area.

The reason given for the potential closure of the community beds was that more care would be provided at home, but how precisely will that be done? I have to declare an interest in that my wife works as a GP in Stoke-on-Trent. From what I hear, community nursing teams sometimes have difficulty in managing the workloads they have at the moment, so where will the extra capacity come from? Surely it would be more sensible, before those beds disappear—if indeed they are scheduled to disappear—to ensure that the extra community nurses are in place and to show that there is a clear reduction in the need for such beds. I urge the Minister to question any proposed reduction in community beds—even if it is not of the order mentioned in the press last week—at a time when they seem to be most in need.

I will now turn to acute services in general. The University Hospitals of the North Midlands Trust has recently announced the closure of in-patient oncology and haematology at the County hospital. In future, there will be outpatient chemotherapy treatment, but in-patients will be seen in the Royal Stoke hospital. This move was not dealt with in any detail during the public consultation on the proposals of the trust special administrator, nor was it mentioned by the NHS in its information about the changes in services provided to my constituents or to those of my hon. Friends the Members for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) and for Stone (Sir William Cash), and my right hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Gavin Williamson) who are affected.

From a visit to a patient on the oncology unit at the County hospital last week, it was clear to me that the service was not only very busy, but greatly appreciated. Constituents have written to me saying how important it was to have the unit relatively close, so that they could be with their family through stays which were very difficult and often lengthy. Why move what is appreciated and working well? I understand that there are staffing problems, but surely those could be tackled. I ask the Minister to look at this again.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Does my hon. Friend welcome the statement made by the Secretary of State for Health the day before yesterday regarding the question of agencies and the absolute necessity to make sure they do not rip off the health service? May I also congratulate him not only on his splendid victory, but on the fact that he has just collected the Act of Parliament that he so successfully piloted last year?

Jeremy Lefroy: I thank my hon. Friend. He has been a huge support in all these matters, which have at times been extremely difficult. He is absolutely right. I have come across cases of agency workers charging absolutely

extortionate fees. I could give the Minister in private—he would be shocked to hear them—one or two examples of what I consider to be close to blackmail.

Another question is raised: if these important services are moving, without mention in the information to my constituents, are other moves planned of which we have no information? The loss of emergency surgery, consultant-led maternity, full level 3 critical care and in-patient paediatrics was—even if most were the wrong decisions—at least clearly set out and communicated with my constituents. These acute in-patient services were not. What we therefore need, and what I have been asking for since last summer, is a clear summary of exactly what services will be available and where.

Of course, this is primarily the responsibility of the UHNM Trust. However, it is grossly unfair to place this burden entirely on it. It has been asked to do a huge job in bringing together two acute hospitals, one of which has been the subject of a major public inquiry. It needs the full support of the NHS through the NHS Trust Development Authority and NHS England. I am asking the Minister to make it his responsibility to do precisely that.

I will now turn to the tender for cancer and end-of-life services throughout the west of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The proposal has been developed by NHS England, the four clinical commissioning groups covering North Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Stafford and surrounds, and Cannock Chase, and Macmillan Cancer Care. The objective is clear: to improve cancer outcomes, which are currently below the average for England and well below the European best, so that survival rates are among the best in England by 2025 and subsequently among the best in Europe.

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend for securing this debate and for the fantastic work he has done over the last five years, both for his constituents and for people across Staffordshire. We welcome the work he does, and I am sure he would join me in thanking the doctors, nurses and clinical staff across Staffordshire who have worked so hard to get improved care across our county. Does he agree that we still have a fragile healthcare economy in Staffordshire? I managed to secure £8 million for East Staffordshire CCG thanks to the help of the previous Health Minister, but that is for just one year, so does my hon. Friend agree that we need to move towards fairer funding in Staffordshire?

Jeremy Lefroy: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend and reiterate his remarks about the excellent work done in my constituency by staff at the County hospital to recover the situation, which a few years ago was extremely difficult, to one where the quality of care offered is of a very high standard.

To return to cancer and end-of-life services, the real concern has been over the method being used. To quote Macmillan:

“We think a procurement process is the best way to integrate the fragmented cancer and end of life services we have in Staffordshire. A procurement process is needed because at the moment there is no one organisation with overall control of cancer or end of life services.”

My argument has always been: in that case, what are CCGs for? They are there to commission, so why can they not commission? In the last Parliament, we gave them

[Jeremy Lefroy]

the ability to work together to procure services, so why cannot the four CCGs involved, together with Macmillan, simply make that happen? The answer I was given at the time was that the constraints on CCGs' own administration costs—a reducing amount of funding per head—meant that it was impossible. Sometimes I am puzzled. We see this all over Government and have done for many years and across many Departments: we constrain spending on so-called bureaucracy and then, in order to get necessary things done, pay large sums of money to consultants to do precisely the kind of bureaucratic work that we forbid the experts from doing—in this case the CCGs—but, because it is called consultancy or programme work rather than overheads, it is allowed. There is a problem that needs to be solved—I do not deny that—and it affects the lives of my constituents and those of other Members, so it must be solved.

Macmillan says about the first two years of the contract:

“The main responsibility of the integrator will be to address the current inadequate data about pathway activity and the real cost of this activity. Much increased investment over the last decade has arguably been wasted by poor contract accountability and a lack of reliable data and analytics.”

That is important, but it is a research and advisory role. I have no problem with the CCGs calling in experts to offer them such research and advice, whether it is a private company, university or, indeed, another arm of the NHS. A fee will be paid for that work. Again, I have no problem with that, but I would like the Minister to say how much it is likely to be. As local MPs, we have a right to know, on behalf of our constituents, or at least have a rough idea.

According to Macmillan, after 18 months the integrator—I would say consultant—will be expected to

“present a more detailed strategy as to how they expect to achieve improved service outcomes. If the evidence is robust, arrangements will be made for all contracts to be transferred to the Service Integrator from the beginning of year 3. If not, the contract with the Integrator could be terminated and the Service integrator will be required to repay all (or a significant part) of their fee to date.”

That is where I do not see the logic. What makes an organisation that is good at research and advice the right body to run cancer services for our constituents? Why can it not simply be thanked for its advice and that advice, if it is good, be followed by the CCGs, working in co-operation with the providers? The risk is that the vital work that patients, the CCGs and Macmillan have done, with the very best of intentions, will be damaged by contractual arrangements that do not make sense and may put a private organisation with a somewhat different ethos in charge of commissioning NHS providers for services, rather than the other way round.

I have no problem at all with a private organisation producing a much better plan for cancer and end-of-life services, nor do I have a problem with social enterprises or private providers being involved in delivering certain elements of that plan, as they do now and have done under Labour, coalition and Conservative Governments. However, I do not see the logic in the organisation producing that plan becoming another bureaucratic tier between the CCGs, providers and patients. I therefore ask the Minister to take up the proposed contract with the CCGs.

The state of general practice is gradually becoming critical in our area. Many GPs are retiring or approaching retirement. I welcome the Government's plans to train more GPs, but we will also have to train more medical students or rely on recruiting from overseas.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In Health questions this week, an issue close to my heart was raised about GP numbers and how many doctors are choosing to become GPs. We have similar issues in Northern Ireland. The difficulties in Staffordshire have been outlined, but they are mirrored across the whole of the United Kingdom, and particularly in Northern Ireland. Could any steps be taken to encourage more doctors to become GPs, thus dealing with the problem of the massive number of patients that each doctor has, because we are getting to the stage where doctors will not be able to cope?

Jeremy Lefroy: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who hits the nail on the head. It is vital to increase the number of medical students and those training as GPs. I know that the Government want to do that and are committed to it, but I believe they need to expand the number of medical school places.

What plans do the Government have for expanding the number of medical school places and ensuring that those trained stay and work in the NHS, particularly in those areas that are running short of GPs? A seven-day personalised service is an ideal, but those GPs who take the care of their patients extremely seriously—and that is the vast majority of them—are already working extraordinarily hard. The European working time directive most certainly does not apply to GPs, even if it does to the rest of the NHS, and if it were to apply, our family doctor service would fall apart.

Finally, I wish to address the financing of the NHS in Staffordshire. All parts of it are under strain. The KPMG report showed, although some of its solutions have rightly not been accepted, that there is a serious problem. The answer is not to be found in short-term fixes, whether they be in Staffordshire or elsewhere. The NHS England 2020 plan—tough though it is—gives us the opportunity to think long term. Yesterday, I argued in this place for a cross-party commission, including the medical professions, on the future of health and social care and its provision and financing for the 20 or 30 years beyond 2020. I repeat that call today, and I urge the Minister and his colleagues to take up the challenge.

8.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer): It is a great pleasure to serve in this, your first Adjournment debate of the new Parliament, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am delighted that you have found your seat again. It is a great pleasure, too, to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), who has been a model for many of us in the 2010 intake in his advocacy of local health issues. He was rightly recognised for so doing in the election, and I am delighted that he, like so many of my hon. Friends, was returned with such a considerable mandate as a result of his hard work. I congratulate him, too, on securing this important Adjournment debate, which continues the battle he has fought on behalf of his constituents over the last Parliament.

Let me say first that the initial meetings I have had in my new position have in large part centred on the issues raised as a result, both directly and indirectly, of the terrible events that befell the Mid Staffordshire trust. My hon. Friend's bringing of this Adjournment debate is timely in that sense.

I shall first address some of the specific issues my hon. Friend raised about the procurements recently spoken about in the press before moving on to deal with the more general issues. None of this has been particularly helped by some of the comments in the local media. Looking at the CCG's proposals to improve the organisation of cancer and end-of-life services, which my hon. Friend raised first, I would like to announce to him and the House today that a public-private consortium led by two NHS trusts is now the sole remaining bidder and is in the final stages of talks with the CCG to manage the cancer care pathway. This is an innovative model. I know my hon. Friend has some reservations about it, but it is the first of its kind and it should greatly help to improve and develop services for patients. It is one of the outcomes we wanted to see from the changes in his county, so that health excellence emerges out of the terrible events that occurred. I know we share a common position on that.

Four CCGs are in the process of procuring this consortium to act as a service integrator for the wide range of organisations in the area providing cancer care and to improve the journey of patients in the county and their experience of the care they receive. Dialogue will now continue.

My hon. Friend asked about the role of advisers, consultants and the associated costs. I cannot give him the details now, but I will ensure that they are provided to him. I will ensure also that all officials, including those in the CCG, have the discussion about the role of consultants and advisers in order to satisfy him—or not—on that matter.

Let me now deal with some more general points about the health economy in which my hon. Friend's constituency sits. It is challenged, and it has been challenged for a long time. Last year, Staffordshire was identified as one of the 11 most challenged local health economies in England. The healthcare organisations in those areas need intensive support to ensure that, as a minimum, services are clinically and financially sustainable over the next five years.

Many of the problems faced by Staffordshire have lain unaddressed for years. Recruitment and retention problems are not unique to the county—other parts of the country experience them as well—but, as my hon. Friend will know, they contributed to the dreadful events on which he has become an expert. Change is needed, not just in the hospitals but in the local health economy as a whole.

As my hon. Friend has already explained, the county hospital in Stafford is now part of the new University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust—in alliance with services in Stoke—but that in itself is not enough to ensure that patients get a better service. That is about much more than a change of management. A solution often used by the NHS involves concentrating services on a single site, so that professional skills are maximised and patients receive much better care.

Although there is a need to reorganise, reorganisation is not just a switch of management location; services themselves must change. That process must be led by local clinicians, working in a partnership between hospital and community, and taking the views of patients into account. The eventual structure cannot be imposed from the outside, nor can there be a “one size fits all” answer. Stafford's geography, population distribution, transport links and distance to nearby towns and cities, for example, are all relevant to a decision on how services should be set up. Any solution must take account of those factors, as well as others such as disease prevalence and age profile, which are, perhaps, more obviously health-related.

Sir William Cash: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Ben Gummer: I will, briefly.

Sir William Cash: Let me—briefly—remind my hon. Friend that people in the deep rural parts of my constituency are served by the county hospital and the University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust. It is important to ensure that, when there is a lack of easy communication on the motorway, they too are specially looked after.

Ben Gummer: That is precisely the point that I made to the clinical commissioning groups when I spoke to them yesterday. I appreciate its importance, and not just on the basis of my own experience of representing an urban seat in a largely rural county.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford raised the issue of community beds. I need not advise him to exercise caution when it comes to believing everything that he reads in the press. However, there will be consultation about any changes that do take place, and I know that the Trust Development Authority and the commissioners will work together to ensure that they take place in a coherent fashion. Following my forthcoming meeting with chief executives and the TDA commissioners, I shall be happy to meet my hon. Friend and others to discuss changes in services if that will help to allay his concerns.

I have had detailed discussions with commissioners and NHS England about haematology and oncology services. Although there was a thought that they had been mentioned in original documents, I must say that I, too, found such mentions to be lacking. I am afraid problems of that kind are often encountered in the NHS, and that, in the past, consultations have not been as full or as pertinent as they should have been. I have asked the NHS again to consult specifically on those services, and also to engage in a full and proper consultation with patients and local groups. The same will apply to any other services that may come into question. I take my hon. Friend's point about the need for a list of services, and I will pass it on to the CCGs, because I think it is important.

Jeremy Lefroy: I am most grateful to the Minister. It is very good news that there will be proper, extra consultation. As I said earlier, last week I visited a patient whom I know, and saw the excellent service that is currently being provided. It would be a real loss—more than that, a tragedy—were that service to be moved.

Ben Gummer: I stress that it is not for me to design the outcome of that consultation, because the whole point of what we are trying to do is to allow clinicians to make that decision, but they must consult properly.

[Ben Gummer]

The same pertains for A&E. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said that round-the-clock A&E services—I know he has made this point specifically to my hon. Friend—could return to Stafford if clinically safe to do so.

There is a need for quality services to be delivered immediately, however, and that is why I am concerned also about the situation at Stoke, where issues clearly need to be addressed in the immediate term. I wrote yesterday to the chief executive of the University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust to arrange a meeting with him, local commissioners and the TDA to see what can be done immediately to help improve the emergency services at Stoke. I will of course speak to my hon. Friend following that meeting to bring him up to date on the conclusions of that discussion.

I also understand from the local NHS that the plans are resilient and will deliver better services, and that the work is being led by CCGs and local authority commissioners. They are redesigning the Staffordshire health and social care economy to ensure that patients enjoy the benefits of a safe, high-quality and financially sound service in the long term. That is their assurance to me. My job, and my hon. Friend's, is to ensure that they fulfil their promise.

My hon. Friend brought up two separate issues more generally about agency nurses and consultants, and he will have seen the announcements made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State yesterday and today

about them. Both go to the heart of the matter my hon. Friend raised and demonstrate how we in this Government are prepared to move rapidly on the matters facing the NHS in the early days of this Parliament to ensure that we can deliver the excellence in healthcare that we know our constituents deserve and wish for.

The Minister for Community and Social Care, sitting beside me, has heard my hon. Friend's comments on GP numbers. That is a challenge throughout England and in my constituency, and one that we hope to address in part by the 5,000 additional general practitioners whom we hope to recruit in the next five years. We will, however, bring forward a range of measures to ensure that general practice not only survives but flourishes in the years to come.

In conclusion, I thank once again my hon. Friend for bringing so carefully and diligently these important matters to the House's attention. It has allowed us to explore some of the wider issues facing the national health service. I hope I have provided him with a few points of consolation and also reassurance on how the Government and local health commissioners will proceed with the matters that he has raised. If he has any further complaints, problems, wishes or desires about his local health service, he should come to me. That invitation extends to his colleagues in the county of Staffordshire as well.

Question put and agreed to.

8.42 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 3 June 2015

CABINET OFFICE

Cabinet Committees and Implementation Taskforces (Membership)

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr Oliver Letwin): Today I am publishing an updated Cabinet Committees list. Alongside the Committees, the Prime Minister has created 10 implementation taskforces to monitor and drive delivery of the Government's most important cross-cutting priorities. I have placed a copy of the new list in the Libraries of both Houses.

Attachments can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2015-06-03/HCWS12>

[HCWS12]

Handling Members' Correspondence

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr Oliver Letwin): I am today publishing a report on the performance of Departments and agencies on handling correspondence from Members and Peers during the calendar year 2014.

Details are set out in the table below. Correspondence statistics for 2013 can be found on 13 May 2014, *Official Report*, column 17WS.

Departmental figures are based on substantive replies unless otherwise indicated. The footnotes to the table provide general background information on how the figures have been compiled.

Correspondence from MPI/Peers to Ministers and Agency Chief Executives 2014 (1)

<i>Department or Agency</i>	<i>Target set for reply (working days)</i>	<i>Number of letters received</i>	<i>% of replies within target</i>
Attorney General's Office	20	434	82
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills	15	6,382	81
- Insolvency Service	15	87	87
- Intellectual Property Office	10	5	80
- Land Registry	15	151	92
- Met Office	10	1	0
- Ordnance Survey	15	4	100
- Skills Funding Agency	10	663	99
Cabinet Office	15	3,257	71
Charity Commission	15	225	89
Department for Communities and Local Government	10	8,574	42
- Planning Inspectorate	10	853	86
Crown Prosecution Service	20	450	98

Correspondence from MPI/Peers to Ministers and Agency Chief Executives 2014 (1)

<i>Department or Agency</i>	<i>Target set for reply (working days)</i>	<i>Number of letters received</i>	<i>% of replies within target</i>
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	20	3,638	85
Ministry of Defence	20	3,746	67
Department for Education	15	14,189	70
Department of Energy and Climate Change	15	5,046	66
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	15	10,595	72
- Animal and Plant Health Agency	15	26	65
- Rural Payments Agency	15	100	85
Food Standards Agency (*)	20	175	87
(*) FSA Ministers replies	20	101	85
(*) FSA Chair/CE replies	20	74	90
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	20	11,649	88
Department of Health	18	17,932	97
- Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency	18	27	96
- Public Health England	18	42	98
Home Office	15	6,529	66
- UK Visas and Immigration/Immigration Enforcement/Border Force	20	45,206	89
- Her Majesty's Passport Office (2)	15	3,128	Jan-Aug: 71 Sep-Dec: 63
Department for International Development	15	3,103	92
Ministry of Justice	15	3,419	64
- HM Courts Service and Tribunals Service (*)			
(*) Where Ministers replied	15	785	58
(*) Where CEO replied	15	323	94
- National Archives (*)			
(*) Where Ministers replied	15	18	76
(*) Where CEO replied	10	10	100
- National Offender Management Service			
(*) Where Ministers replied	15	1,148	72
(*) Where CEO replied	20	318	97
- Office of the Public Guardian (*)			
(*) Where Ministers replied	15	58	83
(*) Where CEO replied	10	72	97
- Official Solicitor and Public Trustee	15	16	56
Northern Ireland Office	15	404	68
Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Schools	15	367	80
Office of Advocate General	15	71	95
Office of Gas and Electricity Markets	15	456	71
Office of the Leader of the House of Commons	15	139	81
Office of the Leader of the House of Lords	15	103	96
Office of Rail Regulation	20	51	78
OFWAT (Water Services Regulation Authority)	10	68	94
Scotland Office	15	303	71
Serious Fraud Office	20	60	83

Correspondence from MP/Peers to Ministers and Agency Chief Executives 2014 (1)

<i>Department or Agency</i>	<i>Target set for reply (working days)</i>	<i>Number of letters received</i>	<i>% of replies within target</i>
Department for Transport	20	8,227	95
- Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency	7	3,010	99
- Driving Standards Agency	10	128	98
HM Treasury	15	8,242	52
- H M Revenue and Customs (*)	15	10,992	
(*) Where Ministers replied	15	2,161	65
(*) Where CEO replied	15	8,831	81
Treasury Solicitor's Department	10	19	100
Wales Office	15	80	97
Department for Work and Pensions	20	16,542	83
Child Maintenance Group	15	958	99

Correspondence from MP/Peers to Ministers and Agency Chief Executives 2014 (1)

<i>Department or Agency</i>	<i>Target set for reply (working days)</i>	<i>Number of letters received</i>	<i>% of replies within target</i>
Health and Safety Executive	15	162	95
Human Resources Director General	15	36	97
	15	2,593	85

1—Departments and Agencies which received 10 MPs/Peers letters or fewer are not shown in this table. Holding or interim replies are not included unless otherwise indicated. The report does not include correspondence considered as freedom of information requests.

2—The format used to report MP case performance was changed in September. From January to August 2014, HMPO reported performance of cases received each month. From September onwards, this has changed to performance of cases dispatched each month, regardless of the month they were received.

3—Child maintenance figures are shown separately although they also come under the remit of the Director General Operations

[HCWS11]

Petition

Wednesday 3 June 2015

OBSERVATIONS

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Sri Lanka & UN Security Council decision

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of residents in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire and the surrounding areas,

Sheweth,

That the Government of Sri Lanka has officially proscribed 16 Tamil Diaspora Organisations and 424 Tamil individuals, many of whom are in the UK, through a government notification as a retaliatory response to 'Resolution A/HRC/25/L.1/Rev.1: Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka' which was passed by the UN Human Rights Council in March 2014; further that Sri Lanka has rejected the UN resolution outright and declared that it will not co-operate with the UN investigation and proscribed diaspora Tamil Community organisations that are championing the cause of justice for Tamil people; and further that the Petitioners believe that by doing so Sri Lanka is abusing UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR 1373) and criminalising the Tamil Community in the UK and around the world.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House urges the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to take Sri Lanka's decision to reject the UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR 1373) up in the international forum to remove this unlawful ban on the Tamil Community.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c. — [*Official Report*, 21 January 2015; Vol. 591, c. 4P.]

[P001428]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs:

We share the petitioners' concerns about this proscription. There are no formal mechanisms within the UN that we can use to make complaints about another state's domestic proscription under UNSCR 1373. However, we have raised our concerns—and pressed for a review of the decision—both with the former Government of Sri Lanka, including the Foreign Minister, and with President Sirisena's new Government. The Government have also made their position on the proscription clear on the record in the House of Commons.

The UN CTED (Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate) conducted a routine visit to Sri Lanka on 27-31 October 2014 to assess Sri Lankan implementation of UN CT resolutions 1373 and 1624. The UN CTED team briefed several heads of mission in Colombo at the end of their visit and said that they had discussed concerns about the listing of organisations and individuals by Sri Lanka under SC resolution 1373. The High Commissioner was able to raise our concerns over the lack of evidence provided by the Sri Lankan authorities with the UN CTED team at this time.

ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 3 June 2015

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Wednesday 3 June 2015

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Wednesday 3 June 2015

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