

Thursday
4 June 2015

Volume 596
No. 11



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 4 June 2015

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport was asked—

Bridge

1. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of the designation of bridge as a mind sport. [900095]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): My hon. Friend will know that bridge is not currently designated as a sport. The High Court will consider a judicial review on the definition of sport from the English Bridge Union in September, to which the Government will respond accordingly.

Bob Blackman: I welcome my hon. Friend to her post. Her prowess on the football field is well known, but I wish to address the issue of mind sports. At the moment, Sport England refuses to fund bridge, chess, go and other mind sports. Her predecessor was investigating this, but will she update us on what progress has been made to ensure that Sport England does recognise mind sports for their ability to train the mind?

Tracey Crouch: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind words. As he rightly said, Sport England does not currently recognise the term "mind sports" and does not provide funding to games such as bridge and chess. As I mentioned, the High Court is considering a judicial review of the definition of "sport" from the English Bridge Union. I recognise that many of these games are enjoyed by many people and that the mental agility required in this activity can help with conditions, bringing many health or wellbeing benefits. I therefore suggest that if he would like to seek funding support for these games, he does so through the Department for Education or the Department of Health.

Broadband Coverage (Gloucestershire)

2. **Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve broadband coverage in Gloucestershire. [900096]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): The Government have committed nearly £27 million to the roll-out of superfast broadband

in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. This should take superfast broadband coverage to an additional 130,000 homes and businesses across the two counties, providing almost 93% coverage by the end of 2017. Small and medium-sized enterprises in Gloucester and Cheltenham are now eligible for a grant of up to £3,000 to improve their broadband connectivity under the broadband connection voucher scheme.

Alex Chalk: I thank the Secretary of State for his answer. None the less, a significant number of homes and businesses in Cheltenham fall between two stools, being, apparently, not sufficiently rural for Fastershire to see fit to step in but too rural for commercial providers to consider it viable to extend broadband provision. Will he meet me to discuss how we can help those stuck in limbo and cut this Gordian knot?

Mr Whittingdale: First, I congratulate my hon. Friend on his election to this House and commend him for his efforts on behalf of his constituents in order that they obtain superfast broadband. He will be aware that 96% of Cheltenham will already have access to it by the end of 2017, which is above the national target, and many small and medium-sized enterprises can also benefit from the broadband connection voucher I mentioned. We are examining ways of extending the reach beyond that 96%, but I would of course be happy to meet him and some of his constituents to discuss what more we might do to help.

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. I note the ingenuity of the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer), but Nottinghamshire is a little distance away from Gloucestershire and Herefordshire.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): May I support the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) and remind the Secretary of State that many rural villages, certainly in my constituency, still do not have sufficiently strong broadband connections? That hampers people who are running small businesses from home, as well as children who are trying to use the internet to learn. What can he do to speed up the provision in those small villages?

Mr Whittingdale: I understand my hon. Friend's concern for his constituents, particularly those in more rural areas. As he may be aware, under phase 1 of the broadband scheme we expect to reach 87.1% of premises across the whole of Herefordshire and Gloucestershire by December 2016, and under phase 2 we hope to extend that to 92.8%. Those in the more remote areas may still prove to be outside, and we will be looking at alternative means by which we can reach them with superfast broadband, but, again, I am happy to talk with him further about this.

Superfast Broadband

3. **Heidi Allen** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): What progress his Department is making on the roll-out of superfast broadband. [900097]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): More than 2.5 million additional homes and businesses now have access to superfast broadband as a result of the Government's intervention. We continue to add 40,000 more homes and businesses every week.

Heidi Allen: I feel that I am about to gatecrash a party, but we have exactly the same situation in South Cambridgeshire. Connecting Cambridgeshire is doing a fantastic job of rolling out broadband across much of the constituency, but our roads are at gridlock—a happy consequence of our economic success—and it is vital that we keep people working in local hubs and from home. I, too, am interested in what other technologies we might explore to reach those people who are missing, so please may I come along too?

Mr Whittingdale: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her election and she is a very welcome party guest. The Government are investing more than £8 million in Connecting Cambridgeshire, which will increase coverage in her constituency to 94% by 2017. As she pointed out, there will be some areas that are much harder to reach and it might not be possible to do so by the traditional methods, so we are running pilot projects to explore other ways in which we can bring coverage up to reach even the furthest parts of her and other hon. Members' constituencies. I would be happy to talk to her further.

20. [900114] **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): Further to that answer, what more can we do to support alternative ways of delivering broadband, such as that offered by W3Z in my constituency, which can provide high-speed broadband to the most rural homes and can get it to them far quicker than fibre broadband will?

Mr Whittingdale: My hon. Friend is completely right that although fibre will, we hope, supply superfast broadband to the overwhelming majority of premises in the country there will be some for which it is not practical. That is why we are piloting alternatives through our three pilot projects testing fixed wireless technologies in rural areas in North Yorkshire, North Lincolnshire and Monmouthshire. These are being run by Airwave, Quickline and AB Internet. We will consider the results to assess the best way of extending the programme still further into the most difficult areas.

18. [900112] **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): One of the issues that remain for the people who will not get superfast broadband via fibre is that it is very hard to find out from BT or local councils that they will definitely not get it. Our programme has made remarkable progress, but would the Secretary of State like to see BT and local councils providing much greater clarity to communities so that they can explore other technologies such as microwave, wi-fi or satellite?

Mr Whittingdale: Again, I congratulate my hon. Friend on his election. I know that in his capacity as a former technology editor he brings a particular expertise to our debates on this subject. He is absolutely right that there will be some cases where, for the time being, it will not be possible to extend superfast broadband. I hope that

we will eventually be able to do so, but in the meantime I entirely agree with him that it is important that people should be aware of that position. We are introducing a seven-digit postcode checker, which is now on the gov.uk website, so that people can be made aware of that position.

Broadband Coverage

4. **Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): When there will be universal broadband coverage in the UK. [900098]

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): I am pleased to tell the hon. Lady that 97% of UK homes and businesses already have access to 2 megabit per second broadband, up from less than 90% in 2010. We hope that all homes will have it by the end of 2015.

Meg Hillier: I welcome the Secretary of State to his position. I had hoped that he and the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills would form a dream team to tackle the nightmare of broadband coverage in this country, including in areas such as mine in Shoreditch. Can the Minister explain why millions of pounds of public money has gone in and yet, as we have heard from other hon. Members today, there is still a serious problem across the UK with what should be a 21st century utility?

Mr Vaizey: I will suppress my personal hurt that the hon. Lady would prefer to deal with the Secretary of State rather than with me, although we have dealt with her issues in Shoreditch over many months. I am pleased, for example, that in her constituency many businesses are taking advantage of broadband vouchers, that Virgin Media is rolling out broadband and that BT is investing in broadband. Across the country, more than 2.5 million homes are covered by our very successful programme.

12. [900106] **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): As the Minister knows, my constituency is sandwiched between Reading and Oxford and is only a stone's throw from London, but there is great frustration at the impoverishment of the broadband coverage there. What is he doing to encourage improvement?

Mr Vaizey: The other day I received an e-mail of congratulations from one of my hon. Friend's constituents thanking me for the broadband that is being delivered to his constituency. As his next door neighbour, I know that the Oxfordshire broadband team is doing a fantastic job in rolling out broadband to thousands of homes across Oxfordshire.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): It would be quite nice to have decent internet access from these Back Benches from time to time. We are talking about universal broadband in the country, but while that is important to many of our constituents, a large number of people still not do have any digital access, and with the closure of libraries and other facilities where there is digital access, a real social exclusion issue is developing in parts of the country. What more can he do to make sure that all our constituents have access to digital technology?

Mr Vaizey: I am sure, Mr Speaker, that you have taken note of the hon. Gentleman's comments about wi-fi in the Chamber. Digital inclusion will form part of our new digital implementation taskforce, and I am pleased that at the end of the last Parliament we set aside more than £7 million to put wi-fi in libraries. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need as many community spaces as possible where people can access the internet.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): The Minister will have got the point from the last 10 minutes of exchanges that decent broadband speed is now a utility expected in every household, like running water and electricity. How effective does he think that the current programme is in filling in the gaps that, especially in rural areas, make it almost impossible for people to set up successful businesses where they are most needed?

Mr Vaizey: As I have already said, I think that the programme has been successful. We have passed more than 2.5 million homes. By the end of 2015 we should have 90% superfast broadband coverage in the UK, which compares well with almost every other country, and puts us at the top of the tree of the big five in Europe.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Hon. Members are right; this is a problem. As I recall, there was a big underspend—£75 million—on the super-connected cities programme. Would the Minister like to reallocate that to speed up broadband roll-out? I offer him this idea free, gratis and for nothing.

Mr Vaizey: I am extremely pleased to have a free, gratis and for nothing suggestion from the second candidate for the chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee who has participated in questions this morning. I suspect that whoever wins that chairmanship will want to investigate broadband and will take note that the super-connected cities vouchers scheme has now taken off like a rocket, with 24,000 businesses now benefiting. In fact, we are going to spend the money by the end of this year.

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): While I rejoice for the people of Cheltenham—the town in which I was educated—who may be reaching 96% coverage by 2017, I have to worry about the people of my constituency and other parts of rural Essex where, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green) has just said, there are now serious gaps. The way business is being done in this country now means that people are spending part of the time at home. That is not to mention the farming community; the Government insist on providing so much information through high-speed broadband that it is essential that we accelerate the programme.

Mr Vaizey: I hear what my right hon. Friend says. The digital implementation committee will be looking at ways in which we can accelerate an extremely successful programme.

Battle of Waterloo

5. **Mr Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con):** What plans the Government have to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the battle of Waterloo. [900099]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): The Government have announced over £1 million of funding for Waterloo 200—the organisation supporting the commemoration of the battle of Waterloo. It has planned a number of high-profile events, including a service at St Paul's Cathedral on 18 June 2015. In addition, £1 million has been made available to support the restoration of the Hougoumont farmhouse, and the Ministry of Defence is sending bands and guards of honour to various events.

Mr Burns: Given that the battle of Waterloo was a tremendous victory for the British, what other activities are being rolled out by other organisations to celebrate this splendid victory?

Tracey Crouch: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that this has been an exciting project. In addition to the service at St Paul's, Waterloo 200 has planned an education programme in 200 schools, to introduce children to the history of the battle, and a descendants campaign. They are also involved with the planned re-enactment of the battle in Belgium. In addition, a number of exhibitions are being held in the United Kingdom and Europe, and I am pleased that many of the events have benefited from heritage lottery funding.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): “Scum of the earth”—that is the term Wellington used not for politicians, but for the soldiers who bravely fought at Waterloo. Can we not have more celebrations here in Westminster for the defeat of a cruel dictator, which ushered in 99 years of peace—we have not done that since—and especially about Hougoumont, where 5,000 men died that day? I challenge every Member of the House to visit Hougoumont and learn about that.

Tracey Crouch: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments. Of course, he will know that there is a very good picture of the battle in the Royal Gallery, which for reasons of sensitivity we occasionally have to cover. I am sure that all the planned events will be much appreciated.

Mr Speaker: I call Diana Johnson.

Mr Keith Simpson (Broadland) (Con) rose—

Mr Speaker: I am sorry; I am getting ahead of myself. Let us hear from Mr Simpson—not that he was present on the occasion.

Mr Simpson: Alas, Mr Speaker, I was not, but my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) was. I congratulate the Minister on her appointment. What will we do to celebrate the two thirds of the Duke of Wellington's army that were, in fact, not British? Some 36% of His Grace's army were British, of whom about one third were Scots and Welsh—the Scots were fighting for the Union—but 45% were Germans; not Prussians, but Hanoverians and others. I think that we should give credit to what, ultimately, was the first NATO army.

Tracey Crouch: My hon. Friend is a great military historian, and I often listen carefully to what he says about these battles. As he knows, the battle obviously

took place with a coalition. Events are being planned across Europe, and we are working with various Governments across the whole European Union. A number of events are taking place in Scotland, including regimental exhibitions at the National Army Museum in Edinburgh.

Arts Funding

6. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the regional distribution of arts funding. [900100]

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): The Government strongly support the fair distribution of funding for culture and arts across the country. Indeed, last week in Hull the chief executive of the Arts Council announced that the amount of lottery funding to bodies outside London would increase from 70% to 75%.

Diana Johnson: May I first congratulate the Minister on his re-appointment? I want to refer to what Darren Henley said in Hull on 28 May:

“If local authority funding is widely withdrawn, there will be little our limited funds can achieve. And no net gain to our increased investment of Lottery money outside London. It will be in vain.”

As the Minister has mentioned, Hull will be UK city of culture in 2017, but we have already lost a quarter of our council funding. Does he really think that we will see any progress on closing the unfair disparity between the north and London?

Mr Vaizey: The hon. Lady’s point is well made to Labour councils up and down the country, which is that they must maintain their investment in culture instead of withdrawing it. It is a partnership, which is why the Chancellor of the Exchequer was pleased to give the Ferens Art Gallery in Hull £1.5 million to help it host the Turner prize, but that is accompanied by local authority investment of £3 million. The message to all those Labour councils is that they must support their local arts organisations—particularly those of the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant).

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): It is indeed good news that the Turner prize will be presented in Hull. It is not always popular on both sides of the House, but what more can the Government do to encourage other such events to support Hull as the city of culture, and to ensure that Hull benefits from that in the long term?

Mr Vaizey: I know that my hon. Friend, who is standing to be the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, is an aficionado of the Turner prize, as well as many other cultural events. He will know—I do not need to tell him—that Derry/Londonderry benefited from a huge range of events, from the BBC and other cultural organisations, and I expect Hull to benefit in the same way.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): I am sorry that the Secretary of State is not answering this question, because only a couple of months ago, when he was the Chair of the Select Committee, he authored an excellent report

highlighting the scandal of the imbalance in funding for the English regions compared with London. Now that he is in a position to implement it, will he?

Mr Vaizey: I am afraid that this is the second time that Opposition Members have asked for the Secretary of State to respond. Unfortunately, they have to put up with me, and I apologise for that. I am pleased that the chief executive of the Arts Council took note of the excellent report put forward by the Select Committee. As a member of that Select Committee, the right hon. Gentleman should be aware that civil servants now pore over these reports as though they were sacred texts.

Syria and Iraq (Cultural Heritage)

7. **Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Foreign Secretary on the effect of the political and security situation in Syria and Iraq on the cultural heritage of those countries. [900101]

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): It’s me again, I’m afraid.

This is a very serious subject. Obviously, we are deeply concerned about the destruction of cultural heritage in Syria and Iraq. Discussions are taking place across Government to ensure that we take a joined-up approach towards those horrific acts of cultural vandalism.

Rehman Chishti: I thank the Minister for that answer. Specifically what are the Government doing to stop the illicit trade in cultural artefacts abroad that helps finance terrorism?

Mr Vaizey: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that we have to stop that illicit trade. We work with partners in the global coalition to put in place international sanctions to prevent the illegal trading of Syrian and Iraqi antiquities. We also have an effective legal framework to tackle the illicit trade, including specific legislation for antiquities from Iraq and Syria.

John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I congratulate the Minister on his reappointment. What support can we give through our museums, universities and galleries to protect and preserve artefacts already removed from areas under ISIS control?

Mr Vaizey: If you will indulge me, Mr Speaker, I would like particularly to welcome the hon. Gentleman to the House, although he did defeat a colleague of mine from the coalition Government. He is an old friend; I hope that that does not hurt his career in the House.

The hon. Gentleman’s point is well made. The British Museum, for example, leads the way in helping to preserve antiquities that have been saved from looting. All our museums, working with both the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for International Development, will continue that work.

14. [900108] **Mr David Burrows** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): In 2008, the Select Committee welcomed the Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill and considered that the ratification of The Hague

convention would strengthen our commitment to the protection of our cultural heritage. Seven years on, cultural heritage is being pillaged at an alarming rate and the EU directive is due to be implemented by the end of the year. When will the Government get on with it?

Mr Vaizey: I hope that we will get on with it very soon, to be frank. I spend my time making the case to ministerial colleagues for introducing that important legislation to allow us to ratify the convention at the earliest opportunity. The destruction in Iraq and Syria highlights the importance that we must place on safeguarding cultural artefacts from armed conflict.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): I echo the comments that we heard a moment ago. Everyone who campaigns on this issue agrees that the two foundation stones that are necessary if the UK is to have credibility are, first, to ratify The Hague convention and, secondly, for the Government to put money where our words have been for many years, by creating something such as a cultural protection fund to protect and support the brave men and women on the ground, under the auspices of great institutions such as the British Museum.

Mr Vaizey: I agree with both those points. I will happily work with my hon. Friend on this. He has been an absolutely first-rate advocate on the issue in the past few months.

Welsh Language and Culture

8. **David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con):** What plans his Department has for supporting Welsh language and culture. [900102]

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): I congratulate my hon. Friend on increasing his majority as part of the best result for the Conservatives in Wales for more than 30 years. The House will want to take note of that truly fantastic achievement.

The Government are committed to supporting Welsh language and culture, in partnership with many bodies—including, of course, Welsh language programming with S4C.

David T. C. Davies: The Minister will no doubt be aware that the National Eisteddfod is the biggest Welsh language cultural event in the world. Next year it is coming to Monmouthshire. Given that Welsh is derived from old Brythonic, which was spoken across the whole of what is now the United Kingdom, and that the Minister has mentioned his role in funding Welsh language television, will he or one of his colleagues consider an invitation to visit the National Eisteddfod in my constituency next year?

Mr Vaizey: I gather that my hon. Friend is now one of seven Davieses sitting on our Benches, but for me he will always be primus inter Davieses. If I get an invitation from him, I shall certainly accept it.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr, Mr Llefarydd. The Minister's Department provides nearly £7 million to S4C—down by 93% since

2010. When will the Government announce their financial intentions for S4C so that the channel can move ahead with commissioning?

Mr Vaizey: I think I had better put that point in context. A large part of the funding for S4C—some £74 million—comes from the BBC, so S4C is extremely generously funded, and unlike many media organisations it has secure funding going forward. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) held the office of Secretary of State, she ensured that S4C was protected from any cuts when we had to make cuts.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): Diolch yn fawr, Llywydd. The Government's handling of the finance and governance of S4C during the previous Parliament was an unmitigated disaster. They failed to listen to any elected representatives in Wales, failed to listen to Wales's excellent Welsh language campaigning organisations, and even failed to listen to the channel S4C itself. It could not possibly be any worse, so may we have a reassurance from the Minister that when it comes to renewing the BBC charter, proper measures will be put in place to protect Welsh language broadcasting this time around?

Mr Vaizey: I can certainly give the hon. Lady that reassurance. As for “an unmitigated disaster”, all I have seen is that S4C has had secure funding and continues to go from strength to strength in producing international hits such as “Hinterland”, which I enjoyed hugely.

Union Flag

9. **Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con):** What his policy is on the flying of the Union flag in Parliament Square for the state opening of Parliament. [900103]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): Mr Speaker, as you and, indeed, my hon. Friend will be aware, the state opening of Parliament is a designated day for flying the Union flag on Government buildings, but not Parliament Square. The ceremonial arrangements for the state opening of Parliament are a matter for the Palace of Westminster and the Earl Marshal, and any changes cannot be made without their approval.

Andrew Rosindell: I thank the Minister for her reply, but will she assure the House that never again will we have the shameful spectacle of empty flagpoles in Parliament Square for the state opening of Parliament on the arrival of Her Majesty the Queen? Will she agree to meet me and representatives of the Flag Institute to ensure that we get the flying of flags in Whitehall and in Parliament Square right for the future?

Tracey Crouch: I know that my hon. Friend is a great expert on these matters, and the Secretary of State and I have some sympathy with his views on the state opening of Parliament. I have therefore asked my officials to raise this issue with the Earl Marshal to look into the possibility of flying the Union flag on the square for future state openings and to establish what the associated costs would be. In the meantime, I would be very happy to meet him and the president of the Flag Institute to discuss it further.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): Flags can undoubtedly be a powerful demonstration of pride in our culture and our economic vibrancy. Does the Minister agree that companies that fear an exit from the EU should be encouraged to fly the European flag to demonstrate their commitment to the single market, together with the Union flag, which they might replace on St George's day with the English flag, on St Andrew's day with the saltire, on St David's day with the ddraig goch, and on St Patrick's day with the tricolour?

Tracey Crouch: I would like to say that I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for asking that question, but that would not be true. Designated days for flying the Union flag are decided by Her Majesty the Queen, and any changes to designated days are for Her Majesty to make. It would therefore be an issue for the Department to discuss with Her Majesty.

FIFA World Cup

10. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): Whether he plans to meet FIFA representatives to discuss arrangements for the World cup; and if he will make a statement. [900104]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): I have no plans to meet FIFA officials at this stage. However, I did meet the chairman and the chief executive of the English Football Association yesterday, and I intend to keep in close touch with them on this matter and, indeed, on other matters relating to football in this country.

Michael Fabricant: My right hon. Friend might like first to thank the Americans for finally exposing the corruption in FIFA that we have all suspected has been endemic for the past 10 or 20 years. Will he speak to his colleague the Foreign Secretary to see whether there can be a re-analysis with Qatar as to whether the World cup should be held there? Precisely what should our relationship with FIFA be, because Blatter's departure is not necessarily going to mean that corruption has ended?

Mr Whittingdale: I agree with my hon. Friend. In order to achieve the reforms that all of us believe are vitally necessary in FIFA, the first requirement was a change in leadership. We have now obtained that, but that is the beginning of the process and certainly not the end of it. It is for the football associations of the home nations to work with other football associations that are equally determined to see change, in order to ensure that the new leadership is properly committed to achieving those changes.

In response to my hon. Friend's second question, on Qatar, that is a separate matter. The Swiss authorities are continuing to investigate the bidding process that resulted in the decision to give the 2018 games to Russia and the 2022 games to Qatar, and we await the outcome of those investigations.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State and the sports Minister to their new posts.

The investigation into FIFA will go on, but the fight for its heart and soul will start now that Sepp Blatter has announced he is standing down. I wonder about these people at the top of FIFA and whether they have ever actually been to a football match for which they bought their own tickets, whether they have followed a football team week in, week out, or whether they have pulled on a football shirt and played in a match. We really need to get rid of these people at the top of the game.

Is the Secretary of State satisfied that Government agencies that are investigating the possibilities of corruption involving UK financial institutions have all the resources they need and that they are doing all they can to root out any criminal activity that may have taken place? Will he say exactly what he can do to ensure that we root out corruption in FIFA?

Mr Whittingdale: In the first instance, that is obviously a matter for the Serious Fraud Office and other investigatory bodies in this country, but I have spoken to the Attorney General about it. We will of course ensure that all the resources necessary to carry out a thorough investigation are available to those bodies and we will work closely with the Swiss and American authorities, which are leading on this matter.

On the reforms necessary in FIFA, we are absolutely committed to working through the FA and other football associations to ensure that the new leadership of FIFA is utterly committed to carrying out the sweeping reforms that are so obviously necessary.

Topical Questions

T1. [900075] **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): This has been a turbulent week for football, with the allegations of corruption eventually leading to the long overdue resignation of Sepp Blatter, and there have obviously been continuing revelations, even today. However, this weekend we once again get to concentrate on what makes the game great, as the women's World cup kicks off in Canada. I am sure I speak for everyone present, even some of the newly elected Opposition Members, in wishing England the very best of luck ahead of their first game on Tuesday.

Richard Graham: I congratulate the Secretary of State on his response to and leadership on the FIFA governance crisis, which is in stark contrast to the efficient arrangements for the world's third largest sporting event, the rugby world cup—coming soon to great venues such as Kingsholm in Gloucester. If FIFA decides in its wisdom that the winter World cup proposed in Qatar should not go ahead, will my right hon. Friend confirm that our nation would be in a position to host it here?

Mr Whittingdale: First, I join my hon. Friend in looking forward to the rugby world cup, which many Members are anticipating with eager excitement. On his second question about the decision to hold the 2022 World cup in Qatar, obviously we are watching the investigation, but at the moment that decision stands. If it were decided to change that, I think that, as the

chairman of the English FA observed, if Russia hosts the World Cup in 2018, it seems very unlikely that another European country would host it in 2022. However, if FIFA came forward and asked us to consider hosting it, we have the facilities in this country, and of course we did mount a very impressive, if unsuccessful, bid to host the 2018 World cup.

Mr Speaker: Brevity is of the essence—we have a lot to get through. I hope that people will take note.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): You always say that before I start, Mr Speaker. [*Laughter.*] And you know about shortness, don't you?

I have already welcomed the new Secretary of State, but I welcome the new sports Minister very warmly. I liked her predecessor enormously, but when she was appointed I just wanted to run around and give her a hug. I am very pleased. It is a delight to see the new arts Minister, the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey), in his place. He looks remarkably like the old arts Minister, except that he has lost his beard. Perhaps that is how he managed to survive. Honestly, it is a delight to see him in his place.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Does he get a hug?

Chris Bryant: No, he does not get a hug. If he really wants one, he can ask for one later, and so can the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone).

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): You flirt!

Chris Bryant: Easy tiger! Sorry, Mr Speaker.

With the news from Chuck Blazer and Jack Warner, is it not increasingly evident that FIFA is a stinking sink of corruption that has polluted everything it has touched? Would it not be wholly inappropriate for any money to pass from the UK broadcasters in respect of the 2018 or 2022 tournaments, unless and until Blatter has actually left, rather than just declared that he is leaving, FIFA is reformed, and the 2018 and 2022 bids rerun?

Mr Whittingdale: I thank the hon. Gentleman and welcome the love-in between the two Front Benches, but I am sure it will not last.

I share the hon. Gentleman's astonishment that, even today, there are new claims being made by Jack Warner. This saga becomes more murky and distasteful by the day. As I said earlier, however, the World cup is a separate matter and we await the outcome of the investigations. If there is evidence that the bid process was corrupt, the case for rerunning it will be strong. However, if the World cup goes ahead, it would be unfair to tell English fans, and indeed fans of the other home nations if their sides qualify, that they cannot watch their sides compete in the World cup because the broadcasters will not purchase the sports rights to cover it. That is a separate matter. The important thing is that we get this all cleared up long before the World cup in 2018.

Mr Speaker: The equally important thing is that we speed up. I do not want Back-Bench Members to lose out. Let us have a very brief exchange, please, between the two Front Benchers.

Chris Bryant: Right. Well, talking of the licence fee, when the Secretary of State was Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, he said that the Government should get on with charter renewal as fast as possible. I note that it is only 576 days until the charter runs out, so will he get on with it? Can he give us a little clue as to his own inclinations? He was Mrs Thatcher's toy boy and Norman Tebbit's special adviser. He calls himself a free-market Conservative and, like Nigel Farage, thinks that it is debatable whether the BBC should even make "Strictly". He says the licence fee is "worse than the poll tax", but I think he always supported the poll tax, so is Auntie safe in his hands?

Mr Whittingdale: I am pleased that normal service has resumed between the Front Benches. On the BBC licence fee and the charter renewal process, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that there is a tight timetable. However, I hope we will be able to renew the charter on time, by the end of 2016. As for the licence fee, he will have to await our conclusions. I would say that I very much agreed with him when he observed of the licence fee:

"Elements of it are regressive, because everyone must pay it, so it falls as a greater percentage of income on the poorest people". —[*Official Report*, 9 March 2005; Vol. 431, c. 1558.]

T2. [900076] **Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con):** Cleethorpes is a thriving, successful seaside resort, but additional help is always useful. Will the Minister outline what support the Government intend to give to our seaside resorts?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): I have fond memories of my time in Cleethorpes while I was at Hull University. Towns like Cleethorpes contribute a great deal to the tourism economy. We will continue to promote such areas through various marketing campaigns, and will create sustainable growth and jobs through the coastal communities fund.

T4. [900078] **Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab):** Will the Secretary of State update the House on the details of the Government's plans for the review of the secondary ticketing market, which was set up under the Consumer Rights Act 2015?

Mr Whittingdale: I am aware of the hon. Lady's long-standing interest in this matter. She and I share a determination to ensure that fraudulent ticket sites are cracked down on. Measures have been taken to do that. She is right to refer to the statutory review, which was set up as a result of legislation. It has to report within a year and we await its findings with considerable interest.

T3. [900077] **David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con):** Will my right hon. Friend ask the BBC why it will not give any airtime to the many scientists and other eminent people who have doubts about the so-called consensus on climate change?

Mr Whittingdale: As my hon. Friend is fully aware, the BBC is under a duty, as are other news broadcasters, to be impartial in its coverage and that should mean giving airtime to both sides of every argument. I do not

wish to interfere in the editorial independence of the BBC, something I think we all value. Nevertheless, I am sure it will have heard my hon. Friend's remarks.

T6. [900080] **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): When are we going to get a report or some action on the improvement of football governance? We do not want a repetition of what happened in Coventry over the past four or five years.

Tracey Crouch: As a Tottenham fan, I find it very difficult to talk about Coventry positively—I am still suffering a broken heart from the 1987 FA cup. We take football governance incredibly seriously and are looking at issues such as financial sustainability. The situation at Coventry raised some real questions. We have met some of the football authorities already. We will be meeting the Football League shortly.

Mr Speaker: As an Arsenal fan, I find it not difficult but quite impossible to talk positively at any time about Tottenham.

T5. [900079] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): I was there in 1987, Mr Speaker.

Harrow Council intends to close four libraries on 13 June despite community bids to run them as community libraries. What action can my hon. Friend take to intervene to ensure that Harrow Council fulfils its statutory duties?

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): I visited one of the libraries under threat with my hon. Friend. I know that when he was the leader of Brent Council he fought very hard to keep libraries open. They were subsequently closed by the Labour administration. I will review the council's plans to close its libraries, as I do with every authority that seeks to close libraries.

T8. [900082] **Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): Wrexham businesses have been complaining about mobile phone coverage in Wrexham town centre over the many years that the Minister has been in his position. What are the Government actually doing to improve the situation for hard-working businesses in my town?

Mr Vaizey: The hon. Gentleman and I are meeting shortly to discuss local television, so perhaps we can add that to the agenda. I know he is delighted with the groundbreaking deal put in place by the former Secretary of State to increase mobile coverage to 90% of geographic areas in the next two years.

T7. [900081] **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): The first ever mixed ability rugby world cup is taking place in Bingley in my constituency between 17 and 21 August this year. May I invite the Secretary of State and the sports Minister to this historic occasion to see at first hand the opportunities it gives to people who would otherwise never get them to play rugby, and the high quality of rugby that is played?

Tracey Crouch: I congratulate my hon. Friend, and indeed the former Member for Bradford South, Gerry Sutcliffe, on all the work they have done to ensure that mixed ability rugby is played in the area. If my diary permits, I would be delighted to attend.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Is the Minister aware of the campaign by the Writers' Guild, "Free is NOT an Option", which is based on a survey that found that TV writers are increasingly being asked or pressurised to write scripts for free, even when they are established writers who have previously written for the same show? What can we do to ensure that creative work is valued in the same way as other work?

Mr Vaizey: I am aware of that very important campaign. I find it absolutely astonishing that many independent production companies, which make millions and millions of pounds, cannot be bothered to pay a decent wage to people who contribute to their work. I will certainly work with the hon. Lady to encourage them to do so.

T9. [900083] **Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): Fast internet connections are fast becoming a necessity, not a luxury. Should other local authorities follow the lead of Hampshire County Council, which has called for all new homes in the county to have superfast broadband built in from day one as part of planning consent?

Mr Whittingdale: I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend. It is now absolutely essential that new estates should, as a matter of course, be linked up to superfast broadband. I commend Hampshire County Council for the actions it is taking to achieve that. My hon. Friend the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy is meeting my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning to discuss what further measures we can take to ensure that other local authorities follow Hampshire's lead.

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): The north-east continues to lose out when it comes to lottery funding. What will Ministers do to ensure that there is greater transparency around the national lottery, so that we can keep up the pressure to shift money out of London to the regions?

Tracey Crouch: Since the national lottery was formed, it has raised more than £33 billion for good causes and made more than 450,000 grants across the UK. I will perhaps reassure the hon. Lady by saying that 70% of all grants have been awarded outside London and the south-east.

T10. [900084] **Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): Kern Ltd, a Fareham business providing packaging systems in my constituency, was one of the first local businesses to take up the connection voucher scheme. What plans are there to assess the effectiveness of the scheme?

Mr Whittingdale: I congratulate Kern Ltd in my hon. Friend's constituency on benefiting from the scheme, along with the 24,000 other businesses across the UK that have similarly benefited. The scheme has proved extremely popular, and that is why we are extending it to 28 more cities and increasing its budget by £40 million.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but we must move on.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

The Leader of the House was asked—

Ministerial Statements

1. **Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What guidance he has given to Ministers on making statements to the House before they are made to the press. [900085]

5. **Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): What recent guidance he has given to ministerial colleagues on making statements to the House before they are made to the media. [900089]

6. **Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): What recent guidance he has given to ministerial colleagues on making statements to the House before they are made to the media. [900090]

7. **Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): What recent guidance he has given to ministerial colleagues on making statements to the House before they are made to the media. [900091]

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): The ministerial code is clear: when Parliament is in session, the most important announcements of Government policy should be made in the first instance to Parliament. I have reminded my Cabinet colleagues of that.

Mr Hanson: On 21 May, the Prime Minister, in a speech to journalists outside this House, gave details of every aspect of the proposed immigration Bill, a full week before that Bill was announced in the Gracious Speech last Wednesday. Whatever the view of the Leader of the House on that, is it not better that Members of Parliament are the first to hear a new policy, so that they can either praise it or ask questions about it in this House?

Chris Grayling: With respect to the right hon. Gentleman, the House was not sitting at that point, and during the past couple of months political leaders of all parties have made detailed statements to the media about their plans for the next five years; fortunately, only one party is able to put its plans into effect. We will ensure that we continue to treat Parliament with the respect it deserves.

Bill Esterson: In the previous Parliament, the ministerial code was clear that Ministers should come to the House first, but it was largely ignored. Early signs are that the same thing is happening in this Session. Can the Leader of the House tell us when the code will be published in this Parliament, whether it will be enforced properly and whether Ministers will come to this House and not go to the press first?

Chris Grayling: The ministerial code will be updated shortly. Labour Members have certainly changed their tune since they were in government. I remember in my first years in this place, when I was in opposition, all those occasions when not only this House but the occupant of No.10 found out in the newspapers what the Chancellor of the Exchequer was doing.

Carolyn Harris: Last week, as many as 17 Bills announced in the Queen's Speech had already been briefed to the press. I concur with my right hon. and hon. Friends: does the Leader of the House agree that Members of Parliament should be the first to know these things?

Chris Grayling: Again, with respect to the hon. Lady, all these measures were in our manifesto. Our first Session is about enacting that manifesto, on which we were elected. If she wants to find out more about our plans, she just has to read that document.

Luciana Berger: I heard what the Leader of the House said about statements that might have been made before this House was in session, but it was on Monday that the Prime Minister announced details of the Government's Childcare Bill not to this House but to the media. Does the Leader of the House agree that the Prime Minister was wrong to do so?

Chris Grayling: That was not a fresh announcement; we set out our plans for childcare weeks and weeks and weeks ago. Simply to repeat things that we have announced weeks ago seems to me to be entirely normal.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is a distinguished occupant of his office, but he is not simply the Government's representative in this House; he is also the representative of this House to Her Majesty's Government. What will he do to enforce any breaches of the ministerial code with regard to releasing information to the press before this House hears it first?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I do take that very seriously. I regard myself as the Leader of the House representing all Members. Of course, it is a matter for the Prime Minister to enforce the ministerial code, but as I indicated a moment ago, I have already reminded my colleagues about the importance of making announcements to Parliament.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): It is important that statements are made to the House first, but it is more important that the policies announced are proper Conservative policies and that when they have been announced, they are seen through by the Government. In that spirit, will the Leader of the House confirm that the Government will crack on with repealing the Human Rights Act and not shilly-shally over it?

Chris Grayling: I can confirm, as the Prime Minister did this week, that that is absolutely our intention.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): The leaking of information to the press before it comes to the House is increasingly frustrating the public. This question is as much for you, Mr Speaker, as for the Leader of the House: is it not time we started thinking about sanctions for Ministers who indulge in this behaviour—for example, not being able to give the oral statement in the House?

Chris Grayling: I have no doubt that my colleagues will be making extensive statements to the House about their policy plans, the changes they are enacting and the issues they face. However, given that this is the first

Conservative Government for far too long in this country, I ask the hon. Gentleman at least to treat current Conservative Cabinet Ministers as innocent unless proven guilty.

Mr Speaker: I call Ian Austin—not here.

Hours of the House

3. **Mr Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): What his policy is on the House sitting later into the evenings on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. [900087]

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): The Government currently have no plans to bring forward changes to the sitting hours of the House.

Mr Turner: A large majority of Members are simply unable to get home in the evenings, and we did not come to London to be given lots of free time. As we have so many new Members, may we ask again whether it is the will of the House that we sit later on Tuesdays and Wednesdays? I would certainly vote in favour of such a proposal, and I know that many other right hon. and hon. Members would agree with me.

Dr Coffey: Hon. Members had the opportunity to vote in the previous Parliament, and I suspect that my hon. Friend and I were in the same Lobby at the time. The Procedure Committee revisited the situation, and could do so again if Members made representations to it, but I repeat that the Government have no plans to change the sitting hours of the House.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I welcome the hon. Lady to her post; I am sure she will perform extremely well, as she has in other posts. The Procedure Committee considered this matter in the previous Parliament, but does she agree that it would be opportune for the Committee to pick it up again when it is reconstituted, so that current Members can comment on the sitting hours of the House?

Dr Coffey: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome, and I congratulate him on, and welcome him to, his new position too. It is not for the Government to determine the business of the Procedure Committee; it is up to the Members selected to serve on the Committee to do that.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The hon. Member for Mole Valley, representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—

Mr Speaker: Before I call the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) to ask Question 4, it might be helpful to new Members if I remind the House that, to avoid any possibility of compromising our security, we do not discuss operational security matters on the Floor of the House. The question is perfectly in order, but hon. Members should take account of this constraint in their further exchanges.

Members' Emails

4. **John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Which House staff or persons authorised by House staff have the ability and authority to view or authorise others to view hon. Members' emails. [900088]

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): The short answer is none. The slightly longer answer is that viewing a Member's emails can be done lawfully only with the consent of the Member, where a circuit judge has made a production order requiring material to be produced, or pursuant to a search warrant and in accordance with the Speaker's protocol on the execution of a search warrant and the precedent of the House of Commons. Thus, no member of staff, including the parliamentary security director, has both the ability and the authority to view or authorise the viewing of Members' emails.

John Mann: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that clarification. Will he confirm that should there be any change in those procedures, he will immediately report such matters to the House?

Sir Paul Beresford: Either I or the appropriate Member will do so.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

The Leader of the House was asked—

Business of the House Committee

8. **Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): If he will bring forward proposals to establish a business of the House Committee. [900092]

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): There was an absence of consensus on this issue at the end of the previous Parliament, and there is still no consensus at the beginning of this Parliament. The Government therefore have no intention to bring forward proposals.

Mr Bone: I did not follow that, because there is now a Conservative majority in this House and it has always been Conservative policy to have a business of the House Committee. In welcoming the Deputy Leader of the House to her new position, I note that she is an ex-Whip, and she knows that such a committee would remove a lot of work from the Whips Office as well as being beneficial to the House. Will the Government reconsider their position?

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend knows that the proposal was in the coalition agreement, and that after our great victory there is no longer a coalition. That said, there is still an absence of consensus on how a House business Committee would really work. I hope my hon. Friend welcomes the extra hour for Westminster Hall debates, so that there are plenty of opportunities for Members of all parties to continue to hold the Government to account.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The hon. Member for Mole Valley, representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—

House of Commons Facilities (Corporate Hire)

10. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): What recent estimate he has made of income raised by the House from the hire of its facilities by the corporate sector since such hire was permitted. [900094]

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): The House generated £441,000 in net sales from the hire of catering and event facilities to third parties between January 2014, when such hire was permitted, and May 2015. This was from a mixture of corporate, wedding, private and charity events that took place when the House was not sitting. Smaller amounts were raised from other activities, including charges for filming on the estate. It is not possible to identify separately the amount of income raised from the corporate sector.

Kevin Brennan: Is the hon. Gentleman as concerned as I am that it is unhealthy for our democracy if this

House becomes more and more dependent on hire fees from corporate interests? Will he therefore look again at this policy of hiring out our facilities to the very people who caused the financial difficulties that the House is trying to meet?

Sir Paul Beresford: I ought to remind the hon. Gentleman that the matter was looked at carefully by the Administration Committee; it was looked at by the Finance and Services Committee; it was looked at by the House of Commons Commission; and it was agreed by the House. The hon. Gentleman may find that he is in a slight minority on this issue.

NHS Success Regime

10.32 am

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the success regime.

Hon. Members: Where is he?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer): I welcome the success regime, details of which were published by Monitor yesterday. The purpose of the success regime is to improve health and care services for patients in local health and care systems that are struggling with financial or quality problems. It will build on the improvements made through the special measures regime, recognising that some of the underlying reasons may result from intrinsic structural problems in the local health economy. This will therefore make sure issues are addressed in the region, not just in one organisation.

The regime is designed to make improvements in some of the most challenged health and care economies. The first sites to enter the regime—North Cumbria, Essex and North East and West Devon—are facing some of the most significant challenges in England. They have been selected based on data such as quality metrics, financial performance and other qualitative information.

Unlike under previous interventions, this success regime will look at the whole health and care economy: providers, such as hospital trusts, service commissioners, clinical commissioning groups and local authorities will be central to the discussions. It will be supported by three national NHS bodies, whereas existing interventions tend to be delivered by individual organisations and to concentrate on one part of a health economy—for example, the commissioning assurance framework led by NHS England that concentrates solely on commissioners, or special measures led by NHS England, the Trust Development Authority or Monitor, which focuses on providers.

Together, Monitor, TDA and NHS England, with local commissioners, patients, their representatives such as Healthwatch England and health and wellbeing boards will aim to address systemic issues. The national bodies will provide support all the way through to implementation, with a focus on supporting and developing local leadership through the process.

Andy Burnham: As we have just heard, this announcement has far-reaching implications for people in Essex, Cumbria and Devon. It was being finalised on Tuesday, when the House was engaged in a full day's debate on the national health service, yet there was not one single mention of it during the debate. What are we to make of that, and why was the Secretary of State not here to make this announcement to the House? Why does he think that it is always more important to make announcements in television studios or to outside conferences than to Members of Parliament in the House of Commons? That is not acceptable. People in Cumbria, Essex and Devon will be worried about what the Minister has just said, and what it means for health services in their areas.

First things first. Can the Minister confirm that services in those areas are safe and sustainable? Are there enough staff, and will work be undertaken immediately to deal with staff shortages? Are plans being drawn up to close A and E departments, or other services, as part of this process? Could it mean mergers between organisations, and job losses?

We welcome action that means taking a broader view of challenged health economies—indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Mr Reed) has long called for such action—but what will the new regime mean for local NHS bodies? Will it be possible for NHS England to overrule them? The House will recall the last occasion on which the Secretary of State tried to take sweeping powers to close health services over the heads of local people in south London. It did not end well; indeed, it ended with his being defeated in the High Court. Can the Minister assure us that patients will be consulted before any changes go ahead?

Is not the fact that NHS is taking drastic powers over whole swathes of the NHS in three counties a sign of the failure of the Government's plans for local commissioning, and evidence of five years of failure of Tory health policies? Is it not evidence that care failures are more likely, not less likely, on the Tories' watch?

This is no way to run a health service, and no way to treat Parliament. The Minister, along with the Secretary of State, is trying to shift the blame for things that have gone wrong in the NHS on their watch—for problems that are of their making. We will not let the Secretary of State do that. He should have been here to do Members who are affected by this announcement the courtesy of giving them answers, and I ask his junior Minister to relay that to him directly after the debate.

Ben Gummer: The shadow Secretary of State has spoken at length—in his answer to his urgent question—about NHS bodies. He has spoken about local commissioners, about NHS England and about the Department of Health, but Members will have noted that there was one group of people about whom he did not speak, and that was patients. It is extraordinary that, once again, he has come here to speak, again and again, about structures—about the NHS and its bodies, about jobs, about providers and about deliverers—but not about the people who are being failed at local level, namely patients in Essex, west and north-east Devon and north Cumbria.

Let me deal with the right hon. Gentleman's points in detail. First, he made accusations about television studios. I think it is a bit of a cheek to make such claims—and I should tell the House that the Secretary of State will very shortly be addressing the NHS Confederation.

Andy Burnham: So that is more important than this?

Ben Gummer: The urgent question was submitted this morning.

Coming from a shadow Secretary of State who is, one might suspect, using urgent questions and the subject of the NHS not to address issues relating to the quality of care, but for his own political reasons—as he always has—this was a shameless attack. It reflected rather badly on the right hon. Gentleman himself, rather than reflecting on the cause that he should seek to pursue: the better care of patients, which lies at the heart of

what NHS England is attempting to do. If he had read what Simon Stevens said when he announced the plans yesterday to the NHS Confederation, he would have noted that they are being drawn up, co-ordinated and, in part, led by local commissioners rather than—as was the case before—by monolithic centralised bodies headed by bureaucrats. This process is being led, locally, by clinicians, who are being supported and helped by NHS England and professional regulators.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about staff shortages. I am surprised that he mentions that, given that he was in part the author of the staff shortages that hobbled the NHS at the end of the previous Administration and that led in part to the problems at Mid Staffordshire that we have been seeking to address. Only this Government, in their previous incarnation, promised to correct that situation, in part through our pledges on GP numbers over the next five years.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about plans for accident and emergency departments and about job losses. I would say to him that it is different this time. These plans are being drawn up by local commissioners, who are now beginning the process of working out how to improve their local health economy. This is not a plan that will be devised centrally in Whitehall, imposed on local areas and announced as a done deal for local people. I know that that is what the right hon. Gentleman is used to, but in this instance it is a genuine conversation between local patients and local commissioners with the aim of improving their local health economies, and it will be supported by national bodies.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about south London and about consultation. I was a candidate in a constituency that had a solution imposed on it, during his tenure as Minister for Health, without any decent consultation. That proposal was eventually thrown out. The previous Government never consulted local people properly when he was in control, but we have changed that. These local plans will involve local people, patient bodies and health and wellbeing boards from the outset.

The shadow Secretary of State asked about the powers of NHS England, about localisation and about the co-ordination of local services. I ask him once again to go back and read Simon Stevens's speech. He will see how things have changed. This is not about decisions being made by politicians in Whitehall. I dare say that the right hon. Gentleman does not know the solution to the problems in the local health economies in Devon, Essex and Cumbria—

Mr Jamie Reed (Copeland) (Lab): I do.

Ben Gummer: I am so glad that the shadow Minister is such an augur of knowledge. I will tell him who knows the solution: it is the patients and the local clinicians. They will provide the answers and make the changes. We want patient care to be improved for local people to provide excellence in the local NHS—excellence delivered and excellence for patients—and we were supported at the general election in that mission to create a world-class NHS.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I understand that there is a high-spirited atmosphere in the Chamber and a great deal of interest in this subject, but I remind Members

that brief questions and brief answers should be on the subject of the urgent question—namely, the success regime. It is with that matter that we are dealing this morning.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I welcome the additional support for struggling health economies, even if it is a classic example of NHS newspeak to call it a success regime. Will the Minister reassure the House that, in looking at a wider approach to health economies, he will also look at the funding formulae for health and for social care, which do not adequately take into consideration the impact of age or rurality?

Ben Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend for her typically gracious welcome for the proposals. She understands why this matter requires a whole-system approach at local level. I can confirm that the NHS will be studying every single aspect of the local health economy and all that that entails.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Is it not disgraceful that in the health debate on the Gracious Speech two days ago the Secretary of State had nothing to say about the financial crisis affecting the NHS and refused to answer my questions about his plans for Devon, and that this announcement was made to the media yesterday with no details of how it is going to affect patient care or the quality of services in my area? The Minister is very keen on quoting Simon Stevens, but Mr Stevens told BBC Radio Devon this morning that this chaos was a direct result of the fragmentation following this Government's reorganisation of the health service. When is the Minister going to admit that that reorganisation was a disaster, and when are the Government going to get a grip on the spiralling financial crisis in our NHS?

Ben Gummer: I heard the right hon. Gentleman's comments during the debate on the Queen's Speech, and I know that he has taken a keen and detailed interest in the problems in his local health economy. I know also that he has been very careful and keen to include local commissioners and those who understand what is happening on the ground. That is why I had hoped he would be pleased about the introduction of the success regime, which will build on the financial consultations and discussions that have been going on, will involve local commissioners and, importantly, will provide the back-up of national regulators and NHS England. I did not hear the comments of Simon Stevens on local radio but I did read his speech, in which he made the opposite point to the one that the right hon. Gentleman suggested. The reforms that were brought in, far from being as the right hon. Gentleman characterised them, have saved £1.5 billion in this year, in addition to the £5 billion previously—money that is being invested in care in his constituency.

Mr Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): I am grateful to the Minister for the statement. How will my constituents in mid-Essex and the local health economy in mid-Essex see the results of what is going to be done under this regime? Can he assure me that it will examine the funding formula for health care per head of the population in mid-Essex, which has historically been skewed away from mid-Essex towards other parts of the country?

Ben Gummer: My right hon. Friend will be aware of the hospitals in Essex that have been placed in special measures. He will also be aware that focusing on one or several particular institutions is not sufficient to sort out the problems in the wider local health economy. That is why the success regime is being brought in—to try and deal with those systemic issues. Once the success regime has been concluded, I hope that his constituents will rapidly see an improvement in the service that they receive and that they deserve, wherever they are in the county.

On his second point about funding per head, he will know that NHS England has already started to look at that and, in some instances, address it. I have the same problem in my constituency in Suffolk, and it needs sorting out in the medium term across the country.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The Minister talks about consulting commissioning groups locally, but why is he not willing to listen to groups of doctors across the country who talk about the point I made on Tuesday—fragmentation? We need integration. Local authorities are having their budget taken away, which means cuts to social care. Social care companies are one thread away from bankruptcy. We need to fund both sides of that, yet we are running round looking at structure. We need to move and look at outcomes. I have heard the Minister talk about “Five Year Forward View”. In Scotland we are already doing that as part of 2020 Vision: look at the patients, as the Minister says.

Ben Gummer: I take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. Lady on her entry into the House and on her maiden speech, which I enjoyed listening to in the Queen’s Speech debate. In England we are addressing the issues surrounding social care and its integration with the health service. That is why we have introduced the £5 billion better care fund. Under the success regime, far from looking at structure, we are trying to see how we can better link up services. That is why local councils will be a key partner at the table in the discussions.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): I welcome the announcement, which I see as an opportunity to review the whole health economy in north Cumbria. It is a chance to review the strengths and weaknesses of health care and patient care in and around Carlisle and north Cumbria. However, will the Minister confirm that this will not hinder other developments, such as the acquisition of the Cumberland infirmary by Northumbria NHS Trust?

Ben Gummer: It is such a pleasure to see my hon. Friend return to the House. I know that he has been a tireless campaigner for the people of Carlisle. The success regime, as I said in answer to previous questions, will look at every single part of the local health economy, and every single partner in those discussions will be locally based or national regulators and NHS England.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): I am desperately concerned about the state of our health services in west and north Cumbria, as are many of my constituents. Many people told me during the election that they want their services delivered as close to where they live—as close to home—as is possible. That is challenging in

west Cumbria. I hope that the success regime recognises that, and that we stop talking and consulting and actually have action to deliver the services where people live. That is challenging because of recruitment, and those issues need to be taken into account. I would like the Minister’s assurance that that will be part of the success regime, because without it there will be no success.

Ben Gummer: I welcome the hon. Lady to her seat. She is right in much of what she says, and the entire purpose of the success regime is to take action, rather than just to keep on publishing PowerPoint presentations. We will be addressing every single part of the failures in her local health economies, and that may well include recruitment.

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): If a major feature of the success regime is ensuring that there is adequate care in the community, so that people who no longer need to be in acute beds can be released safely and comfortably and to the assurance of their relatives and family, is that not something to be welcomed?

Ben Gummer: I thank my right hon. Friend for that, and he has got to the nub of the point in a way that the shadow Secretary of State did not. This is about patient care and the excellence we expect from it. That is precisely why I agree with him that success regimes will be successful only if we ensure that we are improving patient care, and that might well include improving access to care at a local level.

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): I am confused: the NHS success regime is not about success—it is about failure. Will the Minister confirm that services in the areas affected are delivering safe care? Should patients be worried?

Ben Gummer: The hon. Lady should not be confused because the success regime is indeed dealing with local failure and we intend to turn it into a success. That is the point of what we are doing. We have made these decisions where the NHS has assessed areas as having quality and financial problems. We intend to address them rather than just talk about them, which is why I am so glad that this will be locally led, finding local solutions to local problems.

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con): This intervention affects every one of my constituents, and if it improves their patient care of course I welcome it. The Minister has done extremely well from the Dispatch Box in one of his earliest outings, but can he tell us the timescale of this intervention and how we will measure whether or not it has been a success?

Ben Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind comments. He should be aware that success regimes will begin imminently, but we have no set timescale for them yet, because that will be determined by the plan drawn up in the initial stages by local commissioners. Again, that goes to the root of what we are trying to do; this is going to be a plan led by local clinicians, commissioners and providers, in order to provide a local solution.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): There are real concerns in the north-west generally about deficits and problems with patient care and safety if those deficits continue. Let me ask the Minister a specific question on the issue before us today: who will have the final say in these areas? Will it be commissioners or will it be NHS England? If it is the commissioners, will they be able to call for more funding, and will the Government meet that?

Ben Gummer: The hon. Gentleman should know that the success regime will be co-ordinated by local commissioners, supported by NHS England, the TDA and Monitor. They will come together with a plan, which will then be implemented. The only way these success regimes will work is if they are owned by everyone who makes decisions locally. *[Interruption.]*

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I welcome this announcement. As my hon. Friend will know, Basildon hospital has been making good progress in improving patient care, but that has been at a cost. This regime will allow it not to have to choose between balancing the books and providing a safe environment. Can he confirm that patients and the public will be involved at every stage of this process, so that they can suggest any changes that may be necessary to achieve the success we are after?

Ben Gummer: They will not just be involved; they will be central to the discussions. The jeers and taunts from Opposition Front Benchers give the game away: they expect a decision to be made centrally—that is what they want. That is the only way they think. Conservative Members believe that local people should be central to that decision and that we should fix the whole local health economy, as opposed to trying to deal with individual trusts as they encounter problems.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Will the Minister explain how the problem of chief executives who are not performing properly will be dealt with under this regime? Let me give him an example. Under the coalition Government's watch the chief executive at Hull, who was disastrous, was moved to Harlow where he is now earning £170,000 a year. He had the help of the TDA in that move and left a disastrous situation in Hull.

Ben Gummer: I was not aware of that situation and would very much like to talk to the hon. Lady about it afterwards. If the facts she states are true, that is indeed wrong. The whole point of the success regime is to get away from the idea of being able to change one chief executive or commissioner in one provider in a challenged health economy while expecting to see a change to the whole system. We are trying to correct the system so that local care for local people is improved.

Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): If this intervention improves healthcare for my constituents, I will welcome it very much. However, will my hon. Friend clarify the impact on Derriford hospital in my constituency and whether the intervention will put any new management into our hospital?

Ben Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and welcome him to this place. To repeat the answer I have given several times so far—*[Interruption.]* Those

on the Opposition Front Bench say that I do not know, but I must explain to them once again that this is not about a Minister sitting in Whitehall making a decision having never visited an area. That is what the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) did when he tried to destroy local services in my constituency and other places in Suffolk. This is different. It is about trying to fix problems in these challenged local health economies, which in some places have been present not for months or years but for decades. We are trying to ensure that the decisions are corrected and made by the local commissioners and clinicians.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Ministers will be aware of the plight of the Barts Health NHS Trust, which is in special measures. Part of its problem is the weight of the interest on its private finance initiative, a new Labour policy that I did not support. It is having to pay that back at £500,000 a month. Surely a success regime for Barts and other hospitals burdened with PFI debt would be a serious attempt to renegotiate those PFI agreements.

Ben Gummer: I am so glad that the hon. Lady welcomes the success regime and the potential it might have. I spoke to one of her colleagues the other day about the troubled hospitals that she mentioned and I was about to invite her in to have a discussion about them, as we must try to find out what the core issues are with Barts Health NHS Trust. She raises an interesting point about PFI, however. One reason we are struggling in some cases, and why we have struggled over the past five years to provide the funding within the NHS that it requires, is the enormous NHS PFI debt that was loaded on to it by the previous Government and that has cost it billions of pounds over the past 10 years.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for his very thoughtful comments and replies. Does he recognise that one of the problems for the Devon clinical commissioning group is that it covers a large rural community and also Plymouth, the largest conurbation west of Bristol? We need to find a way in which this can all work to ensure that the city of Plymouth gets looked after and that levels of deprivation and so on are considered.

Ben Gummer: My hon. Friend makes the point better than I did. How do we sort these problems out using the local knowledge that he has just demonstrated rather than having a Minister in Whitehall with a map thinking that he or she can make the decision themselves? The success regime seeks to harness that local knowledge and the local solutions.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is simply not acceptable that an announcement of this magnitude should have been made without first being debated in this House. As I understand it, the success regime applies to a number of areas of the country but not to London. My local hospital, King's College hospital, has a deficit well in excess of £40 million. It is nigh on impossible in parts of the constituency to see a GP when people need to. We have a crisis in the NHS across the country. What is the comprehensive plan to address that? We need that rather than a piecemeal intervention in only parts of the country.

Ben Gummer: I welcome the hon. Lady to her place. She will not know that there was an Adjournment debate at the end of the last Parliament on precisely this issue. I invite her to seek such a debate if she wishes to discuss local issues with me or other Ministers. The success regime has been devised by Simon Stevens and NHS England. It will be clinically led, fulfilling our desire to see the NHS led by doctors, not Whitehall bureaucrats.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): I welcome the announcement. Colchester general hospital is in special measures. One of the biggest issues facing our hospital is the recruitment of nursing staff. Will my hon. Friend give an assurance that county-wide recruitment will be included as part of the success regime?

Ben Gummer: Every single aspect that is troubling local health economies, including recruitment, I understand, will be within the scope of success regimes.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Having listened to the Minister's answers, it seems to me that patients have every right to be worried about whether care is safe in the NHS. Does he not realise that, unless the Government reverse the cuts in social care, the problems in patient care will not be resolved anywhere in the NHS—not just in the areas covered by the so-called success regimes?

Ben Gummer: May I gently remind the hon. Gentleman that this Government and their predecessor changed the culture of trying to suppress bad news, whether on care or money, and instead tried to understand what was best for patients, even when that meant facing up to difficult decisions? That is precisely what NHS England is doing with the success regime, and that is why we are addressing seriously challenged local health economies, rather than pretending that there is not a problem, which I am afraid was the attitude of the Labour Front-Bench spokesman when he was in power.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I must say that it is a pleasure to welcome back to the House the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who when he celebrates 45 years in the House this month will I think be approaching the mid-point of his parliamentary career.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): At this crucial mid-point, thank you very much, Mr Speaker, for that unusual way of calling me.

Does my hon. Friend the Minister recall that the whole purpose of introducing the purchaser-provider divide many years ago, which was developed by the Labour party and is now known as local commissioning, was to concentrate on patient care, patient outcomes and local priorities? Will he therefore, with this welcome announcement, continue to stick by NHS England, allow it to do that, and resist the blandishments of the shadow Health Secretary, who seems to pine for the days of centralised bureaucracy and is still feebly trying to weaponise the NHS for party political purposes?

Ben Gummer: It gives me particular pleasure to respond to my right hon. and learned Friend. He was an exceptional Secretary of State for Health because he understood the

centrality of local decisions by patients and their doctors and commissioners. I confirm that we will continue to allow local commissioners to make the decisions, rather than try to wrest power back from them to Whitehall, which is precisely what the shadow Secretary of State did when he was Secretary of State.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Is not the fact that these drastic steps have been taken a sign that care problems are becoming more likely under this Government and not less?

Ben Gummer: I welcome the hon. Lady to her place. I only hope that she does not have the same contempt for her constituents that her predecessor seems to have expressed. It is interesting how it all comes out afterwards. I repeat to the hon. Lady that the decisions will be made locally by local people and local commissioners in response to local problems, and where they arise we will seek to address them.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I have heard that trusts in my constituency were potential candidates for this regime. Will the Minister please make it clear that, unlike some previous oversight regimes, this regime will enable local health care organisations to work together to solve their problems and will involve not just scrutiny but more support?

Ben Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. I am delighted to see her in her place. She has experience and expertise in this area. She will know that elsewhere in the country, before 2010, local commissioners, doctors and providers often came up with good solutions, but then strategic health authorities would come in with a completely different answer and override all of them. That is what we are seeking to avoid.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): The Minister is right that patients are key to this, but so are the people who deliver hands-on services. He has mentioned the role of clinicians a number of times, but what about the voice of care workers, nurses and other people on the front line? Will they be listened to, and will their representative bodies, such as trade unions and colleges, be listened to, or will they be completely and utterly ignored, as was the case with the Health and Social Care Bill?

Ben Gummer: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has made that point. The success regime will not work unless every single part of the local health economy contributes to it, including the vital component of local care workers.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): The early stages of these exchanges would have been better had the Opposition asked how the Government will respond to the deficiencies shown in the Care Quality Commission report. I recommend that all Members read the article in *The Guardian* today by Diane Taylor and Denis Campbell, which sets out the problems that this is tackling. Will my hon. Friend ensure that those areas where there are no major problems, such as Coastal West Sussex, are given support and not overlooked, and that resources are not taken away from them, because they are as under-resourced as others?

Ben Gummer: This is not about moving resources around the country. I must say that I differ with my hon. Friend on his views about the CQC. It was a complete basket case when the Government came to power in 2010, but it has since been turned around and is now providing exceptional inspection regimes, which is changing the whole nature of safety and quality in the NHS. I hope that it will continue to improve.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister says that there are systemic issues in Devon, Cumbria and Essex. Did the National Audit Office confirm that, and did he know that before the election? Why did he not reveal his hand then to say that he would intervene in one or more of those areas, or is he simply playing politics with patients' lives?

Ben Gummer: The hon. Gentleman should know that there have been issues in those areas not just for months and years, but sometimes for decades. We have sought in the first instance to deal with problems with providers, which is why in two of the areas we have hospitals in special measures, or formerly in special measures. We are now seeking to fix the problems in the wider local health economy, led by local people. We are getting on with that, rather than just talking about it, which is what happened before.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): If the success regime is extended to other parts of the country, what will be the impact on the proposed devolution of healthcare to Greater Manchester?

Ben Gummer: I do not at this stage anticipate—I have received no indication from NHS England—that the success regime will be extended in any way. I repeat that this is a particular intervention by local people, in co-ordination with NHS bodies, to fix local NHS problems. If they arise elsewhere in the country, I am sure that local people will want to look at them too.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I congratulate the Minister on what is possibly the fastest reorganisation the NHS has ever seen. Which of those local organisations is in charge, and who will be accountable for deciding what constitutes success?

Ben Gummer: I welcome the hon. Lady to her place. We are now repeating discussions we had in the previous Parliament, because I am afraid that the Labour party still does not understand that these decisions are not being directed from Whitehall. I know that is uncomfortable for them, because what they want to do is pull a lever and hope that something happens at the other end, but that does not work. The only way to get success is by having local clinicians, supported by national bodies, providing the solutions that local people deserve.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): In North Northamptonshire we had a problem with the A&E at Kettering hospital. Local commissioners and three hon. Members—my hon. Friends the Members for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) and for Corby (Tom Pursglove) and I—all worked together to produce a plan, which the Minister has taken up. That is a precursor to the success regime, and it shows that local commissioners, local

hospitals and MPs can solve problems by working together. Will the Minister continue to look on that favourably?

Ben Gummer: The care of my hon. Friend's constituents, including Mrs Bone, is always a prime consideration. He has shown what Opposition Front Benchers should understand, which is that working across parties, as he did in his part of the world, can bring about co-ordination and success. I only wish that those on the Opposition Front Bench, on what should be a clean slate, would do the same.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): Is the success regime a 21st-century way of improving the NHS? If so, may I ask the Minister always to seek to improve the NHS, which has to be constantly moving and improving for the sake of every patient? Will he, like the Secretary of State, visit Teddington memorial hospital in my constituency, where a local initiative has vastly improved our out-of-hours service?

Ben Gummer: I welcome my hon. Friend to her seat. I hope to make a whole series of visits soon and I will certainly talk to her about her hospital. She will have noted that the very first speech given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was about the NHS. That reaffirms our commitment to the NHS. We were the only major party to commit to the NHS's own plan for success over the next five years. That is why the Conservative party, to be frank, is the only one that can now be called the party of the NHS—[*Interruption.*]

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Will my hon. Friend confirm—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I want the hon. Gentleman to be heard.

Jeremy Lefroy: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will my hon. Friend confirm that at the heart of the success regime will be the provisions of the Health and Social Care (Safety and Quality) Act 2015 on integration and quality?

Ben Gummer: It must have been a great pleasure for my hon. Friend to have taken personal possession of the 2015 Act, which he helped steer through Parliament and piloted himself. It is a significant contribution to the cause of patient safety, which lies at the heart of the Government's vision for the NHS.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his obvious grip on complex material. To what extent will the success regime take account of Kate Barker's report on health and social care, recently published by the King's Fund?

Ben Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind comments. The success regime is locally based but must take into account the developing national opinion on the integration of health and social care. However, those can be properly integrated only on the basis of local considerations; this is not something that we can design from the centre, as some would wish.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I thank the Minister for confirming that the Health and Social Care (Safety and Quality) Act 2015 will be at the forefront of the minds of those implementing these plans. The 2015 Act

[Fiona Bruce]

was passed by the House in the very last days of the last Parliament. Does not the fact that the Opposition have asked this urgent question today show that they have already forgotten the central tenet of the Act: that patient care and safety will be at the forefront of everything that the Government do?

Ben Gummer: I repeat to my hon. Friend the observation that I made earlier: it is interesting that in his opening contribution, the right hon. Member for Leigh did not make a single statement about patients and their centrality to what we are trying to do. The NHS has devised its own plan for its own success over the next five years, and the safety and care of patients lie at the heart of it. Only one party is supporting that plan, and that is why the Conservatives are the only party backing the NHS.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his response to the urgent question and the new Government on acting so swiftly. Having listened to the exchanges across the Floor of the House today, I think it would be particularly sensible and grown up for Her Majesty's Government, first, to admit that there are geographical parts of our NHS that are not working as well as they might and, secondly, to seek local holistic solutions to put them right as soon as possible.

Ben Gummer: As so often, my hon. Friend is on the money. He has described exactly what NHS England is trying to achieve with the success regime.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Thank you for calling me, Mr Speaker; my knee is giving way.

Would my hon. Friend like to come to Morecambe bay to see an excellent initiative run by Dr Alex Gaw called Better Care Together which is a pointer for the success regime? I should also say that, according to Labour, the NHS is always in crisis—but it never says what from, unless it is hospital closures that do not exist.

Ben Gummer: My hon. Friend has a particular local experience of a failing hospital, and I welcome him back to his seat. I hope to come to Morecambe bay at some point soon and I look forward to seeing with him the local initiatives that he has mentioned.

Point of Order

11.14 am

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I apologise for testing your patience; I would not have done so were it not an important matter. During the previous exchange, news reached me that the Secretary of State is in Liverpool announcing the scrapping of the 18-week target, presumably because the Government know they can no longer meet it. I was not in business questions, but I am led to believe that the Leader of the House said that Ministers should always make major announcements to this House, and that he had indeed reminded them of their duty to do so. What advice could you give me about making sure that this edict sticks? Before the Minister leaves his place, should he not confirm to this House whether the 18-week target is indeed to be scrapped?

Mr Speaker: There are three points to make. First, the right hon. Gentleman has expressed his concern forcefully in his own way, and it is on the record. Secondly, it would not be appropriate to ask the Minister to respond, because we cannot have interrogation through point of order and the continuation of debate. Thirdly, I can reassure the right hon. Gentleman on one point: he has not missed anything said on this matter at today's business questions for the very simple reason that business questions is about to happen—so he was perhaps ahead of himself. He has made his point and it is on the record, and we will now proceed to business questions.

Business of the House

11.16 am

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

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): During our short debate last night I had the opportunity to extend my congratulations to the Chairman of Ways and Means on his re-election. May I add my congratulations to the other two Deputy Speakers on their election?

The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 8 JUNE—Second Reading of the Scotland Bill.

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

WEDNESDAY 10 JUNE—Opposition day (1st allotted day). Subject to be announced by the Opposition in due course. I also expect my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to make a statement following the G7 summit.

Last week the shadow Leader of the House was eager—indeed, over-enthusiastic—about Thursday's business. She was keen to find out what was happening, and I can now tell her that it is indeed this:

THURSDAY 11 JUNE—Second Reading of the European Union (Finance) Bill.

FRIDAY 12 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 15 June will be:

MONDAY 15 JUNE—Consideration in Committee of the Scotland Bill (day 1).

TUESDAY 16 JUNE—Consideration in Committee of the European Union Referendum Bill (day 1).

WEDNESDAY 17 JUNE—Opposition day (2nd allotted day). Subject to be announced in due course.

THURSDAY 18 JUNE—Consideration in Committee of the European Union Referendum Bill (day 2).

FRIDAY 19 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

Ms Eagle: I thank the Leader of the House for announcing next week's business.

I would like to start by associating myself with the many tributes paid yesterday to Charles Kennedy, who has died far too young. He was known for his wit, once quipping:

“Paddy Ashdown is the only party leader who's a trained killer. Although, to be fair, Mrs Thatcher was self-taught.”

We will all mourn his passing.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr Hoyle), my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel) and the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs Laing) on their election and re-election as Deputy Speakers of this House. Members across the House will be relieved that their enthusiastic campaigning for support will now cease—although I will make no such promise to my Labour colleagues.

I am concerned that the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill has been introduced first in the other place despite its significant constitutional implications. This is against usual practice. While we support greater devolution, we have real concerns about the impact of

this on effective scrutiny of this Bill. Will the Leader of the House set out why this decision was taken, and will he assure me that he will guarantee that there is adequate time to scrutinise the Bill properly when it finally comes to the Commons?

Yesterday the government published the 2014 league table for Ministers' replies to questions from MPs, and I am beginning to wonder whether it might help to explain the reshuffle. The Communities and Local Government Secretary was the worst offender, and the former Justice Secretary—the Leader of the House—replied to just under two thirds of letters sent to him on time. Will the Leader of the House therefore set out what guidance he will be giving to himself on how he can improve his performance? May I also suggest that Members use the opportunity that business questions affords, because they are unlikely to get a written answer from him any time soon?

It is less than a month since the election, and the façade of Tory unity is already beginning to crack. This week alone, the Defence Secretary has publicly warned the Treasury that he does not see the need for any more cuts to his Department. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is reportedly infuriated at the Prime Minister's lack of clarity on child benefit cuts—an emotion we all shared after yesterday's evasive performance at Prime Minister's questions—and we have had complete chaos on human rights and on Europe, including a predictable call from the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) for an end to collective Cabinet responsibility. And we have only been here two weeks!

We will debate the European Union Referendum Bill next week, so I wonder whether the Leader of the House would answer some straightforward questions. The Prime Minister has said repeatedly that he has a list of demands for Europe, but he will not tell us what they are. Will the Leader of the House set out when he will publish that list, and will treaty change feature on it? The Tories are split down the middle on whether to vote yes or no in the referendum, so are Cabinet Ministers going to be allowed to campaign to come out of the European Union and stay in their jobs?

Last week, the Foreign Secretary said that leaving the European convention on human rights was not “on the table”. Last October, the Leader of the House said the UK should be prepared to withdraw and yesterday the Prime Minister said he would “rule nothing out”. Will the Leader of the House tell us who is right: the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary or him?

This week saw the welcome departure of Sepp Blatter from FIFA: a leader past his best, who had just won an election but decided to quit—it is easy to see why the Prime Minister used to be such a fan. Jack Warner, a former member of FIFA's ethics committee—which must compete with “compassionate conservatism” for oxymoron of the year—said:

“Mr Cameron is a knowledgeable man...I certainly trust his knowledge of football.”

That is news to me, because I did not think that the Prime Minister knew his West Hams from his Aston Villas.

This week we learned of a serious security breach at the heart of Government. Staff at No. 10 were alarmed as an unwanted visitor was seen roaming the corridors—and no, it was not the former Deputy Prime Minister trying

[Ms Angela Eagle]

to get back in; I am told it was a heron. Perhaps it was fishing for a salmon, or a sturgeon or even a grayling. The incident gave rise to an interesting poll on the *Daily Mirror* website, which asked readers who they would rather lived at Number 10—a heron or the Prime Minister? The last time I checked, the heron was winning by 94% to 6%.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady started by referring to her own deputy leadership campaign. This week it has been a relief to learn, for her sake, that her sister, the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), is supporting her campaign. As the shadow Leader of the House knows, Labour leadership contests and siblings do not always go together well, so it is a pleasure to know that Sunday lunches in the Eagle household can continue harmoniously.

This week we have also seen the surprise entry into the Labour leadership contest of the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), who I am sorry not to see in his place. One of my colleagues suggested to me that perhaps that opened up an opportunity for the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner)—I am pleased to see him in his place—to stand in the deputy leadership contest, as part of a joint ticket.

There has been an interesting new development on the Labour leadership front today, with the news that the former Foreign Secretary is set to make a return to this country this autumn, when he will make a keynote speech at the conference of the Institute of Directors. As somebody once said, “I wonder what he meant by that.”

The hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) asked why the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill had been introduced in the other place. I regard the other place as an extremely important part of our democratic process. It is important that it plays a prominent role in debating the key issues of this nation. It is entirely right and proper that it is scrutinising a Bill of this importance. There is no shortage of crucial business in this House for the next two months. I am absolutely satisfied that it is the right thing to do, and I assure her that when the time comes there will be plenty of opportunity for this House to debate what is an extremely important measure and something that this Government are proud of.

On letters and parliamentary questions, I remind the hon. Lady that when I was first elected to this House in 2001, there was no five-day target and Members could wait weeks and weeks before getting a reply from Labour Ministers, so I will take no lessons from them about their record in government on responding to Members of this House.

The hon. Lady talked about Conservative party unity. Last night, every single Conservative Member of Parliament who was eligible to do so voted in the first Division of this Parliament. However, there were 15 Labour MPs missing. Where were they? On the subject of divisions, you might have noticed, Mr Speaker, the rather interesting body language in the healthcare debate on Tuesday between two of the candidates for the Labour leadership. They were trying very hard not to look at each other.

The Opposition talk about divisions on the EU, but it is the Labour party that is all over the place on EU policy; we are united. We fought the general election on

the platform of a referendum and we will hold that referendum. We also fought the election on a platform of scrapping the Human Rights Act and we will scrap the Human Rights Act.

I will conclude by going back to where I started—with the hon. Lady's deputy leadership campaign. She has produced a video to support her campaign and the soundtrack is that great Liverpoolian song, “All Together Now” by The Farm, which contains a particularly moving verse that might be deemed apposite:

“The same old story again
All those tears shed in vain
Nothing learnt and nothing gained
Only hope remains”.

That is the Labour party today.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. As experienced Members know, it has been my usual albeit not invariable practice at business questions to try to accommodate everyone who wishes to take part. Unfortunately, given that well in excess of 50 hon. Members wish to contribute to the subsequent debate, I fear that some Members will be disappointed in business questions today. To maximise the number of contributions, brevity from Back Benchers and Front Benchers alike is imperative. The tutorial on this matter will be led by Dr Julian Lewis.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): You always do that to me, Mr Speaker.

At this time of the year, when the thought of the D-day landings is very much in our minds, may we have a statement from a Defence Minister on the position of defence in the nation's priorities?

Chris Grayling: My right hon. Friend is a powerful advocate in this place for our armed forces and Ministers always listen with great care to what he says. Defence questions next Monday will be the first of what will no doubt be many opportunities for him to continue to articulate the importance and heroism of our armed forces.

Mr Speaker: Forgive me; this will, I hope, be the last intervention from the Chair. For the benefit of the House, I should emphasise that the third party spokesman has acknowledged rights on this occasion, as was the case when the Liberal Democrats were the third party, so I hope that there will be proper forbearance and tolerance as I call Mr Pete Wishart and allow him to develop his line of questioning.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I am very grateful, Mr Speaker.

May I pay my tributes to Charles Kennedy? I was with him on the night of the tuition fees vote when we left the building through the back door, as thousands of angry students descended on the House. Even though Charles had not voted for the tuition fees measure, he told me, “Pete, if you fly with the crows, you get shot with the crows, and tonight you are with the crows.” I can report that we made it to Waterloo station safely.

The Leader of the House does not know how excited SNP Members are that the first Bill is the Scotland Bill on Monday. I am very grateful to him for giving us an extra day to improve the Bill, because improvement it needs, as I think he knows. We want to see all the Smith proposals in full, but that is just the baseline—the very minimum that we expect to improve the Bill. It is fantastic that we are getting such time to debate it and that the first Bill in the House is about getting more powers to Scotland. I hope that he is listening to the many representations from the Scottish Government and that he will accept the mandate of the 56 SNP MPs out of 59 as we try to improve the Bill. That is the way to do it—a Bill is brought in and we have First Reading, Second Reading, and then long debate and scrutiny.

I just wish the Leader of the House would do the same for English votes for English laws, something with such significant constitutional implications. There is not even a Bill, just a change to Standing Orders. Will he tell us a bit more about what he intends to do with EVEL? Will we get to amend it? Will we get to scrutinise it? How will scrutiny be exercised? What about the House of Lords? There are 100 Scottish peers down the corridor—will it be English votes for English Lords? Where are we on that sort of thing?

I noted that there was no discussion or debate on the Queen's Speech about reform of the House of Lords. The only thing that the Leader of the House wants to do is put more of his cronies and donors into that already overstuffed House. Ermine-coated, never been voted—let us get rid of the House of Lords. It has almost a thousand Members, and the public need reassurance that we will have some sort of reform.

We are almost three weeks into the House's business, and we have not yet had a departmental statement. May I suggest that the first statement should be a clear statement of what the Government intend to do about the Mediterranean crisis? They should be willing to play a bigger part and take seriously their responsibilities, particularly when it comes to assisting refugees.

Chris Grayling: To take the last point first, the Foreign Secretary was of course in the House earlier in the week, and there was plenty of opportunity for the hon. Gentleman to raise with him that issue and other issues related to international affairs.

May I associate myself with the hon. Gentleman's comments about Charles Kennedy? His untimely death is a great loss to Scotland, and this House has shown itself at its best in the cross-party recognition of the contribution that he made.

With regard to the Scottish National party's well-advertised desire for more powers for Scotland, I say to the hon. Gentleman that in the Government's view, the Scotland Bill will deliver a major change for Scotland and a significant enhancement of the powers of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government. Some of the arguments that the SNP is making simply do not add up. It wants much greater power and full fiscal autonomy, but it simply has not addressed the fact that were it to have that, it would have to choose between massive spending cuts and substantial tax increases in Scotland, neither of which I think the Scottish people would wish for.

I suggest that the hon. Gentleman should sometimes go down and have a listen to the quality of debate in the House of Lords. We have in that place people with immensely important expertise, who bring something to the quality of debate in Parliament. I have to say that I disagree with his view of that House.

I finish by referring to reports that I have seen today, and rumours that I have been picking up around the House, about the time when Members take their seats in the mornings. I understand that both Labour and Scottish National party Members are looking to come in earlier and earlier in the morning to secure their seats, possibly even earlier than 7 o'clock in the morning. It has been suggested to me that, to accommodate that, a trolley service of breakfast might be provided to Members in the Chamber to enable them to come in that early. I simply say that I do not think that would be consistent with the traditions of the House.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): New house building is an important priority for the Government, and buying a new home is the biggest purchase that most of our constituents will ever make. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate to examine the quality of new house building and how the current system is working to expose substandard building companies that fail to deliver the quality of new build houses that we would all expect?

Chris Grayling: That is an important issue, and I praise the work that my right hon. Friend has done in her constituency, where a substantial amount of new housing has been built in recent years. Of course, the people who buy housing and find themselves in possession of properties that simply are not up to scratch go through an immensely difficult time. I simply suggest to her that she use one of the mechanisms available to her, such as Adjournment debates or Communities and Local Government questions when they come up, to keep making her important point and ensure that the message gets across to both the Government and house builders themselves.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): At the time of the 1975 in/out referendum on the then Common Market, the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, very wisely agreed that the Labour party would have a free vote. I hope that that wisdom will be observed by all parties when we come to make a decision again. Will the Leader of the House be advising the Prime Minister and his Chief Whip to observe that wisdom in future?

Chris Grayling: I think this is very much a matter for the Prime Minister. We have barely started the renegotiation and the European Union Referendum Bill has not even had its Second Reading, so I think these matters are for the future.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): The town of Wellington is in my constituency and the famous Wellington monument is prominent from the M5 as one goes south. The town will be having lots of celebrations for the 200th anniversary. May we have a debate to celebrate and discuss this wonderful anniversary? Might the Leader of the House find a little pot of money to restore the wonderful Wellington monument, which is in such great need of an upgrade?

Chris Grayling: I hate to disappoint my hon. Friend, but I do not have a budget from which I could give her that small amount of money. There will, however, be many opportunities to lobby those of my colleagues who do have such a budget. I commend her for the work she is putting into her constituency to celebrate this great anniversary of a great moment in our history. The anniversary is being celebrated in a variety of ways around the country, including with the production by the Royal Mint of a celebratory coin, although I gather that on the other side of the channel there has been some resistance to producing a euro coin to celebrate the same event.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Does the Leader of the House share my concern about the news that the BBC is due to air a programme entitled “Britain’s Hardest Grafter” which has been dubbed “The Hunger Games for the unemployed”? May we have a debate on whether the BBC is fulfilling its objective to air programmes of quality and distinctiveness?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady makes an important point. It is certainly the case that challenges in our society should not be used to create show business opportunities. I would always ask broadcasters to approach their work on analysing life in this country and elsewhere with the utmost caution and sensitivity. She will have the opportunity to raise this issue with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in a month’s time, and, of course, she can always ask for an Adjournment debate on this subject.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): My constituents in Lewes, whether from Seaford, New Haven, Lewes or Wivelsfield, are experiencing acute rail delays and poor service due to both Network Rail and the train operator. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate to discuss these severe issues, which are affecting all MPs in Sussex, to see if we can improve the service and communications to rail passengers?

Chris Grayling: I have every sympathy with my hon. Friend and her constituents. These issues are partly being caused by the necessary improvement works at London Bridge; an investment in the future that is absolutely vital and will be enormously beneficial, but is disruptive while it happens. Nevertheless, she is aware that there have been some real issues concerning services on the Southern routes, and the company needs to address them. I urge her to raise this question again at Transport questions next Thursday.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): May we have an urgent statement next week on the plight of 25 British citizens who are trapped in Sana’a? The civil war in Yemen has so far cost 1,000 lives. Does the Leader of the House agree that there is an obligation to try to help our citizens in need? May we have a debate on this very important issue?

Chris Grayling: I share the right hon. Gentleman’s concern about what is happening in Yemen. We have every reason to be concerned about events in many parts of the middle east at the moment; it is an area of enormous challenge for the international community. He will, early next week, have an opportunity to raise this issue directly with the Foreign Secretary at Foreign Office questions, and I encourage him to do so.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): May we have a debate on education funding? West Sussex is the second-lowest funded area in the country, yet there are many demographic pressures in constituencies such as Crawley.

Chris Grayling: I have every sympathy with my hon. Friend. I represent the county next door, where there are also significant demographic pressures—we are going through a baby boom. These are tough times for the public finances, but I encourage him to talk directly to the Secretary of State, who has proved very thoughtful and very receptive to discussing these issues with colleagues.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): First, Mr Speaker, I thank you for affording us the opportunity yesterday to pay tributes to the much-missed Charles Kennedy.

As we move towards the summer, may we have a debate on the case for reducing VAT on tourism? It is a policy pursued by all but three countries in the EU; it was endorsed by two Select Committees of this House in the last Parliament; and many regional and national economies of the United Kingdom would benefit immeasurably from it.

Chris Grayling: I assure the hon. Gentleman that there will be an opportunity for such a debate. As the Chancellor has already indicated, between now and the summer there will be an additional Budget statement, and the hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity to raise this issue at that time.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): The contaminated blood tragedy is affecting families the length and breadth of Britain. May we have a debate in Government time on the difficulties that my constituents and other Members’ constituents face in trying to access appropriate treatment and support?

Chris Grayling: This issue has affected constituents of Members across the House. It is a matter of great concern for this Government and it was addressed by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health in the last days of the last Parliament, and I know that the Department of Health is working carefully on it. I encourage my hon. Friend to pursue further opportunities to discuss this matter, either here or in Westminster Hall, and to continue to ask for updates from the Secretary of State at Health questions.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): May I request a debate to address the promise made by the Chancellor just a few days prior to the election that constituencies such as my own—Dewsbury—will be identified as enterprise zones within 100 days of the new Parliament? Many businesses in my constituency are struggling significantly and would undoubtedly welcome a period of zero business rates.

Chris Grayling: The Chancellor of the Exchequer will undoubtedly have taken note of the hon. Lady’s comments; I will make sure that his team are aware of what she has said. Of course, we are not yet 100 days into the new Parliament. Nevertheless, I point out to her that Dewsbury, and indeed the whole area of west Yorkshire, has benefited enormously from the economic progress that we have made in recent years, with falling unemployment and more businesses being created. Of course there is further

to go, but what we have seen is a real step in the right direction for the country and the area she now represents.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): May we have a debate on the deficiencies of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012? We may need two days to go through them all, but one pressing matter is that the

“Offence of threatening with article with blade or point or offensive weapon”

set out in the Act applies only when it happens

“in a public place or on school premises”.

It misses out many occasions when threatening with a knife takes place either in the home or on other private property. Can we ensure that this Act is amended as soon as possible, to make sure that violent offenders do not escape justice through a loophole that should not exist?

Chris Grayling: As ever, my hon. Friend makes an important point about crime and justice matters. I will ensure that my colleague the Lord Chancellor is aware of what he has said. I am no longer able to provide a direct solution to the issue that he raises, even though, as he knows, we share many views on criminal matters. However, I will ensure that the Ministry of Justice is aware of what he has said.

Stewart McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): The Leader of the House will be aware of a leak in the press at the weekend that HS2 Ltd says there is no business case to take the project up to Scotland. Scottish National party Members would welcome the opportunity to make that case to the Government. So can he—acting in the spirit of his party’s much-vaunted “one nation” approach to politics—ensure that we have an urgent statement on this issue?

Chris Grayling: First, we regard High Speed 2 as a crucial part of the future infrastructure of the United Kingdom. I am not aware of any plan that has been brought before this House to change the plans that we set out in the last Parliament, but the hon. Gentleman will have two opportunities next week to raise this issue—once in Scotland questions and once in Transport questions—and I hope that he will take them.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): May we please have time in this Chamber to debate rural broadband? We are still not getting BT to pull its weight; it is doing part of the work in constituencies across this country, but it is not fulfilling its obligations, including its contractual obligations. The time has come for this House to speak out on this matter and secure the future for rural people.

Chris Grayling: The House has debated this matter extensively and will continue to do so, and I encourage my hon. Friends to continue raising the matter. My hon. Friend’s comments will have been heard by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The new Secretary of State is a long-standing and experienced Member who does not take prisoners, as the BBC knows—and I have no doubt that BT will have the same experience.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) has just mentioned, the Secretary of State for Health announced in Liverpool this morning that the 18-week target for elective operations will be scrapped. Does the Leader of the House recognise that this shows absolute contempt for this House and our democracy? Did he know about the announcement, and what will he do to ensure the accountability of the Executive to the country’s elected representatives and, in turn, the people?

Chris Grayling: It is important to put on the record that the Secretary of State has made no announcement today. The news story that has emerged has come from the senior official at NHS England who has responsibility for the area under discussion. While it is the responsibility of Ministers to make statements to the House about decisions they personally take, where the NHS has been put under the operational control of the experts best placed to run it, as is the case now and has been argued for over many years, it is not always for Ministers to announce the decisions they take.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): May we have a debate on the workings of the neighbourhood planning process in the Localism Act 2011? The intent of the Act is to bring decision making closer to communities, but that does not appear to be happening in Warminster in my constituency, so I would welcome an early debate.

Chris Grayling: I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend. The process is clearly a new development as part of the Act designed to ensure that local communities have as strong a say as possible over the future development of their areas. I will ensure that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government is made aware of my hon. Friend’s comments, and I hope he will take advantage of the Adjournment debate system to bring forward a debate as soon as he can.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): Parc Slip open-cast mine in my constituency has been closed for several years and is a dreadful scar on the landscape. Will the Leader of the House make time for a much-needed debate on the fate of open-cast mines across the country?

Chris Grayling: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the House. I know that he might have to do some additional campaigning elsewhere in the next few weeks—having just finished one election, his family has another one to fight.

I am aware of the legacy of coal mining, including open-cast mining, in the area the hon. Gentleman represents. In a recent visit to the valleys, I was impressed with how the hills were returning to nature in many places, but he makes an important point about the impact of open-cast mining, and I hope that he will take advantage of the many opportunities available to him to bring a Minister to the House or raise a question directly with Ministers at Question Time to ensure that this issue is firmly on the agenda.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): In welcoming the Government’s commitment to end many new subsidies for onshore wind farms, which have marched across

[Julian Sturdy]

Yorkshire like a plague of locusts in recent years, including a number of applications on green-belt land in my constituency, will the Leader of the House provide a clear timeframe for when these proposals will be implemented?

Chris Grayling: One of the many reasons why I am delighted that we now have a Conservative Government, not a Conservative Government with Lib Dems attached, is the issue of onshore wind farms, which, in my view, has to be handled with the utmost care. I know that the new Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change is looking at this matter carefully. I will ensure that my hon. Friend's concerns are drawn to her attention, and I expect her to bring forward a new approach at an early opportunity.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Further to the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), I and many other Members have in recent weeks received urgent pleas for help from British nationals stranded in Yemen. I wrote to the Foreign Secretary about the matter in April and was informed that there were no plans to evacuate British nationals from the country. It is heartbreaking to have to reply to these cries for help with such a response. May we please have an urgent statement about what more the Government can do to ensure the safe return of British nationals stranded in Yemen and neighbouring countries, such as Djibouti, Saudi Arabia and Oman, as the situation remains extremely volatile?

Chris Grayling: I hear what the hon. Lady says, and I will ensure that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is aware of the concerns raised today. Ministers will be before the House on Tuesday, when I would encourage her to raise the issue with them directly.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): You will know, Mr Speaker, that there are few more shocking or grotesque practices than supermarkets throwing away 50 million tonnes of food as waste every year. Today, the chief executive officer of Tesco, Dave Lewis, has announced that Tesco will stop this practice and ensure that the food goes to charity. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a Minister to clarify what is being done to ensure that, if Tesco can do it, all the other supermarkets can do it so that this grotesque practice can be stopped, and to ensure that if they refuse to do it, we will consider bringing in legislation, as has happened in other countries?

Chris Grayling: I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend had to say. He is, of course, absolutely right: it is inexplicable and indefensible that good food should be thrown away. He is absolutely right, too, that the step taken today is a positive one. I will ensure that my colleagues in the Cabinet Office are made aware of what he said. There will shortly be an opportunity to raise the issue directly with them at Question Time but, before that happens, I shall make sure that they are made aware of my hon. Friend's message.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): The Leader of the House will be aware that the women's institute is celebrating its centenary this year, and he may be further aware that it was founded in the pioneering county of Anglesey, at Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogoch—I will help *Hansard* later! May we have a debate in Government time on this important organisation and the things it has done at local level, national level and international level? Will the right hon. Gentleman, along with Mr Speaker and the House authorities, use his good offices to provide an exhibition for this fine organisation?

Chris Grayling: I had no idea that the women's institute was founded in the village with the world's longest station name, which I visited last year—but I will not even start to seek to pronounce it in the way that the hon. Gentleman clearly can and does so well. Collectively and across party, the whole House should pay tribute to the women's institute for the work that it and its members have done for this country over many decades. It has been the backbone of our voluntary sector for a very long time. I was delighted to see its achievements celebrated at the palace recently. This provides an opportunity for the hon. Gentleman to bring forward what would be an ideal subject for an Adjournment debate.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. With short single-sentence supplementary questions and the continuation of the Leader of the House's exemplary brief replies, I will not say that we will get through everybody, but we will make a pretty good stab at it.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): Places of worship in Kirklees were targeted 132 times by thieves in the last three years. There have been many stone thefts, and last night Scapegoat Hill Junior and Infant School had tiles stolen from its roof, just days after the scaffolding required to make repairs after previous thefts had gone. May we have an urgent debate on the scourge of stone thefts that are blighting our communities?

Chris Grayling: I am very sympathetic to those who have experienced both stone and metal theft. We have, of course, legislated to toughen the penalties for metal theft. What I did for the business community in my previous role was to provide an opportunity for them to explain in detail to a court the impact of the loss of what might sometimes appear to be a small amount in value terms but can be enormously important to the organisation involved. I encourage my hon. Friend to bring the issue forward for an Adjournment debate so that a Minister comes to the House to address it. I express my sympathies to those who have been the victims of this theft over the past 24 hours. Stealing from a place of worship is one of the most despicable crimes one can imagine in our society.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): In the light of the eye-watering projected costs and at a time of austerity, will the Leader of the House undertake to make a statement on the renovation of the Palace of Westminster to explain how Members, and indeed members of the public including my constituents in Airdrie and Shotts, can scrutinise the process?

Chris Grayling: An independent report into the condition of the building has been prepared and it will be made available in the next couple of weeks. There is an extensive discussion to be had across both Houses of Parliament about how to respond to the needs and challenges. This is an iconic building—an enormously important building, not just for our democracy, but for our nation and as a source of tourist revenue from around the world. We should cherish it and look after it. We have to deal with the reality of fiscal austerity and challenging financial times but I would be very reluctant indeed to see anything happen that left this building with an insecure future.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Many of my constituents have contacted me about a threatened neo-Nazi demonstration in the neighbouring borough of Barnet. Although I support freedom of speech, anti-Semitic hate crime is completely unacceptable. Can my right hon. Friend facilitate a statement by the Home Secretary about what action she is going to take to prevent such hate crimes, which threaten the Jewish way of life?

Chris Grayling: I shall be happy to raise the issue with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. Let me, however, make it absolutely clear that anti-Semitic crime in any form is unacceptable, and—like anti-Islamic crime, and crime against any other religious group—should be treated with the maximum toughness by our justice system. As my hon. Friend says, while we should generally cherish free speech, free speech that encourages hatred or violence will never be acceptable in our society.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Leader of the House aware that thousands of children throughout the country who suffer from special educational needs, and autism in particular, cannot be assessed or treated? May we have a debate about that very soon?

Chris Grayling: All Members of Parliament have probably had far more exposure to special needs, and developed a far greater understanding of them, since being elected. I certainly have, and I recognise the importance of getting the arrangements right. I believe that this issue concerns the Education Secretary. She will be answering questions in the House on Monday week, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will take advantage of that opportunity to raise the issue directly with her.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Can the Leader of the House confirm that next week's Government business has passed the family test, and that family impact assessments will be published alongside legislation?

Chris Grayling: Next week's business includes the European Union Referendum Bill on Tuesday and the Scotland Bill on Monday, and I think that the family test will feature less centrally in those Bills than it will in some other measures. However, the Chief Whip and I have noted what my hon. Friend has said, and Ministers in all Departments should do so as well. Getting things right for families is central to protecting the fabric of our society, and we should always work towards that end.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): May we have an urgent debate on the Government's decision, announced just hours after the general election, to limit access to the higher rate of work support for deaf people who earn more than £27,000? That is not a cap on benefits; it is a discriminatory cap on career opportunities for the deaf.

Chris Grayling: Changes in the welfare system will, of course, be included in legislation that will be laid before the House in the coming months. The hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to make his case when that time arrives, as will his party.

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): Following the successful introduction of video games tax relief, which was announced in last year's Budget, and the contribution that the video games sector makes to our economy—not least in my constituency—may we have a debate about how we can help the industry to grow further, so that it is on an equal footing with the United Kingdom film industry?

Chris Grayling: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work that he has done in supporting a sector that is enormously important to our economy. We are world leaders in that sector, and we should work to maintain our position. Even many Members are enthusiastic participants in the products of the video games industry. The Chancellor of the Exchequer—who is, of course, preparing his Budget—will be in the House on Tuesday week, and Members will have an opportunity to make representations to him about the issue then.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): May we have a debate on pay for care home staff? Social services bosses say that the system is in crisis. We need the very best staff to look after our older people.

Chris Grayling: I do not think anyone could disagree with that. It is very important for us to have quality staff, quality support and quality service in our care homes. The hon. Gentleman will have many opportunities to raise the issue directly with Ministers, but in many instances care is provided by private companies, some of which are good and some of which are not. As Members of Parliament, we should always seek to highlight poor performance in the care sector when we encounter it, because we can play a role in ensuring that standards are raised.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I do not know whether the Leader of the House has had the displeasure of using the Dartford crossing recently. If he has, he will have noticed that the free-flow system there seems to have improved the flow of traffic. However, the administration of the scheme through the Dart Charge has exasperated many of my constituents. May we please have a debate about the charge, and about the frustrations that are being experienced by my constituents and people in the surrounding areas?

Chris Grayling: I understand the issues that my hon. Friend and his constituents are facing. I myself have used the Dart Charge on a number of occasions in recent weeks when, for reasons I cannot quite recall, I spent quite a lot of time driving to Essex—to places

[Chris Grayling]

such as Thurrock and Basildon, which are still represented by Conservatives. My hon. Friend will have an opportunity to raise the matter with the Secretary of State in Transport questions next Thursday. The scheme has the potential to make a real difference, but it needs to be got right.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): In the light of the publication of the Shrewsbury report on the baby ashes issue earlier this week, and of the fact that this is an issue in many constituencies up and down the land, including my own, where the family of Mike and Tina Trowhill have been affected, may we please have a statement from the Government on what assistance they will offer to local councils to carry out independent inquiries into what happened to babies' ashes in those local areas?

Chris Grayling: This is an enormously sensitive issue, and our hearts go out to the families affected. They have had to go through not only the trauma of losing a child but the aftermath that the hon. Lady has described. I know that my colleagues are carefully considering that report, and they will seek to deal with the matter sensitively and appropriately. They will come forward with their response in due course.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): May we have a statement on what steps the Government are taking to ensure that the welcome changes designed to prevent nuisance phone calls are actually having an effect? It was quite apparent during the general election that the problem had certainly not gone away, and that these persistent unwanted phone calls were continuing to blight the lives of my constituents.

Chris Grayling: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Work is under way to try to curb this practice, but we are dealing with people who are constantly looking for new ways to do this and who are working around the law. I myself have been the victim of these calls. When I was Secretary of State for Justice, it sometimes came as a bit of a shock to the person making a nuisance call to my mobile phone when I told them that I was the Minister responsible for regulating the sector and asked them for the name and address of their company. They normally hung up on the spot. It is a serious nuisance, however, and we must continue to work hard to address it. I know that my colleagues will do so.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I want to raise a small but important matter. Yet again, this place will take its summer break a month after midsummer, which will coincide—accidentally, no doubt—with the English school holidays and stretch long into the autumn. Could we not have a shorter parliamentary break that coincided with the Scottish and the English school holidays? This would help Members with children, and it would also help all MPs to get round to some of the events in their constituencies.

Chris Grayling: Of course we will always seek to provide recess dates that work as well as possible for Members across the House. The hon. Gentleman talks about holidays, and every Member of Parliament deserves a holiday, but to allow the narrative to continue that

says recesses are holidays does a disservice to the House. They provide the time that we all need to spend in our constituencies, working on our constituents' behalf.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us see whether, with extreme self-discipline, we can accommodate everyone by 12.15, at which point I would like to be able to move on.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the report on the failings at the Emstrey crematorium in Shrewsbury, where babies' ashes were not returned to their bereaved parents, was published earlier this week. The report found that at least 60 families were believed to have been affected by these failings. May we have a debate on the failings at the Emstrey crematorium, and on the lessons that could be learned by local authorities to prevent such failings from happening again?

Chris Grayling: As I said a moment ago, this is an enormously sensitive and difficult issue that we need to treat with enormous care and respect for the families involved. The Government will respond to the report in due course, and it is really important that we get this right.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): May we have an urgent statement from the Secretary of State for Health on when young boys in this country who are suffering from Duchenne muscular dystrophy can expect to have access to the drug Translarna? The drug is readily available across Europe, but its approval has been delayed in this country because of bureaucratic arguments within NHS England that are a direct result of the health service reforms. The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health in the previous Government guaranteed to me and the parents that this matter would be speeded up, but it is still being held up today.

Chris Grayling: I know that this issue has already been raised with Ministers this week, and that they take Members' views on it seriously. I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman's concerns are once again passed on to my colleagues in the Department of Health today.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): There is a troubling example of poor development in an area of outstanding natural beauty in my constituency. Will my right hon. Friend consider finding time for a debate on the subject, and in particular whether there should be restrictions on the use of retrospective planning permissions in AONBs?

Chris Grayling: I am always concerned when I hear about planning going wrong in the way I suspect it has done in my hon. Friend's constituency. It may be most helpful to Ministers if he could produce a short summary of what has gone wrong and pass it to them. That will enable them to look at the regulations and see whether anything needs to be changed.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): The House was at its best yesterday, but also at its worst in another degrading spectacle of Prime Minister's Question Time, which was an exchange of insults and non-responses.

May we debate early-day motion 51, which seeks to reinvent the format for Question Time so that it retains the robust questioning but is carried out in an atmosphere of calm and mutual respect?

[That this House is appalled at the demeaning and deteriorating spectacle of Prime Minister's Questions; notes the widely expressed public revulsion at this ill-mannered, pointless exchange of insults; and calls for its reinvention into a new format in which the Prime Minister can respond to questions in an atmosphere of calm, respect and dignity.]

Chris Grayling: One of the things that make this one of the great debating chambers of the world is that there are lively debates between the two sides. I would never condone insults across the House, but I think we would lose something in this Parliament if we did not have a vigorous and sometimes challenging debate of the kind that we see regularly.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The Queen's Speech contained reference to a reduction in the subsidies for onshore wind turbines. This has caused some uncertainty among businesses serving my local community that deal with offshore wind. May we have an early statement to reassure them that there is no uncertainty about continuing subsidies for the offshore renewables sector?

Chris Grayling: I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change to the concerns that my hon. Friend has raised. I know that the prime concerns of those on the Government Benches are to protect our countryside and ensure that onshore wind is handled sensitively. I shall ask my right hon. Friend to address the issues that my hon. Friend has raised.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): I and the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) have contacted the new Secretary of State for Energy to ask her to continue with the successful cross-party oil and gas promotion group, which had notable achievements in the previous Parliament. May I urge the Leader of the House to speak to the Secretary of State and ask her as a matter of urgency to make a positive decision on this request?

Chris Grayling: I have noted the hon. Lady's comments and I will make sure that my right hon. Friend is aware of her concern.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): My thoughts and those of the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), are very much with those seriously injured at Alton Towers in Staffordshire. We would like to praise the community first responders, who were so quickly on the scene. May we have a debate about community first responders and in particular the issues surrounding markings on cars, which my right hon. Friend knows about, because they are causing great concern to my constituents and those of my hon. Friend?

Chris Grayling: I have been aware for a long time of the fine work done by first responders in my hon. Friend's constituency. In a past role in opposition I made a number of visits to the Staffordshire ambulance service and learned about the work done by first responders.

Clearly, this week was a moment when that work was enormously important. Our hearts go out to the young people affected in that tragic accident. We wish them all the very best for their recovery. I praise all those involved in the rescue efforts and hope all the lessons that can be learned are learned. I encourage my hon. Friend to use the Westminster Hall or the end of day Adjournment debates to find an opportunity to put on record the importance of the work done by first responders and to make sure that Ministers are aware of the issues to which he draws the attention of the House today. I am aware of them and believe they are very important.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): My 82-year-old constituent was refused a blue badge, despite having had one for the past 10 years and having a progressive condition. May we have an urgent statement on and a review of the blue badge guidance to stop this unfairness?

Chris Grayling: The blue badge guidance always has to be fairly tight in order to ensure that people cannot abuse the system. One of the things that we can all do as constituency Members of Parliament is challenge the local authorities when they get it wrong. I have done so in the past and I know that the hon. Lady will do so now to ensure that the right decision is taken.

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): The Leader of the House may be aware that Thoresby colliery will close in July this year. Will he encourage the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills to come to the Chamber to make a statement about the measures that will be put in place to assist the employees there in retraining and reskilling so that they can move on to jobs elsewhere?

Chris Grayling: Extensive support is now available across government for those unfortunate enough to be caught up when a business closes, be that support through Jobcentre Plus or the skills development work done in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be in this House in a couple of weeks' time. I encourage my hon. Friend not only to raise these issues then, but to go directly to the Department now to make sure that the teams there that can help in these matters are ready and available when the change comes.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): The Leader of the House's views on human rights law and conventions are at least clear—he is against them. But could he clarify the Prime Minister's view, which has moved this week from support for the European convention on human rights—reportedly—to now contemplating leaving it? In the absence of a Bill, may we have an early statement or debate so that we can explore the full range of the Tory party's views on this matter?

Chris Grayling: The Conservative party's policy on human rights has not changed since last October. What we do not know is where the Labour party stands, because it says it wants to defend the human rights legal framework as it is, yet on prisoner voting Labour Members will line up to say that they do not want to give votes to prisoners. Those two things are not compatible and Labour needs to decide where it stands, because at the moment it is all over the place.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): In September 2014, the Conservatives gave a commitment that we would scrap the 15-year rule for British ex-pats so that these people could vote in elections. What progress has been made on that? What is the timetable for making sure it happens?

Chris Grayling: That is a clear manifesto commitment and we will deliver it at an early date. I cannot give my hon. Friend an exact timetable, but I can assure him that it is in our plans and it will happen sooner rather than later.

Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House secure an urgent, early debate on the future of NHS walk-in centres, which were opened by a Labour Government and a quarter of which have been closed by this Government? The one in Jarrow is due to close, because of unaccountable management, and 27,000 people are going to be dumped on local GP surgeries that are already overburdened.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman has already had the opportunity this week to raise this matter, in Tuesday's health debate. This Government have already increased spending on the health service and we are committed to spending a further £8 billion extra on it. We are, as yet, uncertain what his party's policy is.

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the flawed review of children's heart services in the previous Parliament. Although much can be welcomed in the new review, access to units is still omitted from the standards, which is causing concern. May we have a statement or debate as soon as possible so we can ensure that the review is first rate this time?

Chris Grayling: First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work he has done on behalf of his constituency and West Yorkshire on this deeply sensitive matter. The concern he has shown is typical of the approach he has taken as a constituency MP and it is one of the reasons he was so successfully re-elected to this place. There will be many opportunities in the coming days to requisition debates so that Ministers come to address these issues, either in Westminster Hall or in this Chamber, and I suggest he take advantage of those.

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): The Government announced a bus Bill to allow some local areas to re-franchise services. In Tyne and Wear, similar plans are already under way, but Ministers have consistently failed to back them. May we have a statement from the Department for Transport about what, if any, implications this planned legislation has on our existing proposals?

Chris Grayling: The bus Bill will be an important part of our devolution plans and we will be introducing it in the near future. The hon. Lady will have an opportunity in next Thursday's Transport questions to raise the issue directly with the Secretary of State, and I am sure she will take advantage of that opportunity.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): May we have a debate on the importance of local arts festivals? The forthcoming weekend sees the first ever Kett Fest, a spontaneous celebration of local arts, culture and music in the town of Kettering. Although supported by the

relevant local authorities, it is—rightly—drawing on only a minimal level of public funding, and its success will be almost entirely due to the individual initiative, enthusiasm and endeavour of a large number of public-spirited individuals who are proud of the town in which they live.

Chris Grayling: I know that Kettering is a town with a very strong community spirit, and what my hon. Friend describes is this country at its best, with people coming forward to deliver change or events that really bring communities together. It is great to hear of such a good example and one that is not simply dependent on public finance to deliver real community togetherness.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Will the Leader of the House give consideration to a statement on submarine activity in the Irish sea that has already interfered with fishing efforts? The latest incident took place on 15 April, when the boat and fishing gear of one of my constituents was destroyed.

Chris Grayling: I do understand the concerns about this matter, including in the fishing community. There will be Defence questions on Monday, and the hon. Lady will have the opportunity in topical questions to raise this issue then, should she choose to do so. Of course, she will have other such opportunities this summer.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): One unintended consequence of the general election is that we have a gap in our Question Times, as there is now no need for Deputy Prime Minister's questions. One very talented Minister, who has a lot to do with the running of this House, has been sitting silently on the Front Bench. May we have a statement from the Leader of the House on instituting a Question Time in future for the Chief Whip? We could then ask him how he united the Conservative party on Europe, how he got every single Conservative Member through the Lobby and how he has had no rebellions.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to praise the Chief Whip, who has made a brilliant start in his job. I would, however, have been slightly worried if he had had a rebellion in his first vote. There is a long tradition in this House, only occasionally broken, of Chief Whips simply getting the job done, rather than advertising what they are doing. I suspect that my right hon. Friend will prefer to keep things that way rather than change the practice of the Chief Whip remaining a silent participant in the House.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House now answer the points made by the shadow Leader of the House on the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill? A great many Members, on both sides of the House, from Greater Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds and Hull wanted to speak in yesterday's oversubscribed debate on devolution to the cities and regions in England. There is clearly a great demand here, and it is doing this House a disservice to start the Bill in the other place.

Chris Grayling: First, it may be appropriate to wish the hon. Gentleman a happy birthday. May I point out to him that there is an Opposition day next week, and

the subject of that debate has not been announced yet? A couple of Opposition Members have expressed an interest in discussing the issues he raises, so there is an ideal opportunity for them and they should speak to the shadow Leader of the House.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Later this month, the Government will receive a report from the Electoral Commission on the completeness of the electoral registers, in preparation for full implementation of individual electoral registration. May we have a report, and a debate in this House, on that very subject?

Chris Grayling: I believe the new approach to electoral registration has been absolutely the right thing to do. We are a society and a democracy that prides itself on being clean and free from fraud, but that has not always been the case in recent years. The reform takes us a step nearer having a fraud-free system. The House will of course have the chance to study the Electoral Commission's report when it is published, and the hon. Gentleman will be able to raise the issues when he chooses to do so.

Debate on the Address

[6TH DAY]

Debate resumed (Order, 3 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.

The Economy

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected amendment (e) in the name of the Leader of the Opposition and amendments (a) and (b), which will be moved formally at the end of the debate.

I should advise the House that 53 hon. and right hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye in the debate and I am sorry to say that inevitably some will be disappointed. Depending on the length of the Front-Bench speeches, I will make a judgment on how exacting the time limit on Back-Bench speeches will need to be. We need to hear and probably will hear fully from the shadow Chancellor and the Chancellor, treating all the issues, but if they feel able to tailor their contributions in a utilitarian spirit to minimise unhappiness and to maximise their colleagues' happiness, they will, I think, be widely applauded.

12.20 pm

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move an amendment, at the end of the Question to add:

“but regret that the Gracious Speech fails to provide a strategy to build the productive economy that the country needs; note that a fragile recovery and stagnating productivity harms living standards and makes it harder to reduce the deficit; believe that every effort should now be concentrated on supporting middle- and lower-income working people; further note that the Gracious Speech is a missed opportunity to tackle the principal causes of rising welfare costs that flow from a low wage, high rent economy; further believe in the pooling and sharing of resources across the UK as the best mechanism for delivering social and economic change; urge the Government to pursue sensible savings in public expenditure as part of a balanced approach and not an ideologically-driven attempt to shrink public services beyond what is needed to address the deficit; and call upon Ministers to spell out where their cuts will fall and who will pay for their unfunded election pledges.”

I welcome the Chancellor to his place. Very few people serve two full terms as Chancellor and I am sure that the whole country will be grateful that he does not plan to do so either. Although he might have his eye on another job, I congratulate him on his reappointment to this one. Of course, we should not ignore the fact that he has a fancy new title to illustrate his role in the EU renegotiation process. He is now the First Secretary of State, no less, following in the footsteps of John Prescott and Peter Mandelson. Let us hope that his ministerial counterparts are suitably impressed.

The Chancellor must now deliver negotiations with other member states to convince the public to opt decisively for Britain to remain a member of the European

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Union. It is important to secure stronger rules so that welfare payments go only to those who have contributed to our system, but in my view we also need greater devolution from Brussels, an overhaul of the EU budget and far greater accountability of the main institutions of the European Union, which still feel too distant and out of touch. It is also essential that he agrees that we need a comprehensive independent risk analysis of Britain leaving the European Union. It needs to be carried out by the Bank of England, the Treasury and the Office for Budget Responsibility and it needs to be published in ample time for the public to consider it in full before the referendum.

Although this is not the Queen's Speech that I wanted the House to be debating, I reassure everybody and remind the Chancellor that we will be a vigilant and responsible Opposition, watching closely the choices he still has to make and holding him to account at every step.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): The shadow Chancellor talks about being a responsible Opposition. In the spirit of responsible opposition, will he admit the errors in his previous economic policy, in which he predicted that unemployment would rise and that we would have no growth? He was comprehensively proved wrong in the election. Has he had time to reflect on how he might recalibrate his economic message?

Chris Leslie: I have had plenty of time to reflect on the result of the general election. Obviously, we are disappointed with it and we will review our policies accordingly, but it is now our job to ask questions and scrutinise what the hon. Gentleman and those on his Front Bench plan to do. I shall come shortly to my observations about that.

Let us not neglect the subject at hand, which is the Queen's Speech. The headlines have, of course, now been spun and the rhetoric from Ministers has started. They are trying in vain to make all the right noises about fairness and even a one nation Government, but let us pause for a moment, walk through the measures in the Queen's Speech and cut through the spin.

The tax-free minimum wage for those working 30 hours sounds fine until we realise that it is already tax free. The real question is why there is no action in the Queen's Speech for the low paid, such as incentives for a living wage, which even the Mayor of London supports. I do not know whether he is in his place, but perhaps he will join us later.

As for the rest of the spin, the household benefit cap, although it is necessary, is only a drop in the ocean of the overall welfare bill, saving less than one 10th of 1%, and is a total distraction from the root cause of escalating welfare costs for the taxpayer in recent years, the low-wage nature of our economy.

What about devolution to a northern powerhouse? If it is genuine, that is all well and good, but local communities have heard these promises before and they know that when the Chancellor talks about devolution it is usually code for shifting the consequence of cuts and not the power to deliver services.

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): At a meeting of the leaders of northern cities on Monday, the Labour leader of Manchester City Council, who has many years of experience, said that the north is working together better than it ever has before. Does that not show that the northern economic powerhouse is a reality and that it is working?

Chris Leslie: The clue was at the beginning of the hon. Gentleman's intervention. Labour leaders do work well together in local government, and when we hear the Chancellor's response to this debate they might find that there are a few surprises and a hidden agenda with a bit of a sting in the tail for them over the next few months.

What about the rest of the spin in the Queen's Speech, such as extending the right to buy? Everyone is in favour of home ownership, of course, but the scheme proposed by Ministers is so badly thought through, throwing housing associations into chaos, that even the Mayor of London—for it is he—has called it the “height of insanity”.

There was a further piece of spin, of course: a tax lock designed purely to stop the Chancellor raising VAT again. Do not get me wrong, we welcome any effort by the Chancellor to legislate against his own record and his own worst instincts, but this legislation does nothing more than prove that he does not even trust himself on tax. Of course, it does not give any guarantees about other stealth tax rises elsewhere, nor does it prevent him from acting on his other instinct of always prioritising tax cuts for the very richest over those for those on middle and low incomes—[*Interruption.*] Conservative Members are all shouting from the Back Benches, but the Chancellor's eyes are down on his notes. Is the Chancellor planning to cut that top rate of tax from 45p on earnings of more than £150,000? I will give way to the Chancellor if he can clarify for us whether that is his plan. Will he cut that rate of 45p for those earning £150,000, or not?

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con) *rose*—

Chris Leslie: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman knows the answer.

Graham Evans: Why in 13 years of the Labour Government did they not increase the top rate from 40p to 50p?

Chris Leslie: We have heard those arguments. I was asking the Government whether they plan to cut the top rate of tax of earnings of £150,000 from 45p, and perhaps down to 40p, and there is silence from the Government Benches and from the Chancellor. Perhaps he will come to that later in his speech.

The Queen's Speech was high on rhetoric but was in reality the usual combination of diversion and distraction. As ever with this Chancellor, there is more than meets the eye. All the rhetoric is just the tip of a Tory iceberg, with 90% of their real agenda hidden below the surface, still invisible from public view. That agenda will not even be partly revealed until the emergency Budget on 8 July. Until then, serious questions remain unanswered about what drives the Government, and in what direction.

The trajectory of overall cuts set out in the March Budget goes beyond what is needed to eradicate the deficit by the end of the Parliament. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the Queen's Speech still leaves us totally in the dark about more than 85% of the Chancellor's planned £12 billion of welfare cuts. Just this morning, the IFS criticised the Government for giving a

"misleading impression of what departmental spending in many areas will look like".

Frankly, there is growing disbelief across the country that the Chancellor can protect those in greatest need while keeping his promises to the electorate on child benefit and disability benefits. My hon. Friends will not have failed to spot during Prime Minister's Question Time yesterday how the Prime Minister, when challenged by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) on the question of disability benefits, digressed into all sorts of reminiscences about the campaign trail and how much fun it was going to various meetings. The Prime Minister promised that

"the most disabled should always be protected"

and I will be looking to the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to keep the Prime Minister's promises. The Government might have secured a majority, but they did not secure a mandate for specific cuts to departments or services because those were never explained or set out before the election. Nor have we ever had an explanation of how they will pay for their multi-billion pound pledges on tax and services or, crucially, for the NHS.

The Opposition agree with yesterday's OECD assessment that a fair approach is the right one to take—sensible savings and protection for those on middle and lower incomes. Cuts that decimate public services would be too big a price to pay, especially as they may even result in higher costs in the longer term. We also heard how 8,000 nurse training places were cut in 2010. The use of agency nurses then proliferated to fill the gap. Is it any wonder, therefore, that NHS trusts now face a deficit of about £2 billion? Part of the reason the deficit is so big is that productivity has been so poor. Britain has the second lowest productivity in the G7, and output per worker is still lower than in 2010. This should have been at the top of the Chancellor's agenda throughout the last Parliament, but he did not even mention it in his last Budget speech. For the Tories, it seems that productivity just springs magically if the Government just get out of the way, unrelated to any fiscal or policy choices that they make.

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): The shadow Chancellor will know that many pundits have been looking at that productivity puzzle. The Treasury Committee has examined it for the past five years. If the Governor of the Bank of England, economists and everyone else does not understand that productivity conundrum, will he share with us where he thinks the lack of productivity comes from?

Chris Leslie: I will come to that in a moment. The hon. Gentleman must also be staggered that the Chancellor did not even mention it in his Budget speech. That was an omission that the Chancellor needs to correct. We take a different view of where productivity comes from because, for us, it depends in part on having decent infrastructure and public services—motorways that flow

freely and trains that commuters can actually get on, tax offices answering business queries efficiently rather than keeping companies' staff waiting on hold, employees who are off sick able to get treated swiftly in a decent NHS, an education system that supports a work force and provides training in high-quality skills. Each of these is crucial for our future economic productivity, and each depends on the Chancellor making the right fiscal choices for this Parliament.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will my hon. Friend push the Chancellor a little harder on productivity? The recent report from the Chartered Management Institute said that management and skills were at the heart of productivity. The Government have not tackled those, and a culture has grown up in which even when managers fail to meet targets they still get their bonus.

Chris Leslie: My hon. Friend makes a good point. According to the OBR, if productivity growth per worker was closer to 4%, our national debt would be £350 billion lower by the end of this Parliament. There is a connection between the choices that are made in fiscal policy and the productive nature of our economy.

The OECD confirmed just yesterday in a sobering reality check for the Chancellor that continued weak productivity could lead to a higher than expected budget deficit, and he should listen to the OECD.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): The shadow Chancellor rightly says that infrastructure is important. On the day when, by coincidence, the Crossrail tunnel is completed, will he not bring himself to recognise that, even at times of great public spending restraint, the last Government continued and, I am sure, this Government will continue with essential infrastructure spending on rail and roads, which lays the foundations for future long-term prosperity, but is difficult to do if the Government run up an unsustainable deficit?

Chris Leslie: The civil service used to have a phrase for things like this. It was a brave decision of the right hon. Gentleman to defend his Government's record on infrastructure. Many projects that were started under the previous Government have still not been completed. Would it not be better if we rose above party political picking out of which infrastructure project should proceed and tried to have a more mature debate about how we plan infrastructure in this country?

The Chancellor knows that Sir John Armitt's report on infrastructure was widely received across the business community and that all sorts of parties wanted to find an independent approach to infrastructure planning. I still believe that that would be a better, more grown up way to plan for infrastructure.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Why did the Labour party announce in its manifesto that it would put on hold the dualling of the A359, which is very important to delivering good transport links to the west country and my constituency?

Chris Leslie: Of course individual choices have to be made, but it would be better if they were made on the basis of need and evidence, not simply on whether the hon. Gentleman has the ear of a particular Minister at

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a particular point in time. That is the old way to plan infrastructure, and he knows in his heart that we should reform it.

The choices that the Chancellor makes in the emergency Budget in July will be crucial for productivity and therefore crucial to the health of the economy and public finances. I want to know whether the Chancellor will set out a sensible approach to deficit reduction by prioritising the areas of public spending that raise productivity. Why do we not ask the OBR to report on how the options for the spending review might impact on productivity and living standards and to set out the impact of the different choices that the Chancellor could make? He will have our support if he wants it to do that work. As the OECD suggested yesterday, the uneven profile of his planned fiscal pathway poses real risks, and higher productivity would give greater scope to protect working families, while still balancing the books. So these are the choices that he must confront. Is he still planning to double the pace of cuts, regardless of the impact on productivity, or is he now planning to moderate that pathway? The Chancellor has wiggle room here, even within his own fiscal rules.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. He is making an excellent speech. I want to follow up on a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman). According to the CMI report, leadership and management are a key issue for this country, and we have seen nothing in government strategy on that issue. How much does my hon. Friend think that that should also be part of our review of why we have such problems with productivity in this country?

Chris Leslie: This is at the heart of the Chancellor's policy choices. Is he looking not just at how much but how spending is taking place? He can choose to ensure that where spending has to be prioritised decisions lean towards supporting growth and productivity and the skills that will in turn get us into that more virtuous cycle.

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Leslie: I will give way in a moment. Not to take a reasonable and measured approach, when the Chancellor clearly has scope to do so, would suggest that he is influenced much more by Conservative ideology than by economic judgment. That is what it always comes down to with this Chancellor. Is he focusing on securing the long-term needs of the economy or on securing his own long-term future; is he focusing on the country or on his Back Benchers; is he focusing on his current job or on a future one?

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Does the shadow Chancellor agree that the best way to drive productivity is to increase competition and that 800,000 new businesses created in the last Parliament will drive productivity in this country?

Chris Leslie: Of course competition is essential, but so are important public services that support businesses

and enable them to optimise the outputs from the inputs to the production process. That is the crucial point that we have to focus on.

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the issues with productivity is that we have become obsessed with mergers and acquisitions for short-term profitability, rather than allowing industry to invest for the longer term as economies such as Germany have been doing?

Chris Leslie: Long-term investment, especially production process technology and business investment, is crucial, which is why the stop-start approach of recent years from the Treasury has seen us underperform in business investment into the productive economy. It is essential.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Governments should try to encourage increased productivity in the private sector, but it is down to business confidence and reinvestment decisions. Although business confidence is now the highest it has been since 1992, investment dropped off in the run-up to the general election, because business was scared that there would be a hard-left socialist Government.

Chris Leslie: I know that the hon. Gentleman wants to make his political points, but I think we have a duty to ensure that we examine far more forensically the drivers of economic productivity and the growth that will help us to repair the public finances more successfully. That is the agenda we have to follow.

These are serious times, and we needed a serious Queen's Speech agenda to address Britain's long-term economic challenges. We should not forget that progress in our economy is still fragile and the recovery is still too constrained. The economy remains fraught with pressures, which have been heaped on the shoulders of many working people. For example, the number of people who have to work a second job in order to get by has increased dramatically in recent years, and a record number of pensioners are returning to the labour market. Indeed, the number of over-65s in employment has increased by more than 8% over the past year alone. The Office for National Statistics says that our share of high-skilled jobs is falling. The Government's vision for Britain is one of a low-wage, bargain-basement economy. That is not the vision of a party for working people.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I am listening to the hon. Gentleman carefully, but he has said very little about job creation under the previous Government. Will he take this opportunity to recognise that we now have record numbers of people in work in this country, which contrasts with the fact that no Labour Government, from the time they came into power to the time they left, have ever managed to bring down unemployment?

Chris Leslie: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has seen the ONS report published yesterday, but it shows that we are losing high-skilled employment in this country and that gradually it is being replaced with low-skilled employment, which is a real worry. We need to ensure that we compete in the world on the basis of a high-skilled, virtuous cycle. I think that he would be complacent if he ignored what is happening in our economy.

Christopher Pincher *rose*—

Chris Leslie: I cannot remember whether I have given way to the hon. Gentleman already but, given that he is being so polite and persistent, I will give way one last time to him.

Christopher Pincher: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman. He likes to give the impression that sweetness and light always surround him, but he might like to look behind him occasionally. He must recognise that no one will take his talk about deficit reduction seriously when sitting behind him is his former leader, who less than a month ago said that the previous Labour Government did not spend too much.

Chris Leslie: When it comes to deficit reduction, let us never forget that the Chancellor of the Exchequer promised to eradicate the deficit by the end of the previous Parliament. We have passed that deadline, so he has broken that promise. He should put his hands up and admit that, when it came to his promise on the deficit, he failed.

We now need focus to address our economic challenges, not a Chancellor distracted by his own political ambition. We need a concerted drive to boost productivity; a balanced recovery reaching all corners of the country, with no sector left behind; a meaningful effort to tackle the root causes of higher welfare costs, low pay and insecure working conditions; a guarantee that any scope for tax cuts should be focused entirely on middle and lower earners; and a commitment to reject an ideological drive to shrink public investment. That is the approach Britain needs. That would be a genuinely one-nation approach.

Instead, we had a Queen's Speech that focused on short-term political headlines, rather than long-term economic gain. It was designed to lay political traps for the Chancellor's opponents as part of a grand political chess game, rather than to focus on productivity and balanced growth. This obsession with short-term, narrow political gain is the Chancellor's curse. He is the Chancellor for whom productivity means kicking the Home Secretary off her Cabinet Committees. He is the Chancellor for whom a long-term plan means a move next door. He is sticking with the family business and measuring up the wallpaper for No. 10 already. That is his real agenda. Cold and calculating, he is the iceberg Chancellor, with hidden dangers beneath the surface. He is putting productivity and public services at risk, prioritising the very richest above those on middle and lower incomes, pitting one nation against another. Britain did not vote for a hidden agenda. I urge the Chancellor to put the ambitions of Britain above his own.

12.45 pm

The First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): I rise on the last day of the Queen's Speech debate to support a programme for government that stands full square behind the working people of this country. It unashamedly backs the aspiration of working people to own their own home. It unflinchingly supports the businesses, especially the small firms, that provide the jobs that working people depend on. It unfailingly stands on the side of parents who want what every parent wants for their child: good education in a

great school. It understands that the best way to support the incomes of working people is to let them keep more of their income tax-free. Our programme for government is unwavering in its determination to deliver sound public finances and the economic security that they bring for working people, because without that security nothing else is possible. We were elected as a party for the working people, and we will govern as a Government for the working people.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Osborne: I will give way in a moment, but let me first make some progress.

Of course, this is the day we vote on the Queen's Speech, deciding whether the legislative programme it proposes should proceed into law. We were told four weeks ago by the pollsters and pundits that this day would be one of great constitutional drama. Would the party leader who managed to cobble together enough votes in a hung Parliament manage to survive the test of the vote tonight? As always, we are taking nothing for granted, but I am reasonably confident that we will have the votes tonight, because what the pollsters and pundits did not reckon on was the good sense of the British people, who did not want to put at risk everything that has been achieved over the past five years and who want to continue with a long-term economic plan that is working for this country.

Let me say—I mean this sincerely—that it is very good to see the former leader of the Labour party here today. I think that he earns everyone's respect by coming to the House so soon after the election defeat, and I understand that he wants to take part in the debate. Despite the fierce arguments of the general election, I do not think that anyone ever doubted his personal integrity or the conviction with which he made his arguments. It is good to see him back in the Chamber.

Let me also put on the record my thanks to the former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the former Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey, who lost his seat at the election, with whom I worked incredibly closely. He gave great public service to this country. Of course, that is not to say that I am sorry to have a Conservative Chief Secretary. It is fantastic to have my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands) in that role, along with the new members of the Treasury team.

The measures set out in the Queen's Speech represent the next stages of our long-term economic plan, because we on the Government side of the House know that the job of repairing the British economy is not yet done, and that the work of preparing our country for the future has only just started.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Does support for hard-working people include sanctioning those who are in work but on low wages and in receipt of tax credits?

Mr Osborne: If the hon. Lady is talking about benefit sanctions, I think that it is perfectly reasonable to ask people who are capable of work to turn up to job interviews and to make sure that they are doing everything possible to look for work. We support them while they are doing that, but the taxpayers of this country expect them to search for work.

[Mr Osborne]

The economic situation at the beginning of this Parliament is vastly better than the one we inherited at the start of the last Parliament. Back then, debt was soaring; today, it is projected this year to fall as a share of our national income. Back then, millions were looking for work; today, 2 million new jobs have been created. Back then, we were in the grip of an economic crisis; this week, the latest forecast is that the UK will be the fastest growing of any of the G7 economies—not just in 2014, but now in 2015 as well. That we have come so far in five years is a testament to the effort of the working people of Britain.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): One of the myths that the Conservatives have been very successful with—I credit them for it—is the suggestion that debt soared under the last Labour Government from 1997 onwards. However, according to the House of Commons Library, debt in 1997 was higher than it was in 2007-08, just before the banking crisis hit. Yes or no?

Mr Osborne: The idea that the last Labour Government did not leave the country with a debt crisis is laughable. The fact that the Labour party is starting this Parliament making the same argument that it made in the last one shows how much it needs to learn and listen.

Clive Efford *rose*—

Mr Osborne: I am answering the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

Mr Speaker: Order. We deal with these matters in an orderly and sequential manner. The Chancellor is seeking to respond to the intervention; the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) can always try his luck again in a moment. Ministers should not be hectoring in these circumstances. Let the Chancellor reply first.

Mr Osborne: The point I make to the hon. Gentleman is that national debt started rising in the very first years of the beginning of this century—in 2001 and 2002. It rose through the boom years, when the Labour Government should have been paying down the debt and should not have been running a deficit. One of the things on which the various leaders of the Labour party all seem to agree at the moment is that the deficit was too high going into the crash.

Clive Efford *rose*—

Mr Osborne: I do not know who the hon. Gentleman is going to vote for in the Labour leadership contest; the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) may be the one person still sticking with the line that he is pursuing.

Clive Efford *rose*—

Mr Osborne: I think I have dealt with the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mark Garnier: The subject of debt is incredibly important, but debt is not just national; there is household debt as well. Does the Chancellor agree that the £1 trillion rise in household debt between 1997 and 2008, taking it

up to £1.47 trillion, was one of the most pernicious acts of the Labour Government? It damaged households immeasurably and is the biggest crisis that we have to deal with.

Mr Osborne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There was no institution looking at overall debt levels in our country.

Clive Efford: Make it up as you go along!

Mr Speaker: Order. If the Chancellor wants to give way, he will, and if he does not, he will not. A Member should not continue to stand in an attempt to intimidate a Minister or anybody else into giving way. [Interruption.] Order. A Member should not continue to stand as if their intervention was inevitable. Seriously, that is an established point of parliamentary procedure. The hon. Member for Eltham can have a go, but if the intervention is not accepted, he will have to resume his seat.

Clive Efford: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. For the record, I want to apologise—I did not want to intimidate the Chancellor.

Mr Speaker: Whether the hon. Gentleman wanted to or not, I am happy to concede that he was not doing so.

Mr Osborne: I am not feeling particularly intimidated by the hon. Gentleman because he is spouting the same old anti-aspiration, anti-sound public finances nonsense that we have heard from the Opposition for the past five years.

Let me make progress and come to the central point. We have to tackle the endemic weaknesses in the British economy that no Government have been able to solve in the past: we are not productive enough and we do not export enough, save enough, train enough or build enough.

Graham Evans *rose*—

Mr Osborne: Let me make a little progress before I give way to my hon. Friend. We do not see enough of the prosperity and opportunity produced by our economy shared across all parts of our United Kingdom. The Queen's Speech addresses those weaknesses head on. The housing Bill will ensure that more new homes are built and that tenants of housing associations get the opportunity to buy their own homes.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): A disgrace!

Mr Osborne: But it is anti-aspiration to deny working people in housing associations the right to buy their own homes. That will be an early, key test of whether the Labour party has learned anything from its massive election defeat.

The enterprise Bill supports the small businesses that are the productive engine of the modern economy. The High Speed 2 Bill commits us to the vital modern transport infrastructure that we need. The Childcare Bill supports the working parents—especially the working mothers—who have never had the backing that matches their contribution to our economy. The full employment and welfare Bill delivers the 3 million apprenticeships and creates the work incentives in our welfare system so that every citizen who can work is able to.

Yesterday, we discovered that the UK had climbed up the global employment league table, overtaking Canada to have the third highest employment rate of any of the major advanced economies in the world, on the path to full employment that we have set out. There is the promise of further devolution, delivered in the legislation, to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Then there is the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill, which helps to dismantle the failed model that says that we have to run the entire country from the centre of London. Instead, it empowers our great cities across England and adds to the foundations of the northern powerhouse that we are building.

That is the agenda that we offer—full of ambition, brimming with ideas, not afraid of the future but excited about what it can bring. What of the alternative? The Labour party has taken the unusual approach of erecting the headstone first and then conducting the post-mortem. What conclusion has it reached? The shadow Chancellor just said that this is not the Queen's Speech that he would have wanted. The Queen's Speech that he does want is not entirely clear. He said that Labour's economic policy was not credible; that its spending policy meant that it spent too much; that its tax policy was punitive and, in his word, "crude"; that its housing and rent policy was unworkable; that its energy policy meant higher energy bills; that its European policy was anti-democratic; and that its business policy was anti-business. Other than that, it was all okay!

Chris Leslie *rose*—

Mr Osborne: I will give way, but I should properly welcome the hon. Gentleman, along with the rest of his shadow Treasury team. One of the great pleasures of doing this job has been the opportunity to work with four different shadow Chancellors. I wish the hon. Gentleman the same success as his predecessors enjoyed.

Chris Leslie: Very funny. I asked the Chancellor about an issue of substance—whether he is planning to cut the 45p rate of tax on earnings of £150,000. Is he able to rule that out as unfair and inappropriate?

Mr Osborne: There was a very good intervention which pointed out that there was a 40p rate for almost the entire period of Labour government. But let me say this. My tax priorities are clear: to raise the tax-free personal allowance to £12,500 and the higher rate threshold to £50,000. Those are my priorities and they will be reflected in the Budgets presented from this Dispatch Box.

The shadow Chancellor is a thoughtful man. Last weekend, he gave an interview to *The Guardian*, in which he tried to pinpoint what went wrong. This was his conclusion:

"It's the Which? magazine strata of society that somehow we just didn't understand".

To be honest, I would stop worrying about *Which?* magazine and start focusing on which leader. There are four members of the Labour Treasury team. Three have backed different potential Labour leaders and the shadow Chancellor has led from the front by deciding that he is not going to back anyone at all. The truth is that it does not matter which of the leaders they pick—none of them understands the aspirations of working people because, in the devastating words of the right hon.

Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), Labour has become the "anti-worker" party. That is what she said. That is a quote that I suspect we will hear again in this Chamber in the coming years.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Osborne: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Labour party is the anti-worker party?

Bill Esterson: The Chancellor has talked about his priorities. May I ask him about his priorities for the £12 billion of unfunded spending cuts? Will he confirm today what the Prime Minister refused to confirm yesterday? Will he be cutting benefits for people with disabilities—yes or no?

Mr Osborne: As the Prime Minister made very clear yesterday, we will follow the principles that we followed in the previous Parliament, when we protected the most vulnerable in our society and actually increased the amount we were able to give to the most disabled in our country. In every single intervention about economic policy today, in the different debates we have had since the Queen's Speech, and at Prime Minister's questions, Labour Members have demanded more public spending, complained about a public expenditure cut, or implied that there should be higher welfare bills. That is what we have heard about over the past few days—more spending and higher welfare bills that can be paid for only by more borrowing and higher taxes on the working people of this country. That would undermine the security that we have restored to our economy.

Graham Evans *rose*—

Mr Osborne: I now give way to my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour.

Graham Evans: I wonder whether the Chancellor is aware that, as I speak, IBM is signing a multimillion-pound contract in my constituency of Weaver Vale on high-speed computing, in partnership with the Science and Technology Facilities Council at Sci-Tech Daresbury—the enterprise zone. Does he agree that this has happened only because of our long-term economic plan for reducing the deficit and cutting taxes, that the British people know that only the Conservatives are the party of business, and that the whole world knows that Britain is open for business?

Mr Osborne: Let me say how fantastic it is to see my hon. Friend back in his place, because he has fought so hard for his constituency in delivering the Mersey Gateway bridge, the rail improvements in his constituency, and, as he mentioned, the major investments in science at Daresbury, including in high-performance computing. Today's announcement from IBM shows what happens if we get our science and technology policy right as a country—we attract investment from all over the world.

Mr Sheerman: Can I ask the Chancellor about—

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been here for 36 years, and he ought to know that you do not pose the question before permission to make the

[Mr Speaker]

intervention has been granted. I think the Chancellor has acceded to the intervention; let us now hear what it is.

Mr Sheerman: The right hon. Gentleman knows that I try to play fair in these things, but on his question about my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), I think a sense of humility is needed in this Chamber today. The Tory party has just got 30% of the popular vote; the Labour party got 31%. A hell of a lot of people in this country did not vote Conservative and did not vote Labour, and if we are not looking at why we do not enthuse the people, we are not doing our job.

Mr Osborne: I could not tell whether the hon. Gentleman agrees with the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford that the Labour party is the anti-worker party—but we will find out.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Osborne: Actually, I would much rather give way to the new Member for Taunton.

Rebecca Pow: This Government are committed to infrastructure investment to benefit business. As my right hon. Friend said earlier, the Labour party, in its manifesto, was going to axe the upgrade of the A358, not realising that linked to that upgrade is the development of a new IT business park in Taunton on which depend many jobs and the future of our economy. The Conservative party understands that this is to benefit business; clearly the Labour party does not.

Mr Osborne: It is fantastic to see my hon. Friend here representing Taunton. She has already made an impact and made sure that the A358 is absolutely in the Government's road programme. For all that we heard from the shadow Chancellor about investment and the like, the Labour party announced during the general election that it was cancelling the A358, and indeed the A20, which showed that it did not care about the south of England at all, or about investment in the south-west of England. That is pretty astonishing.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The Chancellor will of course be aware that Scotland rejected the cuts agenda—the austerity cult that he is the high priest of—and we now have 56 out of 59 MPs. I see from the front page of today's *Financial Times* that the OECD agrees with the SNP on spending and says that his cuts agenda is a danger to the economy of the UK. Will he take some economic lessons from the SNP and perhaps improve the performance of this Government?

Mr Osborne: If we had listened to the SNP there would be a massive hole in Scotland's public finances because of the price of oil. We are obviously going to be hearing a lot more from SNP Members in this Parliament because of their numbers. If there are cuts that they oppose, let me point out that the Scottish National party in Holyrood has the power to increase taxes to increase spending. It has the power to increase income

tax already and it is getting more powers next year to do so. When it comes to complaints about public expenditure, it is time for the SNP to put up or shut up.

Let me turn to economic security and public spending. Economic security is at the heart of everything. Without economic security, families cannot be supported, people cannot buy homes, businesses dare not invest, and jobs are not created. Without economic security, there are no aspirations, no opportunities, no hopes, and no ambitions. We cannot have economic security in a country that borrows too much and spends too much and does not live within its means. When confronted with the synthetic cries of Labour Members who claim to be standing up for the poorest in our country, let us also recognise this: the people who suffer most when Britain cannot pay its way, spends more than it can afford and sees security give way to instability are not the richest in this country but the poorest. When the economy fails, it is the poorest who lose their jobs and see their incomes cut and their dreams shattered. That is what we saw five years ago when there was no money left. For as long as Labour Members fail to understand that, they will remain the anti-worker party.

Economic security is at the heart of everything we offer, and it will be at the centre of the Budget I present to this House on 8 July. The budget deficit is less than half what it was, but at 4.8% it is still one of the highest in the world. Our national debt as a share of national income—

Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Osborne: I will give way to my hon. Friend and then make some progress because I know that lots of people want to give their maiden speeches.

Luke Hall: In Thornbury and Yate unemployment has fallen by 59% since 2010. May I urge the Chancellor to stick to the long-term economic plan and ignore the siren calls from Labour Members?

Mr Osborne: I absolutely will do that. I remember my visit with my hon. Friend to his constituency to meet some of the small businesses on the high street who depend on the people in this House delivering economic security and stability for this country, and that is what we are determined to do.

The global economy is full of risks at present. We should be redoubling our efforts to prepare Britain for whatever the world throws at us in the coming years, not easing off. The time to fix the roof is when the sun is shining. So in the Budget and in the spending review that follows, we will take the necessary steps to eliminate the deficit and run the surplus required in good times to bring debt sustainably down. That is what we promised in the election, and it is what we aim to deliver in government. I am not going to pretend to the House that these will be easy decisions, but nor will I pretend to the public that we can avoid taking them—we cannot. We have a structural budget deficit—we spend more than we collect in taxes—and that is not going to be fixed by economic growth alone. We have to bring spending down so that our country lives within its means.

As with any challenge, the sooner you get on with it, the better, and that is what we do today. Over the past five years we have brought a culture of good housekeeping to Whitehall. In every year of the previous Parliament—

Debbie Abrahams *rose*—

Mr Osborne: I will make a little progress, if the hon. Lady does not mind. As I say, lots of Members want to get in on this debate later.

In every year of the previous Parliament, Government Departments kept their spending not just within budget but well under budget. Outside key protected areas like the national health service, those budgets have been reduced year on year to more sustainable levels. At the start of this Parliament, it is important that we continue to control spending in the same vein. Two weeks ago, my right hon. Friend the new Chief Secretary asked Government Departments to seek further savings beyond the £13 billion of savings that they are already delivering this year. I can report today that together we have got straight back to the task in hand. We have found a further £4.5 billion of savings that we can make to the Government budget this year, including sensible asset sales. Some £3 billion of these extra savings come from finding more efficiency in Whitehall Departments and from the good housekeeping of coming in under budget. The breakdown per Department is being published by the Treasury today.

There is another component to this: I am today announcing that the Government will begin selling the remaining 30% shareholding we have in Royal Mail. It is the right thing to do for Royal Mail, for the businesses and families who depend on it, and, crucially, for the taxpayer. That business is now thriving after we gave it access to investment from the private sector in the last Parliament. There is no reason we should continue to hold a minority stake. That stake is worth about £1.5 billion at current market prices.

Of course, share prices fluctuate and the final value will depend on market conditions at the point of sale. We will sell our stake only when we can be sure that we are getting value for money, but let us be clear: holding over £1 billion of Royal Mail shares in public hands is not a sensible use of taxpayers' money. By selling it, we help that important national business to prosper and invest in the future, while we use the money we get to pay down the national debt and pay less interest on that debt as a result. It is a double win for the taxpayer, for we on this side never forget that it is not our money or the Government's money; it is the money that people work for and pay in taxes, and entrust to us to spend wisely.

Chris Leslie: I warned in my earlier remarks about the Chancellor's hidden agenda. Before he went into the section on Royal Mail, I think I heard him announce upwards of £4.5 billion or more of in-year cuts to public services. [HON. MEMBERS: "Savings!"] I think he called it "good housekeeping". He announced in-year savings of that magnitude without coming to the House to give an oral statement or publishing them for the House, so that we can scrutinise what he has just announced. It sounds to me as though any semblance of a long-term plan has been totally ripped up, and that there is panic in the Treasury and chaos, with in-year public spending decisions being taken. Why did he not announce those in the March Budget if they were part of some sort of long-term continuum? Has he suddenly decided rapidly to change his course when it comes to public expenditure? And why do it in such a shabby way?

Mr Osborne: Only the Labour party would think it shabby to make an announcement first in the House of Commons.

Chris Leslie *rose*—

Mr Osborne: The shadow Chancellor can sit down.

We set out two weeks ago that we were going to find further efficiencies and savings in Government, and that is what we deliver today.

Chris Leslie: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is the usual convention, if there are significant changes to the estimates and supply that support public services, that the documentation and details for every single Department are laid before the House of Commons, so that all Members can be informed of what is happening with our public services within a financial year. This is ripping up any semblance of long-term continuity, and it is a shabby way to treat Parliament and the public services.

Mr Speaker: The shadow Chancellor has spoken, but this is not a matter with which the Chair needs to deal. He has made his point and it is on the record, but the Chancellor will now continue.

Mr Osborne: We made this announcement to the House of Commons, and the detail is there for people to examine. There will be estimates debates as usual, but there is a very simple question: does the Labour party support further savings in public expenditure? If it does not, that means the Labour party wants to increase borrowing, increase taxes and take this country back to square one and repeat all the mistakes it carried out in office—and, indeed, repeat all the political mistakes that meant it went down to a historic election defeat just a month ago.

Chris Leslie *rose*—

Mr Osborne: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman. He will have his opportunity.

Further savings in Departments this year, selling our stake in Royal Mail, getting on with what we promised, and reducing the deficit—that is how to deliver lasting economic security for working people, for as everyone knows, when it comes to living within your means, the sooner you start, the smoother the ride.

We continue today to deliver on our long-term economic plan. The measures in this Queen's Speech back aspiration and opportunity, but they rest on the bedrock of economic security that our plan has delivered and continues to deliver. We have taken further steps today to prioritise that economic security. It is the security that the working people of this country elected this Government to provide, and I commend the Queen's Speech to the House.

1.15 pm

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): May I start by thanking the Chancellor for his gracious words about me in his speech? It is an achievement to survive five years as Chancellor of the Exchequer and, indeed, to be reappointed, and I congratulate him on that.

[Edward Miliband]

I rise to speak from the Back Benches for the first time in nine years. I do so obviously deeply disappointed at Labour's election defeat, for which I take full responsibility. I believe it is right that my party comprehensively examines the reasons for that defeat and does the hard and painful thinking necessary. On the day after the general election I rang the Prime Minister to congratulate him. I said, as the Chancellor said in his speech, that he had defied the pollsters and the pundits—and indeed that is true. I repeat those congratulations to the Conservative party.

In the time since the general election, I can report to the House that I have found some small consolations of losing, including spending time with my two boys, who feel that they have their dad back. However, I confess that my eldest, who has just turned six, did bring me further down to earth last week. He suddenly turned to me out of the blue and said, "Dad, if there is a fire in our house, I think we'll be okay." I said, "Why's that, Daniel?" He said, "Because if we ring the fire brigade they'll recognise your name because you used to be famous." "Thanks very much," I said. From my used-to-be-famous position on the Back Benches, I look forward to helping to play my part in holding the Government to account, as it is the job of the Opposition to do, and the occasion of the Queen's Speech is the right place to start.

Whatever our profound differences over the years, I welcome the Prime Minister's commitment in the days after the election, and repeated in the Gracious Speech, to govern for one nation. I welcome this because it speaks in historical terms to what I see as an admirable side of Conservatism, represented by Disraeli and Macmillan. It is worth reminding ourselves of the historical lineage that suggests. This is what Disraeli said in his novel "Sybil, or The Two Nations", published 170 years ago this year, about what he was fighting against:

"Two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets".

For many people, that will sound like the description, in old-fashioned language, of some of what afflicts our country today: a divide between the top 1%, or even the top 0.1%, and everyone else. Facing up to that is a challenge for any Government of any colour, but particularly, if I may suggest, for one claiming the mantle of one nation.

A huge question facing all western democracies in the next five, 10, 20 years is whether we are comfortable with the huge disparities that exist, whether we are fated to have them and whether we want to even try to confront them. Personally, I believe we will have to, and I believe this is an issue for right and left.

What has changed in the debate about inequality is that, internationally and across the political spectrum, there is growing recognition that these gaps are not just bad for the poor, as we always used to believe, but bad—

Mr MacNeil: Come and join us, Ed.

Edward Miliband: No, thanks very much.

These gaps are not just bad for the poor, but bad for all of us. Last month, the OECD joined the International Monetary Fund in saying that inequality was definitively a problem. The secretary-general of the OECD said there was

"compelling evidence that high inequality harms economic growth" and social mobility. Simply put, if the rungs of the ladder grow too far apart, it is much harder to climb them.

The old idea was that inequality was necessary for economic growth. In fact, we now know that the deep structural challenges in our economy of low productivity—which, to be fair, the Chancellor and, indeed, my hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor referred to—are bound up with high inequality. More unequal societies tend to use the talents of fewer people, and they suffer as a result.

It is not just internationally that the debate has shifted, and I applaud those on the right—some of whom are sitting on the Government Benches—who have focused on this issue. I was intrigued the other day to hear Steve Hilton, the Prime Minister's former adviser, say that it was time to impose a maximum wage for the bankers. As you would expect from me, Mr Speaker, I see that proposal as anti-aspiration and anti-business, and I have no truck with it. [Laughter.] The serious point is that this issue will not go away and needs to be confronted.

I hope that we can move on—maybe the Government's emphasis on one nation presages this—from discussing whether inequality is a problem to what the solutions are. There are no easy solutions in the context of a global economy, but progress can be made in the way we shape our economy and the way we approach tax and benefits. As a starting point, I urge the Government and the Chancellor, in the spirit of one nation, to look at the OECD recommendations—not just those about the pursuit of equal opportunity and skills, but those about tackling insecure work in our economy, which it specifically identifies as part of the problem, and progressive taxation, which it says is part of the answer. Perhaps that will all be in a one nation Budget in July. I wait with interest.

Within the profound and growing challenge of inequality lies the specific problem of in-work poverty. I would say that it is the modern scourge of our time. For the first time, as many people in Britain who are in poverty are in work as out of work. I believe that the left and right can agree that it should be a basic principle that if you go out to work, you should not be living in poverty. But we are very far from that in Britain today.

The minimum wage has played its part in countering the worst exploitation, but I believe it needs to do more. In Doncaster, which I represent, 28% of men and more than a third of women workers are paid less than the living wage of £7.65 an hour. The UK is one of the low-pay capitals of western Europe. There is an irony here: the Low Pay Commission is a great success, and indeed a lasting achievement, of the 1997 Labour Government—to be fair, the last Government continued to operate with the Low Pay Commission—but I fear that the way it operates has become too much a recipe for the lowest common denominator.

Countries around the world are confronting similar issues and seeking to act. There is a live debate in the United States about raising the minimum wage. Los

Angeles has just passed a plan to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour from \$9 an hour over five years. I say to the Chancellor that if we are to make progress here at home, it will require us to strengthen and guide the Low Pay Commission much more explicitly. That is something that its previous chair, George Bain, has called for. Without it, I do not believe it we will be equal to the challenge of low pay.

Just as one nation requires the right approach to those who work, so it requires the right approach to those who cannot. The origin of one nation for Disraeli was rooted in the lives of the rich and the poor. Responsibility is absolutely part of a successful welfare system, but so too is protection of the most vulnerable. We will never be one nation without a social security system that supports those who need it.

I think it would repay Ministers to read some of the early speeches by the Prime Minister when he became leader of the Conservative party. On the 25th anniversary of the Scarman report in 2006, he said:

“In the past we used to think of poverty in absolute terms—meaning straightforward material deprivation. That’s not enough. We need to think of poverty in relative terms—the fact that some people lack those things which others in society take for granted.” He continued:

“I want this message to go out loud and clear—the Conservative Party recognises, will measure and will act on relative poverty.”

That was seen as a radical departure from the tenets of Thatcherism, and it was. If the approach in the Queen’s Speech is indeed meant to be a return to the earlier incarnation of the Prime Minister’s approach, which I welcome, Ministers need to prove it and to square the circle with the Government’s proposals for deficit reduction.

Can one nation really be consistent with making those on welfare shoulder £12 billion of the burden for deficit reduction and those at the top nothing at all? Can one nation really be squared with cuts to tax credits, with their impact on working people? Can one nation be squared with a welfare system that is so often harsh, brutal and brutalising? Can one nation be squared with a country where a million people go to food banks? Those tests on inequality, low pay and a compassionate social security system are appropriate tests for a Government claiming the mantle of one nation. There are many more besides, including, of course, keeping our United Kingdom together.

Let me make this final point about the situation facing the Prime Minister. Fighting an election and winning is some achievement; how he seeks to use the mandate is what will really define his legacy. He is in an unusual position in that he has fought his last election. He is able, if he wishes, to return to what he said when he first became Leader of the Opposition and not worry about an election round the corner, with all the pressures that entails. I urge him, perhaps through the Chancellor, to follow through on his one nation rhetoric. Opposition Members will hold the Government to account at every turn for whether they are living up to their own test: one nation in spirit and deed. If that is where the battleground of politics lies in the years ahead, I welcome it and look forward to playing my part.

1.26 pm

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) on his forceful and good speech, and on his

resilience in coming here and facing the House with such dignity and distinction. I, too, pay tribute to the way in which he fought for his principles and his cause in the election. Indeed, it causes me slight annoyance that in the leadership election that has broken out in the Labour party, some of the people who a month ago were his greatest admirers, his most loyal colleagues and those closest to his cause are now busily detaching themselves and attempting to scapegoat him for the problems that the Labour movement experienced.

In my opinion, for what it is worth, the right hon. Gentleman fought a very good election campaign. It was much better than anybody expected, because of the expectations that the tabloid press had raised. I thought he put the message across very well. I thought the message was wrong, and that was the judgment of the majority of constituents in my constituency and my part of the world. It is not the case that his performance had anything to do with the result. Apart from the great events in Scotland—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”] Apart from the remarkable, almost bizarre, events in Scotland—the SNP is equalled only by Syriza in Greece on economic policy—and the very welcome events in the south-west, which were also very unkind because I lost many good colleagues in government as a result, the underlying basis of the majority that we won, to most people’s surprise, was the judgment of sensible people on economic competence and our record on the economy.

I do not think the election campaign made very much difference to the result one way or the other. My part of the country, the east midlands, is thick with marginal seats. We won all of them and added gains by taking back Derby North. In the end, people saw what we had inherited economically and what we had done over the previous five years. They recognised our economic competence and accepted the message that the job had to be completed. When listening to the Labour party’s message, however it was presented, they simply decided that they could not take the risk of changing the Government. When the problem arose that the SNP would apparently be able to hold a Labour Government to ransom in what was bound, because of the tsunami in Scotland, to be a hung Parliament if Labour won, that made a little bit of difference, but the result was mainly down to economic competence.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman feel that in individual constituencies, particularly Liberal Democrat-Conservative marginals, the fact that his party was often outspending my party by a factor of perhaps five to one made any difference to the election result?

Mr Clarke: I look forward to a little party political debate with the right hon. Gentleman again. As I have said, what decided the election was the coalition Government’s extraordinary record. It was a particular tribute to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, closely assisted, as he said, by Danny Alexander, the former Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey, who was an excellent Chief Secretary, in getting the affairs of the nation back in order and steering us to some of the most successful economic results in the western developed world, which is what we have now.

[*Mr Kenneth Clarke*]

What concerns us now, in this Parliament, is what judgment the public and history will make of this Government when they look back in five years' time, or whenever. That will crucially depend on whether we finish the job and deliver the modern, more balanced, competitive economy that will give our children and grandchildren greater security and a better quality of life. That is the task we have set ourselves, and it is not going to be easy.

At the moment we are all enjoying the hubris of victory, as far as my party is concerned, or the relief of being back here just opposing, as far as the Opposition parties are concerned. On the surface the task looks easy, because at the moment our economy is growing more strongly than almost any other in the western world, employment is soaring because of our flexible labour market, which we should keep that way, our inflation is low, and real pay is at last beginning to rise as the benefits of recovery get through to every level of society. However, it would be a false assumption to think that it is plain sailing from now on, that everything will continue in that way and that the risks have vanished domestically and abroad, so we can take easy measures to reward those who voted for us. The world is not like that.

I take encouragement from what I took to be the Chancellor's message. He has announced a July Budget, because he wants to take the opportunity while the economy is growing to take some of the tough and difficult decisions that the Government still have to take. I certainly encourage him to do so. In my part of the world—Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, the east midlands—the people who voted for us knew that there were still tough and difficult decisions to take. They were not seduced by the speeches of those whose only examples of what they intended to do were ways of spending money or rather short-term popular things. The sooner we get on with tackling the underlying problems—including, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has reassuringly just confirmed, the debt and the deficit—the better we will be able to get on with all the other things that need to be done, which will enable our economy steadily to get back on to a stronger and more secure footing.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr Clarke: I will, but this is the last time I will do so, because a lot of other Members want to speak.

Neil Carmichael: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend. Does he agree that one of the key tasks is to keep up the pressure to improve our skills agenda, so that we can ensure that our young people continue to contribute to a productive economy and increase our capacity to develop, innovate, research and develop and manufacture?

Mr Clarke: My hon. Friend anticipates some of the points I wish to make. I agree with everything he has just said. Tackling the deficit and debt, together with what he has just described and the other measures that we have committed ourselves to, is a genuinely one

nation Conservative approach. Ever since I became active in politics, I have declared myself a one nation Conservative. The phrase has moved in and out of fashion a little in my time, but I have remained boringly consistent. In my view, it means free market economics combined with a social conscience, as well as a forceful internationalism that looks after Britain's interests in the world and helps to spread our values.

On the economic front, the combination of fiscal discipline and economic competence, with measures such as taking the very lowest-paid out of tax altogether, easing the tax burden on the lower-paid, not taking people on ordinary incomes into higher rates of tax that should affect only the very wealthy, and the right to buy from those giant landlords the housing associations, which should be unlocking their resources to invest in more new social housing, gives the right one nation balance to the proposals we have put forward. As I have said, it is important that we get on with it, because this Session of Parliament is probably the best time to get some of the most formidable challenges out of the way and under our belt.

If I am sounding a little foreboding about what could go wrong, I should say that I do not foresee anything going wrong, but we will be lucky if no global shocks hit us. We have had five years of growth since 2010, with only a minor blip—not a recession—in 2012, and 10 years of uninterrupted growth would be pretty well a post-war miracle. It does not happen in the real world. We are doing better than any other western European nation, but that is based on the fact that we devalued by 25% when we had the crash—that has done us a bit of good, but not a great deal—and on a US recovery that is now looking rather feeble, as it was stimulated by quantitative easing, which is a dangerous thing. Our own recovery is not forcefully strong, and it was based on quantitative easing when that was necessary. Of course, we rely on interest rates, and they are the lowest they have been for 300 years, which is good for indebted countries.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr Clarke: I will not, because other Members want to speak. I enjoyed what the hon. Gentleman said yesterday, and I would like to give way to him, but not at the moment.

It will be surprising if we do not face difficult times. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has taken the deficit down to a little under 5% of GDP—far too high, and quite unsustainable, but practically half what we inherited. He paced it pragmatically, because five-year forecasts of where we will be are a complete waste of time, although people always produce them. So long as we have growth, we should press on with taking the deficit down now, because if we ever have a slowdown we will have no weapons to do anything about it. If the Chinese turn out not to have a soft landing, or if America goes wrong, we will not be able to help ourselves by having a fiscal stimulus when we have a 5% deficit. We will not be able to ease monetary policy with interest rates at practically zero. Now is the time to get on with the task.

There is much more that I would like to say along the lines of the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael), because cutting the debt and deficit is not in itself a complete economic policy. It

is the essential precondition for all the structural reforms that we still have to make so that we can make our economy modern and competitive. We have a long way to go, because as Members have said, our productivity performance is dreadful, our investment performance is recovering but remains rather poor, our trade and export performance is pretty dismal and we have an appalling current account deficit. In this modern, balanced economy, we have a long way to go.

We therefore require the right kind of European reform. The European Union has been the essential basis on which we have established our voice in the world and our current economic base. In my lifetime, it has had the most beneficial effect on both those things, which were in a pretty dreadful state until we joined, but it does require changes.

When the Prime Minister announced his referendum, in a very pro-European speech at Bloomberg, he set out an economic agenda for change. That remains the most essential reform that we require and desire, and it would benefit the rest of Europe, as well as us. That means completing the single market, which we have talked about and never done. It means an EU-US trade treaty, which we have an opportunity to get and which would boost investment, trade, jobs and activity on both sides of the Atlantic.

It means deregulation. The Barroso Commission talked about deregulation and got no support whatever from member states. The Governments of all member states, including Britain, tend to send people to Councils from various Departments who advocate more regulation—on transport, road safety, food safety, environmental standards, pollution and all the rest of it. Vice-President Timmermans wants to deregulate. We should compete with deregulating there by deregulating here to stimulate our economy.

Of course we can stop people coming here just to claim benefit—we have always been able to do so. There are other things we can do. The economic reforms, however, were the basis on which we started the negotiations and they remain the most important to us.

Beyond that, skills training and education reforms are still required. We have immigrants because we have to go Romania to recruit nurses—we do not train enough nurses of our own. Our construction industry would come to an end if Poles did not come here in the numbers they do. Skills training, education and higher education—every innovative business I know complains they cannot recruit people with the necessary skills to expand their business. It is one of their major constraints. We do not train and produce enough engineers. We need to get somewhere with giving STEM subjects a higher priority and so on.

I could go on. [HON. MEMBERS: “Go on.”] No, no. This is an agenda for a Parliament. It is tough agenda. Now that we have been re-elected, we have the ability to deliver it. The precondition is that we start well, and we start with getting rid of the deficit and debt restraints while we can. In July, we need an iron Chancellor. We need a bold and radical Government. We need a Government who are going to repeat the success of the past five years, measuring up to these enormous international challenges, to show that the United Kingdom can again have one of the strongest global economies in a totally changed globalised economy and a new world.

1.42 pm

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to propose the amendment in my name and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends. It is also a great pleasure to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). He talked earlier in his contribution about the bizarre events in Scotland. We tend to call it democracy. In the same way as the Chancellor spoke about the good sense of the British people, I might say that, with 56 out of 59 MPs and half the vote, we celebrate very much the good sense of the Scottish people—a true one nation in every sense.

The Chancellor spoke about the challenges the Scottish economy may face. He spoke about fiscal autonomy and what he called a massive hole. I just say gently to him that any challenges on the Scottish current account are as nothing compared with a £1.6 trillion UK national debt built up by Labour and Tory alike.

The Chancellor laid out his plans today. For our part, the last thing that the country needs, that the economy can afford and that those who have suffered most over the past five years should be expected to bear is another austerity Government. Yet that is exactly the direction of travel laid out today: a continuation of vague talk about a long-term economic plan, where none really exists; hubris about so-called economic success, most of which is contradicted by fact and a litany of broken promises; and a complete disregard of the impact his policies have had, are having and will have over the next five years on people through the UK—and that is before we even start to talk about the impact on investment for growth and on our vital public services.

We know the impact those policies have had throughout the UK. We know what has happened in Scotland specifically since 2010. We have seen the budget cut by about 11% in real terms and capital expenditure down by 34%. As a result of decisions taken by this Chancellor, the budget in Scotland has been cut by a staggering £3.5 billion in real terms. The plans announced throughout the election and reiterated today—before the bombshell of in-year cuts, which we will analyse further later—will result in a cumulative share of cuts to day-to-day spending over the next five years for Scotland worth about £12 billion at today's levels. Those cuts to Scotland and elsewhere are the consequence of the Chancellor's economic failure.

It is worth reminding ourselves what the Chancellor said when he took office: debt would begin to fall as a share of GDP by last year; the current account should be in balance this year; and public sector net borrowing would fall to £20 billion in the same year. Debt did not fall as a share of GDP in 2014-15, the current account will not be back in the black until 2017-18, and public sector net borrowing—the Chancellor can smirk all he likes—was not the barely £20 billion he promised: it was almost four times that at £75 billion. The Chancellor failed to meet every one of the key targets he set himself. Tory policy stifled recovery from 2010 for years into the previous Parliament. With a cumulative £146 billion of cuts still to come, we are all on track for a decade of austerity.

We know where the pain of this has been felt and we know where the pain of it will be felt. In Scotland, 145,000 households affected by changes to incapacity benefit will lose about £2,000 each.

Mr Osborne: If the hon. Gentleman, who speaks for the Scottish nationalists, opposes these spending cuts, why does he not increase taxes and use the powers available to the Scottish Government? He could then spend more money.

Stewart Hosie: We do not need to increase taxes in the way the Chancellor describes. He knows perfectly well, and I will come on to it shortly, that there is a way of managing the economy in a fiscally responsible way that allows an increase in spending while the debt and the deficit continue to fall. He may disagree with me—I respect that—but he had better respect that this is a genuine alternative vision to the cuts coming from his party.

The pain will be felt by the 145,000 households affected by changes to incapacity benefit, the 370,000 who have seen tax credits reduced, and the 620,000 families hit by child benefit freezes. It will be felt by the 120,000 people who have lost an average of £2,600 as disability living allowance was removed. I am glad the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is here to hear this. He can perhaps begin to understand that this is not a theoretical cut in a back office, but a real cut to real people's living standards throughout the UK. It will be felt by the 835,000 households hit by the increase in the benefit cap. Why are these decisions wrong? There is now a substantial growing body of opinion, as the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) said, that we do not simply need a growing economy to fund our welfare provision; we need to squeeze inequality out of the system to provide a solid platform to grow the economy.

Andrew Bridgen: The hon. Gentleman rightly basks in his electoral success and that of his party. Is he as relieved as I am that the right hon. Member for Doncaster North saved the best speech I have heard him give until after the general election? Will he join me in offering the right hon. Gentleman some solace, regardless of the right hon. Gentleman's son's remarks that he used to be famous? He will be very successful again in the future and it is far better to have been a has-been than a never-was.

Stewart Hosie: I would be slightly more gracious than that. I think that the right hon. Gentleman will make a contribution to his party's policy development. Let us hope that it moves to somewhere progressive rather than sticking to the kind of austerity-lite position that it had before the election.

We need to squeeze inequality out of the system. The December 2014 OECD report told us that rising inequality in the UK had cost it 9 percentage points in growth between 1990 and 2010. It is an obvious fact: it is not possible to squeeze inequality out of the system at the same time as the squeeze is being put on the poorest in society, and once again this Government are swimming against the tide of informed public opinion.

The alternative to the Government plan is clear; it is the alternative economic plan that we pursued, rather successfully, in Scotland at the election. It is a plan aimed at balancing deficit reduction with increased investment in public services. We argued rightly that with a modest 0.5% real-terms spending increase between 2016-17 and the end of this Parliament we could release

£140 billion for essential spending and investment over and above the Government's plans. The alternative for Scotland is £11 billion of spending compared with £12 billion of cuts. Our plan makes sense. It is a fiscally responsible plan that protects public services, protects investment, really ends austerity and lifts the squeeze off ordinary people, but still sees the debt and deficit fall.

Iain Stewart: May I repeat the question put by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor? The Scottish Parliament already has significant tax powers and it will gain more in this Parliament. The leader of the Scottish Conservatives, Ruth Davidson, has pledged not to have tax rates in Scotland that are higher than in the rest of the UK. Will the hon. Gentleman meet that pledge, or does he want to pursue his expansionary agenda and raise taxes?

Stewart Hosie: I do not think that Scottish people should pay tax twice for services that we would have if we simply had full fiscal autonomy.

The UK Government have advocated an approach that will result in further spending cuts in the coming years to achieve the fiscal targets set out in the budget charter, but those cuts have not been spelt out in full. The Tories have not said where the axe will fall. The Chancellor said some things today, particularly about in-year cuts and asset sales in certain Departments, but nowhere near enough to explain what he plans to do. Perhaps he or one of his Ministers might decide to come clean with this House later today and tell us where the axe will fall.

Will they really restrict carer's allowance to those eligible for universal credit, so that 40% of claimants lose out? Will they really increase means-testing for the contributory element of employment and support allowance, or of jobseeker's allowance, which would see 30% of claimants—300,000 families—lose £80 a week? Will they remove the tax-free status of disability benefits to save £1.5 billion? Will this Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions really take the axe to those most in need to deliver £8 billion of tax cuts, which right now, and I have heard nothing today to change my mind on this, are completely unfunded?

I said that the UK Government plan is designed to achieve the fiscal targets set out in the charter for budget responsibility, but we know that the scale of the spending cuts plan, as set out in the March Budget, significantly exceeds what is required for the UK Government to meet their targets. There is therefore flexibility for the UK Government to meet those objectives without implementing in full the spending cuts that are currently planned for the coming years.

Based on plans set out in the March Budget, public sector net debt is projected to begin falling in 2015-16, and a cyclically adjusted current budget surplus of £35 billion is projected for 2018-19, rather than simply returning the adjusted current account to balance. Therefore, the UK Government have the flexibility to cut spending by less than currently planned while meeting their fiscal targets. I hope the Chancellor uses that flexibility wisely.

I want to move on to the real economy. As our First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said, there are three areas where we seek to achieve outcomes at a UK level that will benefit the economy in Scotland. First, we will continue to oppose spending reductions of the scale

and speed that the Government have suggested. We believe that those would slow economic recovery and make deficit reduction more difficult.

Secondly, we do not think it is desirable for trade or business for there to be an in/out referendum on membership of the EU. However, since a referendum now seems inevitable, we will protect Scotland's interests. We propose a "double-lock", meaning that exit is only possible if all four nations in the UK agree to it, which would quite rightly prevent Scotland from being dragged out of the EU against the will of the Scottish people. *[Interruption.]* I think we have worked out what the Government mean by "one nation", and they will need more than one nation to take the state out of Europe.

Thirdly and finally, we will seek greater powers for Scotland, to ensure, at the very least, that the recommendations of the Smith commission are met in full. However, we are seeking additional responsibilities, beyond those that the Smith commission identified, in particular greater power over business taxes, employment law, the minimum wage and welfare, to enable us to create jobs, grow the economy and lift people out of poverty. That was the manifesto on which we were elected.

Those powers will allow us to tackle one of the challenges that the First Minister, and indeed the shadow Chancellor in his speech today, have raised: that of productivity. Those comments are important, not least because they chime with what Mark Carney, the Governor of the central bank, said recently at the launch of the quarterly inflation report. He said that "productivity growth...is the key determinant of income growth. Our shared prosperity depends on it."

However, the Bank of England also highlighted the extent to which the UK as a whole has a productivity problem. Output per hour is below pre-recession levels; it is 13% below that of Sweden and 20% below that of Germany. In Scotland we know, and I suspect that the figures are the same for the UK, that if we can boost total factor productivity by 0.1% over a decade, we can see 1.3% additional GDP growth and additional tax yield of around half a billion pounds a year. With better productivity, living standards would be higher and the budget deficit lower.

In Scotland, we have set out how we intend to do that, based around the "four I's" of innovation, internationalisation, investment in infrastructure and skills, and promoting inclusive growth, but we have also made it clear that promoting a more equal and inclusive society is an important part of building a stronger economy.

The Scottish Government are mitigating the consequences of this Government's welfare reform, promoting gender equality, investing in early years education and care, and setting targets to ensure that everyone—irrespective of their background—has the chance to go to university. Essentially, that economic strategy sets out a vision of an economy based on innovation rather than insecurity; on high skills, not low wages; and on enhanced productivity rather than reduced job security. We want to climb the global competitiveness rankings on quality, rather than racing to the bottom on costs, and we want to deliver positive change in the real economy to drive changes in the big fiscal numbers. So we have to improve productivity, we need to encourage innovation and exports, and we must support business growth and job creation. There are a hundred things on

which we must take specific action, not least delivering fairness in electricity connectivity charges across the grid and certainty in the tax code, and ensuring that businesses have access to bank lending.

I hope that there will be scope within the enterprise Bill to replicate many of the ideas contained within the Scottish business pledge, whereby in return for support from agencies businesses must commit to innovation, to seeking and taking export opportunities, and to paying the living wage. I also hope that there will be scope within the national insurance contributions Bill to continue to bear down on employer costs, to encourage more businesses to create jobs. There must be scope within the energy Bill to end the inequity of a £25.50 per kW charge to connect to the grid in the north of Scotland and a £5.20 per kW subsidy for any old chugger to connect in central London.

I hope that the Budget will support business investment. We have gone from an industrial buildings allowance, done away with in 2007, to an annual investment allowance of £50,000 in 2008, which increased to £100,000 in 2010; decreased to £25,000 in 2012; increased to £250,000 the following year; and increased to £500,000 the year after that. It was then temporarily maintained, but will come to a cliff edge and a grinding halt at the end of the year and revert to £25,000 on 1 January. That is not tax certainty; that is a shambles, and I hope that the Chancellor undertakes to fix it, even at a little cost, in the Budget in July.

We will be a constructive Opposition. We will support individual measures, where they merit it, and seek to mend and improve provisions where they do not. We will also be a principled Opposition, because we oppose the Tory programme of cuts. We wish to see growth and fairness in our economy and more power for Scotland, and we want to support aspiration and deliver help for those who need it most. As well as being a principled Opposition, unless or until our friends in other parties work out what their economic policy actually is, we will be the principal opposition to Tory cuts in this Parliament.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Just before I call the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst), I advise the House that the six-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches will now apply. Drove of colleagues wish to contribute, including a number of potential maiden speakers. The Chair will do its best to accommodate colleagues, and I absolutely understand why maiden speakers wish to speak, but, once and for all, may I ask Members not to come to the Chair inquiring where they are on the list or pointing out exactly how many members of their family are present? I understand these considerations, but there are wider considerations of which the Chair has to take account. We will do our best, but I am afraid that it is part of parliamentary life that, at the end of a debate, some colleagues are content and others are not. That, I am afraid, is the reality, but we will do our best.

2.2 pm

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): I apologise to the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) if I do not directly follow his remarks, tempting though that might be.

[*Sir Alan Haselhurst*]

Transport has not so far been a major focus in the debate on the Gracious Speech, yet surely it is a key component of a successful economy. The speech talked about

“bringing different parts of our country together”,

which suggests to me that transport has an important role to play, as was confirmed by reference to the Government’s determination

“to legislate for high-speed rail links”—

I note it was in the plural—

“between the different parts of the country.”

I find it odd that there was no mention in the Queen’s Speech of airport capacity. It is the elephant in the Chamber. The recommendations of the Davies commission are imminent, so perhaps a decision on this matter, which is judged by many people to be vital to our economic success, will be among the other measures to be laid before us. I have great respect for Sir Howard Davies, and I am sure that his report will be accomplished and thorough, but if the Government have not steeled themselves to accept whatever he proposes, and at the same time given no indication that their decision will come before Parliament this Session, they might be subject to criticism from those in the industry concerned about the country being insufficiently open for business. I might also add—somewhat facetiously—that the sooner the decision is made the better, for otherwise the main airport operators might bankrupt themselves with the amount of advertising and promotion they are doing.

In reflecting on past years, I find it astonishing that we have allowed ourselves to get into this multi-airport situation. If it is judged too late to start again, it is certainly not too late to rebalance the economy, which is why enormous importance attaches to the concept of the northern powerhouse. I was born in Yorkshire and represented for a period a Greater Manchester seat, so I feel strongly about the need to rebalance the economy, and I feel every bit as strongly about it having served as Member for Saffron Walden for 37 years, because rebalancing will take pressure off the south-east.

Apart from a decision on airport capacity and the south-east, I would like to see Manchester airport promoted as a major port of entry into this country. It is important for business and tourism. I am afraid, therefore, that I might disappoint some of my right hon. and hon. Friends by saying that I strongly support High Speed 2 and what the Gracious Speech said about it. Also on rebalancing, it was interesting to read that HS2 would bring Birmingham airport within 36 minutes of central London, given that the average time from Stansted airport in my constituency is 47 minutes. I sympathise with colleagues whose constituencies are in the path of HS2, but I remember seeing the M62 driven through the constituency of Middleton and Prestwich, and I saw Stansted airport imposed on the rural charms of north-west Essex. We can get over these things.

I suggest to the Government, however, that there is another powerhouse—the powerhouse of East Anglia—that is nevertheless served badly by both road and rail. I do not begrudge our new colleague in the House, the Mayor of London, for increasing his grip on the rail services in inner London, but I insist that we need serious levels of investment in transport, especially rail, in East Anglia. The Great Eastern and West Anglia

lines out of Liverpool Street are a disgrace, and the trains that run on them are scarcely less so. I congratulate the Government on the rail revolution—no less a term is justified—that they have helped to engineer, but that revolution has still to reach East Anglia. As the economy improves, I hope that they will pay full attention to the voices of East Anglia Members, augmented as they are by representatives of industry, business and commerce, and deliver soon the improvements that our region demands. In return, the East Anglian region—the East Anglian powerhouse, as it could become—will deliver further enhancements to bolster the national economy.

2.7 pm

Mr Michael Meacher (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): I pay tribute to the speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), in terms of both content and statesmanship. He was a fine leader who was largely misrepresented and misunderstood, and I think he had admirable vision and conviction. He will be sorely missed, but I hope that many of his principles, convictions and values will be incorporated not only into the Labour party leadership contest but into the political debate over the next years.

I have a rather different message for the Chancellor. Underpinning the whole of the Government’s programme, which he set out today, is the theme that the Tories inherited a recession caused by Labour overspending, that they set in place a strong economic recovery, that they are within sight of dealing with the deficit and that austerity has been vindicated. All those are false. First, the recession was caused by the international recession triggered by the banks’ financial crisis; it was not caused by Labour profligacy. In truth, the Blair-Brown Government, in the 11 years before the crash—1997 to 2008—never ran a budget deficit larger than 3.3% of GDP, which was roughly the same as Germany’s, whereas the Thatcher-Major Governments racked up deficits larger than this in 10 out of their 18 years.

Secondly, we have seen the slowest and feeblest recovery for more than a century. The economy was recovering in 2010, but it was brought to a juddering halt by the Chancellor’s successive austerity Budgets—so much so that after two and a half years of stagnation, he was forced to reverse engines, to go easy on austerity and generate an artificial recovery based on a housing asset bubble, via Help to Buy. That artificial recovery lasted just 18 months until the middle of last year, and has now been punctured like a deflating balloon. In the last nine months, growth has nosedived by two thirds, from 0.9% in the third quarter of last year to just 0.3% in the first quarter of this year. If that continues, we will have an annual growth rate of just 1.25%—lower than in the eurozone.

Then there is the deficit. The Chancellor likes to claim he has halved the deficit since 2009-10. He has not. The deficit peaked that year at £157 billion. Given that the Budget measures take 12 to 18 months to work their way through the economy, Alistair Darling, in his last two expansionary Budgets, had reduced the deficit to about £118 billion by 2011—a cut of nearly £20 billion a year. The present Chancellor, by contrast, has reduced it over the last three years to its current level, which I remind the House is over £90 billion—a cut of only about £9 billion a year, which is less than half the rate of reduction of the previous Labour Chancellor.

Now we are being told that the Chancellor will eliminate the structural deficit altogether by 2018, at an average rate of reduction, according to the Red Book, of some £25 billion a year. I ask hon. Members: is that remotely credible? He promised in 2010 that he would eliminate the deficit by 2015; in the event, it has ended up at over £90 billion. The Chancellor is achieving form in his fantasy projections, or is it that the real Tory primary aim is not to shrink the budget deficit, but rather to shrink the state, shrink the public sector and transfer all public services to the private market—back to the dimensions of the 1930s?

Has austerity been vindicated? Since, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility, austerity reduced GDP growth by 1% in both of the first two years of the coalition Government, that indicates, at the very least, that austerity led to a cumulative output loss, which will never be recovered, of 5% of GDP or about £75 billion—some little short of the whole of the deficit.

What else has austerity brought about? Wages are still nearly 8% below their pre-crash level, while productivity, on which all agree our future living standards depend, is slack. Private investment is anaemic, which shows that even business itself does not believe that the Chancellor's recovery is sustainable. The trade deficit in manufactured goods at over £100 billion a year is the worst in British history, unemployment is still nearly 2 million and household debt is now tipping £2 trillion.

It against that background that the Chancellor now forces through his cuts target, as he set it out. Growth will collapse as even the IMF today is warning. Without, this time, the adventitious halving of the international oil price, Britain will soon be at serious risk of a third recession. So much for the Government's ludicrous "long-term plan"!

2.13 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech. Before I do so, I pay tribute to the speeches of right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken so eloquently, leaving me with a hard task to follow. I also pay tribute to my predecessor as MP for Bexhill and Battle, the right hon. Greg Barker. Greg worked hard for his constituents over his 14 years as their MP, and left his mark in government as a Minister of State for Energy, working tirelessly to tackle climate change. I thank Greg for the advice and kindness he has given and continues to give me.

The Bexhill and Battle constituency nestles on the East Sussex seafront at its southern face and the beautiful Weald at its northern ridge. It spans over 200 square miles where my 100,000 constituents reside in 100 towns and villages. Mine is one of those constituencies that lists just two of the place names in its title. When I promised in my election literature to put the residents of Bexhill and Battle first, this raised questions about why I was de-prioritising the needs of the 50,000 constituents who did not live in either of those two towns. The use of the word "constituency" in literature is often overlooked.

My constituency borders the East Sussex constituencies of Hastings and Rye, Lewes, Wealden and Eastbourne. As the only male MP in this cluster of blue constituencies, I pledge to be the champion for other minority groups in East Sussex.

Many in this House will be unaware that Bexhill is the birthplace of British motor racing, having staged the first ever automobile race on British soil in 1906. This race was orchestrated by the eighth Lord De La Warr and the organisation that latterly became the Royal Automobile Club. Bexhill was also the launch-pad of another engine of progress and mobility, being the location where the Prime Minister launched his leadership bid to the membership of the Conservative party in 2005.

Next year, we face a battle against the aggressors of Europe who intend to march over our land, vanquish our sovereignty and replace it with French-based custom and rule. Will our nation rise up and repel this threat, or will we be defeated and be ruled for generations from Europe? I refer, of course, to the re-enactment to celebrate the 950th anniversary of the battle of Hastings, when William the Conqueror triumphed over King Harold and his army in a field that now adjoins Battle abbey. I believe there will be another key determination on Europe during this term, and I welcome my Government's commitment to give people a say in a more civilised manner than that accorded in 1066.

It is customary in a maiden speech to bestow the title of "the most beautiful constituency" on to the area where one serves. Having lived in this wonderful area for almost 10 years, this is an easy case to make. I am, however, conscious of my upbringing for the first 19 years of my life in the noble constituency of Buckingham. As this House knows, this is your constituency, Mr Speaker, where my mother, sisters and wider family still reside as your constituents. I think it best to surmise that the most beautiful constituencies are entitled by the first letter of their description.

I hail from a family of Labour-leaning trade unionists. Having crossed the dining room floor of 5 Gawcott Fields, Buckingham at the age of 16, I know what it takes to stand for the courage of one's convictions and to suffer the harsh consequences of washing-up sanctions as a result. Yet while my family and I may differ in the means, the ends of giving people hope and support via an education, a job, housing, support in ill-health and strong community are the reasons I sought election to this noble House. It is also the reason I am grateful to be able to deliver my maiden speech in the segment of the debate of the most Gracious Speech that is dedicated to the economy.

For the last seven years, I have led a team of lawyers who have been unwinding the Lehman Brothers estate in Europe. This was the largest bankruptcy in world history. From a starting position of bankruptcy, £35 billion-worth of cash and assets have been recovered and distributed by our small team; the books have been balanced with creditors paid in full; and we now focus on paying a surplus. I am aware that a much more challenging turnaround has been performed by the Government team, led by those on the Front Bench. I support the balancing of the national books, returns to taxpayers and the desire to record a surplus.

Earlier this year, the Prime Minister and Chancellor visited our region to announce the south coast plan. This is a plan that has already started with the delivery of a new link road between Bexhill and Hastings. When it opens this year, it will stand ready to deliver thousands

[*Huw Merriman*]

of new jobs in a 42-acre business park, with 3,000 homes to attract new labour and give local people the chance of their own home and with a new country park bringing economic regeneration to my constituency. Thanks to the investment delivered by this Government, the future is positive for my constituents in Bexhill and Battle.

However, some of the most vulnerable and troubled of my constituents will always need a safety net, always require a defender and always need to rely on someone who will bat for them in their time of need. I pledge to work with all Members of this House in order that we may together provide this role—not just for my constituents in Bexhill and Battle, but for all constituents represented in this noble House.

2.19 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me early in this debate and for selecting the Liberal Democrat amendment in my name and those of my hon. Friends.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) on delivering a flawless maiden speech, and I thank the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) for delivering such a gracious speech, particularly given that he has not had much practice over the last nine years when it comes to delivering a speech from the Back Benches.

I want to speak briefly about a couple of matters that are mentioned in our amendment. First, I want to try to clarify the reason for the Conservative party's opposition to the Human Rights Act. I think that it boils down to just two issues: foreign prisoners and prisoner voting. Members will know that the Home Secretary famously tried to kick-start her own leadership bandwagon with a Tory conference speech in which she promised to deport an illegal migrant whose removal was said to have been blocked by the courts on the basis of article 8 of the European convention on human rights, which concerns the right to a family life. She said:

“We all know the stories about the Human Rights Act...about the illegal immigrant who cannot be deported because, and I am not making this up, he had a pet cat.”

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): She was making it up.

Tom Brake: Hold on. “But”, we are told,

“a spokesman for the Judicial Office at the Royal Courts of Justice, which issues statements on behalf of senior judges, said the pet had ‘had nothing to do with’ the judgement allowing the man to stay.”

So, unfortunately, it was just that: a story about the Human Rights Act—a story which just happened not to be true. If there are other aspects of the Act that the Government want to get rid of, such as the right to life or the right to privacy, I think we are entitled to know that, but at present there is no real clarity about the nature of their concerns.

I am sorry that the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) is no longer in the Chamber. I do not agree with him that it makes no difference how much a party spends on its campaign, particularly if

there are ways of spending that get around the constituency spending limits, but I do agree with what he said about the European convention:

“I personally think it is unthinkable to leave the European convention on human rights...It is the way we uphold the values we strive for which are the rule of law, individual liberty, justice for all, regardless of gender. The convention is the bedrock of that.”

I also agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) that the European Court of Human Rights is,

“on a daily basis, producing decisions of great importance in improving human rights in Europe which are inevitably ignored here because they tend to concern countries in eastern Europe”.

I agree with those respected Conservative politicians that scrapping the Human Rights Act and leaving the convention would be a disaster for the United Kingdom's credibility. It would send countries such as Belarus and Russia the message that it is possible to take or leave, or pick and choose, human rights as if they were favourite dishes on a Chinese restaurant menu.

Let me now say something about the snoopers charter, which clearly has business implications. Start-up businesses would be required to collect and store data in a way that would not be in their interests. As we know, David Anderson has been examining the current surveillance and intercept laws. He handed a report to the Prime Minister on 6 May. I wonder whether the Government had time to take it into account when they presented their proposals for an investigatory powers Bill. We need to see what is in that Bill, and we also need an explanation of why the United Kingdom Government are proceeding with proposals that the Americans have just rejected. The Americans have no mandatory communications data retention requirement for communication service providers, and I think we need to know why this country has such a requirement. Do the Government believe that the Americans are putting the lives of their civilians at risk?

I fear that the new report by Sir Nigel Sheinwald may well not be released, but I urge the Government to make a copy available to the public, even if it has to be redacted. It is quite possible that the report will show that there is no need for a snoopers charter, and that an international treaty could be used instead, allowing countries to agree to release data if required to do so by the security services.

Finally, let me touch briefly on the issue of the right to buy. During the general election campaign, there was clear agreement that we needed to build more homes, but I am afraid that the Government's proposals are very unlikely to achieve that. When asked about the right to buy, the Mayor of London said that it was

“obviously one of the issues...that it would be potentially extremely costly to this body”,

meaning the Greater London Assembly. He added:

“We would have to make up the difference. Housing associations are private bodies, as we all know. It would involve massive subsidies.”

However, in a tweet—I think that he was tweeting as the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip rather than as Mayor—he said that the right to buy was a very good policy, and that the Conservatives' proposals were “a good way of ensuring it is funded.”

We need some clarity, but I suppose that those with two jobs often have to contradict themselves, and that is obviously what the Mayor has had to do.

Time does not allow me to touch on other matters, such as the Liberal Democrats' free childcare and tax threshold. I should love to have an opportunity to discuss them on another occasion.

Mr Speaker: I call Chris White.

2.25 pm

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker—not least for putting me higher up the list than you intended to yesterday.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) on a fabulous maiden speech. I hope that, like me, he will grow to cherish the double-barrelled nature of his constituency.

I am grateful for the opportunity to support the Queen's Speech, and, in particular, the measures that will build on the work done in the last Parliament to secure the continued growth of our economy. Whether we are talking about big manufacturing brands and household names such as Aga Rangemaster, Dennis Eagle and National Grid, or the new and exciting creative industries and companies such as Freestyle Games and Radiant Worlds, Warwick and Leamington is clearly a good place in which to do business. I also welcome Tata Technologies, which has unveiled plans to build its new European headquarters in my constituency next year.

I am delighted that the Government have announced plans to continue our economic growth by supporting business and encouraging job creation, with the ambition of achieving full employment. We have a fantastic record, on which we continue to build. In Warwick and Leamington, for example, the number of jobseeker's allowance claimants has fallen by 74% over the last five years, and the number of youth claimants has fallen by an astonishing 82%. Tribute must be paid to employers and employees for that achievement..

Warwick and Leamington is part of a region that has a tremendous manufacturing heritage. During the last Parliament, we saw a renewed and extremely welcome focus on manufacturing and the re-shoring of that vital sector of the economy—in the words of the Chancellor, “the march of the makers”.

Manufacturing is growing in the United Kingdom, and in the midlands in particular. It makes up 54% of UK exports, and directly employs 2.6 million people. Growth has been positive in recent years. In 2014, sales in the UK car industry in the UK were the best for nearly 10 years, which was a particularly encouraging development. In manufacturing overall, there is an average productivity increase of 3.6% a year.

I believe that the Government must ensure that the United Kingdom continues to be a place where things are designed and made. That means supporting businesses, large and small, particularly those in the supply chains. We must also address the skills shortage, and focus on training young people to be equipped for the workforce. One way of supporting businesses is to create an environment in which we can foster collaboration and support between businesses. We are already seeing examples of that in the establishment of local enterprise partnerships

and the growth of city deals throughout the country. The all-party parliamentary manufacturing group, of which I am co-chair, recently published a report about skills I am delighted to see that the other co-chair, the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), is in the Chamber.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris White: I will give way to my near neighbour.

Mr Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman's constituency abuts mine. We share an interest in research and development, and in both small businesses and major companies such as Jaguar Land Rover. Does he not welcome this development?

Chris White: I welcome it very much. I also recognise that the hon. Gentleman and I share a university. The students live largely in my constituency, but the University of Warwick is based in his. It is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.

The Royal Academy of Engineering has reported that the country will need an additional 800,000 graduates in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics—STEM—sectors by 2020. Encouraging students—boys and girls—to study STEM subjects at school and providing clear career advice to students from a young age will help to address this serious skills gap. We must ensure that our technical and further education colleges are given the recognition and assistance they need to achieve this.

We are particularly fortunate in Warwick and Leamington to have Warwickshire College, one of the best further education institutions in the country. We are also home to many students from Warwick University which, after only 50 years, is already one of the top 100 universities in the world. I have been privileged to see the quality of the training and education that both those institutions provide. Over many years now, this has reinforced for me the importance of tertiary and further education in providing the skills and training that young people need to succeed.

In terms of further education, Warwickshire College has entered into partnerships with local employers such as Rolls-Royce and Jaguar Land Rover to provide work experience and ensure that students are exposed to the workplace throughout their education. This collaborative approach provides the best of both worlds for students. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the new principal of Warwickshire College, Angela Joyce, to her post. I would like to reiterate the importance of support for our economy to create an environment that supports job creation and business growth. Additionally, giving our young people the skills that they need to get those jobs is just as vital, not least as we see existing and new sectors develop and grow.

2.31 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I should like to start by congratulating you on your successful election yesterday to the post of Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr Deputy Speaker.

[*Ian Paisley*]

In the debates on the Queen's Speech, I have heard "oneness" and "togetherness" mentioned on a number of occasions. That is music to my ears as a Unionist. I feel very much a part of this nation and I want to ensure that its economy grows with a spirit of togetherness. Binding us more closely into the Union will bring us closer together, allowing us to share our strengths and ensuring that our weaknesses are not made greater. Those concepts of oneness and togetherness are therefore welcome and heartening; they give us a sense of belief in the potential of what this new Government are offering us.

I am proud to be a Member of Parliament from Northern Ireland, and from North Antrim, and as such I am bound to ask what the Queen's Speech will specifically mean to my constituents, my people and my community. In the last Parliament, I welcomed the fact that the Government put their neck on the line and pursued a change in corporation tax specifically for Northern Ireland. They gave us the power to reduce our corporation tax rate, and I hope that the Assembly will use that power wisely and allow us seriously to compete with the nation with which we share a land border—the Irish Republic—whose corporation tax rate stands at 12.5%. I hope that the Assembly will take up that challenge and make that change, and I welcome the fact that Westminster gave us that power.

There are other things that this Government could do to enable Northern Ireland to increase its economic competitiveness and to be a stronger part of this nation. The tourism sector provides an example. I have the joy of having the Giants Causeway in my constituency. It is one of the finest natural locations for people to visit; indeed, it is the single largest visitor attraction on the entire island of Ireland. I welcome many people there each year; I just wish that they were all my voters. That attraction creates and stimulates employment and opportunity. Attracting more tourists to Northern Ireland is therefore part of the business plan for our country.

We currently have 60,000 people directly employed in the tourism sector, and a £1 billion a year spend in a country with a population of 1.7 million. That comprises £600 million being brought in by visitors to Northern Ireland and spent there, plus £400 million going out with people leaving Northern Ireland for tourism purposes. The Government could help by reducing VAT in the tourism sector, and I hope that they will look at my proposal, possibly even before 8 July. I would welcome that change, which would help small businesses in the sector.

I would also like to see air passenger duty removed altogether from domestic flights. The Government kindly reduced it for long-haul flights, which helps the airport in South Antrim, the constituency next door to mine, but I would like to see it removed from local flights. If you are really serious about togetherness, do not tax us when we fly to our nation's capital!

The Government have done well in appointing a Minister for the northern powerhouse. Speaking as someone who represents the real northern powerhouse in our country—Northern Ireland—I hope that that Minister's remit will be extended to allow him to look at the economic opportunities that flow from Ulster. Indeed, he could link in with Invest Northern Ireland and with

our tourism, enterprise and trade to create great connectivity between the economic powerhouse being built in the north of England and the economic power base that could exist in Northern Ireland. That was certainly one of our priorities in the election campaign, and I look forward to that link being created.

The largest economic sector in Northern Ireland is agri-foods, and I hope that the Government will take a serious look at the opportunities created by our exporting our finest product—namely, food produce. One possibility could involve agricultural licences for the export trade with Asia, the far east and the middle east. Restrictions on exports are incredibly high at the moment, and I hope that our Government will make a serious effort to say to China and the middle east in particular, "Here is an opportunity for us to increase our trade and expand our agri-foods industry in Northern Ireland." I hope that the Government will consider that opportunity.

In the weeks ahead, Northern Ireland will face a political crisis relating to welfare reform. I hope that the Government recognise that they have a serious responsibility to hold firmly to the line that the Prime Minister expressed yesterday when he said that we want to see the full implementation of the agreement that was struck in Belfast in the latter part of last year. Only by having economic sense and recognising that we cannot spend beyond our means will we be able to take Northern Ireland out of the way of the economic harm that those opposing welfare reform in our country wish on our land.

2.37 pm

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak this afternoon. I congratulate you on your election. I am delighted to speak after my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman). I, too, have a specialism in insolvency, but neither of us can claim to be as expert in that subject as Gordon Brown. I am also pleased to have spoken after the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley), who spoke so well about the value of unity.

I have listened with much admiration for a number of days to the eloquent and passionate maiden speeches on both sides of the House. It is an absolute privilege to be part of our British democracy. South East Cambridgeshire, the constituency I am fortunate to represent, has not troubled this House with a maiden speech for 28 years. It has been well served by the distinguished Sir James Paice for all that period. Sir James is an honourable, loyal and principled man, who has throughout his career stood up for farmers both within and outside the constituency. I know that he will be sorely missed in that community and many others.

Many presume that South East Cambridgeshire is a safe Conservative seat. I am not sure that there is such a thing as a safe seat of any kind any more, but even if there were, that is not a term that should be used to describe my constituency, which has had a chequered, even colourful, political history. The Isle of Ely, which falls within it, was the seat of Clement Freud. He was a man of many rare attributes, being a night club manager, a dog-food commercial actor and a Liberal Democrat, all of which fit together surprisingly well.

The constituency was represented by Francis Pym—yes, a Conservative, but not always a supporter of his Prime Minister—who once said, “Landslides do not on the whole produce effective government.” So our Prime Minister can rest assured of an effective and smooth five years. And it was the home of Oliver Cromwell, who defeated the Scots at Dunbar, incorporated Scotland into his protectorate and transported the Scots as slaves to the colonies. Now, there is an answer to the West Lothian question—but not one, of course, that I would recommend.

Standing in the shoes of such colourful and distinguished predecessors is difficult, but it has been made much easier by the charm and friendliness of the people of South East Cambridgeshire. The constituency includes the city of Ely, the town of Soham and many villages. It is the only constituency in the country that contains a racecourse, a science park and a thriving farming sector. The businesses in these areas are leaders in their fields, competing successfully on the international markets. They are part of our growing economy in the east of England. Our Government have an opportunity, if not an obligation, to support and nurture such successes, and I am delighted that our Government are doing precisely that.

But I am also mindful that economic success is not universal throughout the constituency. As the daughter of a teacher who taught in a state primary school in a very deprived area in Leeds, and the granddaughter of a headmaster who founded a technical school in Leicester, recognising as he did that academic education is not the right route for all children, I know that education can transform lives, that education is a driver of social mobility, and that ambition and aspiration are not and should be the preserve not of the few, but of the many.

Equality of opportunity is at the heart of any respectable democratic country. A good education should be available to all, no matter what background they come from or where they live, which is why it is so important that we have a fair funding formula for our education nationally—a formula that provides per pupil funding which is more consistent across the country. Ambition and aspiration are now being talked about by both major parties, and rightly so, but that should not be limited to aspiration for individuals alone. It should encompass our vision for our country. A small but great Britain has played a disproportionate role in world affairs for centuries. A strong Britain should continue to play a key role in our international affairs.

My great-grandparents fled to this country with nothing, with no possessions and no money, not even speaking the language, and Britain gave them a home. It gave them hope and it gave them a future. They integrated into our society, such that my grandfather was awarded a CBE for services to education. I am so proud to be part of this great country and to be in a position to give back to our communities. It is a huge privilege to have been chosen to represent the people of South East Cambridgeshire and I will do my utmost to serve them.

2.43 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. and learned Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer). One of the few things I like about this new Parliament is the sight of more women on all the Benches around us.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) reminded us, the Queen promised last Wednesday that the Government would adopt a one-nation approach, yet in practice this Government's approach to the economy has divided our nation. What brings a nation together? A sense of fair play, underpinned, in my view, by universal human rights, and a sense that everyone can depend on good public services when they need them. We can be united by confidence in a fair tax system and spending that is efficient, where our money is not wasted. When I was a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I was constantly struck by how many voters watched our hearings, praising my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge) for her determined defence of the taxpayer's pound. Their enthusiasm showed that when we in Parliament stop the Government wasting citizens' hard-earned money, they are not in the least turned off by politics.

But politicians must be scrupulously honest about what we do. The plan to make it illegal to increase taxes looks like a rhetorical device. What is the penalty going to be? Will the Chancellor go to jail if, for example, he increases VAT on books to equalise the treatment of electronic reading material and printed books? The trumpeted plans to exempt the lowest paid from any form of income tax are an example of a policy that divides rather than unites. It has been dressed up as help to the low paid, but every study shows that the majority of the benefit goes to families in the top half of earners, whose tax bill as a share of their income will fall further than that of the poorer half of the community.

My objection to this policy is that it divides society, separating us into givers and takers—those who pay into the system and those who take out—breeding a culture of blame and suspicion. Of course, we all pay tax. We all pay VAT when we buy things, but the greatest proportion of tax, and often the most resented, is income tax. It is fairer than other taxes, all of which take up more of the household budgets of the poorest people than of those who are wealthier. Paying tax, as we too often fail to remind citizens, is a symptom of social solidarity. It is our subscription to civilised society where we can all enjoy public parks, send our children to schools where they have an equal chance to learn, and have a health service we can rely on when we are ill. One of the defining characteristics of Britain is a strong sense of fair play, but if no one explains the unfair consequences of plans to change tax thresholds, the one-nation label that the Government claim will camouflage this unfairness.

I represent a successful town. It attracts inward investment to the United Kingdom. It is an immigrant town. Slough residents are aspirational, work hard and generate wealth. It is the third most productive town in the United Kingdom, contributing approximately £8 billion to the national economy—double the UK average. However, that growth generates losers as well as winners. In our local housing market, rising prices push up GDP figures while the rest of the economy drags, and as a result home owners see their assets grow while everyone else spends unsustainable proportions of their income on rent or on struggling to buy.

The plans to sell off housing association properties at a discount—properties that are already occupied by secure tenants—is a gross example of taking assets available to the many people who have housing need,

[*Fiona Mactaggart*]

destroying the legacy of philanthropists and mutual aid societies who created those housing associations, and giving those assets to a few sitting tenants who can raise a mortgage. That is the Conservative way—to take from the many and give to the few.

GDP does not tell us how the benefits of growth are distributed—who wins within the population and who loses. Some people get no financial benefit at all. It is estimated that unpaid childcare contributes nearly three quarters of GDP. Carers of ill and disabled relatives save more than the entire spend of the national health service. Yet UK workers who are employed and paid now receive only half of GDP, whereas in 1976 the figure was two thirds. That rate of decline is unmatched by any developed economy or any other industrialised economy. The employees' share of the economic pie is now the lowest ever recorded and it will keep decreasing because of this Government's plans to cut in-work benefits. Other countries, most notably Scandinavian countries, have worker representatives on company boards so that meaningful discussions about sharing corporate wealth can take place. Sharing wealth equitably should be part of corporate social responsibility, and those eschewing it should not be given taxpayer-funded contracts.

I urge the Government to match their one-nation rhetoric with action. If they do, we could have an economy where hard work is well rewarded, whether it is work by a mum bringing up babies or a banker borrowing and lending. If everyone is confident that their aspiration will be rewarded, they will do as my constituents do: invest in their skills, work hard and grow our whole nation's economy.

2.49 pm

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to the Queen's Speech debate today and to congratulate all those who made their maiden speeches, particularly my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer). She made a fine maiden speech, true to the traditions of those who have gone before her in that constituency. She talked about what is at the heart of this Queen's Speech and this Government—mobility and aspiration for all. We will continue to strive for that throughout this Parliament.

Like my hon. and learned Friend, other hon. Members have paid generous tribute to their predecessors. One tribute, however, has not been paid, and I have given the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) notice that she made no mention of her predecessor. I am going to correct that wrong—that omission—and pay tribute to Nick de Bois, my former colleague, a neighbour and friend. He was a great asset to this House, and Members on both sides can recognise his contribution to this House and to his constituency. It is appropriate to pay tribute to him in this debate on our economy, because it is right to recognise his contribution to supporting our growing economy. It was Nick de Bois who initiated the jobs fairs that many colleagues have taken up throughout the country. They have provided great results, and he championed jobs and apprenticeships in Enfield. He also championed trade envoys. Again, that has been taken up by the Government and we have envoys to many different countries now. The fruits of

his labour are having great effect, with us at last turning around the legacy of decades of underinvestment in exports and working with UK Trade & Investment to produce great results.

Nick de Bois has left a great legacy, as I saw when we co-hosted our latest jobs fair, at Southbury leisure centre in February. We saw hundreds of people benefiting from hundreds of jobs and having their lives transformed. We are talking not just about the stats or about plans, but about real lives that have been transformed. Many people responded to that jobs fair and told us how much they had benefited, not least from the hard work of Nick de Bois. He has left that legacy and he can be proud of it. Our Government can also be proud of that legacy, as we strive towards full employment.

The right hon. Member for Enfield North did talk about our local Chase Farm hospital, another thing Nick de Bois championed and campaigned hard on. Although she mentioned it, she missed a number of points. There is a contrast to make here with the previous Labour Government, who were full of broken and empty promises. Before the election, Nick and I secured the business case, which was signed off by the Treasury. We secured £270 million for redevelopment at Chase Farm hospital. That is significant because it means that we will have a modern, 21st-century local hospital with eight operating theatres. We will have all the existing services put together in a 32,000 square metre building.

That is very important, and what is the contrast with it? It certainly contrasts with what we heard from the right hon. Lady, who said that this was going to gut Chase Farm hospital. Far from gutting it, this is going to breathe new life into decrepit buildings left behind by the last Labour Government. The contrast is very clear: we need a strong economy to be able to have a strong national health service. We needed the strong economy to be able to ensure that this was based on taxpayers' money—£120 million-worth of taxpayers' money, as part of a wider £270 million deal—and not on the private finance initiative. Our local hospitals have been beset by that. The millstone around the necks of Barnet hospital and of North Middlesex University hospital was PFI. That is typical of the previous Labour Government. They maxed out the credit card and now we are paying off those debts. Sadly, our health service is struggling and challenged because of it.

I wish to highlight two areas that will have a big effect on our economy and our society. They will be a litmus test of something we talk about a lot: a one-nation party and one-nation Government. The first of those areas is the family. We now have a family test, introduced by the Prime Minister last August. It means that every Department will be held to account for the impact of its policies on the family. Will the Minister say what the impact was of the whole Queen's Speech? A summary of that might be useful. It is important that we do not just have a tick-box exercise; the Government have had tests in the past, but this needs to have real meaning. It would be good to continue to work with The Relationships Alliance to ensure that there is real meaning and to show that we are true on our deep commitment to the family. We all know that family breakdown costs—it has been estimated at £48 billion a year, perhaps more—and it is the poorest households that get hit.

Two thirds of 15-year-olds in the poorest 20% of society no longer live with both parents. Our party, however, supports marriage loud and clear. Towards the

end of the last Parliament, there was the welcome introduction of the marriage tax allowance. It is small, at £212, but it is a start and I want the Government to go a lot further. At the heart of our one-nation concern is a concern for others. Nowhere can we see that better than in our concern for strong marriages and strong families. The good support for childcare is welcome, but let us broaden that understanding and support marriage as well.

Another test is how we support complex needs. I welcome the fact that in the autumn statement there was real support for the troubled families programme, which has transformed many lives and saved a huge amount of money. We can work that model into cases with multiple needs. By working hard for strong families and those with the most complex needs, including housing, addiction and educational needs, we will pass the test and truly be a one-nation party and one-nation Government.

2.55 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to participate in this debate and to make my maiden speech. I congratulate you on your re-election and praise the maiden speeches we have heard so far today from the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) and the hon. and learned Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), despite our political and, as has been outlined, historical differences.

I hope that you will be patient with new Members, Mr Deputy Speaker, as we get used to our new surroundings. As a trade unionist, I am getting used to the rules not just of this House but of this great city. That fact was underlined to me when I was on the London underground and my hon. Friends told me that I had to stand to the right at all times. I retorted, "Never." However, I have been assured by many experts that that is to do with health and safety and regulation, so I can assure the House that I will comply with that request—on the tube, not in this place.

I thank the voters of Glasgow South West for giving me the honour and privilege of representing them in this Parliament. I pay a genuine and gracious tribute to my immediate predecessor, Ian Davidson. Ian Davidson served this House for 23 years, latterly as Chair of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. He was a strong champion for workers' rights, including his work on blacklisting, and I pledge to take on that work during my time in this place. He was a robust debater and he was always civil and respectful to me although, as they say in Glasgow, there was always a fair bit of banter. Indeed, in his maiden speech, he said of his immediate predecessor, Jim Sillars:

"I think my predecessor made a contribution to Scottish politics which should not be underestimated or overlooked even by those who disagree with his content or style, or both."—[*Official Report*, 19 October 1992; Vol. 212, c. 264.]

Let me gently but firmly associate myself with the words of my immediate predecessor, about my immediate predecessor. I wish Ian well in whatever he decides to do next.

Glasgow South West is an area rooted in the history of the struggles of the working class, with a long tradition of representatives who fought for the underdog

and gave voice to the voiceless. The constituency stretches from Govan to Pollok, featuring Ibrox Stadium, the home of Rangers football club. As a proud Partick Thistle supporter—a pleasure I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Ms Black)—I recognise what Rangers football club means to its supporters around the world as well as in Glasgow.

The constituency also includes Bellahouston Park, with the beautiful House for an Art Lover, designed by the world-famous Charles Rennie Mackintosh. It is a site where not one but two Popes have celebrated mass, which I was privileged to attend on both occasions. The Govan shipyards are iconic and serve as a reminder that heavy industry and manufacturing should have a place in our economy.

My constituency is rich in history, but I want to highlight just one more point. Over the next three years, all the nations of the UK will commemorate the sacrifices our forebears made in the first world war. It is my belief that all aspects of that period should be taught and remembered. In Govan, the great Mary Barbour led rent strikes fighting against unscrupulous landlords who increased rents on the home front during that time of sacrifice on the western front. That might have been a century ago, but we have come full circle as the exploitation of one of the most basic human needs, shelter and a place to raise a family, is once more a key issue in this Parliament. The Remember Mary Barbour Association does fantastic work.

There is not enough time for me to tell all the stories and outline all the hopes of the people in my constituency, but I was struck by the fact that they all want the message delivered loud and clear that they and their families deserve better. We have heard much about the importance of fostering aspiration and celebrating wealth creators. I believe that everyone has aspiration, and it concerns me when the welfare debate is reduced to judging who is deserving and undeserving, seeking the politics of grievance and envy, sowing the seeds of division within our communities.

Welfare sanctions are dragging people to the point of despair, food banks are the only growth industry in too many communities, and the daily grind of low-paid workers on insecure but highly flexible contracts is a world away from the privileged workplace I now find myself in.

I was elected to speak truth to power in this place and to stand up for the real wealth creators—the low-paid, long-hours, insecure workers who keep the economic wheels turning despite the poor treatment too many receive at the hands of their employers.

I come to this House after 25 years working in public services, and almost 20 serving as a Unison activist, representing working people on a daily basis. The trade union movement gave me a political education and the confidence to stand for election, and I know that this experience is shared with other Members who did not have a privileged start in life.

We live in a global world, and I believe that a different approach needs to be taken in the 21st century. We need to step away from the 19th century world of work and the devil-take-the-hindmost approach to social security. That is an economic illiteracy that is not only immoral but ends up costing more in the long run in damage to individuals, families and communities.

[Chris Stephens]

We in the SNP come to this House to argue that social justice must be at the heart of the economic debate—that we should put people before profits and bairns before bombs—and, as the STUC puts it, that a better way is possible.

3.1 pm

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): May I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) on his maiden speech, as well as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman)? They all included brilliant eulogies to their predecessors' political careers. Mr Speaker, you will not get that from me, but for the very best of reasons. Every Conservative Member of this House will be delighted to hear that the political service of my predecessor, now transformed, butterfly-like, into the noble Lord Maude of Horsham, continues in rude health in another place. I have no doubt that his distinguished career in the Treasury, the Foreign Office and latterly in the Cabinet Office will get yet more distinguished as Minister for Trade. If he is as effective at boosting exports as he was at cutting waste, we can look forward to a sustained and ever-growing trade surplus.

In addition to the wise advice of the noble Lord Maude, I am indebted to one of my constituents, the right hon. Sir Peter Hordern, for his advice. He is one of a trio of Conservative MPs who for no less than 93 years represented Horsham during the last century. Major Freddie Gough held the bridge at Arnhem. Lord Winterton went, over a career of 47 years, from being the baby of the House to being the Father of the House. I see she is in her place, Mr Speaker, and I hope that she will accept the compliment when I say that I sincerely hope that the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Ms Black) will still be gracing this Chamber, for the sake of our country, in half a century's time.

Horsham is an ancient town, represented here since 1295, but on occasion it has fallen into bad habits. "A Parliamentary History of Horsham" recalls how in the epic struggle between the Tories and the Liberals it moved on from the more prosaic forms of electoral vice to the mass kidnap of each other's voters. The situation was improved by the addition to the borough constituency of large swathes of rural West Sussex, which we still enjoy. From Rudgwick in the west it sweeps down to Billingshurst and over to Balcombe and Ardingly, the site of the South of England Show. It contains Wakehurst Place, the country home of the Royal Botanic Gardens and the largest seed bank in the world. The north takes in Crawley Down and Copthorne, once the haunt of prize fighters and smugglers, now home to far more respectable residents.

A whole series of opinion surveys consistently rates Horsham as a great place to live and work. There may be some cynicism in this House about opinion polls these days, but I can assure the House that these, at least, can be relied on. The constituency is proud of its economic independence and benefits from a burgeoning small business sector with a vast range of entrepreneurial and innovative industries. It has prospered in no small measure from the economic success fostered by the

Government. The growth in the number of new businesses over the past few years is matched in steepness only by the fall in the number of jobseeker's allowance claimants.

I am one of few new Members who can honestly claim that, no matter how reviled the status of being a Member of Parliament, I have managed to improve my standing in the world, because I was previously employed by an investment bank. However, I have also spent time in Her Majesty's Treasury, and would like to pay tribute to the Government's handling of our economic recovery. The robust underpinning of the country's economy over the past five years gives confidence to the small businesses in my constituency that under this Government they can continue to invest, expand and prosper.

Alongside economic success, Horsham has a strong social conscience; it is home to many charities and is determined to ensure that this and future generations can continue to enjoy our countryside and benefit from excellent services. The area has been subject to substantial recent development, and residents are concerned about the impact on the environment and the supporting local infrastructure, not least the provision of NHS services. That is why we welcomed the Conservative manifesto commitment to encourage brownfield development and why we were delighted to see the trenchant support for enhanced primary health care services. The current building and infrastructure concerns would be as nothing, however, were Gatwick airport to be permitted to build a second runway, the impact of which would be profound right across the constituency and far beyond.

Horsham has real concerns on which I will engage in the coming years, but at least it is certain that under a Conservative Government its economy will flourish and that, as outlined in the Gracious Speech, this Parliament will be focused on ensuring that the increasing wealth created will benefit all and that all our citizens can aspire and prosper.

3.6 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): May I start by congratulating you, Mr Speaker, on your re-election? I also congratulate the three Deputy Speakers, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel), who I think will be an excellent Deputy Speaker, fulfilling the potential she showed in the previous Parliament as an excellent Chair of the Backbench Business Committee.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin) on his eloquent maiden speech and wish him luck in his work of representing his constituents and his party in this place. I pay tribute to all the new Members who have made their maiden speeches so far. We have heard some excellent maiden speeches, delivered confidently and with real style and polish.

Today's debate is broadly about fiscal issues relating to the deficit and debt, but growth, of course, has a key part to play in reducing the deficit. Indeed, our nation's prosperity depends on robust economic growth. We in the Opposition absolutely understand the need for economic growth based on wealth creation. While the majority of Opposition colleagues were fighting hard for manufacturing in the previous Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), joint chair of the all-party group on manufacturing, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) were also

making the case for an industrial strategy to underpin and help manufacturing to grow its share of the economy. That has to be a key part of the way forward.

In that context, I welcome the Government's northern powerhouse initiative. Indeed, I have long argued for the devolution of powers in England and believe that this country can be one nation only on the basis of a properly thought through devolution settlement for England. However, the real danger with the northern powerhouse project, as it currently stands, is that devolution, as promised by the legislation on the table, will become discredited unless it is accompanied by changes to the distribution of funding by central Government.

We all know that the north of England and large parts of provincial England lose out on local government funding. There are huge disparities in how local government is funded. The issue affects transport as well: transport funding from central Government is distributed on a really unfair and uneven basis—London enjoys transport investment way beyond anything enjoyed by the north of England. The danger affects the regions of the UK that are already disadvantaged in trailing behind London on GDP and economic growth; the disparities could become even more deeply entrenched unless there is an effective Government strategy to address the issue properly. We cannot ignore the danger. The north of England, Greater Manchester, South Yorkshire and the west riding of Yorkshire will not grow as they need to unless the Government address those disparities.

Finally, I want to develop a little further the argument for a more comprehensive, better thought through approach to devolution, because the other danger is that rural areas, as well as suburban areas, will feel increasingly alienated and left out by concepts such as the northern powerhouse. Every Member needs to take cognisance of that danger, and we need a non-partisan approach to dealing with it.

Let us take Greater Manchester and South Yorkshire as the classic example. Between those two city regions, there is the Peak District national park—what we call the “Dark Peak”. Nothing is on the table at the moment to integrate that area into a devolutionary settlement, yet it has a key role to play in the economic growth of the north of England. That issue must be dealt with. Of course it is true that big cities will always be the motor of our economy, but that must not mean that we ignore the contribution that smaller towns and rural areas can make or their potential for economic growth.

I finish with a good example of how this can be achieved. Among the biggest contributors to the manufacturing activity of this country are food and farming. Food manufacturing is a huge player that contributes billions to our GDP. There is no better example of how activities in rural areas and the produce of the land are transformed into the food on our plates. Those two activities, properly integrated in a devolutionary settlement, can help deliver for the economic growth of this country in future.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Hoyle): Order. I am going to reduce the time limit to five minutes, so that as many Members as possible can speak.

3.13 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): Many congratulations on your re-election, Mr Deputy Speaker. I also congratulate all the new Members who have made such excellent maiden speeches.

I support the Queen's Speech because of its ambition and direction of travel. The Prime Minister has rightly stated that every part of this country has a stake in our economic success. Much good work was done by the previous Government, but there is a great deal more to do and there will be plenty of potential pitfalls along the way.

The Bills in the Queen's Speech provide the framework for developing sustained prosperity right across the country and it will be important to scrutinise them closely as they progress through this House and the other place. In some cases, the devil will be in the detail; no stone should be left unturned in the pursuit of good legislation that works for the whole United Kingdom.

For too long, economic policy in the UK has been centralised and top down. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is correct in his assessment that the model of running everything from London has failed and created an unbalanced economy. It has become clear that the man in Whitehall does not know best. I support the ambition and determination to create a northern powerhouse, but it is important that all other parts of the country should have the same opportunity and access to the necessary funds.

For my part, I wholly endorse the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) in wanting an East Anglian powerhouse. British people talk about the weather; we East Anglians talk about infrastructure. That is because we do not have very much of it, and what we do have does not work very well. In my Waveney constituency, the nearest motorway is in Holland; our railways resemble an elephants' graveyard where trains come to die; and there are some very rural areas where broadband coverage is spasmodic, at the very least. I commend the Prime Minister for stating:

“We will make sure everyone has the infrastructure they need to succeed.”

In the previous Parliament, he and the Government that he led put their money where their mouth was. In this Parliament, we have to deliver, and get these roads and bridges built and superfast broadband made available to all.

The projects for which funding has been provided must be built on time. The preparatory work for upgrading the A47 must be carried out promptly. The 16-month period that has been suggested before any construction work begins is not acceptable. We must use the opportunity presented by the rail franchise tender to deliver better railways with reliable, fast and comfortable trains that run on time. With the third crossing project in Lowestoft, locally we will complete the necessary studies that the Government have enabled us to do and then work with them to get this very important piece of local infrastructure built.

I shall briefly mention three industries important to Waveney that have the potential to contribute a great deal to the local economy but need to overcome a variety of obstacles. First, the oil and sector faces significant challenges created by the dramatic fall in

[Peter Aldous]

crude oil prices. Jobs are being lost, including at AKD Engineering in Lowestoft, which closes this month. The Government have recognised the problem and come forward in the Budget with proposals that restructure the taxation regime. The Office for Budget Responsibility estimates that that should boost North sea oil production by 15% by the end of the decade. That is welcome, but I urge the Treasury to work closely with the industry to bring in further measures in next month's Budget if necessary.

The offshore wind industry can bring significant benefits to the Waveney economy, and in the past five years work has been put in place to enable it to do so. We need to get those wind farms off the East Anglian coast built during this five-year term.

The fishing industry is also in need of support. My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) helped to reform the common fisheries policy. We now need to ensure that the small fishermen who make up the Lowestoft fleet have fair access and a fair share of quota.

The proposals announced in the Queen's Speech are welcome, but there is much work to do. No parts of the country must be forgotten. On infrastructure, we must press on to get roads and bridges built. There must be no no-go areas as regards policy, particularly in fishing.

3.18 pm

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous). As he described infrastructure in his constituency I began to wonder whether it had been transferred to the north-east, because we have very similar problems.

At the beginning of this debate we heard an intense political exchange about the right speed of deficit reduction. We will continue to see a big political debate about the appropriate size and scope of the public sector, but where we have consensus is on the importance of effective and efficient use of public money. Everyone wants the taxpayer to get good value for money.

We all have our stories of Whitehall waste. My low point was when I was a Minister. I was sitting in my office and two men came in to water the plants. They watered two plants, and then I pointed to another one on the windowsill and said, "What about that one?" They went over and looked very carefully at it, felt the leaves, and then said, "That's not ours", because plant watering had been contracted out. Before Government Members suggest that that was confined to the Labour years, I have to tell them that after tabling a series of parliamentary questions in the spring, I found that Departments are renting desks, including one Department that was paying the fabulous sum of £10,309.63 a year per desk.

If we are to get to grips with these problems, we must ask why they happen. It is important to root out waste in individual programmes, but we will succeed only if we look at the underlying patterns and problems. There are recurrent issues, including in large information and communications technology projects. For example, in past years the Rural Payments Agency and tax credits were a problem, and this Government are now running into similar issues with universal credit. Procurement

capacity in Whitehall needs to be improved. It is not good, because the route to the top is through being able to write clever policy papers, not through doing good deals.

The transparency of value for money when services are contracted out is another problem. We have to hold to account the Sercos, Capitas and G4Ss of this world, because they now control billions of pounds, and they cannot hide behind the excuse of "commercial in confidence" any longer. We are seeing unnecessarily complex financial arrangements, excessive returns to bankers and consultants, and not the cheapest deal for taxpayers. Only this week, problems were highlighted in the health service, with rip-off agency fees for doctors and nurses who are being paid more than those on regular contracts, and the revolving door for senior executives. No one thinks it is acceptable for someone to retire on a Monday, collect a lump sum on the Tuesday and then go back into the same job on the Wednesday.

As a country, we are now spending £740 billion. If we can achieve an efficiency improvement of 2% on that £740 billion, the savings would amount to £13 billion. Some people would want to use that for tax cuts, whereas some would want to use it to bolster public services, but it is definitely money worth finding. Parliament, including the Select Committees, has a key part to play in that. By fulfilling our role, we can improve Government's long-term capacity to deliver their plans to set out and do what they intend to do.

If we work in an incisive, open and transparent manner, we can raise trust in the political process. By shining a light and not being afraid to challenge those in positions of power, we can make a real difference. By doing so in an effective way, we will raise confidence in politics, Parliament and the political process, as I am sure all Members of this House want to do.

3.23 pm

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech as part of today's debate. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) and I would like to congratulate all the Members who have also made maiden speeches today.

It is a real honour to be standing in this most historic Chamber, representing the residents of Cannock Chase, a constituency in Staffordshire—the county in which I was born and brought up—and to join one of the former Members of Parliament for Cannock Chase, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth).

My immediate predecessor, Aidan Burley, won the seat in historic fashion in 2010. Since that time, Aidan has worked very hard on behalf of Cannock Chase residents, and I would like to thank him. His successful jobs fairs helped to contribute to the significant fall in unemployment. He spearheaded the campaign to save our fantastic Cannock Chase hospital, and he campaigned for the investment that will lead to the electrification of the Chase line. I wish Aidan the best of luck for the future and for life with his wife, Jodie.

The constituency takes its name from the forest, much of which lies within the parliamentary boundaries of Cannock Chase. The Chase was designated an area

of outstanding natural beauty in 1958 and comprises a wide range of landscapes and wildlife, including a herd of fallow deer. Over the years, the Chase has become a destination for visitors. Whether one is a mountain biker, a runner or a walker, there is something for everyone. Every November, the Cannock rotary holds a 10 km run through the Chase. I would welcome any Member who wants to join me on that run—the scenery is stunning.

Bordering the forest are the constituency's three main towns: Cannock, Hednesford and Rugeley. Each has a unique character, but they have one commonality: a strong history and proud heritage in coalmining. One of Cannock's best-known former residents and miners is a well-known Member of this House: the Secretary of State for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Mr McLoughlin). He is well loved and highly regarded by the residents of Cannock Chase. Our mining heritage helps to explain the incredibly strong sense of community that is felt in Cannock Chase. I am proud to say that we have a wide variety of local charities, voluntary groups and community groups.

The skyline in Rugeley is a reminder of the past and a sign of the future. I am pleased to say that it demonstrates the extent to which the area has evolved and adapted to industrial change. Once, there stood two power stations and a colliery; now, there is one power station, with new industrial and business parks opposite it. It is home to one of Amazon's distribution centres, as well as to many small and medium-sized businesses. Such small and medium-sized businesses are the engine of our economy and, more particularly, of Cannock Chase in the 21st century.

Before being elected, I had a career in business. Business is in my blood, which is why I chose to speak today. I am sure that my late father, Humphrey Milling, who was once the managing director of a local tool manufacturing business, Britool, which had its own connections to Cannock, would have been pleased that supporting local businesses is one of my key priorities. He would also have been delighted to see the election of a pro-business Conservative majority Government.

It is thriving local businesses that have created jobs for local hard-working families and that are giving opportunities to our young people. I look forward to working with local businesses, training providers and young people to help get as many of those young people as possible into work.

The Cannock Chase that I have described today is one of aspiration and opportunity. I look forward to representing the area in this Parliament to ensure that it becomes an even better place to live and work.

3.28 pm

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech. I offer my congratulations on your re-election. It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling). I pay tribute to hon. Members on both sides of the House who have made their maiden speeches today and commend their excellent contributions.

For new Members like me, speaking in this Chamber for the first time is a deeply humbling experience. It is made all the more humbling for me by an awareness of

the formidable predecessors who have represented the area that I call home and that I now have the privilege of serving in this place. It was on Blackheath in 1876, in an open-air meeting attended by 10,000 of his Greenwich constituents—"those rabid cockneys" in the words of Disraeli—that Gladstone first denounced the Bulgarian horrors, and in so doing reformed his links with popular radicalism and set himself on a journey towards a second Ministry.

It was in Woolwich in 1903 that Will Crooks, the son of a ship's stoker who had endured the privations of the workhouse, won a spectacular by-election victory over his Conservative and Unionist opponent to become the fourth ever Labour Member of Parliament. It was Woolwich in February 1950 that gave Labour's greatest Foreign Secretary, Ernie Bevin, a final berth from which to serve out his days as one of the chief architects of our post-war world.

Over the course of 23 years of distinguished service, my immediate predecessor, the right hon. Nick Raynsford, more than earned his place among such illustrious company. I would like to pay tribute to him, not just because it is customary but out of a deep sense of gratitude and respect. Nick's efforts over many decades helped transform Greenwich and Woolwich, and his contribution to our national life was no less impressive. As well as an effective Minister and a skilled parliamentarian, Nick was a diligent and caring constituency MP who fought tenaciously to better the lives of his constituents. He was, I know, admired on both sides of the House, and it is both an honour and an enormous challenge to take on his mantle.

Greenwich and Woolwich has an extremely rich history, as the millions of tourists who visit my constituency each year discover. The historical centre of Greenwich is a breathtaking blend of history, science and architecture. It has been the residence of Tudor kings, was the birthplace of classical architecture in England, is the spiritual home of Britain's maritime past, was the place where the heavens were first comprehensively mapped out, and is where the world's prime meridian runs across an ordinary London pavement.

Yet as imperceptibly bound to its maritime and monarchical past as my constituency is, it has another proud history—one that is far too often overlooked, but which is just as inspiring. It is a history of industry, innovation, progressive social change and self-organisation, and above all of people who have come from every part of these islands and beyond living together and looking out for one another in diverse and tolerant communities.

The area was once a great manufacturing hub that teemed with the noise of shipbuilding, engineering, Europe's biggest glassworks at Charlton and the colossal Royal Arsenal at Woolwich, birthplace of both the Royal Artillery and the Royal Engineers, which employed 70,000 people at its peak during the first world war. It has been a centre of research and discovery, which in the 1850s produced the earliest telegraph cables and the first to be laid across the Atlantic, by Brunel's vast ship the Great Eastern. It has been a breeding ground of progressive politics, which gave birth to one of Britain's first building societies, the Woolwich Provident, one of its first co-operatives, the Royal Arsenal co-op, and the first mass membership Labour party. It is a place whose people, confronted over the years by hardship, industrial

[Matthew Pennycook]

decline, violence and sadly even terrorism, have none the less remained resilient, vibrant and optimistic for the future.

My constituency is now undergoing rapid change. Much of that change is extremely positive, but significant challenges remain, and not just how we get Charlton Athletic back into the premiership. Inequality, deprivation, poverty, endemic low pay, long-term and youth unemployment, strained public transport services and a chronic lack of genuinely affordable homes to rent or buy—all these issues will need to be tackled in the years ahead if we are to have an economy that is sustainable and works for all my constituents. I am determined to do everything in my power to make sure that they are tackled in the years ahead, and I am extremely grateful for the opportunity that I have been given by the people of Greenwich and Woolwich to be their voice in this place and the champion and servant of this great constituency.

3.33 pm

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): May I be the first to congratulate you while you are in the Chair on assuming your position, Madam Deputy Speaker? As it happens, this is turning out to be a Parliament of firsts for me. Last week I think I was the first Member in this Parliament to be granted an urgent question, and I am the first Member to have been called by you. I am tempted to ask whether you can enjoin the House not to interrupt me, on the basis that this is perhaps a maiden speech. I say that because, after I was granted the urgent question last week, someone at Sky kindly tweeted that a new Member had been granted an urgent question. I have obviously made an extraordinary impact on the media over the course of the past few years.

May I also congratulate all the Members who have made their maiden speeches today? They are my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens), my hon. Friends the Members for Horsham (Jeremy Quin) and for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) and the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook). They will all obviously have fine parliamentary careers, although I remind them that in 1837, when Disraeli, whom we have already heard about twice in this debate, made his maiden speech, he ended it, after a considerable amount of barracking, with the words:

“I will sit down now, but the time will come when you will hear me.”

Well, the House has heard from all those Members today, and it is much better for having done so.

I have sat through the entirety of the debate, and if I may I would like to commend the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) for one of the finest speeches I have heard during my five years in this place. It was a speech that, in common with my hon. Friend the Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen), I am pleased he did not make before the election. It was a speech that, essentially, could have come from the Conservative Benches, because it was a speech about one nationism. One nationism is what this

Government and this party stand for. The Gracious Speech, on which we are debating the Address, is a speech about one nation. It is a speech about this country over the next five years, and about what the Government's plans, on which we were returned with a significant majority, are going to achieve.

Time is very limited in this debate given the number of speakers, but there are three areas on which I wish to very briefly focus my remarks. I understand that this is principally a debate on the economy, but the first area relates to the Human Rights Act 1998. A rumour has grown up on the Conservative Benches—or at least that is what I hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), who is now the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice—that I am somehow going to be difficult in relation to the Human Rights Act, given my background and role as a lawyer. That rumour is misplaced.

I stood on a manifesto—I want to remind Conservative Members that we all stood on a manifesto—that said we would replace the Human Rights Act with a British Bill of Rights. That does not need to involve our withdrawal from the European convention. What we have said, and what we said in the manifesto in 2010, is that the Act can and should be replaced by a British Bill of Rights which is justiciable in the courts of this country, whether they are the courts of England and Wales, or of Scotland or Northern Ireland. That, as was made crystal clear by an editorial in *The Sun* last week and by what we were told on the doorstep during the general election campaign, is what the British people want.

The other thing that the British people want in relation to Europe, albeit unconnected with the European Court of Human Rights, is a referendum on the European Union. It is this party that is going to deliver that referendum. I remind everybody in the House—all right hon. and hon. Members, whether they are the most fervent Europhile or the most ardent Eurosceptic—that we are all here because we were elected in a democracy. If we believe in democracy, as we all ought to do, then giving the British people a say on whether they want to continue to be part of what the European community has become is absolutely the right thing to do.

I have already said that the right hon. Member for Doncaster North mentioned Disraeli in his speech. Disraeli also said, in a very famous passage, that he was “a Conservative to preserve all that is good in our constitution, a Radical to remove all that is bad.”

This is a Government who have my support in relation to the Gracious Speech, because they are Conservative in relation to what is good in our constitution and they are radical in relation to what is bad.

3.37 pm

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): What a pleasure it is to be the first Member on the Labour Benches to be called by you, Ms Engel. You and I have been friends since you came to the House, and what I love about you is that you are passionate about this House. You were a great Chair of the Backbench Business Committee.

I have been sitting here since 9.30 am and have heard many excellent speeches and interventions today. There have been too many maiden speeches to mention. The secret

of this place is to use it, serve the apprenticeship and then enjoy it. It is the place for hon. Members to make their reputation, hone their skills and show that they are real parliamentarians.

I wanted to talk about austerity, productivity, schools and skills, the north-south divide and the danger of withdrawing from Europe, but I probably will not be able to touch on a lot of that. I will instead start by being a little serious. Mr Speaker is sometimes very ageist and points out how long I have been in the House of Commons. My wife is just as bad. I was making my acceptance speech in Huddersfield on election night and said that I had just fought my ninth campaign. My wife said, "Darling, it's your tenth. You fought Taunton first and didn't get in." I looked it up and found that I am the last Labour candidate to come second in Taunton. We came in behind the UK Independence party this year. That is quite a long history of fighting 10 elections.

However, this is the most worrying election I have been involved in. I say that not because the Labour party got a drubbing, or because there was a spectacular surge in Scotland by the Scottish National party. What was really worrying was the electorate's lack of enthusiasm for any of us. They do not like us very much. Only two thirds of them voted and they did not vote with the great passion, saying they wanted to get to the polls, they wanted to get a Labour party or a Conservative party, or anybody else in Government. I found it very worrying that there was so little enthusiasm for the election as I knocked on doors. This is a country in which people such as the Luddites, the Chartists and the Suffragettes fought for the vote, but now we knock on people's doors and are told, "We're not voting—you're all the same." That is a terrible comment on where we are in our democracy today.

I found that the electorate were confused and depressed, and they resented and distrusted us. They wanted the leaders of our parties to be better, and I also think that all three leaders could have been a darn sight better. There was a feeling that there was no legitimacy about the election. Only 66% of the electorate voted, 71% in Scotland. As I said in an intervention on the Chancellor of the Exchequer earlier, "Don't let's crow about how well we represent everyone, when even the Government party is only representing such a small percentage of the British and the UK people."

This is a year of really important anniversaries: 800 years since Magna Carta, and 200 years since Waterloo. However, I want to dwell for a moment on world war two, as it is 70 years since it ended. Faced with the challenge of rebuilding a devastated country that had been at war for six years, we picked ourselves up under a Labour Government and made the basic institutions that were to provide the foundations of the good life for so many people for 70 years. There was the national health service, which meant everybody getting the best medical treatment on the basis of need and not the ability to pay. There was the welfare state—okay, it was started after the first world war by Lloyd George, but it was made much more comprehensive after 1945 by a Government that said there should be a welfare net and that no one should fall below that level of poverty and need. Then, "welfare" meant something wonderful and not what it has been turned into now, partly sometimes in this country by the Government but particularly by the Republicans in the United States. I believe in the welfare state, and I believe in a great state.

We have a great challenge now to regenerate our economy and our country, and we will only do that by making our people happy and contented, and giving them the good life that they deserve.

3.42 pm

Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): Madam Deputy Speaker, many congratulations on your election, and I am glad to have caught your eye on this occasion, so as to make my maiden speech.

I am very pleased to rise today as the first Conservative since 1951 to be newly elected to serve the people of the Yeovil constituency. Therefore, this is the first of Her Majesty's Gracious Speeches since then to be welcomed by an incoming Yeovil Conservative, a task made easier by the fact that the people of Yeovil, in making their choice, contributed to it outlining a Conservative programme.

People in my area made a decisive choice to support a future of jobs and opportunities, to continue rebuilding our national finances, and to stop burdening our young people and future generations with our mistakes and debts. Whether it is investment in defence, health, education or infrastructure to power our local growth, people understand that it cannot be done without the foundation of a strong economy and sound public finances.

My constituency sits in the middle of the narrowest part of the entrance to the south-west peninsula, on the main ancient route between London and the west country, and at a crossing of the route between Bristol and the ancient port of Weymouth. Surrounded by rich agricultural land, a series of towns and villages along these routes was fashioned from the local hamstone, giving golden warmth to travellers and inhabitants alike. The area became the natural home of successful farmers, seafarers and venturers, and it delivered a ready supply of the highest grades of flax, rope and sailcloth that powered their exploits.

In modern times, the people of Yeovil remain adventurous and resourceful. Hi-tech, modern defence industries and facilities sit beside innovative service and engineering firms, modern farms and superb tourist experiences. Hon. Members will have heard of the cutting-edge helicopters made by Westland, a great Yeovil firm that grew through Spitfire manufacture during the second world war. This year, it celebrates its 100th year, supported by a legion of smaller local suppliers.

In all parts of my constituency, in Yeovil, Crewkerne, Chard, Ilminster, South Petherton, Ilchester and all the farms and villages in between, there is a very positive spirit in all sizes of businesses and sectors. We know that with the right policies and support, we can make our area better, deliver for people in it and raise their incomes. I fully support the Government's programme of infrastructure improvement, including the major road, rail, broadband and mobile signal projects that we are promoting in the south-west, not least the dualling of the A303 and A358, which run through my constituency, so that we can regain our place as a key regional powerhouse of economic growth in Britain, improve our productivity and enhance local people's incomes.

My immediate predecessor, David Laws, worked hard, was polite and clear, and had a charming way, especially with older people in my constituency. He also took an

[*Marcus Fysh*]

interest in the young and recognised the dedication of our teachers to young people's progress, which I also hope to do. His dry economic views smoothed the way for the formation of the coalition Government in 2010, in which he served first as Chief Secretary to the Treasury and latterly as Education Minister. His voting support for that Government and their policies was notable, and I thank him for his service.

Finally, we must reflect on why some have lost faith in our politics and try to put it right by our actions. We need in this place to be more thoughtful and humble and never to lose touch with the roots of trust of the people we represent and never stop listening to them and their hopes. To speak in this Chamber, the repository of so much human hope, past, future and present, is both thrilling and humbling. It is the Chamber's particular part in preserving that democratic humility that we should defend above all. Our great poet, T. S. Eliot, commemorated in Westminster Abbey but resting for eternity in my constituency in a simple church in the parish of East Coker, in a poem of the same name, put it very satisfactorily: "humility is endless".

3.47 pm

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech today and congratulate you on your election. I also congratulate all hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches in today's debate, and I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Yeovil (Marcus Fysh).

The time constraint today means that we are short, but I hope we are also sweet. As a new Member, I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and all the parliamentary staff for welcoming me and helping me settle in. Without fail, everyone has been generous with their time and patience, and I am very grateful for that.

To represent the people of Cardiff Central is a great privilege and responsibility. When I moved to Cardiff Central 26 years ago, little did I know that all these years later, my fellow residents would elect me, and place their trust in me, to be their first female Labour MP and their strong voice in this place. I pay tribute to my predecessor, Jennifer Willott, who served Cardiff Central for 10 years as a Back Bencher, Government Whip and Minister. She became a visible advocate for working parents, and I wish Jenny and her young family well for the future.

I also pay tribute to the last Labour MP for Cardiff Central, Jon Owen Jones, who served the constituency for 13 years, including as a Minister, and still lives there. He has been a source of kind support and wise advice.

Cardiff Central is a special place. While we have six electoral communities—Adamsdown, Cathays, Cyncoed, Pentwyn, Penylan, and Plasnewydd—our community is rich in history, diversity and culture and has welcomed people from all over the world to learn, work and seek refuge. We are very proud of our vibrant cosmopolitan and inclusive community.

From humble beginnings as a small Roman settlement on the site of what is now Cardiff castle, Cardiff Central is at the heart of what is now a modern, European capital city. We have grand civic buildings in Cathays

Park, built by the Marquess of Bute, three universities, theatres, music venues and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, whose famous alumni include Oscar winner Sir Anthony Hopkins and the legendary Ruth Jones, better known as Nessa from *Gavin and Stacey*. Alongside the world's oldest record shop, Spillers, which opened in 1894, and our beautiful Victorian shopping arcades, we have a famous Caroline Street, where early and late-night city-centre revellers enjoy our special Welsh delicacy of chicken curry, *arf'n'arf*.

We also have the best sporting stadium in the world, the Millennium stadium, where we will welcome the world this autumn for the 2015 rugby world cup. I can assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that however nervous I felt just before starting this speech, my nerves are nothing like those I experience when watching my nation play in that stadium—a cauldron of noise and song—with 75,000 other rugby fans.

The subject of the debate today is the economy. In Cardiff Central, people have not felt an economic recovery. Many experience a recovery that is fragile because it is built on low-paid, insecure work. Many of my constituents work in the retail, care and hospitality sectors where insecure employment, zero-hours contracts and minimum wage work is the norm.

In order to build a strong economic recovery and to increase productivity, the answer does not lie in further weakening employment rights and protections. It certainly does not lie in exiting the European Union, a move that would threaten jobs, businesses and cutting-edge research in our universities. Indeed, it threatens the existence of many universities in Cardiff Central and beyond. The answer lies in making employment more secure, in boosting wages and productivity and in giving businesses and workers more certainty about their futures—and that includes a future in the European Union, so that they feel confident in investing, spending and job creation. That is best done in partnership with trade unions and their members across the UK. It is what responsible and successful businesses do, and it is what a responsible Government should do and promote, as the Labour Government in Wales have done.

Throughout the election, I campaigned on the need to tackle inequality head on—wealth inequality, social inequality and tax inequality. I will continue that campaign and be a strong voice for all the people of Cardiff Central. I look forward to working with colleagues here.

3.52 pm

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): Congratulations, Madam Deputy Speaker. As is already clear, you will find a warm welcome from all sides of the House because we know you as a champion of us Back Benchers, and we trust you.

It is a pleasure to follow so many outstanding maiden speeches. Constituents across the country will be proud to see their choices vindicated today. Those speeches take me back to my first days as an MP when I was elected in 2010. Hundreds of thousands of people had lost their jobs and for many more the prospect of home ownership was a distant dream. Others struggled to make ends meet. Our first duty in coalition was to restore fiscal responsibility to our public finances, offering this country the economic security that underpins all

other policy decisions. There is nothing compassionate about paying more in debt interest than could be afforded on education. It is right to finish the job now. Once we have balanced the books, we can target investment and create the climate for all parts of the UK to realise their full potential.

Already, employment is at a record high and rising. In my constituency, youth unemployment has fallen by over 76%, but it is no good creating all these jobs if we do not offer the education and skills for local people to benefit. It is no good funding millions of apprenticeships and university places if we are not going to address skills shortages we face in engineering, nursing, construction and social care. I hope that the full employment and welfare benefits Bill reporting duties will not just be headline employment and apprenticeships figures, but that they will review progress broken down by sector and set against skills demand. That is the only way in which we will deliver the sophisticated skills strategy we need.

Oxfordshire, for example, is among the top five innovation ecosystems in the world. We have more than 1,500 high-tech firms, from start-ups to global company headquarters. We are world leaders in life sciences, big physics and space, and we employ more than 43,000 people. Not only has Oxford produced more than 50 Nobel laureates, but we are leaders in UK tech transfer. Between 2010 and 2012, Oxford university generated more spin-outs than any other UK university. State-of-the-art facilities such as the Diamond synchrotron and the Culham Centre for Fusion Energy, and access to our hyper-skilled labour pool, make us disproportionately attractive to tech industry.

Even in Oxford, however, businesses struggle with the skills shortage, housing costs, and digital and physical infrastructure, and those are the constraints that we must overcome. The Chancellor has rightly zeroed in on weak productivity, but the British scientific community is the most productive in the world. With just over 3% of the world's research and development spending, we produce more than 6% of the world's publications and 16% of its most cited papers. Our researchers translate funding into great science more effectively than anyone else. Yet despite recent increases, we still lag behind our international competitors in R and D investment, ranking only 12th in the EU.

Commercialisation is another issue. Despite Innovate UK's excellent reputation, tech firms outside London speak of a chronic shortage of early-stage investment capital, and a mismatch between longer lead-in times—especially for biotech—and the impatience of capital investors. Incentives for individual investors de-risk investments, and we have a growing angel network in Oxford, but there are no breakthrough, throwing-down-the-gauntlet-to-Silicon-Valley solutions. I hope that the Treasury will explore incentives for pension funds and insurance companies—those with long-term perspectives—to invest directly in tech firms. Globalisation means that a single disruptive technology can create a worldwide paradigm shift in what seems like an instant: think Uber and taxis, Netflix and DVDs. Our STEM ecosystem needs to be the most agile and responsive in the world.

In five years of representing what I consider to be the vertex of our golden triangle, I have learnt a few things: for instance, that one should always go to a surgery

prepared for an impromptu tutorial on wave particle duality and that we need to develop a policy for our STEM ecosystem as a coherent whole. We have come closest to that with our growth deals, which is why we in Oxford are particularly excited about the genuinely transformative possibilities of the cities and local government devolution Bill. We feel that if Cambridge has been granted devolved powers to retain business rates, we should have those powers too.

It would be deeply disappointing if, in his efforts to rebalance the economy, the Chancellor overlooked counties which already power the economy, but still have much more to give. The exam question should be not “Are you doing OK?”, but “How much better could you be doing?” Just as the education Bill will tackle both failing and coasting schools, this Government programme should aim to unlock the full potential of every local economy and community in Great Britain.

3.57 pm

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate you on your election, Madam Deputy Speaker. You and I have known each other for many years, and it is, to say the least, a pleasure to serve under your stewardship.

A number of Members have quoted Disraeli in the context of “one nation”, but Disraeli had something else to say. He said that if the Tory party was nothing else, it was “organised hypocrisy”. We did not hear that quotation today.

When the Chancellor opened the debate, he did not explain to us where exactly the Government would make the £12 billion of welfare cuts. I think that they owe us an answer to that question, and I hope that we shall hear one from whoever winds up the debate. They are also going to try to make tax cuts amounting to £7 billion. We are all for tax cuts, but the needy should not suffer as a result.

Someone said earlier that one of the growing industries in this country was the food bank industry, and there is a lot of truth in that. I was amazed to discover recently that some 18,000 people in Coventry are using food banks. Moreover, many people are on low and, it might be argued, poverty wages, and rely on benefits. That is quite an indictment, quite apart from what was said in the last Parliament about zero-hours contracts. That is another scandal. Those contracts might suit some people but they do not suit the majority of people who want to own their own homes. This Government talk about a property-owning democracy, but what chance do those people have of getting on to the housing ladder when they cannot get a mortgage because they are earning poverty wages on zero-hours contracts? That is another thing that this Government should answer for.

We have rehearsed the argument many times about who was responsible for the deficit. The thinking public, and the world at large, know that the economic crisis started in America with Lehman Brothers. Someone mentioned Lehman Brothers earlier, so I shall not rehearse that argument further. It has also been claimed that the manufacturing recovery in the west midlands somehow just happened under this Government. I sometimes wonder about this Government, when they say that all the bad things happened under Labour and the good things happened under them. It sounds like Pol Pot,

[Mr Jim Cunningham]

35 years ago in Cambodia. He claimed that all the bad things happened before his time, and all the good things happened when he came to power. We all know what Pol Pot was like, and where he ended up.

When we talk about the economic recovery and about Coventry, we must remember that the buy-out involving Tata and Jaguar Land Rover took place before this Government came to power. Let us be quite clear about that when we remember the jobs that were created as a result. Similarly, Advantage West Midlands created the infrastructure for Ansty Park, but Ministers are now rushing up to Ansty Park because a lot of industries are relocating there. The latest to do so is the London Taxi Company.

Local government has also been involved in the experimental stages. Let us remember that a previous Conservative Government abolished the rating system and introduced the poll tax. They also introduced metropolitan authorities, but the next Conservative Government came into power and abolished them. Local authority leaders, certainly in the west midlands, have been involved in negotiations with the Chancellor to create a greater authority in the west midlands with an elected mayor. Most people in the west midlands would object to having an elected mayor. I am not involved in the negotiations with the Chancellor, but he seems to be claiming that he got a mandate in the general election to make those changes. I for one will be watching the situation very carefully.

It is very important that Coventry does not lose its identity, although we would obviously co-operate in an economic sense if that were beneficial to the city. I suspect, however, that this is a smokescreen for further local government cuts and that when things do not work out, local government will be blamed again. The Government are not taking democracy back to local government; they are taking it away, just as they did in the past when they created metropolitan councils. I know that a lot of people want to speak in the debate; they have been here all day and I am nearly at the end of my allotted time.

4.3 pm

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Madam Deputy Speaker—congratulations, and thank you for allowing me to make my maiden speech during this important debate on the economy. It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham), and I also congratulate all the previous speakers who have made their maiden speeches today. They have set the bar very high for the rest of us who are following them. Thank you for that!

I should like to begin by paying tribute to my predecessor in Mid Worcestershire, Sir Peter Luff. Peter was first elected to this place in 1992 as the MP for Worcester, following in the footsteps of another highly respected Member, Peter Walker. Peter Luff was a Whip and a former Chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee and the Agriculture Select Committee. He was also, of course, a Defence Minister in the last Government. Peter leaves a great legacy in Worcestershire. He fought for significant improvements to local infrastructure, including the new Worcestershire Parkway

station which will open in 2017. He also worked hard to preserve and restore local heritage assets such as Hartlebury Castle, the Droitwich canals and the Regal Cinema. I will try to serve the kind and generous constituents of Mid Worcestershire as well as Peter did.

I am fortunate to represent one of the most idyllic constituencies in the country. A drive through Mid Worcestershire is a wonderful experience, starting from Broadway—the gateway to the Cotswolds—in the south, and heading through the gently undulating landscape of the Vale of Evesham, past fields of asparagus, plum and apple orchards, and greenhouses full of fragrant and beautiful flowers. One continues north, passing the Worcester Warriors rugby stadium, towards the historic town of Droitwich Spa and on to Ombersley and Hartlebury in the north. On the journey one will pass through many quintessentially English villages with splendid names, such as Upton Snodsbury, Flyford Flavell and my children's favourite—Wyre Piddle. I am proud of the links between my constituency and this place via Simon de Montfort of de Montfort Parliament fame. In August this year we will commemorate the 750th anniversary of the battle of Evesham, where Simon de Montfort was killed.

The experiences of the past few weeks have taught us all in this place that there is no such thing as a safe seat in modern British politics, but Mid Worcestershire is about as true blue Tory as one can get, having returned a Conservative Member at every election since 1837, apart from once, in 1880, when a Liberal was returned as the MP for Evesham by two votes. As this result was transparently an error, a petition was lodged, the result was voided and a Conservative was returned instead. I like the precedent.

As I have spent the past several years working for one of the leading technology companies in the world, it will be no surprise that in this place I wish to be an advocate for technology and the digital sector, despite the fact that I am reading from a piece of paper. Ignore that for the moment. The UK's digital economy is vital. It employs more than 1.5 million people and is growing at double the rate of GDP. We can be proud that the UK is one of the most advanced digital economies in the world, and I know that this Government are committed to making sure it continues to be so.

The other sector I wish to champion in this place is travel and tourism—again, one of the fastest growing sectors of the British economy. Since 2010 one in three of all new jobs has been in the travel and hospitality space, and tourism overall contributes more than £127 billion—a staggering sum—to the UK economy and employs more than 3 million UK people, including many in my constituency.

Finally, we all know that we can have good public services only if we have a strong economy that generates the taxes to pay for them. That is why it is vital that we continue to support business and job creation, thereby supporting workers and their families. That is what I am here to do. That is what this Queen's Speech and this Government will deliver.

4.7 pm

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Many congratulations, Madam Deputy Speaker, from the Scottish Benches on your election.

In February 1974, I first stood for this Parliament. It has been a rather long campaign but here I am, representing that wonderful constituency, Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath. In the 2010 election former Prime Minister Gordon Brown had a majority of 23,000. I stand here today with a majority of some 10,000, an indication surely of a desire for change not just in my constituency, but mirrored the length and breadth of Scotland.

It is fitting on these occasions to recognise the work of the previous Member of Parliament. Gordon Brown was a giant in Labour party politics and in British politics. He went on to become Chancellor of the Exchequer and then Prime Minister—a very distinguished career to which I pay tribute. There were many issues where we disagreed, but I am sure the whole House will follow me in wishing him the very best for his future. I particularly look forward to the work he intends doing internationally among the poorest countries in the world to bring education to the most disadvantaged.

Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath is a constituency of many parts. Some of our communities, including Cowdenbeath, Lochgelly, Kelty, Lochore, Ballingry, Crosshill and the delightful Lumphinnans were hewn out of the very mines of the Scottish coalfields. That mining industry may have gone, but the strength of the community built by those miners is still there, although for the past 30 years or more they have been suffering from political and economic neglect such that I will have to do my best to address it.

In other parts of the constituency, people can meander down the coast from Dysart, through Kirkcaldy, Kinghorn and Aberdour, to the more modern Dalgety Bay, and gaze across the River Forth to Edinburgh. That coastal stretch was a favourite of Adam Smith, that much misquoted father of economics. He would often walk that way and contemplate the great philosophical questions of the day. As he did so, he would look at the impressive European trading ships that sailed up and down the Forth, providing that strong economic and social link to the many great nations of the continent. Standing on the shores of Scotland he saw the importance of international trade and of a European outlook. His perspective then, in the 18th century, challenges us all today to be just as outward looking and imaginative as he was in his time.

Adam Smith knew, too, that there is no centre of internationalism. It is something to be sought in the minds and deeds of people; whether you live in a great city of a great land or in a small seaside town on the northern shores of Scotland, you can be international. He knew, too, of problems, and as I look across at the Government Benches, I see many problems. If I were to point out just one thing where I share the view of Adam Smith, it would be that he could see readily that when looking at people with power and riches, you see that they are no protections against small-mindedness.

Turning to other matters, I was very impressed by the recent OECD report outlining the fact that excessive inequality is bad for growth. To talk of inequality is not to engage in the politics of envy. Rather, it is to engage in a debate about economic failure and missed opportunities. Let me finish with a quote from Adam Smith:

“No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable.”

4.12 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Congratulations on your election, Madam Deputy Speaker. In speaking to the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin) as one of the “problems” from the other side of the House, I congratulate him on a fine opening speech.

I stand before you today not as someone who has long pursued a career in politics, but as someone who was inspired many years ago to make the most of their life. My parents were decent, hard-working people who worked every hour God sent to build something for themselves and, more importantly, for their children. They talked to me not only about making your own way, but about helping people along the way.

The keener observers among you will notice that I am a little older than some of my young, vibrant colleagues, but 23 years building a business is responsible for that. I am older but certainly no wiser; my colleagues are of a very high calibre. They have also come from a very diverse range of backgrounds, careers and experiences, and that strikes at the very heart of the myth that the Conservative party is a party of privilege.

I wish to pay tribute to my predecessor, Anne McIntosh, who worked so hard and was a great champion of the farming industry. She did an excellent job as the Chair of the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. She was a strong voice, and a willing and active participant in this Chamber.

It is, of course, a huge honour to represent Thirsk and Malton, a place where I have lived all my life. It is a place of distinct and stunning scenery, from Filey, with its immaculate gardens and broad, smooth beaches to picture-postcard villages and market towns such as Malton, racing's northern home and Yorkshire's food capital. It has Thirsk, the real-life home of James Herriot and the birthplace of Thomas Lord, who set up Lord's cricket club and the MCC; Pickering, the gateway to the heather-scented North York Moors; and Easingwold, my home town, the place I was brought up. In short, it is God's own county, and the true and original country of the white rose.

We are all here to represent our constituencies and to get the best deal, but in my experience we cannot win if the other side loses: it only breeds resentment, division and future conflict. I come to this House wanting a fair deal for our farmers, our businesses, our councils, our schools and our hospitals. I also want to help to build a fairer society and a fairer deal for the north and, in particular, for North Yorkshire. The vibrancy of our economy is critical. Never forget that everything here is provided by business people who go out and take risks, work twice the hours for half the money and put their life savings on the line. More often than not, they will never see them again.

Ronald Reagan once said that virtually all our economic growth is achieved by entrepreneurs and their small businesses. I have heard a lot of talk about productivity in this Chamber over the past couple of weeks and the way to increase productivity is to increase competition. We must make it easier and more rewarding to start a business and invest, and we do not help the poor by destroying the rich.

As our economy grows, the benefits should be felt by everyone. Over time, I believe that we should work with business and work towards introducing a living wage so

[Kevin Hollinrake]

that everybody gets a decent standard of living. I welcome the Government's drive to cut red tape. Governments should do less, not more, but must keep stable conditions in our economy. I also welcome the Government's programme of investment in our railways and in our roads. I would certainly welcome investment in the A64 in our neck of the woods. It is a huge bottleneck and an accident blackspot.

If the price of devolution to North Yorkshire is a metro mayor, I will pay that price. One of the most important things we need is rural broadband and better mobile phone coverage. We heard talk about 4G and 5G, but where I live 1G is the result and that leaves many businesses at a disadvantage. Local businesses compete locally but also nationally and internationally and we need to give them a level playing field.

It is in honour to be in this place. I will work tirelessly and to the best of my ability and always on behalf of the people who put me in this place.

4.18 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to make my maiden speech. I, too, congratulate you on your re-election.

It is a great pleasure to speak after so many distinguished colleagues who have done their constituents proud in this debate. I am incredibly proud to be the youngest Labour MP serving in the House of Commons. It is often claimed that young people are apathetic or disengaged, but the young people I campaigned with and for in this election were far from apathetic. They were angry and felt let down because they thought that they did not have a voice. Young people have been under-represented in this Chamber for too long, but it is clear that that is changing on both sides of the House. It is a great honour to be part of the most diverse Parliament ever.

As the fourth Labour Member to represent Sheffield Heeley, it is also a great privilege to succeed Meg Munn, who served in this House for 14 years. She was renowned for her assiduous promotion of women's issues, particularly in the science, technology, engineering and maths industries, and for building on her extensive experience as a social worker before entering this House to highlight child protection issues and improved rights for young carers. These are her very proud legacy.

Like Meg, I was born and raised in Sheffield, the very heart of God's own county, a city renowned for its industrial heritage and now the greenest city in the UK, with more trees per person than any other city in Europe.

My constituency boasts a number of beautiful parklands, from Graves Park past Heeley City Farm and Heeley development trust to Richmond and Norfolk parks, all of which not only provide precious and much-loved green space but are important community hubs, providing childcare and family activities as well as adult education and training opportunities.

Colleagues may know that, like Rome, Sheffield is built on seven hills, which means that areas of my constituency command spectacular views of the rest of Sheffield and the surrounding Peak district. However, it also means that the inequality that scars our great city

can be viewed in sharp relief. Young people who live at the top of hills in Gleadless Valley and Arbourthorne can look down on the two world-leading universities that we host—universities that they have been priced out of. They can look down on the dwindling industrial bases that their parents and grandparents would have been proud to work in, but which no longer create the jobs they desperately need. And they can look across to the west of Sheffield, where a baby girl can expect to live almost 10 years longer than another born and living her life about four miles away, by virtue of nothing more than her socioeconomic circumstances and the area she was born into. Our duty to our constituents is one that we share in all parts of the House, and the inequality that scars Sheffield, like so much of our nation, is something that I know we will all aspire to eradicate.

Before I entered this place, I worked in the City of London, and that experience motivated me to run for Parliament. I know from my time there that it makes a valuable contribution to our economy, but I also know that the culture and attitudes inherent there have been unaffected by the events of the last eight years. The culture of excessive pay, short-termism and cavalier risk-taking was demonstrated only last week with yet another case of LIBOR fixing. While our constituents remain worse off as a continued result of the financial crisis, again I know that this is something we will all aspire to solve.

It was disappointing, therefore, to hear very little in the Gracious Address on how we can reform the financial system. Given that the consequences of the weak recovery will be familiar to all of us—low wages, poor productivity and insecure work—it is incumbent on us all to address the reasons why our financial system is not providing the long-term investment that we need in cities like Sheffield. Being literally the greenest city in the UK is not enough; this must be at the heart of our industrial strategy and economic policy. If we are to secure a sustainable economy that delivers benefits for all, we must transform the way our economy works, incentivising investment in green, productive industries and penalising those short-term industries and practices that have done our economy and society such harm.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, we in Sheffield Heeley have waited too long for change. My predecessor's predecessor, Bill Michie, in his maiden speech in 1983—four years before I was born—spoke about the plight of the long-term unemployed, the young people out of work, the educational inequalities and the lack of investment in my constituency. Those problems pervade to this day. Change for the very vulnerable, the low paid and all working people is long overdue and we face a very clear choice in this Parliament—to continue down the same economic path that has entrenched inequality and embedded vested interests or to stand for a system that will protect the vulnerable, reward working people and create a fairer society so that my successor does not have to repeat the same tired list of issues in another generation's time.

4.23 pm

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called to speak in this final day of the debate on the Gracious Speech, but that pleasure is increased by the fact that I represent the constituency of North

Dorset, which is probably—I will not give way to anyone on this point—the most beautiful constituency, certainly in England. At its heart is Blackmore Vale, made famous in the writings of Thomas Hardy. The village of Marnhull, where my children attend school, is very much the centre of the story of “Tess of the d’Urbervilles”. Who will ever forget the great scene in which Tess sees Angel Clare country dancing on the village green? I note that there is no all-party parliamentary group for country dancing. The House will be pleased to know that I am not proposing that we set one up.

The constituency of North Dorset has been represented by some colourful characters over the years, including a polar explorer, a former chairman of Crufts—the dog show, I presume—and a Loch Ness researcher. I do not know whether he ever found the Loch Ness monster, but I say to Scottish National party Members that that is not an invitation to field a candidate at the next general election.

This is an important debate, and one in which my predecessor, Robert Walter, took great interest. Robert served North Dorset for 18 years, filling a number of roles in this House. Probably more importantly, his commitment to democracy and his desire to see the eastern bloc and Europe flourish took him into the realms of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, where he did a huge amount of very good work over the years. We wish him well in his next turn of career.

That said, Robert never neglected his constituency. I lost track of the number of people who told me on the doorstep while I was canvassing for the election that they would always vote Conservative because of what Mr Walter did 10 or 15 years ago. Those are big shoes to fill, and it is a legacy I hope to continue. We wish him and his wife Feride well. While on the subject of Feride, I note that Robert, a man who liked to do things for the first time, was the first Member of this House to have a Muslim wedding service here in the Palace of Westminster.

The economy of North Dorset is growing and our employment rates are going up, but there is still fragility there. A number of hon. Friends have already referred to some of the challenges that hold back what in my constituency are not small to medium-sized businesses, but micro to small businesses. We do not have particularly good coverage for mobile phone signals, or indeed for broadband, as referenced by my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake). Those are things that I campaigned on during the general election, and on which I will be pressing Ministers in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and other Departments in order to deliver those opportunities for local businesses to grow.

The constituency wants to do well and to see investment, and I am going to be a champion for that. Like many other quarters of the country, we need investment in our road infrastructure. I refer, in particular, to the A350 and the C13. When I was selected as the Conservative candidate, a lady asked me whether I would be joining the 1933 group. I replied, “I think we all join the 1922 committee,” assuming that she was just a little confused about the antiquities of the Conservative parliamentary party. She was, in fact, referring to the local action group set up in 1933 to campaign for the Melbury Abbas bypass. It may well be that in my time in this House we are able to deliver it.

The Gracious Speech put at the heart of the Government’s programme a commitment to growth and to entrepreneurialism, and that is something I want to champion during the years I am here. The people of Dorset are welcoming and they want the constituency to do well. I invite Members of the House to visit Hardy country. Tourism and agriculture in the area are growing. Indeed, the agricultural economy is probably the largest in the constituency. I will be looking to Front-Bench colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to ensure that we are doing all we can to combat such challenges as bovine TB and ensure stability in the dairy sector. There is a lot to do, and I have the honour to play a part in helping North Dorset thrive. I look forward to it.

4.28 pm

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I congratulate you on your re-election, Madam Deputy Speaker, and your colleagues. I also congratulate all those Members on both sides of the House who made their maiden speeches today. I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on the Queen’s Speech, which focuses on the future and, in particular, the economy.

Given the grand claims we have heard from the Government, both before the general election and since, about a long-term economic plan that is working, one would be forgiven for thinking that the UK was in the midst of some kind of economic miracle. The truth, however, is that we are not experiencing any kind of economic miracle and that the recovery, such as it is, remains fragile. We still have record debt, notwithstanding the fact that the Chancellor announced today that Departments will be expected to make further savings through asset sales and that the Government are to sell off their stake in Royal Mail, which I regret and which will have an impact on the delivery of postal services to people across the UK.

We still have that record debt, which despite years of austerity is still rising, and there has not been sufficient growth to improve the fundamental economic ratios. The Government point to their record on job creation, which looks superficially impressive. Record numbers of people are at work, but in fact many of the new jobs are insecure and low paid and many people are doing more work, simply running to stand still. Those people are not feeling better off because they are not becoming better off. The new jobs are not driving economic growth or strengthening the economy because they are low value added and low productivity. Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of England, has recently highlighted the fundamental importance of raising productivity and diplomatically reminded us of the real Government failure in this area of economic policy.

The productivity failure is symptomatic of the wider failure to use more imaginatively the economic levers available to Governments. Instead of focusing on austerity and cuts, the Government could do more to stimulate economic activity in sectors that can yield an immediate contribution to growth and prosperity. The necessary stimulus can come from greater fiscal creativity and the smarter application of taxation. One such area is the labour-intensive industry of tourism. I firmly believe that the Chancellor and his Front-Bench Treasury team should give longer and deeper consideration to lowering VAT on tourism for all the UK.

[Ms Margaret Ritchie]

Tourism is the principal economic driver in my constituency. Only last week, we hosted the Irish Open, which attracted 20,000 visitors each day. They came not only to witness our great golfers from the island of Ireland, Britain and elsewhere, including the guy from Denmark who won, but to get outside and sample our local hospitality—our restaurants, eateries and the rest of our tourism offering. But if tourism is to be more successful, the Government need to lower VAT. Northern Ireland—my constituency in particular—has a land border with the south of Ireland, whose VAT rate has been 9% for years, notwithstanding its austerity measures. Our VAT is 20%. It has become increasingly difficult to be competitive in such a world. I ask the Government and hon. Members to give the issue due consideration because fiscal flexibility will help achieve better economic prosperity for difficult regions.

4.33 pm

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): It is a pleasure to deliver my maiden speech following such distinguished contributions, including from the hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie), and to have such an illustrious predecessor in representing my seat, which is such a beautiful part of the country. First elected to represent Loughborough in 1979 and becoming the right hon. Member for Charnwood in 1997, following the seat's creation, Stephen Dorrell served for an astonishing 36 years in this House. Upon his election, he was the baby of the House, often described as “permanently boyish”—a trait that, as hon. Members will see, eluded my grasp, I fear, many years ago. Stephen served in a string of offices, from the Whips Office to the Cabinet. His commitment to serving his constituents was formidable and the respect in which he is held locally never ceased to be apparent to me as I campaigned.

But the man is so much more than a list of the offices that he held. He was once described in *The Guardian* as “exuding sweet reasonableness and being recognisably a member of the human race.”

He combined this with intellectual rigour, diligence and genuine decency. While I may not be able to emulate his length of service or swift progression through ministerial ranks, I will continually strive to emulate his values, humanity and hard work.

Although a relatively new seat, Charnwood is in the ancient heart of our great country, sandwiched between Leicester and Loughborough. It also, in its short history, has a strong tradition of re-electing its Member—something I hope will continue. It is a mixed, beautiful but oddly shaped constituency, curving around Leicester from Glenfield and Leicester Forest East in the west in a large arc to the rural villages of Barkby, Beeby and South Croxton in the east, taking in historic Kirby Muxloe with its castle, through Groby and Anstey—reputedly the furthest point south reached by Bonnie Prince Charlie's Scottish army before its swift retreat back north—and picture-book rural villages like Woodhouse Eaves, then passing Bradgate park, containing the ruins of Lady Jane Grey's family estate and the ancient Charnwood forest.

Heading east, we pass through Cropston, Swithland, Rothley and Mountsorrel, with Thurmaston and Birstall to the south, before reaching Syston, the home of Pukka Pies. I fear that my post-election figure suggests

that I have taken my support of local industry a little bit too far. Finally we reach Queniborough, East Goscote and the rural idyll typified by villages such as Cossington, Seagrave, Thrussington, Rearsby and Barkby, where, with the summer approaching and the nights getting shorter—not, I hasten to add, a reference to my constituency neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan)—many a sunny evening can be spent at the excellent Barkby United village cricket ground.

In the past five years the Chancellor has already laid the strong economic foundations for creating the one nation we all aspire to. Now, with the proposals in the Gracious Speech, we will make that a reality for everyone in this country. I look forward to being in my place to support him in doing this.

Charnwood is a success story and it has achieved much since 2010. It is a constituency blessed with extremely high ownership rates, low unemployment and successful businesses, although there is always more to do. That success does not just happen—that it happens is down to the hard work of the people of Charnwood, the sort of people who are the backbone of this country, working hard, doing the right thing, and building a better future for themselves and their family. They are exactly the people this Government are pledged to continue to support with our focus on opportunity and aspiration.

I will always fight for my constituents and constituency—for example, in continuing to campaign for fairer funding for my county of Leicestershire and for its schools—but there are a number of broader causes that I will particularly seek to champion in this House. While we have made significant progress in recent years, we still need to go further in vigorously and energetically focusing on improving dementia care and mental health provision; both are causes on which I will be vocal. I will not, I fear, be able to emulate the moving eloquence of my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) on this subject, but he will always find me shoulder to shoulder with him in his commitment to improving this country's mental health care for children and adults and giving a voice to those whose cause is too often not heard.

I am here to represent the whole community in my constituency but particularly those on the fringes of our society who may not have the voice or ability to speak up for themselves. Every day I will strive to help build the one nation the Prime Minister has spoken about and in which I passionately believe, and every day I will humbly endeavour to repay the honour and trust that the people of Charnwood have placed in me.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): I am sorry that it has not been possible to find time today for every new colleague who sought to make their maiden speech. I hope you will all be reassured by the thought that if you have sat here all day partaking in this excellent and important debate, should you seek to catch Mr Speaker's eye again in the near future you will be looked on favourably.

4.39 pm

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Thank you and congratulations, Madam Deputy Speaker. As you have said, we have had a good debate, which has demonstrated

the seriousness and commitment with which we are ready to take up our duties as Opposition Members.

It has been widely acknowledged in this debate that my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), the former leader of our party, made a fine and powerful contribution. It was especially welcome for being so soon after our bruising election defeat. He addressed the topic of one nation, which was the theme of his leadership as well, drawing attention to the problem of rising inequality across western democracies. He spoke of the rungs of the ladder getting further apart and reminded the Prime Minister of his 2006 commitment to address relative poverty. I think the whole House will look forward to my right hon. Friend developing those ideas in the months ahead.

We have had valuable contributions from both sides of the House. I particularly congratulate everyone who has made their maiden speech today, including the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), the hon. and learned Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), the hon. Members for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens), for Horsham (Jeremy Quin) and for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling), my hon. Friends the Members for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook) and for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens), the hon. Members for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston), for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin) and for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) and the hon. Members for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) and for Charnwood (Edward Argar). I congratulate each of them and wish them well for their membership of this House. The whole House will look forward to hearing more from each of them in the years ahead.

At the heart of this debate is the security of working families. Many families feel deeply insecure at the moment, in ways spelled out in a fine maiden speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich. How is the programme that has been announced going to affect them? We have yet to hear clear answers from the Government on how they plan to strengthen the foundations of our economy so that we can deal with the deficit, control social security costs and secure better living standards and a better future for the working people of Britain.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Chris Leslie) began by highlighting the fragility of our economic recovery. Productivity continues to stagnate, leaving output per worker far behind that of comparable advanced economies—a point that was highlighted by the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie).

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) was right to point out that employers are struggling to find people with the right skills for their jobs. Many employees have roles that do not make full use of their talents and potential, and we have heard a great deal in the debate about the grave challenges relating to infrastructure and the need for more progress. Those underlying weaknesses will make it harder to get the public finances in order and to get social security spending under control.

Fragility in the economy translates into insecurity for working families, who have seen their living standards go backwards over recent years and still worry about whether they will be able to keep on top of their bills. Working families are struggling to balance the demands of work with the rising cost of childcare. They wonder

whether the NHS will still be there for them when they need it in future and want their children to have a decent career and a realistic prospect of getting on the housing ladder. Too many at the moment are stuck in low-paid, insecure work and a growing number are depending on housing benefit to make ends meet. Those families all want to know what difference the measures in this Queen's Speech will make to them.

There are welcome commitments in some areas, but questions remain about how some of them will be paid for. It is, however, what has been left out that gives the greatest cause for concern—actions not taken, details not provided—and makes many families less secure and fear for the future.

We all support any cut in taxes for low-paid workers, but we also need a serious plan to tackle low pay and boost wages for the majority by raising investment, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central pointed out in her excellent speech. The hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton also rightly called for the adoption of a living wage in the UK. We need to raise the levels of skills and productivity across the economy, securing sustainable tax revenues and reducing the reliance on in-work benefits.

It was disappointing to have sprung on the House this afternoon, without any proper detail or explanation, a series of spending cuts in the Chancellor's speech. There is a press release that outlines what they are, but there is no proper information. We should have had a statement so that the House could scrutinise the cuts. They include a significant cut to the skills budget.

We will welcome any help for working parents with childcare, but families can be forgiven for believing it when they see it, after five years in which it has become harder, not easier, to afford the childcare they need. There is a worry that the proposals in the Queen's Speech are likely to result in fewer affordable homes and bigger housing benefit bills for taxpayers.

Britain succeeds only when working people succeed. Hard work should be rewarded, prosperity should be shared and we should protect the most vulnerable. Those elements, which are vital for our society, need to be underpinned by a strong social security net. The Opposition support the work that local authorities are doing under the Government's troubled families programme, but we are aware that a majority of the families involved still have nobody in work and that the Work programme is not doing enough to help them. We will be glad to see additional money for apprenticeships.

We have made clear our support for the principle of a benefit cap to ensure that people are better off in work and for reforms to ensure that young people are earning or learning, and do not become caught in a benefits system that at the moment does too little to improve their skills and prospects. We will scrutinise—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I hesitate to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman. There is no heckling or bad behaviour going on, but there are an awful lot of private conversations. He has a difficult job to do and he should be given peace in which to do it.

Stephen Timms: We will scrutinise those proposals with great care. The well-meaning rhetoric on apprenticeships needs to be matched by action on the

[Stephen Timms]

quality, as well as the quantity, of the apprenticeships that are being created. When the rules are changed on benefits for 18 to 21-year-olds, we will look carefully at the safeguards for the vulnerable young people who will be included. We need to ensure that reducing the benefit cap does not end up costing more than it saves.

Those measures amount to only a fraction of the £12 billion reduction in social security spending that the Government promised. We want to see savings where they can sensibly be made. We have argued consistently for keeping the system affordable. We have said that that requires a readiness to take tough decisions on low-priority spending, alongside action to tackle the underlying drivers of rising benefit bills, such as low pay and high housing costs. The unwillingness or inability of Ministers to explain to this House or the public how they intend to make the reductions that they have set out is adding to the insecurity that is felt by many working families today.

There will be widespread relief that the Prime Minister has, reportedly, overruled the Secretary of State on child benefit. However, working families need to know whether the tax credits and other in-work benefits that they depend on will be taken away. The Prime Minister yesterday declined my invitation to reaffirm his election campaign commitment that benefits for disabled people are safe. The Institute for Fiscal Studies says that it will be virtually impossible to achieve a £12 billion saving without hitting low-income working families hard.

When he gets to his feet, the Secretary of State needs to assure those who are clearly not well enough to work that support for disabled people and their carers will be protected. Government failures in that area—the failure of the rushed and ill-prepared incapacity benefit reassessment exercise and the failures of the Work programme for people in receipt of employment and support allowance—mean that the Government are spending nearly £5 billion more this year on employment and support allowance than they forecast five years ago. That is a serious failure.

We heard a Queen's Speech five years ago that promised "to simplify the benefits system in order to improve work incentives". That was a worthy aim, but there has been very little progress since then. My hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) touched on the problems with the IT for universal credit. In 2011, the Secretary of State told us that universal credit would be complete in six years; now he is telling us that it will be complete in another six years. In four years, completion has slipped by four years.

The Opposition will continue to stand up and speak for the working people of this country, who have endured years of falling living standards and economic uncertainty. They now need assurances and action from the Government to promote their security and to secure their finances and the public services that they rely on, and on which all our futures will depend.

4.50 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith): May I start by congratulating you on returning to your position, Madam Deputy Speaker?

It is a pleasure to conclude this debate on the Gracious Speech. I am conscious of the fact that we do not have a huge amount of time, but I want to congratulate right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House on their contributions, particularly those who have made maiden speeches. I will come back in a little more detail to those speeches and to a few comments that the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) made. I think I have a few tips for him.

We are elected and in power now, although I remind my colleagues that a month ago pollsters said otherwise. As my right hon. Friend the First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his excellent speech, we defied expectation and were elected to govern with a majority Government, and we intend to govern accordingly. We were elected to continue with our long-term economic plan and our welfare reforms, which have seen employment rates at record highs, the number in the main out-of-work benefits down by 1 million since 2010 and workless household rates at record lows. We will also carry on our work on repairing the economy, reducing the deficit and creating jobs. That is our purpose, and we will stick to it.

I will pick up on some of the speeches that have been made, as is normal for a Member winding up a debate. I start with the right hon. Member for Doncaster North. I feel like I am the only one in the House who understands where he is. As he knows, and as I mentioned earlier, I won some money on him when he became the leader of the Labour party—I put a bet on him two years out. I never felt that I was wrong. Whatever else the British public and others may have decided, I have always felt, and I have told him this, that he is a decent man who is highly intelligent and motivated to serve the British people and his constituents. His speech today showed the best of him. In the leadership election campaign, there will be collective amnesia among some of his closest colleagues about who was in the room when policy decisions were made. He may feel now like he was the only man in the room, but that short-term memory loss will not last. His colleagues' short-term memory does not mean that he should have anything less than a long-term political career. I sense that the best is yet to be.

There were a number of really good maiden speeches from Government Members. I will try to go through as many as I possibly can. I commend the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), who took well to his task of recommending his constituency. He made an incredibly fluent speech, and even though he strayed back to 1066 to draw upon his predecessors, he made powerful comments about getting the economy right, and always doing it with social justice. I recommend that he stays with that idea.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer) made a really interesting speech. I think she upset some Scottish National party Members when she referred to her predecessor but many, one Oliver Cromwell, who, she said, had found a solution to the West Lothian question that we might not necessarily wish to pursue today. [Interruption.] And the Irish problem, although some may say that he made it worse.

My hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin) spoke movingly about his predecessor. Our friend, Francis Maude, served diligently. He was always reminded

that he was the one who signed the Maastricht treaty—everybody else apparently had a medical appointment on that particular day. My hon. Friend will go far.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) showed her business prowess. She brings that very welcome experience to this House. As she represents Cannock Chase, I will offer her one little bit of advice: she should make sure she does not wear any fancy dress, as this does not help one's prospects.

My hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Marcus Fysh) made an excellent speech in which he talked about transport infrastructure and quoted T.S. Eliot on humility. It was a very powerful speech. I recommend it, for those who want to read it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) paid a powerful tribute to our old friend Peter Luff. He talked about the virtues of service, which he intends to follow.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) paid a strong tribute to Anne McIntosh, who served both in the European Parliament and here in the House of Commons with great distinction. Many of us who are her friends feel that she has yet still more to do. His business experience is most needed in this House. No matter what his age is—I have to say he looks pretty young to me—he will go far with that experience and he should use it.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) spoke movingly about his constituency and recommended that everyone tour there. His speech got a bit complicated when he started asking about wanting to set up all-party groups on country dancing à la Thomas Hardy. I will leave that to him if he does not mind, but he spoke very well indeed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) finished off by paying tribute to his predecessor, Stephen Dorrell, who served with huge distinction in this House through some very difficult periods, particularly when he was Health Secretary. He spoke well and fluently. I recommend him to the House.

Many other hon. Members spoke well, but I cannot go through them all. I hope they will forgive me if I do not mention them. I will make one exception and mention the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin). I thought he spoke brilliantly. He is the successor to Gordon Brown and he spoke just as powerfully and as loudly as him—and almost with the same politics. I wondered whether there had been any change at all, although he is not quite the same age. I recommend him to his colleagues and to the House. He made a really, really good speech.

The Queen's Speech builds on the best of what we can do here in Parliament and sets out our plans for the next. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor made it very clear that we will introduce a full employment Bill. It will contain a range of measures to reform welfare and to grow the economy. We will give more people the security of a pay packet by achieving full employment and we will report on progress annually. We have the highest employment rates in the G7. Too many Opposition Members kept on repeating the same mantra they had before, laying out the course for more spending, more borrowing and more taxation. The electorate rejected that at the election and we must never cease to remind them.

There are four areas in the welfare Bill. I want to speak about three areas in particular. In the previous Parliament, we delivered 2.2 million apprenticeships. It is really important to train and provide the skills our young and older people need to get on and to develop their productivity. We intend to deliver a further 3 million. We intend to report on this. We take it so seriously that the Chancellor has made it clear that he will not put up with any divergence: we will get those apprenticeships and they will work.

In conclusion, we will pursue what we set out to do: unemployment going down, workless households down, the deficit down. The Queen's Speech builds on our success and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 278, Noes 325.

Division No. 2]

[4.59 pm

AYES

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Abbott, Ms Diane | Cowan, Ronnie |
| Abrahams, Debbie | Cox, Jo |
| Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina | Coyle, Neil |
| Alexander, Heidi | Crawley, Angela |
| Ali, Rushanara | Creasy, Stella |
| Allen, Mr Graham | Cruddas, Jon |
| Anderson, Mr David | Cummins, Judith |
| Arkless, Richard | Cunningham, Alex |
| Ashworth, Jonathan | Cunningham, Mr Jim |
| Austin, Ian | Danczuk, Simon |
| Bailey, Mr Adrian | David, Wayne |
| Bardell, Hannah | Davies, Geraint |
| Barron, rh Kevin | Day, Martyn |
| Beckett, rh Margaret | De Piero, Gloria |
| Benn, rh Hilary | Debbonaire, Thangam |
| Berger, Luciana | Docherty, Martin John |
| Betts, Mr Clive | Donaldson, Stuart Blair |
| Black, Ms Mhairi | Doughty, Stephen |
| Blackford, Ian | Dowd, Jim |
| Blackman, Kirsty | Dowd, Peter |
| Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta | Dromey, Jack |
| Blenkinsop, Tom | Dugher, Michael |
| Blomfield, Paul | Durkan, Mark |
| Boswell, Philip | Eagle, Ms Angela |
| Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben | Eagle, Maria |
| Brennan, Kevin | Edwards, Jonathan |
| Brock, Deidre | Efford, Clive |
| Brown, Alan | Ellman, Mrs Louise |
| Brown, Lyn | Esterson, Bill |
| Brown, rh Mr Nicholas | Evans, Chris |
| Bryant, Chris | Farrelly, Paul |
| Buck, Ms Karen | Fellows, Marion |
| Burden, Richard | Ferrier, Margaret |
| Burgon, Richard | Field, rh Frank |
| Butler, Dawn | Fitzpatrick, Jim |
| Byrne, rh Liam | Flelo, Robert |
| Cadbury, Ruth | Fletcher, Colleen |
| Cameron, Dr Lisa | Flint, rh Caroline |
| Campbell, rh Mr Alan | Flynn, Paul |
| Campbell, Mr Ronnie | Fovargue, Yvonne |
| Champion, Sarah | Foxcroft, Vicky |
| Chapman, Douglas | Gapes, Mike |
| Chapman, Jenny | Gardiner, Barry |
| Cherry, Joanna | Gethins, Stephen |
| Coaker, Vernon | Gibson, Patricia |
| Coffey, Ann | Glass, Pat |
| Cooper, Julie | Glindon, Mary |
| Cooper, Rosie | Godsiff, Mr Roger |
| Cooper, rh Yvette | Goodman, Helen |
| Corbyn, Jeremy | Grady, Patrick |

Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harpham, Harry
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mr Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodge, rh Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Hunt, Tristram
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Irranca-Davies, Huw
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Kane, Mike
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Chris
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain

McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGarry, Natalie
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Meacher, rh Mr Michael
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, Angus
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo

Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Mr Tom

Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Phil
 Wilson, Sammy
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Susan Elan Jones and
 Nic Dakin

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Mr Henry
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 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
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colville, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard

Fysh, Marcus
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 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
 Green, rh Damian
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 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
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Boris
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kinahan, Danny
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 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
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 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
 Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria

Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 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
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert

Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Quince, Will
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 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
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Charlie Elphicke and
Stephen Barclay

Question accordingly negated.

Amendment proposed: at the end of the Question to add:

“but regret that the measures set out do not adequately meet the challenges facing the majority of people across the UK; call in particular for your Government to change course on plans for further austerity spending cuts, to reconsider changes to the welfare state that will hit many of the most vulnerable people in our country and to halt proposals to waste £100 billion on new nuclear weapons at a time when vital public services are being squeezed across the country; and recognise the overwhelming mandate in Scotland for both the early implementation, in full, of the Smith Commission proposals and the delivery of additional powers for the Scottish Parliament including new powers on job creation, to improve living standards and to protect the welfare state in Scotland.”—(*Stewart Hosie.*)

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 33), That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 60, Noes 318.

Division No. 3]

[5.14 pm

AYES

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina | Blackford, Ian |
| Arkless, Richard | Blackman, Kirsty |
| Bardell, Hannah | Boswell, Philip |
| Black, Ms Mhairi | Brock, Deidre |

Brown, Alan
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Cowan, Ronnie
Crawley, Angela
Day, Martyn
Docherty, Martin John
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Durkan, Mark
Edwards, Jonathan
Ferrier, Margaret
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Hendry, Drew
Hosie, Stewart
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Law, Chris
Lucas, Caroline
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Mc Nally, John
McCaig, Callum
McDonald, Stewart
McDonald, Stuart C.

McGarry, Natalie
McLaughlin, Anne
Monaghan, Carol
Monaghan, Dr Paul
Mullin, Roger
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John
O'Hara, Brendan
Oswald, Kirsten
Paterson, Steven
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, Angus
Salmond, rh Alex
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Stephens, Chris
Thewliss, Alison
Thomson, Michelle
Weir, Mike
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Corri
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Ayes:
Owen Thompson and
Marion Fellows

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
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
Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan, rh Sir Alan

Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
Ghani, Nusrat
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
Green, rh Damian
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
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
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy

Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkyins, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kinahan, Danny
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
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
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline

Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 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
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 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
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wilson, Sammy
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Charlie Elphicke and
Stephen Barclay

Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 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
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colville, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Mr David

Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 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
 Green, rh Damian
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 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
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Boris
 Johnson, Gareth

Question accordingly negated.

Main Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 326, Noes 279.

Division No. 4]

[5.29 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward

Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Mr Henry
 Benyon, Richard

Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kinahan, Danny
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 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
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 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
 Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark

Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 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
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 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
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill

Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Charlie Elphicke and
Stephen Barclay

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allen, Mr Graham
 Anderson, Mr David
 Arkless, Richard
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barron, rh Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Ms Mhairi
 Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Boswell, Philip
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Cox, Jo
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Docherty, Martin John
 Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Dugher, Michael
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harpham, Harry
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue

Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mr Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodge, rh Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Irranca-Davies, Huw
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Kane, Mike
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael

Matheson, Chris
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGarry, Natalie
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Meacher, rh Mr Michael
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert
 Paisley, Ian
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie

Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, Angus
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Saville Roberts,
 Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr
 John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark

Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds,
 Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Wigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Phil
 Wilson, Sammy
 Winnick, Mr David
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Susan Elan Jones and
 Nic Dakin

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

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.

Address to be presented to Her Majesty by Members of the House who are Privy Counsellors or Members of Her Majesty's Household.

Rohingya Community (Burma)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Margot James.)

5.44 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you re-elected and in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. Please accept my congratulations on your re-election.

I want to bring to the House an opportunity to talk about the human rights situation in Burma/Myanmar and the migrant boat crisis that we have seen reported on in recent weeks in the media. We have seen heartbreaking coverage as thousands of Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrants have remained stranded in squalor in smugglers' boats at sea while initially Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia refused to allow them to land.

Some estimates suggest that 88,000 Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants have taken to the seas over the past 15 months. Indeed, between January and March this year 25,000 boarded smugglers' boats, which is double the number for the same period in 2014. It was only after media reports and international pressure that the Thai, Malaysian and Indonesian authorities allowed migrants to arrive on their shores and, in recent weeks, between 3,500 and 4,000 have been allowed into Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia or have returned to Burma/Myanmar.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I commend the hon. Gentleman for bringing this extremely important issue to the House's attention. Does he agree that the circumstances in which so many of those people are living in Burma need to be looked at, and that urgent representations need to be made to the Government of Burma—or Myanmar—on granting humanitarian access to those areas so that they can be improved radically, which is greatly needed?

Jonathan Ashworth: I thank the hon. Lady, who hits the nail on the head with that intervention. I will come later in my remarks to the persecution of the Rohingya in Burma, which is what is driving the migrant crisis. I saw her statement a few weeks ago on behalf of the Conservative party human rights commission, which I entirely endorse. I am pleased that she has been able to put her point on the record this evening.

Throughout early May it seemed that every day brought another report of abandoned migrants found at sea: 10 May, 575 migrants were rescued near Indonesia; 11 May, 1,018 migrants were found on the Malaysian coast; 11 May again, a vessel carrying 400 migrants was intercepted by the Indonesian navy; 13 May, a boat carrying 300 migrants was turned away from Langkawi island near Malaysia; 13 May again, another boat carrying 500 migrants was turned away from Penang island near Malaysia; 14 May, a boat carrying 300 migrants left the Thai shore, having been given food and water but refused refuge; 15 May, 700 migrants were rescued by a fishing boat after their vessel sank near Indonesia; and last week more than 700 refugees were brought ashore in Burma/Myanmar, having been found drifting in the Andaman sea in an overloaded fishing boat that was taking in water.

The coverage we have seen—I pay tribute to the BBC and al-Jazeera, in particular, for their reporting—has shown desperate scenes of dehydrated refugees and emaciated, starving children. On the boats women endure rape and other sexual violence, and many are forced into marriage with the men who pay for their journey.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that no preconditions were set before the British Army started training the Burmese military, despite allegations of continued sexual violence? Given that Burma has now been included in the initiative on preventing sexual violence, will he join me in asking the Minister to look into what is being done about that?

Jonathan Ashworth: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valid point. I hope that the Minister will reflect upon that and perhaps say something when he responds to the debate.

The people traffickers had abandoned those boats, leaving those on board with no food or water. The migrants were then refused sanctuary by the countries to which they were trying to escape. The Rohingya people are often described as the most persecuted in the world. Those men, women and children were fleeing Burma/Myanmar to escape what have been described as apartheid-like conditions, hoping to reach predominantly Muslim counties such as Malaysia via the jungles of southern Thailand. Yet many meet certain death; if they are not swallowed up by the south-east Asian seas, they are slung into mass graves when they eventually reach the Thai-Malaysian borders.

One migrant, Ziaur Rahamn, spoke to the *Financial Times*. He escaped from Burma/Myanmar to Bangladesh, but he was then kidnapped and trafficked to Thailand before being sold on and making it to Malaysia. He said:

"I have an ambition to help my mother and help my nation...Everywhere is dying for the Rohingya. Everywhere is killing and beating and trafficking, everywhere."

Today it is not clear how many migrants remain at sea in boats abandoned by the people traffickers; search and rescue vessels from Malaysia and Indonesia have not yet located any more migrant ships. So many of the boats have been abandoned as a tragic consequence of Thailand's seeking—for entirely the right reasons, I emphasise—to stamp out its appalling record on people trafficking in the region. As a result, many of the smugglers, no longer able to bring people ashore, have resorted to abandoning boats or dumping their human cargo on islands near the coastline—essentially, they have killed some of their human cargo. The circumstances are tragic. The Thai authorities have found graves with 150 bodies along the Thai-Malaysian border, many thought to belong to Rohingya migrants.

The US and EU have criticised the authorities for failing to deal adequately with people trafficking. In recent months, the Thai authorities have arrested several Government officials, from army colonels to town mayors, thought to have been involved in people trafficking. Indeed, in the past 24 hours there have been reports of a senior major-general's involvement in trafficking the Rohingya.

The problem is that no single Government in the region is prepared to show any leadership or take any real responsibility; it is no wonder that the UN has

described the situation as a “massive humanitarian crisis”. Yes, there was a conference in Bangkok on 29 May to respond to the crisis. Yes, it is welcome that the countries attending agreed to intensify search and rescue operations and that the Indonesians and Malaysians agreed to offer shelter to migrants—albeit temporarily and in the expectation that the international community will resettle them within a year. Yes, there was a welcome agreement to tackle the causes of migration through job creation and the promotion of

“full respect for human rights and adequate access of people to basic rights and services, such as housing, education and health care”.

Those commitments are all welcome; I will be interested in the Minister’s assessment of them. However, was it not hugely disappointing that the conference refused even to utter the word “Rohingya” publicly? It refused to recognise that driving this issue is the persecution of the Rohingya people in Burma/Myanmar and the fact that to this day Burma/Myanmar refuses to recognise the citizenship of the Rohingya.

Like many Members here tonight, I have spoken before in the House about the citizenship issue and I will reiterate some of the points in a moment. Before that, let me say a brief word about the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. I hope the Minister will agree that the crisis has become a major test of the association. If those nations want to launch a single economic market by the end of the year, as is their plan, does that not imply rules on movement of labour—and not trafficked labour with smugglers’ networks in which it seems Government officials are complicit? The single economic market that ASEAN wants to create by the end of the year needs to face up to the human rights abuses of the Rohingya in Burma.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. I want to follow on from the point made by the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), who went to Burma with Mr Speaker and me two years ago. Does my hon. Friend agree that this is a classic case for the involvement of the United Nations? Should not the Secretary-General take personal control of this enormous and overwhelming humanitarian crisis?

Jonathan Ashworth: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I pay tribute to the work she did in the last Parliament, and I know she will continue to do in this Parliament, on raising the issue of Burma. She has been a strong and persuasive voice. I am pleased that she has got her point, which I agree with and will come to, on the record.

The Minister has my appreciation for having been the first western Minister to visit Rakhine state. Some 1.1 million Rohingya in western Burma, particularly in Rakhine state, are denied citizenship and access to jobs and basic services. Indeed, he knows, after the brutal sectarian violence in 2012, many of the Rohingya were forced out into some of the worst camps ever seen, according to the UN.

In the past year, conditions have worsened for the Rohingya. They have been denied voting rights unless they are prepared to register themselves as Bengali, and they do not recognise themselves as Bengali, as the Minister is well aware. He will also be aware that the

violence in Rakhine a few years ago when Rohingya were driven from their homes often occurred with the complicity of local officials, if not national Burmese officials. Certainly, local officials appeared to turn their back on some of the communal violence. Is it not an absolute disgrace that when the UN adopts resolutions, as it did in December 2014, urging the Myanmar Government to grant the Rohingya full citizenship and calling for the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to be opened in Myanmar without delay, the response of the Myanmar-Burmese regime is still to refuse even to acknowledge the Rohingya as an ethnic group, and then to say that reports of Muslim persecution are a “fabrication”? I agree with the President of the United States when he says, rightly, that Burma/Myanmar should end this discrimination against the Rohingya.

There are going to be elections later this year. Given the migrant boat crisis over the past few weeks, should not the British Government take the view that it is time for all Burmese political leaders now to speak up and do what they can for the Rohingya and say that Rohingya citizenship should be recognised? The Minister will be aware that there is one particular prominent leader who many of us are keen to see speak up and say that Rohingya citizenship should be recognised. According to reports, US Assistant Secretary of State Anne Richard said recently in Jakarta that while the US was not considering imposing more sanctions, they remain “in the diplomatic toolbox”. What is the Minister’s view of sanctions given the migrant crisis we have seen over the past few weeks?

I recall that in our previous parliamentary debate in Westminster Hall in January the Minister rightly told us of the Government’s commitment of £12 million in aid for Rakhine state. Of course, I support that. However, given that we are set for a rollercoaster ride in the future projections of public expenditure, can he indicate the Government’s future thinking on aid and humanitarian assistance for Rakhine and in the region more generally? Picking up on the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), does he agree that now is the time for the UN Secretary-General to be given personal responsibility for negotiating unrestricted international humanitarian access to Rakhine state? What representations has he made at the UN level on that matter?

On the boat crisis, will the Minister update the House on the discussions that he and the FCO have had with the ASEAN nations in recent days? Is there any more support that we can offer to Thailand, for example, in dealing with people-trafficking in the region? Will he agree to lobby the ASEAN nations to ensure that genuinely life-saving measures are set up to offer support on search and rescue operations so that when migrants disembark from ships they are given appropriate access to humanitarian assistance? Will he raise particularly the issue of children? Many of the children coming off these boats are unaccompanied. Will he undertake to lobby for the provision of child-friendly spaces and learning spaces in the shelters and camps in Malaysia, Indonesia and elsewhere so that they are protected and have access to education?

I am very grateful for this opportunity to put some of these points on the record so early in the Parliament. I look forward to a full response from the Minister,

[Jonathan Ashworth]

because whether it is the migrant crisis in the south Asia seas or the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean, we simply cannot walk by on the other side.

5.58 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) on his re-election and on securing this debate—his second on this important subject within six months. I also thank other hon. Members for their contributions.

The fact that this debate comes so soon after the House's return demonstrates the importance that Parliament rightly places on the situation of the Rohingya and on the recent humanitarian crisis in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman sea. The crisis has been made even more alarming by the discovery of mass graves in Thailand and Malaysia, and by boats either avoiding landing or being prevented from doing so.

With conditions at sea becoming increasingly desperate, we welcome the 20 May decision by the Foreign Ministers of Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia to provide vital humanitarian assistance. Clearly, tackling this issue requires a strong and co-ordinated regional response. I am glad that Thailand called last Friday's regional co-ordination meeting in Bangkok, at which our ambassador represented the United Kingdom. I welcome the agreement of the countries involved to meet again soon.

Those discussions were a positive step, but much more remains to be done. South-east Asian countries must continue to work together to tackle the appalling trade in human lives and its root causes, and, in particular, to press Burma to address the situation of the Rohingya in Rakhine state. With that, I can associate myself with the hon. Gentleman's comments about ASEAN and its future.

According to the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, over 130,000 Rohingya left by sea between 2012 and 2014. However, the numbers this year are something new, with a further 25,000 leaving in the first three months of 2015—nearly double the numbers during the same period last year. I share the hon. Gentleman's deep concern about the many issues they face. The fact that so many are willing to risk this highly dangerous journey speaks of increasing desperation within the community. It is a community where, three years since the ethnic violence of 2012, over 140,000 remain displaced in "temporary" camps, where humanitarian conditions—as I saw at first hand during my visit in 2012—are, quite frankly, dreadful. The February decision to cancel the temporary identity cards held by many Rohingya looks set to disfranchise the community and leave them open to further restrictions, intimidation and abuse.

As the crisis emerged last month, I took action in calling the Burmese ambassador to the Foreign Office in order to express our concern and press Burma to take urgent steps to deal with the humanitarian implications of the crisis, as well as the underlying causes in Rakhine.

I met the Bangladeshi Foreign Secretary in London on 20 May and urged Bangladesh to work within the region to address people trafficking and irregular migration in the Bay of Bengal.

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): My father was born in Burma, so I take a great interest in these issues. What is going on there is horrific, so I congratulate the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) on securing this debate. As he and the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) have said, Ban Ki-moon should take a personal interest in the matter. Burma Campaign UK, Christian Solidarity Worldwide and a number of other organisations have also called for such action. I would be grateful if the Minister informed us what the UK Government are doing in that regard.

Mr Swire: I welcome my hon. Friend to the House and the fact that we now have somebody interested in these matters who perhaps has closer Burmese connections than any of the rest of us. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called Burmese President Thein Sein on 20 May to discuss Rakhine and Burma's response to the migration crisis. With our support, the issue of Rakhine was also discussed at a briefing of the UN Security Council on 28 May. My hon. Friend may be unaware of this, but in the past few years we have had a Friends of Myanmar—Friends of Burma—meeting at the General Assembly in New York, and we will be pressing for just such a meeting again this autumn.

In Rangoon, our ambassador joined EU and US colleagues in delivering a joint *démarche* to Burmese Ministers. Through our network of missions, we lobbied extensively throughout the region and co-ordinated regular discussion with like-minded states, non-governmental organisations and international organisations, including the International Organisation for Migration and the UNHCR.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), who has taken a very close interest in this issue, raised the wider issue of Rakhine itself. We will continue to raise the problems in Rakhine at every opportunity. In particular, we continue to press the Burmese authorities for progress in a number of vital areas: improved humanitarian access, greater security and accountability, the protection of civil and political rights for everyone in Burma, and a sustainable solution on citizenship.

The hon. Member for Leicester South spoke about the vast amount of money the British taxpayer gives to Burma. I confirm that as part of our continuing commitment to support progress in Burma, we will continue with our funding, which increased to £82 million this financial year.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP) rose—

Mr Swire: I will make progress, if I may.

In Rakhine state, we are one of the largest bilateral humanitarian donors. We have given it over £18 million in humanitarian support since 2012. I am pleased to say that an additional £6.2 million was recently announced for 2015-16.

The hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) raised our training of the Tatmadaw, the Burmese military. It remains a key force in Burma and we believe that it is right to continue to engage with it. It is not true to say that we have not consulted; we have consulted extensively with members of ethnic groups, civil society and the political Opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi, who is supportive of this approach. We cannot ignore the fact that it still has a bloc in Parliament, and it needs to be

taught to behave like a responsible military in a democratic country in the 21st century. It is key to repeat that we provide only non-combat education and training, and we will continue to do so.

In addition to our other bilateral work, we continue to operate through the UN and the EU. The Secretary-General has called Burmese President Thein Sein, as I said, and the UN Security Council discussed Rakhine on 28 May. The UK has been instrumental in securing strong UN resolutions on Burma, including the Human Rights Council resolution in March, which extended the mandate of the special rapporteur for human rights in Burma, Professor Yanghee Lee, who has done so much to shine a spotlight on the plight of the Rohingya.

We have made our concerns extremely clear to the Burmese Government, and we will continue to do so. We will continue to work with the Burmese and our international partners for progress. The hon. Member for Leicester South asked about the other people—he said I would know who he was speaking about, and indeed I do. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has a remarkable record of defending human rights and democracy, and we encourage all parties in Burma to work together to improve the humanitarian conditions and ensure that there is respect for the human rights of all communities in Rakhine. Ultimately, of course, it is the Burmese Government that have the executive power.

Patrick Grady: Does the Minister have any indication of the number or proportion of refugees who might be making their way to these islands? What support are the British Government prepared to offer any of them who do end up here?

Mr Swire: As far as we can ascertain, this is a regional issue that needs to be addressed by the countries that I have mentioned. It is an ASEAN problem. Where the majority of these people are coming from is quite uncertain. It is our assessment that it is a combination of people coming from Rakhine itself, possibly some people getting on boats and coming across the Bay of Bengal, and others coming down. It is pretty mixed. The key thing is the immediate humanitarian alleviation, such as getting them off the boats and getting them watered and fed. At the same time, on a parallel track, we need to get Burma and Bangladesh to play their part. As far as we know, there are no people heading here. That is not to say that we are not interested or that we do not care. We care passionately about the situation, but at the moment it is for the countries in the neighbourhood to deal with it.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): The Minister says that this is a regional issue, but is it not an international issue? There are grave international precedents of community groups and ethnic groups effectively being pushed out and cleansed, and being left to find their own way on boats. Surely we must recognise that

this is an international issue that demands an international and United Nations response.

Mr Swire: I hoped to demonstrate our interest and that of the international community—I have obviously failed—by mentioning the fact that we have been pressing for the meeting that took place. I have discussed the matter with the Burmese ambassador and the Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh, and we have been pushing in the UN and will do so again in the autumn. The international aspect of the matter is about Burma's future transition to a democratic country with democratic values and tolerance of people's ethnicity, religion, sex and so on, which we take for granted. It is also about the humanitarian aspect of the crisis. However, the immediate issue is local. It is happening on the borders of the countries to which I have alluded, and it is for them to deal with it at first hand. That does not mean that the international community is turning its back on the situation—quite the reverse.

We have repeatedly made our concerns extremely clear to the Burmese Government, and we will continue to work with the Burmese and our international partners to make progress. Some have criticised our continuing engagement with the Burmese Government, whether with the military or through our aid programme. However, we believe, in consultation with our international partners, that the best way to help Burma achieve real progress is to engage with all parties, including the Rakhine community itself, about their concerns.

It is important that the international community demonstrates that it is listening to all sides, so that the arguments do not become more polarised than they already are, particularly in the run-up to the forthcoming election. That is the way to help embed reform and encourage the transition towards peaceful and democratic government for the benefit of all Burma's people. With elections set for November, and in the light of the situation that we have seen in the Bay of Bengal, that need is more starkly apparent than ever.

I thank the hon. Member for Leicester South for this opportunity to set out the Government's position once again. I very much welcome the involvement in the debate of Members in all parts of the House, and I am particularly pleased that the shadow Foreign Secretary is on the Front Bench to listen to it. I particularly welcome my new colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully), who has close genealogical connections with a country that we all care passionately about. We want to see it transition from an extraordinarily difficult, dark period. We can expect to see more challenges, and we will maintain our levels of interest and support, but not at the cost of turning our back on an appalling humanitarian situation.

Question put and agreed to.

6.12 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 4 June 2015

DEFENCE

Chemical Weapons Convention

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Julian Brazier): The UK's chemical protection programme is designed to protect against the use of chemical weapons. Such a programme is permitted by the chemical weapons convention, with which the United Kingdom is fully compliant. Under the terms of the convention, we are required to provide information annually to the organisation for the prohibition of chemical weapons. In accordance with the Government's commitment to openness, I am placing in the Library of the House a copy of the summary that has been provided to the organisation outlining the UK's chemical protection programme in 2014.

[HCWS15]

National Employer Advisory Board

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Julian Brazier): Following open competition, I am pleased to advise the House of the appointment of seven new members to the National Employer Advisory Board (NEAB). They are:

Mr Bagnall
Mr Bird
Mr Carter
Mr McTague
Mr Randeniya
Mr Sproule
Mr Walkinshaw

They join the other seven members of the board, which is chaired by Mr Richard Boggis-Rolfe. The NEAB provides informed independent strategic advice to the Ministry of Defence and the reserves community about how they can most effectively develop their relationship with employers across the UK and particularly employers of members of the armed forces and veterans. I take this opportunity to thank the NEAB for its work which is greatly valued by the Ministry of Defence.

[HCWS16]

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Energy Council

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): In advance of the forthcoming Energy Council in Luxembourg on 8 June, I am writing to outline the agenda items to be discussed.

Under the first item on the agenda, the Council will hold a policy debate on implementation of the EU energy security strategy, focusing on achievement in strengthening energy security in Europe since adoption of the strategy in 2014, priorities for next steps to be taken and how to ensure synergies between the various tools that can contribute to energy security in the EU. The UK considers that there have been a number of

developments in the EU that will have a positive impact on energy security, including the agreement of the 2030 climate and energy framework and the development of the energy union. Looking ahead, the UK considers that delivering a fully functional single energy market, building resilience into the system and diversifying energy supplies should all continue to be priorities.

The Council will then be asked to adopt conclusions on the implementation of the framework strategy for the energy union focusing on empowering consumers and incentivising investments in the energy sector. The UK agrees that more needs to be done to enhance competitiveness in the internal energy market to deliver benefits for consumers and that particular priority needs to be given to the facilitation of new interconnection and investment projects.

The Commission will then report on developments in external energy relations, including recent trilateral talks on energy issues between the EU, Russia and Ukraine, and developments in the energy community.

The Czech delegation will update Council on discussions held at the plenary meeting of the European Nuclear Energy Forum (ENEF) which took place in Prague in May.

Finally, the Luxembourg delegation will inform the Council of the priorities for their presidency in the first half of 2016.

[HCWS13]

JUSTICE

Service Personnel Deaths (Inquests)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinéage): Together with my hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans, I present our latest joint statement on the progress of coroner investigations into the deaths of UK service personnel on active service overseas. Our armed forces demonstrate great courage, commitment and self-sacrifice in their service to our country, and it is right that they receive our heartfelt gratitude. Most of all we remember and honour those who have laid down their lives in the service of their country, and the families they leave behind.

This statement sets out the progress of investigations being held by the senior coroners for Oxfordshire, for Wiltshire and Swindon and for other coroner areas in England and Wales as at 22 May 2015.

Tables to supplement this report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. These give details of all cases, including whether there has been or will be a service inquiry—known as a board of inquiry in the earlier years covered.

The defence inquests unit of the Ministry of Defence continues to work closely with coroners—including the dedicated cadre of coroners with special training in service personnel inquests—to make sure that everything possible is done to progress and complete investigations quickly and thoroughly. There is now provision under section 12 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 for investigations to be held in Scotland, where appropriate, rather than in England and Wales.

We are thankful to all who are involved in the course of these investigations: to those who provide support and assistance to bereaved families; to the coroners and their staff who seek to conduct thorough investigations which put the bereaved families at their heart; and for the Chief Coroner for his leadership and oversight of the coroner service.

Repatriations of service personnel who have died overseas have mainly taken place at RAF Brize Norton and RAF Lyneham. To enable the senior coroners for Oxfordshire and for Wiltshire and Swindon to conduct inquests into these deaths alongside their local case load, additional funding has been provided to both areas since 2007 by the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Justice.

Current status of inquests

Since our last statement on 29 January 2015 there have been six inquests into the deaths of service personnel on operations in Iraq or Afghanistan. This brings the total of inquests into the deaths of service personnel who have died on active service in Iraq or Afghanistan or who have died in the UK of injuries sustained on active service to 624. Three deaths of injured service

personnel have not led to a formal inquest. Two of these were taken into consideration at inquests into other deaths which occurred in the same incidents. The third case concerned a serviceman in Scotland who made a partial recovery but later died from his injuries, and it was decided not to hold a fatal accident inquiry.

Coroners' investigations which have been opened

As at 22 May, seven coroner investigations are open into the deaths of service personnel in Afghanistan.

The senior coroner for Oxfordshire has retained five of these. The other two investigations are being conducted by the senior coroners for Gateshead and south Tyneside and for West Sussex, whose courts are closer to the next of kin. A pre-inquest hearing date of 2 November 2015 has been set for one of these inquests. Hearing dates have not yet been listed for the remaining six inquests.

We will continue to inform the House of progress.

Attachments can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2015-06-04/HCWS14/>

[HCWS14]

ORAL ANSWERS

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