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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 8 June 2015

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Strategic Defence and Security Review

1. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What the timetable is for the strategic defence and security review. [900115]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): I hope you will allow me, Mr Speaker, to welcome the new Minister for the Armed Forces and the new Minister for defence personnel and veterans, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster), to their places.

Work has now begun on the 2015 strategic defence and security review, led by the Cabinet Office, and we expect the review to report towards the end of the year.

Diana Johnson: But before we had seen any timetable for the SDSR, the Chancellor last week announced £500 million-worth of defence cuts. Leaving aside our NATO commitments and the fundamental importance of keeping this nation safe, should we not assess our security needs first and then set the budget?

Michael Fallon: The savings announced last week were in-year savings that do not affect the core baseline defence budget, from which we will negotiate spending for the next three years; they do not affect manpower numbers; they do not affect our commitment to increase the equipment programme by 1% ahead of inflation; and they will have no effect on current operations. The strategic review on which we have now embarked will be, quite properly, aligned with the spending review, because defence, to be deliverable, has to be affordable.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): Surely my right hon. Friend must accept that, as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) made clear, we need to establish the security requirements—the strategic prospects for the United Kingdom in a very dangerous world. I am extremely alarmed, as others are, at the prospect of another Treasury-driven review, at a time when we face a much more dangerous world than we did in 2010.

Michael Fallon: My hon. Friend speaks with great experience on these matters, as a former Defence Minister. Let me be clear with the House: this is a strategic defence and security review. It is not a Treasury-led review. It is a review across the whole of government to assess the threats to our country—and the future threats to it that may emerge; the capabilities we need to address those threats; and, of course, the resources we need to finance those capabilities.

19. [900134] **Chris Evans** (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State will know that the defence industry contains 300,000 jobs, 55,000 of which are reliant on exports. Will he guarantee that the impact on employment will be included in the SDSR?

Michael Fallon: Absolutely. This five-yearly review gives us the opportunity to look again at our defence industry to see how it is competing with our major defence competitors and whether enough is being done to advance those exports in certain markets, and to ensure that our smaller and medium-sized companies also enjoy the benefit. The defence industry is a major employer and this will be a key part of the review.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): In 2010, the SDSR largely neglected the threat from Russia. That situation has now changed. It was also not able to address the upheavals in the middle east, because they had not happened, but we now face a serious threat emanating from the middle east. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that those two factors will be clearly placed as assumptions in the next SDSR?

Michael Fallon: I can reassure my hon. Friend on that. We are building on the foundations of the 2010 review, much of whose analysis holds good, but, as he has told the House, it did not predict the sudden rise of ISIL in the middle east or the return of Russian aggression, with the attempt to change international borders by force in Europe. Let me assure him that both those threats will be a key part of this review.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): In the forthcoming SDSR, what cognisance will the Secretary of State give to the fact that in last month's general election a clear majority of the Scottish electorate voted for parties that put opposition to Trident at the forefront of their manifesto and that 57 of 59 Members returned from Scotland do not want Trident renewal to go ahead? What cognisance will he give to the fact that the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Churches and the Scottish trade unions are also opposed to Trident—

Mr Speaker: Order. We are immensely grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Michael Fallon: Successive Governments have supported the renewal of our nuclear deterrent that has helped to keep this country safe, and we are committed to replacing all four Vanguard submarines with new submarines that will serve this country until at least 2060. The deterrent is a major employer. Thousands of jobs are at stake in Faslane, in the hon. Gentleman's own constituency, so I hope that he will consider the consequences of his policy on his own constituents.

Brendan O'Hara: Given that there was precious little strategy involved in the 2010 SDSR and that it was in fact little more than a cost-cutting exercise, will the Minister ensure that the process of renewing and purchasing United Kingdom maritime patrol aircraft will be undertaken immediately and that those aircraft will then be based where they should be historically and logically—in Scotland?

Michael Fallon: The 2010 review necessarily involved some tough decisions because we had to balance the budget as a result of the mess that we inherited from Labour. Let me assure the hon. Gentleman that we will be looking again at all these different capabilities and at the importance of Scotland. I hope that he noted that I was able to be on the Clyde this morning cutting the first steel on our very latest warship, HMS Medway, which is being built on the Clyde to defend the whole of the United Kingdom.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): When the SDSR finally arrives, it must incorporate three promises: the Prime Minister's promise during the general election campaign that there will be no cuts whatsoever in the regular forces; the promise that the Prime Minister made shortly after the last election that there will be real growth in defence spending; and the promise recently reiterated by the Secretary of State about the 1% increase in real terms in defence equipment spending from now onwards. Given those three commitments—leaving aside for a moment the 2% commitment to NATO—where will the Secretary of State find any cash at all to save if he is asked to by the comprehensive spending review?

Michael Fallon: My hon. Friend is right that he and I were elected on a mandate to replace the nuclear deterrent with four new nuclear ballistic submarines; to maintain the current size of the regular armed forces; and to increase our spending on the equipment programme by inflation plus 1% each year. It is our task now in this review to ensure that those commitments are held to and that our armed forces have the equipment and the resources that they need.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): I congratulate the Defence Secretary on his reappointment and wish him and his ministerial team well for the future. I also pay tribute to all the crew on HMS Bulwark who are doing such a fantastic job in the Mediterranean at this time.

Due to a lack of transparency—almost secrecy—nobody outside a small inner circle in the Government has a real clue about what is going on with respect to the forthcoming strategic defence and security review. At a time when Britain is being accused of resigning as a world power, should the Government not get a grip, abandon warm rhetoric and set out a clear timetable for discussing how we address our role in the world and the military capability that we need to match it?

Michael Fallon: I am grateful to the shadow Defence Secretary for what he said and congratulate him on hanging on in there, at least for the moment. I thank him for his tribute, which I hope the whole House will echo, to the crew and the air crew on HMS Bulwark. I visited Bulwark myself on Saturday afternoon and saw at first hand how the crews were preparing to cope with this extraordinary number of migrants who need rescuing from the sea.

As far as the strategic review is concerned, I have set out the timetable to the House today, and the scope and the ambition of the review, which has already started and will be concluded towards the end of this year. We will also consult key external voices, such as academics and those in other areas who have something to contribute to the review. I hope that will include the hon. Gentleman.

Vernon Coaker: That answer really shows just how complacent the Government are. Just yesterday, the US President spoke to the Prime Minister. The US Defence Secretary said that our actions seemed to indicate disengagement. I ask the Secretary of State again: when will the Government set out their plans to discuss, with Parliament and the rest of the country, the threats we face, our global role and the military capability we need? For example, when will they discuss the lack of a maritime patrol aircraft and what the availability of two aircraft carriers actually means—just two examples of the decisions facing the country? This is the Defence Secretary's chance to launch a wide-ranging debate about the forthcoming SDSR. Will he do it?

Michael Fallon: Yes, of course we will engage with Parliament and I look forward to engaging with the newly established Select Committee on Defence. However, the hon. Gentleman has chosen two rather odd capabilities to put on the table. We are addressing the gap in maritime patrol aircraft because the previous Labour Government were supposed to deliver 23 Nimrods but, when we came into office in 2010, the programme was eight years behind schedule, £800 million over budget and not a single Nimrod had been delivered. He then went on to mention aircraft carriers, but it is this Government that are building two aircraft carriers and this Government that are committed to sailing them both.

ISIL (Iraq)

2. **Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to counter ISIL in Iraq. [900116]

15. **Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to assist Iraqi forces in countering ISIL. [900129]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): The UK contributes significantly to the coalition against ISIL by providing sophisticated aircraft such as Tornado, Reaper, Rivet Joint and Sentinel from across the middle east and Cyprus to support Iraqi ground forces. We lead the coalition's counter-improvised explosive device training programme and have trained more than 1,400 Iraqis in counter-IED and other infantry skills. Yesterday, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) will have heard, we offered to expand that counter-IED and other training to additional coalition training sites.

Mr David Jones: Major General Tim Cross, who was the senior British officer involved in post-war planning in Iraq, attributed the fall of Ramadi to a lack of will or, as he put it, "moral cohesion" on the part of Iraqi forces. What is my right hon. Friend's Department

doing to help promote that moral cohesion in an Iraqi army that frequently heavily outnumbers its ISIL opponents?

Michael Fallon: The partners in the coalition and Prime Minister al-Abadi recognise that the Iraqi security forces need support to help them take the fight to ISIL on the ground. That is why we are contributing not simply to air support but to the building partner capacity programme, which aims to boost the capabilities and confidence of the Iraqi security forces.

Neil Carmichael: It is certainly correct that the Iraqi forces need strengthening. What further measures does the Secretary of State have in mind to do exactly that, as it is the long-term guarantee of security?

Michael Fallon: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced at the weekend, we have offered a further 125 troops to join the coalition troops training the Iraqi security forces, including more than 60 counter-IED trainers. Those additional troops will be the first UK personnel deployed to training sites outside Irbil or Baghdad and, subject to the needs of the coalition, will take our presence in Iraq to more than 275 troops. As well as further counter-IED trainers, we are offering specialist training in areas such as medical skills, equipment maintenance, manoeuvre support and information operations.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Building and strengthening partner capacity is happening not just in Iraq but in neighbouring countries. Will the Secretary of State say a little more about what we are doing with Jordan and whether we are expanding our capability there?

Michael Fallon: We have begun the training of moderate Syrian forces in bases outside Syria and a number of people are contributing to that training. Progress will depend on identifying suitable moderate forces that are prepared to take the fight to ISIL, particularly in the north of Syria, and ensuring that once they are trained they are ready to rejoin that fight. We are making that contribution to the training effort being led by the Americans and proposed for four different sites, all outside Syria.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): What steps are the Department taking to work with other Departments, particularly the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development, to ensure that measures being taken to counter extremism include aid to support education, not just military action?

Michael Fallon: The hon. Lady is quite right. The effort has to be spread across diplomatic activity, political activity and communications activity. We have to make efforts to deradicalise extremists in our societies, so we have to take measures across the board. ISIL cannot simply be defeated militarily, and I can assure her that this is an effort that is spread across the Whitehall Departments to which she referred.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State clarify, with the additional deployment, how many UK troops will serve in Iraq? Will he confirm that

they are working not just with the Kurdistan Regional Government and in Baghdad but with the very varied ethnic groups in Iraq whose support is essential to a successful coalition effort?

Michael Fallon: The number involved, as I told the House, is about 275, but it will vary as the training forces begin and end service. The significance of the announcement at the weekend is that we will—*[Interruption.]* Two hundred and seventy five is the number that I have given the House. The significance of the announcement at the weekend is that some of those trainers will train at the building partner capacity bases outside the Kurdish areas.

Reserve Forces (Recruitment)

3. **Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): How many people have been recruited to the reserve forces in each of the last three years. [900117]

10. **Karen Lumley** (Redditch) (Con): What assessment he has made of recent trends in recruitment of reservists. [900124]

13. **Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): What assessment he has made of recent trends in recruitment of reservists. [900127]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Julian Brazier): Six thousand eight hundred and ten personnel joined the reserves in financial year 2014-15, a rise of 65% on the previous financial year. For 2012-13, the only statistics available are for the Army reserve, with 3,960 joining that year. We have made significant improvements to the recruiting process, the offer to reservists and the support we give to employers. We continue to look at further improvements to build on this considerable growth.

Pauline Latham: I thank the Minister for his reply. Can he explain what plans his Department has to celebrate reserves day later this month, and will he encourage hon. Members to support it in their constituencies?

Mr Brazier: Reserves day is an important opportunity for colleagues in the House to support the reserves. It was called uniform to work day, and a number of hon. Members took part in it. Reserve forces and cadets associations will tell colleagues about opportunities to support the event, including an opportunity in the House of Commons for Members and researchers, both existing members of the reserves and those who are interested in joining.

Karen Lumley: The 37 Signal Regiment reservists, who are based in my constituency, do an amazing job and have been awarded the freedom of our borough. Will my hon. Friend inform the House how future reserve proposals will help the regiment to continue its brilliant work?

Mr Brazier: I join my hon. Friend in her tribute to the 37 Signal Regiment, which has deployed personnel on operations to Afghanistan, as well as on recent exercises in Belize, Gibraltar, Germany and Cyprus, and has provided essential work to the civil authorities

in the UK. Army reserve units are paired with, and train alongside, regular units and, when required, may deploy with them—in 37's case, with 16 Signal Regiment, as she knows. Reserves have the same access to equipment and technology as their regular counterparts, and receive high-quality, challenging training, including more opportunities to exercise overseas.

Mr Speaker: I see the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) has perambulated to a different part of the Chamber, and is not where we are accustomed to seeing him—but I can still see him.

Sir Nicholas Soames: May I first congratulate my hon. Friend on his tremendous support and enthusiasm for the reserves, which is very well taken? He is aware of my connection with the Royal Yeomanry, but is he aware that it is the best recruiting regiment in the reserves? That is not just because it has made good use of what the central facility provides but because it does a lot of it itself, and takes a lot of trouble over recruiting. Will he emphasise to all the other reserve units that they can do a great deal themselves to encourage people in their regimental family to get more people into the reserves?

Mr Brazier: I am always delighted to take a question from my right hon. Friend, whose illustrious grandfather was a long-serving member of the Territorial Army. He is quite right about the Royal Yeomanry's achievements. I visited it twice in the past year and, in many ways, it is a trailblazer. The key point that he makes about empowering units to do more to help themselves, including devolving some of the marketing budgets—something that we have begun to do—is very well taken.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): What is the average age of recruits to the reserves?

Mr Brazier: I do not have the exact age of reservist recruits, but the current average of the Army Reserve is 37. If the hon. Gentleman is thinking of joining, I am sure we can put him in touch with somebody.

14. [900128] **Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab):** Recent personnel statistics show that nearly a third of the armed forces are dissatisfied with military life, so what provisions are in place to ensure that this troubling figure is reduced?

Mr Brazier: There is no single bullet. The armed forces have come through a difficult time, with a combination of downsizing of the numbers in the Army as a result of the £38 billion black hole, and the end of operations in Afghanistan, which for many young men and women was an attractor. But measures ranging from the purchase of new equipment to an almost unparalleled number of overseas exercises, together with a fresh look at the terms and conditions of service, are all designed to address the issue that the hon. Gentleman points to.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I welcome the Minister back to his position and congratulate the two new members of the Defence team. In the run-up to the election the Prime Minister pledged that regular personnel numbers would not be reduced, but we heard

last week about the first down payment from the Defence budget as a result of the Chancellor's cuts. Can the Minister give an assurance that the target set by the previous Government for reservists will be met and funded?

Mr Brazier: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome, and the same applies to him. It is always a pleasure to spar across the Dispatch Box. The Conservative manifesto was clear about expanding the number of reservists across the three services to 35,000. The funding is there through the £1.8 billion that was provided over a 10-year period, and the current strengths are running ahead of schedule in all three volunteer reserve services.

Mr Speaker: Order. At this point I appeal for slightly snappier questions and answers because we have a lot to get through.

Defence Storage and Distribution Agency

4. **Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con):** When he expects to complete negotiations on the sale of the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency in Ashchurch; and if he will make a statement. [900118]

The Minister for Defence Procurement (Mr Philip Dunne): I know that my hon. Friend takes a keen interest in the Ministry of Defence presence at Ashchurch in his constituency. I am pleased to be able to inform him and the House that a land sale development partnership contract was signed with Vinci St Modwen in March this year to promote the site through the planning process and ultimately to enable its redevelopment, subject to planning consent. We expect to commence transfer of the site to our development partner in phases from early 2018.

Mr Robertson: I thank the Minister for that response and for the interest he has taken in the site. He will be aware that the threat of closure has hung over employees on that site for very many years. Can the redevelopment be moved along as quickly as possible with due regard to the future of those employees?

Mr Dunne: My hon. Friend rightly takes a great interest in the site for the welfare and future prospects of the employees from his constituency there. The 160 former employees and 80 agency staff within the Defence Support Group at Ashchurch were all transferred under the TUPE process across to Babcock on completion of that transaction on 31 March, and we have continuous and regular engagement with the trade union representatives to make sure that they are all fully informed.

Ebola

5. **Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con):** What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the contribution of the armed forces to tackling the spread of Ebola. [900119]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Penny Mordaunt): I would like to make the House aware that I have a declarable interest as a member of the Royal Navy

Reserve. The Navy is investigating the most appropriate way for me to remain as a reservist for the duration of my appointment as Minister for the Armed Forces. I will update the House in due course.

I thank my hon. Friend for enabling me to pay tribute to our armed forces who have served on Operation Gritrock, one of the most challenging operations in recent times, during which our medical professionals demonstrated tremendous skill and courage. Recent statistics show just 12 new cases of Ebola a week, well down from the more than 500 in November last year. The World Health Organisation currently assesses that Sierra Leone will be free from Ebola in a matter of weeks, and I am sure the whole House will want to join me in thanking our armed forces and our MOD civilians for all they have done in achieving that.

Derek Thomas: The Minister will be aware that personnel from RNAS Culdrose in my constituency sailed with RFA Argus last year as part of the Government's reaction to the fight against Ebola. What assurances can she give that RNAS Culdrose will continue to be adequately resourced so that it can play a similar role in future crises?

Penny Mordaunt: Culdrose is certainly resourced for similar crises. In fact, only recently we deployed further personnel and three helicopters from there to assist in our operations to deal with the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean, where they are providing valuable information to the search and rescue operation. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to champion them.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Minister to her new post, but may I gently remind her that the British Army's capacity to intervene, even in helping with the Ebola crisis, will become more limited as time goes on, as America retreats as a pushy world power and we are more on our own in Europe and the world? The fact of the matter, as she knows, is that we could fit the whole of our defence forces into Wembley stadium, yet still she is in favour of cutting defence spending to below 2% of GDP.

Penny Mordaunt: As I speak, we have over 3,600 personnel deployed on 21 operations across 19 countries. We are actually doing more operations, although they might not have the profile of some recent operations, so our armed forces are still incredibly busy. We are also regenerating capability that was lost under the Labour Administration.

VJ Day

6. **Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab):** What plans the armed forces have to commemorate VJ Day. [900120]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): As this is my first Defence Question Time, I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Although I remain a member of the Army Reserve, I have requested that I be placed on the unposted list for the duration of my appointment as a Defence Minister.

The MOD will be supporting the national commemorative and thanksgiving events that will take place in central London on Saturday 15 August. The Government are committed to providing their full support

to those events, which will provide an opportunity for the public, and the nation at large, to honour and pay their respects to those who fought during the far east campaigns.

Bridget Phillipson: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer and welcome him to his new post. Men such as my late grandfather fought in the east, enduring the harshest conditions, and of course many never returned home. Will the Minister commit to working with colleagues across the Government to ensure that schools, organisations and communities have all the support they need to recognise the bravery and commitment of our veterans?

Mark Lancaster: I am delighted that the hon. Lady clearly shares my passion and determination to ensure that this year's events will be a fitting tribute to veterans and their families, such as hers, who will be very much the focus. We are committed to marking the 70th anniversary of VJ Day and ensuring that veterans of the far east campaigns have a national event that provides an opportunity for the public and the nation to pay their respects and offer their gratitude. I will be delighted to work with any Member of the House who wishes to pursue that.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Last year I received a very moving letter from a veteran in Goole, Edgar Sheppard, whom I subsequently visited in his care home. He told me how concerned he was that young people did not know the sacrifice that he and his Burma veterans had endured. Can we ensure that our cadet forces and the Ministry of Defence work with the Department for Education to ensure that the school children of today know about the sacrifices of yesterday?

Mark Lancaster: My hon. Friend makes an important point. He will be aware of the Government's commitment to the cadet forces expansion programme. We increased the number of cadet forces by over 100 during the previous Parliament, and we are committed to increasing it to 500. I am a great fan of the cadet force, having previously been a member of it, and am determined that we should expand it.

Defence Spending (NATO Target)

7. **Mr Keith Simpson (Broadland) (Con):** Whether his Department's budget will meet the NATO target of spending 2% of GDP on defence in each year to 2020. [900121]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): We will be spending 2% of GDP on defence this financial year. Spending beyond that will be determined in the spending review. The Government were elected with a mandate to maintain the size of our regular armed forces, increase the equipment budget in real terms every year and replace our four nuclear ballistic submarines. Those commitments will secure the shape and power of our armed forces throughout this Parliament.

Mr Simpson: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, but I think he is aware from the comments already made that there is deep concern on both sides of the House about the fact that the Prime Minister,

having asked other NATO countries to commit themselves to spending 2% of GDP on defence, is unable to commit to that beyond 2015-16. I hope we will all urge the Secretary of State to make certain that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is aware of that concern, given the threats that have been outlined and the fact that our capacity to deal with them is stretched pretty thin.

Michael Fallon: Let me assure my hon. Friend that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is fully aware of the commitments that were made at the NATO summit and has been even more fully aware during recent negotiations over the in-year savings, which have not taken us below 2%. It is important to note, though, that seven of the 28 NATO members do not even spend 1% on their defence and 20 of the 28 do not even spend 1.5%.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): As NATO now requires us to pay 2%, and apparently other member states the same, and has since 2006 given itself a global role, whose interests is it defending worldwide, and is it demanding that we replace the Trident nuclear missile system, or is that a self-grown decision?

Michael Fallon: The purpose of the alliance is to defend its members. That is why our troops were exercising last week in Estonia and will shortly be exercising in Romania and the Baltic sea, and why our Typhoons are flying with the Norwegians to protect the skies over Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the face of Russian aggression. We are one of the nuclear members of the NATO alliance, and that nuclear shield helps to protect all members of the alliance.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): When the Secretary of State is next having a word in the shell-like ear of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, will he mention that it does not make a lot of sense for any Government to say that defence is the first duty of Government if they protect other Departments' spending but not defence spending?

Michael Fallon: I know of my hon. Friend's long-standing commitment to defence and to defence expenditure. He is right, of course, that the first duty of Government is to defend our country and our people. I reminded him earlier of the commitments in the manifesto to protect the size and power of our armed forces right through this Parliament. However, I note what he has said. Those commitments are for the remaining three financial years, from 2016-17 onwards. These are matters for negotiation in the autumn.

Martin John Docherty (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Given the £500 million of cuts announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer last week in this House, will the Secretary of State advise us whether they will affect Trident replacement? If not, will that mean a cut to conventional forces?

Michael Fallon: Let me assure the hon. Gentleman that the in-year savings that we have been asked to find for the current financial year are way below the original demand of the Treasury. They do not affect the 2% target that we are continuing to meet, they will have no effect on manpower numbers or on current operations—I have just explained to the House that we are extending

one of our current operations in Iraq—and they will have no effect on the baseline of defence expenditure before the negotiations begin in the autumn. These savings will fall on some in-year expenditure on travel costs and on consultancy, and we will defer some spending on infrastructure and equipment from this financial year to the next—

Mr Speaker: Order. We are deeply obliged to the Secretary of State, but the answer is too long. We have to move on.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): We are all waiting for the National Security Council risk assessment that the Government are carrying out at the moment. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that there will be an intellectual and coherent thread from that through to the strategic defence and security review, and from that to the comprehensive spending review?

Michael Fallon: Yes, I can. The review will be based on the risk assessment that is now being updated from the 2010 assessment. That will take us through the work that is being done under the review, which is being undertaken at the same time as the spending review, so all these things come together in identifying the threats we face and the capabilities we need to address them.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): Given the lack of success by the leader of the free world at the G7 in extracting the 2% commitment that he desired from the Prime Minister, I am realistic about my own chances, but will the Secretary of State at least accept that if the UK falls below 2%, it will do significant damage to our standing in NATO and our defence relationship with the United States?

Michael Fallon: It is nice to hear so many Opposition Members championing the cause of 2%. I did not hear that quite so loudly during the general election; perhaps I was listening to the wrong people, and perhaps the Opposition were due to explain exactly how they would finance it. Let us be clear what was agreed last September. In response to the threats from Russian aggression and the rise of ISIL—direct threats to us here in western Europe—the United States wants European members of NATO to shoulder a greater proportion of the burden.

Armed Forces Covenant

8. **Byron Davies** (Gower) (Con): What plans he has to strengthen the armed forces covenant. [900122]

9. **Nicola Blackwood** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): What plans he has to strengthen the armed forces covenant. [900123]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): The armed forces covenant is one of this Government's most important priorities; I will endeavour to drive it forward with the same passion and commitment as my predecessors. This year sees the implementation of a permanent commitment to the covenant through a £10 million per annum fund. Over the coming months, we will focus on how best to

communicate the aims of the covenant and continue to work with industry and the voluntary sector to ensure that it goes from strength to strength.

Byron Davies: Ensuring that our servicemen and women can buy their own homes is, rightly, a priority for this Government. How many people have benefited from the Forces Help to Buy scheme so far?

Mark Lancaster: Forces Help to Buy gives service personnel the opportunity to get on the housing ladder, not only giving them and their families stability during their military service but helping them form a foundation for future life. I am pleased to say that since April 2014, more than 3,500 service personnel have received funds totalling £53.7 million. A further 1,800 service personnel have had their applications approved fully and are awaiting the completion of property purchases.

Nicola Blackwood: More than 20,000 skilled men and women, to whom we owe a debt of gratitude, leave the armed forces each year. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that local skills and economic strategies work effectively to realise the full potential of that highly trained, well disciplined and adaptable workforce?

Mark Lancaster: All those who join as junior ranks receive key skills training and complete professional apprenticeships. All personnel can access routes to higher and further education, are provided with some financial assistance and are given time to study. All personnel leaving the armed forces—about 20,000 a year—are entitled to resettlement provision to help their transition into future careers.

I am sure that my hon. Friend is rightly proud that Oxfordshire has led the way in delivering on our community covenant by being the first local authority to change its schools admissions policy to make it easier for the children of service families to secure school places by using base addresses before their postings. I know that she has played a key role in driving that forward, and I thank her for it.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): I am sure that the Minister agrees that support for our veterans is fundamental to the armed forces covenant. There are 500,000 veterans in the north-west of England, many of them in my constituency, but not one penny of the £40 million veterans accommodation fund went to any organisation in the north-west. Will he ensure that funding for veterans organisations is fairly distributed across the country, and that there are mechanisms in place to do so?

Mark Lancaster: Yes, of course. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that over the past three years, some £150 million of LIBOR funding has been used for the military covenant. I am determined that that should be spread equally across the country, and I will look into the matter that he has raised.

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): I too welcome the Minister to his post, and I welcome his support for the armed forces covenant, but does the rhetoric match the reality on the ground? My local authority in Wigan is investing £500,000 to provide a veterans hub to create a single point of contact for veterans, in recognition of

the current, confusing patchwork of provision. What is the Minister doing to ensure that such good practice is recognised and resourced throughout the country, ending the current postcode lottery for veterans?

Mark Lancaster: The hon. Lady will be aware that all local authorities in Great Britain have signed the community covenant. In my new role, I am very keen to ensure that best practice is spread across the United Kingdom. This is a partnership between the Ministry of Defence and, indeed, other Government Departments. If the hon. Lady feels that her own local authority has best practices that can be shared more widely, I shall be delighted to talk to her.

Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con): What steps is the Minister taking to implement our manifesto commitment to address hearing loss among veterans?

Mark Lancaster: The Royal British Legion was recently awarded £10 million LIBOR funding over five years to address long-term hearing issues. Work has already started with key stakeholders, and the Legion aims to launch the fund in early autumn. From summer 2015, the MOD will introduce new hearing protection measures for UK armed forces personnel, which will reduce the number of veterans with service-attributable hearing issues.

NATO Very High Readiness Joint Task Force

11. **Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): What progress has been made on the creation of a NATO very high readiness joint task force. [900125]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): Significant progress has been made on the very high readiness joint task force. The interim force is established and the operational force will be ready by the Warsaw summit next year. We will contribute a battle group to the Spanish-led task force next year, and we will lead a fully operational task force brigade from January 2017. Our contribution that year will increase from 2,500 to 3,000 personnel.

Jack Lopresti: Given reports in recent days of attacks against Ukrainian forces by Russian forces and separatists backed by Russia, what is NATO doing to deter such aggression, and could a rapid task force play an important role in that?

Michael Fallon: We are continuing to press for sanctions to be upheld against Russia. We are helping Ukrainian armed forces with trainers at six different sites in western Ukraine, training and improving the capacity of the Ukrainian armed forces. We have troops exercising in eastern Europe—in Romania and the Baltic—and our Typhoons are flying every day this summer to help to protect Baltic airspace.

23. [900139] **Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): The need for the development of a NATO very high readiness joint task force is reflected by the deteriorating wider security situation, particularly with the Russians. That is not wholly consistent with relying on 30,000 reservists

as part of our armed forces. If the wider security situation continues to deteriorate, will the Secretary of State review that reliance?

Michael Fallon: We have not yet got to the stage where Future Force 2020 has been completed. We have time enough to ensure that our total of 30,000 reservists is reached, but my hon. Friend will recall our manifesto commitment of no further cuts in the size of the regular armed forces.

Type 26 Frigates

12. **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): What progress his Department has made on the introduction of Type 26 frigates. [900126]

The Minister for Defence Procurement (Mr Philip Dunne): As my hon. Friend knows, in February this year the Prime Minister announced the awarding of a contract for the demonstration phase of the Type 26 programme, valued at £859 million, to complete the detailed design for the ship and engage the maritime supply chain to procure essential long-lead items. This is an incremental programme and detailed discussions with the contractors continue. We intend to award a contract for the manufacture phase next year.

Richard Graham: That is welcome news for many manufacturers and specialist engineers. Can my hon. Friend confirm that there is no danger of falling behind our manifesto commitment for a 1% plus inflation equipment plan for our defence, and that that will not fall victim to any deferring of expenditure referred to by the Defence Secretary?

Mr Dunne: The current contract is completely taken into account in the equipment plan, which, as my hon. Friend rightly points out, is due to increase by 1% a year in excess of inflation for each of the next five years, and we have planned for it to do so during the currency of the 10-year plan.

Topical Questions

T1. [900140] **Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): My immediate priorities are: our operations against ISIL; the strategic defence and security review; and delivering our manifesto commitments to maintain the size of the armed forces, build four successor ballistic missile submarines and increase the equipment budget every year, ensuring the shape and power of our armed forces to keep Britain safe.

Julian Knight: Given the recent naming of the TS Royalist—the sea cadets' flagship—what importance does the Secretary of State attach to our cadet forces in providing training and discipline to young people? Will he join me in visiting one of the cadet centres in my constituency?

Michael Fallon: Let me congratulate my hon. Friend on his election to this place. I am delighted that Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal recently named training ship Royalist. Cadet forces are hugely influential in the development of young people and in raising awareness

of the armed forces. That is why I increased funding for 100 new cadet units in schools last year, and why we have committed to increasing the total number to 500 by 2020. I would be delighted to join my hon. Friend one day on a visit in his constituency.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): The Defence Secretary recently attended a conference in Singapore, where the ongoing tensions in the South China sea were discussed. I recently visited Japan, where concerns were also raised. Does he agree that Britain has considerable interests in this area of the world, and that we all need to work together to defuse potential problems before they escalate? Is it not yet another example of where we need to be clear about what the Government's actual strategy is in dealing with a very real potential problem?

Michael Fallon: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Nearly half the world's trade passes through the South China sea. When I spoke at that conference, I called on all those involved in land reclamation, not simply China, to exercise restraint, to pursue these claims through proper legal frameworks and to avoid the danger—the very real danger—of some local miscalculation that could escalate. He is right: this is a very serious issue, and this is a part of world in which we have a very strong commercial interest.

T3. [900142] **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What help is being given by our forces to aid reconstruction in Nepal? May I commend members of the Gurkha regiment and the Gurkha welfare scheme for overseeing the excellent water project that I and other members of the International Development Committee saw this spring? Will Ministers liaise with their counterparts to discuss supporting additional, desperately needed projects?

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Penny Mordaunt): I thank my hon. Friend for again allowing me to pay tribute to the work not just of the Gurkhas—the Royal Gurkha Rifles and the Gurkha engineers—but to the superb job done by the RAF in transporting 148 tonnes of aid and equipment. We are funding the engineers who remain in Nepal supporting the Gurkha communities, and we are working closely with the Gurkha Welfare Trust to deliver further reconstruction work in the area. We are very clear that we are there for the long haul.

Mr Speaker: I call Alex Cunningham. Not here.

T4. [900143] **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): Will the Defence Secretary clarify something he said earlier about the number of boots currently on the ground in Iraq? He said 250 troops were currently deployed, whereas *The Guardian* reports that the deployment of an additional 125 troops will take the number of "UK military personnel involved in Iraq-related missions to 900." *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Independent* mention similar figures. Will he clarify why those press reports are different from what he told the House earlier?

Michael Fallon: Let me explain to the hon. Gentleman. The figure of 900 relates to the total mission—all those involved in helping to defeat ISIL—which of course includes our air crews in Akrotiri in Cyprus and at other bases in the Gulf. We expect the numbers on the

ground in Iraq to reach about 275, with the increase that was announced at the weekend. As he said, the total mission will then involve about 900 people.

T5. [900144] **Stephen Phillips** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Further to the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Broadland (Mr Simpson), my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will know that post-conflict reconstruction and renewal costs borne by his Department do not currently count towards the 2% of GDP spending. Does he have any plans to lobby the OECD and/or NATO on this, and what is the Government's position?

Michael Fallon: My hon. and learned Friend makes a fair and interesting point. We need to look at where expenditure from the defence and development budgets is security expenditure in the round. Where it is preventing conflict, helping to stabilise countries and avoiding the future commitment of British troops, there is a very strong case for looking at all these things together. The House will know that a sizeable part of our operation in Sierra Leone and indeed the humanitarian work in Nepal, to which the Minister for the Armed Forces referred, is classified as humanitarian assistance to those two countries and will be recouped from the overseas aid budget.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): Given that hairline fissures and radioactive leaks from the test reactor at Vulcan have necessitated the expenditure of several hundred million pounds to render the current Trident submarine fleet safe, how can the Government possibly justify going ahead with another generation of nuclear weapons without a test reactor? Has not that cavalier attitude towards the safety of the Scottish population resulted in 57 of the 59 Scottish MPs being against the renewal of Trident?

Michael Fallon: I absolutely reject that. The safety of the reactors is paramount and is consistently assessed at every stage of their life, from design and build through to operation and disposal. That is independently regulated in accordance with the law and by our own independent nuclear regulator.

T6. [900145] **James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that some of the most severe threats we face emanate from cyberspace, and that the strategic defence and security review should include our cyber-security capability to ensure that we have both offensive and defensive cyber capability?

Penny Mordaunt: I agree with my hon. Friend. Following the 2010 strategic defence and security review, the Government put in place a national cyber-security programme backed by £860 million of Government investment up to 2016. It is for the current SDSR to decide where cyber sits in the overall prioritisation of security threats and responses. However, we have been clear that we will continue to invest in our cyber-defence capabilities, partly because, as he knows, it is a rapidly developing area and we need to keep up.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): We all know that the French navy is being used to plug gaps in military operations in the Gulf, and that in that context the US military has taken to describing our

country as "Great shrinking Britain". Surely the Secretary of State is concerned about that view of this country. What is he going to do about it?

Michael Fallon: I must tell the hon. Lady that HMS Kent was recently part of the carrier screen around the Charles de Gaulle in the Gulf. We have worked with the French to help lift their troops into Mali, and the French in turn help us. That is part of the alliance—France, the United States, ourselves and the Norwegians work together on these threats.

T8. [900147] **James Heapey** (Wells) (Con): After the announcement last week of further troops to train indigenous forces in northern Iraq, and with the possible opportunities to stem the flow of economic migrants through Libya by building capacity in the security forces there, will my right hon. Friend confirm what resources are being made available to the Army so that it can develop that increasingly important capability?

Michael Fallon: I congratulate my hon. Friend not just on his election but on his magnificent maiden speech last week, in which he brought his own regimental experience to the House's attention.

As my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces told the House, our personnel are engaged in some 21 operations around the world in 19 different countries, and we are ready to expand those operations where necessary. Just this weekend, we have announced an enlargement of our mission and our work in Iraq, and I have today told the House of an enlargement of our contribution to the very high readiness task force. We are able to do that only because we have balanced the defence budget and set out the right priorities for it.

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): How does the Secretary of State reconcile his warm words about veterans with the fact that one of my constituents, whose hearing was profoundly damaged during his time in the Army, cannot get any financial support because the support available for the armed forces is far different from that for people who work in, say, a factory, and have their hearing damaged there? How can that be right?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the investment that we mentioned earlier of £10 million for veterans with hearing loss. I am unaware of the details of the specific case he mentions, but I would be delighted to meet him to discuss it.

T9. [900148] **Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Will the Minister meet me to discuss the gap in provision in Northumberland to support the growing number of veterans on my patch who are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder?

Mark Lancaster: I would be happy to discuss any cases my hon. Friend has in mind, but I am not aware of any gaps in service provision in the Northumberland area. A wide range of services is available to those suffering from PTSD in that region, including the Veterans Wellbeing Assessment and Liaison Service, run by the local NHS foundation trust, which provides outreach

and assessment workers and utilises existing community, primary and secondary care mental health services across the north-east.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I am incredibly proud of the work carried out by local government, especially by the Greater Manchester authorities and the combined authority in my city region, to implement the armed forces covenant at a local level, but may I urge the Minister to speak to his colleagues in government to ensure consistency across all Government Departments? Too many decisions are still being taken by Government Departments and Government agencies that are not consistent with the principles of the armed forces covenant.

Mark Lancaster: The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the fact that the community covenant is the responsibility of not just the Ministry of Defence but all Government Departments. That is precisely why the Government have instigated a new working group that cross-cuts Government Departments to address the very issues he raises.

Mr Speaker: Order. May I very gently point out that we are not in the reading room of the Bearsden public library and that hon. Members should not read a newspaper unless it relates to the matter currently under consideration by the House? I say that in a jocular spirit to the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson), who is a literate fellow. I am sure he will savour his enjoyment on a subsequent occasion.

Kevin Brennan: He was reading his horoscope. [*Laughter.*]

Mr Speaker: I would not want to suggest that the hon. Gentleman was reading his horoscope. I do not think he was doing anything of the kind—that is a calumny!

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Defence diplomacy is a major component of Britain's soft power. What steps are the Government taking to foster and encourage this aspect of our international relations?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Julian Brazier): My hon. Friend is absolutely right: defence engagement is of pivotal importance. We are in the process of “upgunning” the role of defence attachés worldwide, with more language training and a proper career structure to make it more attractive. That is part of a wider attempt to raise the importance of defence diplomacy. Soldiers, sailors and airmen can so often reach parts of our allies that others cannot.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give the total cost of Trident replacement so far? Could he confirm whether this House has approved every element of that expenditure?

Michael Fallon: This House voted on the renewal of Trident with an overwhelming majority back in January—I think the largest majority for some years. I am very happy to set out in the House the details of the current expenditure. I think about £3 billion has been earmarked so far. I think, from memory, about £1.5 billion has been spent so far, but if I am wrong I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

T10. [900149] **Mark Spencer** (Sherwood) (Con): What military assistance is being provided by the Department in the Mediterranean and north Africa to help with humanitarian disasters?

Michael Fallon: HMS Bulwark and three Merlin helicopters are conducting search and rescue in the Mediterranean. To date, they have rescued 2,909 migrants from the sea. I hope the whole House will pay tribute to the professionalism and bravery of those involved in this extraordinarily large rescue mission. As well as rescuing those at sea, we now need to address this problem further back by tackling the trafficking gangs who are making money out of this misery and discouraging people from leaving their countries to make this long and very dangerous journey.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): May I tell the Secretary of State how much I enjoyed our exchange of letters during the election campaign—less so the 20,000 letters he sent to my constituents? Now that he has finished unsettling the carefully constructed supply chain, will he give a statement on the timetable for maingate? Is there a prospect of bringing it forward?

Michael Fallon: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on surviving the election campaign. It is good to see him back in his place; indeed, it is good to hear him championing the renewal of the nuclear deterrent. I hope he will continue to do so throughout this Parliament. We expect the maingate decision to be taken in this Parliament—next year, I hope.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): The Secretary of State set out the importance of cadet forces around the UK, but cadets in Heanor, in my constituency, report that they lack the funds to get the full experience they want and deserve. Is there a way of squeezing out more money so that cadets can get the experience they need?

Mark Lancaster: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his commitment to supporting the community cadet force in his constituency. The Army Cadet Force receives £81 million a year distributed between the various detachments across UK counties. Derbyshire has a vibrant cadet representation. All three detachments in his constituency—Alfreton, Ripley and Heanor—see healthy attendance and are funded appropriately.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry to disappoint remaining colleagues, but we must now move on.

Clandestine Migrants (Harwich)

3.35 pm

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Home Secretary to make a statement about the discovery and detention of 68 clandestine migrants by the Border Force at Harwich international port on the night of Thursday 4 June.

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): Last Thursday evening, Border Force officers at the port of Harwich detected and intercepted 68 migrants seeking to enter the UK illegally and clandestinely. The discovery came after four lorries were selected for examination and for searching through Border Force's normal operating procedures. Among the 68 migrants were two pregnant women and 15 children. Seven migrants complained of chest pains and nausea and were taken to hospital as a precautionary measure. All four drivers of the lorries involved were arrested on suspicion of facilitating illegal immigration. They have been bailed but remain under investigation by law enforcement bodies, including the National Crime Agency.

Of the 68 people found, 35 were Afghans, 22 Chinese, 10 Vietnamese and one Russian. None of those taken to hospital, including the two pregnant women, was found to have a substantive medical condition of concern. Some of the individuals have claimed asylum, and UK Visas and Immigration is considering their claims, including suitability for the "detained fast track" process. Two of the asylum seekers are unaccompanied minors and have been placed in the care of Essex social services. We have already begun the work to seek the removal of the remaining migrants from the UK, and 15 have already been successfully removed. If we can show that those claiming asylum have also claimed in another EU member state, we will seek to remove them under the Dublin regulations. The Government are clear that the EU's approach to migratory flows must include the proper management of the external border, the prompt return of those not in genuine need of protection and action to tackle the efforts of the smugglers and traffickers who profit from human misery.

I am aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) visited the port, which is in his constituency, on Friday, and I endorse and echo his positive words about the work of Border Force. It conducts rigorous checks, on a targeted basis, on lorries and other vehicles as they arrive at UK ports of entry, as was the case at Harwich on Thursday evening. Such checks are undertaken by skilled officers who have the expertise to identify individuals often well hidden in vehicles and they involve the use of state-of-the-art scanning and X-ray technology. Thursday night's incident at Harwich comes on the back of several other good results for the Border Force team at that port. Among other successful operations in recent years, the team has made some significant seizures, including 15 kg of heroin in December, 17 kg of cocaine in May and 2.9 million cigarettes in March.

On the specific problems of clandestine immigrants, Border Force concentrates significant resources at the juxtaposed ports in northern France, where the vast majority of illegal border crossings are attempted. All lorries undergo enhanced screening at these locations, but our approach is flexible and intelligence led. Border

Force can and does move its resources around on the basis of threat to ensure we keep one step ahead of the criminal gangs that exploit vulnerable people and try to circumvent our immigration laws.

The important work that Border Force officers carry out, detecting and intercepting those who attempt to enter the UK illegally, in conjunction with law enforcement agencies in the UK and internationally, is vital in the fight against organised criminal networks engaged in people smuggling. These gangs show a callous disregard for human life and seek to make a profit out of other people's misery. I commend Border Force for its discovery last week and the work it does day in, day out to protect the UK's border, and I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Jenkin: I thank my hon. Friend for his statement. Can he confirm that this is, in fact, one of the largest discoveries of clandestines ever at a port of entry into the UK? I join him in his praise for Border Force and the effectiveness of its operation. I also join him in underlining what a pitiful sight these individuals were and in remembering that they are the victims of people traffickers as much as they are seeking to exploit the system themselves.

Does the Minister share public concern about the immediate implications of this discovery, which perhaps arise under three main issues? How much does this incident demonstrate the increasing pressures on Border Force and the UK authorities, and do they have adequate manpower and equipment? Harwich international port is able to stop and search only about 6% of the 250,000 commercial vehicles entering the UK at Harwich each year. It does not know and cannot know how many unchecked vehicles might contain undetected clandestines. Seeking out illegal entrants is not its first priority, which is to swipe passports of known passengers and carry out anti-terrorist measures.

Secondly, although Border Force was able to reassure me that it has effective working relationships with its counterparts in Holland and elsewhere across the continent, the UK does not have an agreement with Holland on what is known as—the Minister referred to it—juxtaposed controls, similar to those with France, which enable the UK authorities to operate on the ground at Calais and other French channel ports. Without criticising the Dutch Government in any way, this incident raises the question of whether arrangements at Hook of Holland need to be reviewed?

Thirdly, what signal does this send? Yes, we found these individuals, and I am delighted that the Minister has been able to tell us that 15 of these clandestine migrants have already been deported, but out of the 68, what is the likelihood that many will end up achieving what they wanted and be allowed to stay here? Why do clandestines cross continents of free countries to claim asylum here? While we must honour our obligations under the tightly defined criteria for asylum claims laid down in the 1951 Geneva convention, how much does the way that we adjudicate on the much wider provisions of the European convention on human rights unreasonably inflate asylum claims so that the UK attracts people to claim asylum here rather than elsewhere, and what should be done about that?

James Brokenshire: I thank my hon. Friend for the manner in which he has approached this issue. I know of the direct stance he has taken in visiting the port and

[James Brokenshire]

ensuring that he represents his constituents effectively. He makes a powerful point about the pitiful sight of those discovered in these four lorries and about how those seeking to exploit migrants really have no care or consideration—even at times as to whether these people will live or die. That is the callous and harsh reality of the organised crime groups to which we are responding. That is also why it is right that we have enforcement activity both in this country, leveraging with the work of the National Crime Agency, and with other European partners.

My hon. Friend highlights his concerns about the immediate aftermath of the detection, and this has certainly been a very significant detection of illicit migrants, although we have worked hard across the whole of the juxtaposed and other port controls, with just over 39,000 detections being made last year. That shows the vigilance and hard work of Border Force—both in country and elsewhere.

My hon. Friend highlights the need to work internationally, which is certainly what we are doing with the Dutch and others, and asks why people are claiming asylum here rather than in other countries. I would point to that fact that, last year, there were 200,000 asylum claims in Germany—much more than the approximately 30,000 we saw in this country—and 81,000 in Sweden and 63,000 in France. A large majority of asylum claimants are thus going to other European countries rather than here. I can certainly assure my hon. Friend on the work that Border Force is undertaking and the work we will continue to do to secure our border, using technology and flexibly deploying our resources in respect of intelligence where we need it, and ensuring that we are doing all we can to secure our border.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): First, may I thank you, Mr Speaker, and the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) for raising this important issue here today? It remains one of the most serious humanitarian issues facing not just this Government but Europe as a whole. We must ensure that we maintain, as the Minister wants to do, the integrity of our borders. The people found at Harwich this weekend are as much victims of criminal gangs as those found on boats in the Mediterranean, or indeed at the border in Calais. As the Minister has said, we need concerted UK and EU action to ensure we stop this trade in human beings at source.

We on this side of the House warned in October that the removal of Operation Triton would lead to further pressure on European borders, and the lack of effective action taken in Calais by the French authorities and their failure to identify and to remove correctly those at the French border is leading to attempts at other borders, including those in Holland. The measures taken earlier this year by the Government and European Governments are welcome, and I also pay tribute to the armed forces for their help in the Mediterranean, but some questions remain.

First, will the Minister outline in detail what steps he is taking with our European partners and Europol to establish where the people traffickers are operating from, to follow the money raised by payment to these individuals back to source, and to establish further intelligence-led

operations to close down this business? How many prosecutions of people traffickers have taken place in the past 12 months both in the UK and internationally? Will he now arrange an urgent meeting of the EU police forces and Ministers to look at this issue again, and to track, identify and prosecute those involved in this trade? Might we look particularly at the issues of north Africa and the middle east, and the Governments and regimes there, to help stop this trade at source?

Like the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex, I briefly want to look at what we are doing in the UK. We need to intensify the checks on vehicles, particularly lorries at UK ports of entry. Can the Minister confirm what percentage of lorries and containers are routinely checked at UK ports of entry, and say whether the figure of 6% for Harwich is accurate? Can he confirm whether the statement of the former inspector of borders, John Vine, at the weekend that

“good intelligence and experienced staff were critical, but a lot of experienced staff were leaving and not being replaced” is true?

Can the Minister confirm whether Border Force funding is ring-fenced from the £30 million Home Office cut announced by the Chancellor last week? A further reduction in funding, even in these hard times, will put pressure on Border Force staff. Will he indicate, if not now then in writing in the Library of the House, how many staff were in post in May 2010 and how many staff are in post now? Does he accept that the pressures on Calais and the work done in Calais are now displacing people to other ports, as we warned last year? Will he look at the issue of the Dublin convention to make sure arrangements are put in place so that those whose first port of entry is not in the UK are dealt with elsewhere?

Finally, as the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex has asked, will the Minister indicate what steps he is taking to work with the Government of Holland in particular, but also those in Belgium, Spain and Ireland who have direct sea routes to the UK, to put in place stronger mechanisms, as we have in France, to stop the traffickers in mainland Europe?

This is a criminal trade, and the people at Harwich are victims. We need to make sure that the UK Government work hand in hand with our European partners because we need, collectively with the support of the Opposition, to close down this vile trade.

James Brokenshire: The right hon. Gentleman has asked a series of questions. I may not be able to answer all of them in the time available, but I welcome his constructive approach.

The right hon. Gentleman highlights the need to work jointly with other European countries, and I agree. That is why we have a dedicated UK taskforce in Dover which provides real-time intelligence and investigation response to all operations. For example with links to France and Belgium, 32 live investigations and 22 organised crime groups have already been disrupted since February 2014, and the total custodial sentences to date is 148 years. I hope that responds on his question about the body of work.

The right hon. Gentleman highlights the work that we have rightly undertaken in Calais with the French authorities—the £12 million joint investment with the French Government to strengthen security at that port.

That is on top of additional investment in screening and other detection equipment, which underlines our strong, practical response.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about the number of Border Force officers—there are around 8,000. They are deployed flexibly, by which I mean that is dependent on the intelligence that we see for a particular port at any one time. Therefore, it is not appropriate to give the breakdown or percentages that he seeks, but we rightly take a responsive stance to deal with such issues.

The right hon. Gentleman also highlighted the need to ensure adherence to the Dublin regulations that allow us to return people who may have been able to claim asylum in other countries. We take that responsibility seriously and we continue to press other European countries in that regard.

One of the key things is to ensure that those who arrive in the European Union are properly fingerprinted and that we have the identification of those who come to our shores. More work needs to be done on that and we will continue to press other European countries to fulfil their responsibilities.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Will the Minister assure us that the traffickers, if convicted, will not be allowed to use any of the legal procedures under the Human Rights Act or the charter of fundamental rights to avoid immediate deportation?

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the work that the Government have done through the Immigration Act 2014—to put in place clarification of article 8, for example, on the right to a family life, to ensure that it is properly balanced—so that we can seek removal. I am sure that such issues of fundamental and human rights are ones that we shall return to during the course of the Parliament.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Unfortunately, the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin), the Minister and the shadow Minister all significantly exceeded their allotted time. I am keen to accommodate the very proper interest of colleagues, and I will try to do so, but I am also conscious—I hope that the House will be sensitive to the fact—of an important Second Reading debate to follow, which is well subscribed and of which I must therefore take proper account.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): The Minister has one of the toughest jobs in Government. I congratulate him on being the first Immigration Minister to be reappointed after a general election.

I fully support what Charles Montgomery and his team have done at the border. They do an excellent job, as does Wagtail UK, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary. This is fundamentally an EU problem, in terms of not only tackling the human traffickers, but protecting the border. Will the Minister ensure that Frontex is made to do the job that it is supposed to do, which is to protect the external border of the EU so that people such as those caught in the containers are not allowed to be treated in that way?

James Brokenshire: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind comments. I fully recognise the importance of this work, of EU action and of the role that Frontex has to play. This is certainly something that the Home Secretary has continued to advance at Justice and Home Affairs Council meetings. Indeed, there were discussions at the G6 last week, when the Home Secretary spoke to a number of her European counterparts. I assure the right hon. Gentleman of the importance that we attach to the work of Frontex and to ensuring that the external border is strengthened.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): It is slightly alarming that it is now public knowledge that clandestine migrants have a 94% chance of getting in through Harwich. When the Home Affairs Committee in the previous Parliament visited Calais, we saw all lorries routinely subject to carbon dioxide sensors, motion sensors, sniffer dogs and X-rays. When will similar thoroughness be applied to Harwich, where clearly displacement has happened?

James Brokenshire: We have those controls juxtaposed at ports where we see the majority of the problem. Clearly we keep under review the way in which we apply our resourcing to particular ports. I do not comment on specific percentages or ways in which resources are deployed. The right thing to do is to look at the intelligence and the threat and to ensure that we are doing our utmost. That is precisely what we are doing.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Reports suggest that the migrants had been stowed for a long time, with many tired and dehydrated. The Minister said that they included two pregnant women and 15 children, and that some were taken to hospital as a precautionary measure but none was found to have a substantial “medical condition of concern.” What assurances can he give that those migrants who remain in the UK have continuing access to appropriate healthcare? What updates can he provide, particularly on the condition of the pregnant women and children reported to have been among their number?

James Brokenshire: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for her question and welcome her to her place today. I have given the House an update on the medical condition of the children and the others rescued at Harwich. Obviously, continuing medical support will be made available should it be required, but, again, I am pleased to say that no further intervention was needed.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I congratulate Border Force on this operation. Given that ports and lorries are rather obvious methods of entry into the United Kingdom, what others are being used and how widespread are they?

James Brokenshire: As I hope my hon. Friend will recognise, it would not be appropriate for me to identify or set out alternative routes for others to take. I can say to him that Border Force is vigilant and is always looking at different ways in which those who seek to get to this country may stow away or hide themselves. The real concern is the extent to which people are prepared to put their lives at risk, sometimes in really dangerous

[James Brokenshire]

conditions. We take that extremely seriously, in terms not simply of trying to identify individuals but of ensuring that they are safeguarded.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): The Minister has talked about how some people who have been smuggled are being returned and how the drivers of the lorries have been arrested, but he has not told us what has happened to the organisers of this operation. In preparation for this question, I looked to see how many criminal gangs that are smuggling people into Britain had been prosecuted. The Minister said he is disrupting their operations, but is he going to prosecute any of them?

James Brokenshire: When the hon. Lady looks back at a previous answer I gave about the work of operation groundbreaker, she will see that prosecutions have been achieved, with a significant number of years' imprisonment secured against those involved.

As I said in my statement, the National Crime Agency is involved in this area, working with immigration enforcement. The hon. Lady rightly says that this is about going against the trafficking groups—the organised crime groups—and looking overseas to where the facilitation is taking place. This is a pernicious and appalling trade, which is why we are fusing intelligence and working jointly with European partners to go after those responsible for putting people in such dangerous conditions.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Does my hon. Friend recognise the importance of immigration removal centres? The whole House has recognised that the people involved at Harwich were clearly the victims. As the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) said, it is important that there is somewhere safe and secure for people to be held and looked after, which is why the IRCs are important.

James Brokenshire: I recognise and support the need for detention as part of a removals policy, and IRCs play an important role in ensuring that that takes place in a safe manner. Obviously, we are concerned to ensure that detention in an IRC is for the most limited period possible and that appropriate welfare is provided, but it is absolutely right that we have our IRCs to do the job on facilitation and removal.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Given that these were intelligence-led operations, may I return to John Vine's comments about Border Force? His concerns were that too many staff with long experience have been lost and that although we may have the numbers, these people are not sufficiently experienced. Will the Minister return to the issue to satisfy himself that that is not happening?

James Brokenshire: The success of Border Force is clear to see, with more than 39,000 attempts to cross the channel illegally having been stopped in 2014-15. Indeed, its successful work last week underpins its activity. We continue to strengthen the security at our border to stop those who have no right to enter the UK, and our highly trained staff in Border Force are doing that precise job.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Helping fragile states is expensive, but helping failed states is even more expensive in terms of blood, treasure and mass migration—often illegal mass migration. Although these clandestines are arguably not from failed states, many more who come to this country are. Does that not underline the importance of the Government's commitment to the Department for International Development budget, particularly in doing more for conflict prevention and conflict resolution?

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend makes an important and powerful point. Our international and regional development assistance plays a key part in providing long-term solutions to help prevent the flows of people across continents and in confronting and combating the traffickers who are engaged in this pernicious trade. Yes, he is correct, and we certainly do want to see that focus on international development assistance to support our own domestic priorities.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): As the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) said, only 6% of vehicles are stopped. We know that there is an issue around infrastructure as well as around resources at ports. What conversation is the Minister having with the ferry companies, which often plead commercial pressures as well, to ensure that there is space and willingness to engage with the Border Force to tackle this issue?

James Brokenshire: As I have already told the House, it is not correct to talk about any specific percentages at any one port given the very flexible way in which resources are directed to meet the threat. But we continue to discuss the matter with the maritime and other sectors. Indeed the round-table discussion that I had with the hauliers in March focused on how we could work with them, the need for greater security and the support they need to help them with their role. We will certainly continue those discussions.

Mary Robison (Cheadle) (Con): Will the Minister remind the House of the actions taken by this Government to give asylum to the most vulnerable cases?

James Brokenshire: This country should be proud of its record of granting asylum to those who are fleeing persecution and those whose lives would be at risk if they were returned to their countries of origin. This Government have taken significant steps to improve the way we process asylum cases and deal with the backlogs. We now have a six-month service standard for processing straightforward claims. Obviously, we remain vigilant against those who abuse our asylum system and our hospitality, which is why we are following the Dublin regulation and ensuring that those who are coming here not for asylum are processed effectively and removed if they have no right to be here.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I ask the Minister to think quite deeply about this issue. Those poor people who were taken into Harwich are but the tip of an iceberg. There are hundreds of thousands of people around the world who are victims of war, oppression, and human rights abuses. Apparently, many of them come from Afghanistan, which we have occupied for

the past 14 years. Does he not think that there is a worldwide humanitarian crisis here that we should be addressing to save lives? It is fine to condemn people traffickers—we can all do that—but we must look at the consequences for those desperate and very poor people.

James Brokenshire: The hon. Gentleman will have heard what I said in relation to a previous question on the use of international and regional development assistance, and I believe very strongly in that. It is an end-to-end approach that we need here. Yes, of course we have the immediate issue that we were confronted with on Thursday of those who have arrived on our shores. Equally we need to look at the external border in dealing with Frontex and some of the other European institutions. But it is also about stopping people from making these journeys. It is not only about confronting the organised crime groups; it is also about regional assistance and development and ensuring that we have solid states so that people do not need to make those perilous journeys.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Caring for trafficked children is putting a great financial strain on local authorities, including Northamptonshire. Are Ministers making additional resources available in this dreadful case to help that process?

James Brokenshire: Certainly, we recognise that a number of areas around the UK are under significant pressure from migration. That is why the Prime Minister has said that we are examining the creation of a special fund to make money available to those areas of the country that are particularly affected. Certainly, that is something that we are considering further, and we will come back to the House with further information in due course.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister set out what co-operation is being undertaken with the Dutch authorities to ensure that checks on lorries take place at the earliest possible opportunity to reduce the risk to migrants? What percentage of checks are taking place in Holland and what investment is planned to ensure that, as has been illustrated in Calais, early intervention reduces the risks?

James Brokenshire: The relationship with the authorities in the Netherlands is particularly strong and has resulted in a joint action plan that will embed regular data and intelligence sharing between Border Force and its Dutch equivalent. Intelligence is already being shared that is helping to improve Border Force targeting and in the future we plan to run joint operational activities on common threats in the Netherlands to enhance security. The strong joint working that we see already will be enhanced.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Earlier this year, a case was reported of a failed asylum seeker whose application had been refused in 1997 but who, incredibly, was still here in 2015, mainly due to the Human Rights Act. Will the Minister please confirm that all the illegal immigrants found at Harwich will be returned within 18 days, never mind 18 weeks, 18 months or 18 years? If that is not possible because of the

Human Rights Act, it will be yet further evidence of why we urgently need to review our human rights legislation.

James Brokenshire: It is right that any asylum claims should be appropriately considered, and that is what will happen. As I have already said, the Government have done a great deal to speed up and improve the process of examining those claims. My hon. Friend has a good point about the ability to appeal. We believe that further steps are needed on various different routes, so that appeal rights can be maintained, but out of the country. That is what we have done with foreign national offenders and we want to extend it further into other routes.

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Stopping this revolting trade requires action at source and my hon. Friend has spoken about the importance of the use of our international aid budget. What discussions has he had with Foreign Office Ministers about taking concerted action across the globe?

James Brokenshire: We have joint action on this and the Home Office does not simply work in isolation. We work with the Department for International Development and Ministers from the Foreign Office, so I can certainly assure my hon. and learned Friend that the Government take our responsibilities in combating this issue seriously. That requires work overseas as well as in this country, and Foreign Office Ministers are certainly playing their part.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con) rose—

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con) rose—

Mr Speaker: What a delicious remaining choice. I call Mr Philip Hollobone.

Mr Hollobone: Given that only 6% of lorries are being searched at major ports such as Harwich, is it not time to recruit more personnel from the increasing reservoir of former police officers and armed forces personnel so that more searches can be undertaken? Is it not now time to make it absolutely clear that this country will not accept fresh asylum claims from those who have travelled through many other safe countries before arriving at our shores?

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend has rightly raised the effective use of the Dublin regulation on a number of occasions. We want it to be strengthened further, which is why I made the comment earlier about ensuring that we fingerprint those who arrive within the EU. I have already dealt with how Border Force uses its resources. It is right that it should do that. We certainly remain focused on the clandestine threat as well as on other threats to the UK border and on how we use Border Force resources and technology to meet those threats.

Mr Bone: It is quite clear that human traffickers are evil, brutal gangs, but one problem that we came across when I was chairman of the all-party group on human trafficking was that illegal immigrants were coming through the porous eastern borders of the European

[Mr Bone]

Union and travelling across the EU unchallenged, partly because of freedom of movement and partly because there are no border checks. The main reason, however, was that there were no incentives for those countries to intervene and stop those people because they would then become their problem. What discussion has the Minister had with his European Union colleagues to correct this problem?

James Brokenshire: I congratulate my hon. Friend on all the work that he did in the last Parliament to highlight the trafficking of human beings. His work was instrumental in shaping the Modern Slavery Act 2015, for example, and ensuring that we take this issue as seriously as possible. We underline those themes, and one of the Home Secretary's priorities at European Council of Ministers meetings is the need to confront and combat trafficking—that pernicious trade, which is exploitative, has no regard for individuals' welfare or wellbeing, and sees them transited across countries to make money for people. It is utterly sick, and it is an issue that we shall retain as a priority. I can assure my hon. Friend that we will return to it on future justice and home affairs council meetings, given the importance that we rightly attach to it.

Scotland Bill

[Relevant document: *The Ninth Report from the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, Session 2014-15, on Constitutional Implications of the Government's draft Scotland clauses, HC 1022.*]

Second Reading

Mr Speaker: The amendment has not been selected.

4.10 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

May I begin by offering my warmest congratulations to all new MPs from Scotland on winning their seats? This Government respect the results from Scotland in the general election, just as we respect the result of the referendum last year. As the Prime Minister said, this is a one-nation Government. That is why one of our chief priorities is to bring the four nations of our United Kingdom together. The Bill is an important part of a package of measures that we believe does just that. If the House agrees to give the Bill a Second Reading it will be subject to four days of line-by-line scrutiny on the Floor of the House. I am happy to have my feet held to the fire, and for the Bill to receive full scrutiny, because I am confident that it delivers the Smith commission recommendations in full, but that does not mean that we will not listen carefully to contributions as it is debated.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP) rose—

David Mundell: Let me progress a little.

Let us not allow bluff and bluster to obscure the fact that there is already substantial agreement on the most significant aspects of the Bill. The UK and Scottish Governments agree on the devolution of income tax, representing £11 billion in revenue, and on the principle, if not yet the detail, of devolving £2.5 billion in welfare.

Alex Salmond: Has the Secretary of State seen today's edition of the *Daily Record*, in which there is an excellent eight-page supplement? The paper, after all, offered the vow, and more than any other newspaper, was influential in securing a no vote in the referendum. In its editorial today, the *Daily Record* describes the Bill as “unacceptable” for not implementing the promises of the Smith commission. Why does the Secretary of State believe that the *Daily Record* describes his Bill as unacceptable and accuses him of renegeing on the Smith commission's recommendations?

David Mundell: I am afraid that that is the right hon. Gentleman's interpretation. There is an excellent piece, which I commend to him, by Professor Adam Tomkins, in that very edition, in which he sets out the argument that the Bill clearly meets the Smith commission recommendations.

Alex Salmond rose—

David Mundell: Let me continue. We are going to debate the Bill in full. We are going to scrutinise, over four days, every line and every clause. I am satisfied that the editor and readers of the *Daily Record* will be confident that the Bill meets the Smith commission

recommendations in full when we complete that process. *[Interruption.]* No, we have dealt with that issue. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. We cannot have argument by gesticulation. The right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) is a seasoned observer—he does not have the excuse that he is a newcomer to the House—and he has a sort of cheeky chappie countenance, but I am afraid that it will not wash at this stage. He will have to try his luck later.

David Mundell: I fear there is a lot of cheek still to come.

Over 18 years, the devolution of power and decision making from this Parliament to the Assemblies of Wales and Northern Ireland and to the Parliament in Scotland has changed the constitutional make-up of the United Kingdom fundamentally. I was proud to be elected as a Member of the new Scottish Parliament at its inception in 1999—indeed, I was the first MSP to ask a question in that Parliament on the opening day, so I draw from my experience of the Scottish devolution settlement as I take this Bill forward.

Even though some had doubts at the time, few would now deny that devolution has been a success story for Scotland. It has ensured that decisions affecting our homes and our families, from schools to hospitals to our police service, have been taken closer to the people they affect. As today's Bill makes clear, the Scottish Parliament is a permanent part of the UK's constitutional arrangements. The Bill recognises that, and rightly so.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): To what extent does the Bill represent a full and final settlement for the future of the United Kingdom? How stable will it be?

David Mundell: I anticipate that the Bill will be a very stable settlement for Scotland as it was signed up to by all five of the political parties represented in the Scottish Parliament, including the Scottish National party.

That does not mean that the devolution settlement is or ever was perfect. From the start the settlement contained an imbalance, with a Scottish Parliament responsible for spending money which another Parliament—this one—was chiefly accountable for raising. It is one of the most important features of the Bill that it seeks to redress that balance. I will go into that in more detail later in my remarks.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): With reference to the Minister's comments on responsibility, can he confirm to the House that this Bill is so inadequate that it does not even allow the Scottish Parliament to raise all the money that it spends?

David Mundell: In my opening comments, I mentioned that there had been a referendum in Scotland last year in which the people of Scotland voted to remain within the United Kingdom as part of this United Kingdom Parliament, but with a strong Scottish Parliament. The Scottish National party was part of the Smith commission which signed up to the tax powers. I find it interesting that the Scottish Government made a 61-page submission to the Committee in the Scottish Parliament about

this Bill. How many lines were dedicated to the £11 billion of tax measures? Two lines, because the Scottish Government agree with those measures.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the measures that he is putting forward will make the Scottish Parliament one of the most powerful devolved Parliaments in the world?

David Mundell: Indeed. I hope these measures will allow the debate to move from process to action and policy, and that we can finally hear from the Scottish Government how they intend to deploy the significant powers that are provided in the Bill and in the Scotland Act 2012.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) said that the deficiency of the Bill is that it does not allow Scotland to raise all the money it spends. I am confused. I thought the SNP did not want full fiscal and financial autonomy because that would get rid of the Barnett formula. Is the Secretary of State any the wiser?

David Mundell: I think the hon. Gentleman, like me, looks forward to amendments to the Bill being tabled, setting out the SNP position on full fiscal autonomy. I have heard that issue raised on numerous occasions but I am still not absolutely clear what it means in the SNP's terms. The Institute for Fiscal Studies identifies a black hole of between £7 billion and £10 billion in Scotland's finances.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): With respect—*[Interruption.]* Actually, I am going to make a point that might be quite positive. With respect to my right hon. Friend's arguments, what worries me is that this might not be the end of the story, because it does not get to the kernel of the problem, which is that the Scottish Parliament will raise only about 50% of what it spends and, therefore, will be fundamentally a spending Parliament, not a tax-raising Parliament. There is a good Conservative case to be made for full fiscal autonomy, because it would breed responsibility.

David Mundell: I do not believe that there is a Conservative case, or indeed any case, to be made for an outcome that would leave Scotland with a gap of between £7 billion and £10 billion in its finances, which would affect every school, every hospital and every person in Scotland.

The independence referendum on 18 September 2014 was a truly historic moment, and I am proud that the people of Scotland voted decisively to remain part of our United Kingdom. The debates were passionate, as many here today will vouch, and extensive, and the level of participation was a credit to Scotland. The result was clear and decisive. It represented the sovereign will of the Scottish people. In voting no to independence, we Scots, for the first time in our history, made the positive, conscious and collective choice to pull our sovereignty with our neighbours in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We made the positive choice to enjoy the best of both worlds. We chose to continue to share the benefits of being part of a strong United Kingdom while enjoying the benefits of a strong devolved Parliament in Edinburgh delivering Scottish solutions to Scottish

[David Mundell]

issues. However, a no vote was not a vote for no change. The Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats all published extensive proposals for more powers for the Scottish Parliament in the months before the referendum.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): The SNP accepted the result of the Scottish people but, during the referendum campaign, when Gordon Brown spoke on behalf of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal parties, we were promised that we would get as close to federalism as possible; that we would have home rule in the spirit of Keir Hardie. We hear about respect. The SNP won the election in Scotland conclusively. We stood on a mandate of powers for a purpose. Why does the Secretary of State not deliver what the people of Scotland voted for: a powerhouse Parliament with full economic powers?

David Mundell: I have heard the hon. Gentleman make his points before. The facts of the matter are that the SNP took part in the Smith commission after the referendum, signed up to a package of measures set out in the commission's report and then, during the election, argued that its MPs would come to this Parliament to ensure that it was delivered.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Can the Secretary of State outline whether any of the fiscal arrangements that will be changed as a result of the Bill will affect Northern Ireland in any way?

David Mundell: It will clearly be the case that the Scottish Parliament will have significantly greater powers over income tax and welfare than it has now, but the Scottish Parliament is currently able to introduce policies that are significantly different from policies that are adopted in Northern Ireland. That is the nature of devolution and the devolution settlement.

Ian Paisley: I will put it the way a Ballymena man would: how much will it affect Northern Ireland?

David Mundell: It will depend on the policies that are pursued in the Scottish Parliament. For example, were my colleague Ruth Davidson to become First Minister of Scotland, we would see taxes reduced in Scotland, which I think would have a positive effect in Northern Ireland, because it would be an incentive to see business done in a compatible manner. But devolution is about taking decisions in the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly, and increasingly in different parts of England.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, at a time when we are devolving more powers to Scotland and other parts of the United Kingdom, we also need a fair and equitable settlement for the people of England, starting with English votes for English laws?

David Mundell: As my hon. Friend is aware, that proposal was in the Conservative party manifesto and it will be brought to this Parliament. [Interruption.]

I think we have concluded on the issue of what devolution means throughout the United Kingdom.

The Conservative-led coalition Government passed the Scotland Act 2012—the biggest single transfer of fiscal responsibility to Edinburgh in 300 years. They also oversaw significant further devolution to Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as groundbreaking work on city deals and a step change across England with the work towards the creation of the northern powerhouse. The Bill before the House today represents a further step forward in the governance of Scotland and our United Kingdom.

The settled will of the Scottish people is now that Scotland should remain part of the United Kingdom. As such, this Bill demonstrates the Government's determination that the Scottish Parliament should be made more powerful, more accountable yet autonomous, and better equipped to serve the people of Scotland. It is the fulfilment of our manifesto commitment that the all-party Smith commission agreement should be implemented in full. The fact that the Bill was introduced on the first day after the Queen's Speech and that its Second Reading is taking place at the first opportunity since the general election speaks volumes for the Government's determination to honour that manifesto commitment and get on with the job.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his new position and on beating off the opposition that he no doubt had in getting it. Does he not have cause to reflect that, whereas the previous Government in which he served as a Minister had the support of about a quarter of the elected Members of this House from Scotland, he is now this Government's sole representative in Scotland? Does not that place on him a moral obligation to discuss with the elected representatives of the people of Scotland how to take forward this Bill? Is he not concerned that the all-party group in the Scottish Parliament that considered his draft proposals says that they do not equate to the proposals made by the Smith commission?

Mr Speaker: Order. Interventions must be brief.

David Mundell: I was intending to cover a number of the points that the hon. Gentleman raises. I have met the Scottish Parliament committee that was set up in relation to the Bill, and I am going to appear before it to give evidence directly on 25 June. I am in ongoing and constant dialogue with the Scottish Government in relation to this Bill. This very morning, I had a very cordial meeting with John Swinney, the Deputy First Minister, who is responsible for constitutional matters. During the four days when the Bill will be debated on a line-by-line basis, I will be very pleased to hear the suggestions and proposals that come forward from the hon. Gentleman's group and, indeed, from any Members of this House.

Tommy Sheppard: What, then, is your observation on the fact that an all-party group of the Scottish Parliament, including members from your own party, has come to the conclusion that the proposals before us do not put into effect the Smith commission proposals? What is your reflection on that?

Mr Speaker: Order. All these things take some acclimatisation, but debate must always go through the Chair. The concept of “you” does not arise, because “you” means me—and I have no views on these matters.

David Mundell: The hon. Gentleman will see that there have been significant changes to the draft Bill—[*Interruption.*] There have been. If he goes through the Bill in detail, he will see that there are significant changes. [*Interruption.*] Well, I do not regard the power to give the Scottish Parliament the right to top up all welfare benefits in Scotland as some minuscule change; I regard it as a very, very significant clause in the Bill. It is one of a number of changes that have been made. We have made it very clear that throughout the Committee stage of the Bill we will look at proposals for changes to it. The Scottish Government published some proposed changes to the Bill yesterday—it was nice to see them—and no doubt we will have a greater chance to debate them in detail.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I do not think that I have ever seen such a shambling Front-Bench performance. Why does the Secretary of State believe he should have a veto over certain issues decided by the Scottish Parliament?

David Mundell: I had thought that being part of a larger number might change the hon. Gentleman’s habits, but he remains as ungracious as ever. The Bill contains no vetoes, as he will be well aware if he has read it in detail. What it contains is mechanisms to allow two Governments to work together on matters of shared interest and application. To me, the meaning of a veto is that when someone says they want to do something, someone else has the capacity to say, “No, you can’t.” Not a single provision of the Bill relates to such a proposal.

Martin John Docherty (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State fundamentally believe that the decisions of a democratically elected Government sitting in Edinburgh, who have 56 of the 59 Scottish Members in this House, should be challenged by him or any other Government Member with a veto?

David Mundell: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman did not hear what I said in response to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart). There are no vetoes in the Bill. The hon. Gentleman and others will see that clearly when we scrutinise it line by line.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

David Mundell: I need to make a little progress.

Let me turn to the all-party Smith commission agreement, achieved under the chairmanship of Lord Smith of Kelvin. The morning after the decisive no vote in the referendum, the Prime Minister announced that all-party talks should take place to ensure further devolution to Scotland. The remit was defined by the referendum result: keeping the UK together and keeping Scotland a strong part of it. All four parties represented in this House, with the addition of the Scottish Green party, took part in the process, and all five parties signed up to the final agreement without caveat.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Does the Minister not agree that the Prime Minister gambled with the Union to sweeten the SNP, and that that sweetness has now turned sour? The Prime Minister is in chaos over Scotland, as he is over Europe.

David Mundell: I do not quite get the hon. Lady’s multiple metaphors. I am sure that there are some SNP Members who are sweet, and there are certainly some who are sour.

The central aim of the Smith commission was to address a flaw that had existed in the devolution settlement from the outset by making the Scottish Parliament more accountable for raising the taxpayers’ money that it sends. The significance of that point should not be overlooked, and we have alluded to it already: before fully implementing the Scotland Act 2012, the Scottish Parliament controlled almost 60% of public expenditure in Scotland, yet it was responsible for raising only about 10% of the funding. I did not believe that that was sustainable, and neither did the people of Scotland. For Holyrood to be the powerhouse Parliament that it rightly aspires to be and that this Government want it to be, it must be accountable to the people of Scotland for raising more of the money that it spends. The Bill is about ensuring that that missing link is fixed.

A second key aim of the Smith commission was to ensure that more decisions about welfare policy can be taken in the Scottish Parliament, so that specifically Scottish circumstances can be taken into account. The timetable set for the talks was that an agreement should be reached by St Andrew’s day. It was a challenging deadline, but it was met with a few days to spare—another commitment delivered to the people of Scotland on time.

I pay tribute to the 10 members of the Smith commission who represented their parties with skill and tenacity and worked constructively and co-operatively throughout the duration of the commission. They should be proud of what they have achieved for the people of Scotland. Again, I pay particular tribute to Lord Smith of Kelvin, who chaired the talks. He brought to the task his characteristic blend of good humour, insight and hard work. Of course, the occasional bout of strong-arming was also needed, but he says such bouts were mercifully rare.

Key to the success and the credibility of the talks was the fact that Lord Smith made sure that the voice of civic Scotland was heard loud and clear as the negotiations progressed. More than 18,000 people made submissions to the commission on what powers should be devolved to Scotland, and more than 400 individual organisations the length and breadth of Scotland submitted their views on the way forward.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I am sure it will not have escaped the Secretary of State’s notice that the five parties that signed up to the Smith commission are the same ones that are involved in the Scottish Parliament’s Devolution (Further Powers) Committee, which has stated that the Government’s Bill does not live up to either the substance or the spirit of the Smith commission. Why will he not now go back to the drawing board and listen to what was said by the Smith commission, as well as by the 60 organisations that have called for welfare powers to be devolved, and actually deliver it?

David Mundell: I have made it clear, and the hon. Lady is aware, that significant changes have been made to the draft clauses, which were published ahead of the Scottish Parliament committee considering them. I have told the House that we look forward to seeing amendments and proposals. Yesterday the Scottish Government produced some draft clauses, which we most certainly will look at as part of our ongoing discussions with them. If the hon. Lady and others feel that the Smith commission is not met in full by the exact terms of the Bill, there will be plenty of opportunities for debate and discussion in this House. As I have said, there will be four days of line-by-line scrutiny of the Bill.

Alex Salmond *rose*—

David Mundell: I have a quote from the current First Minister, so perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will wait until I have reminded him that last week she said that “compromise isn’t...the same as concession.”

Compromise was made by all parties in respect of delivering the Smith agreement. This Bill is not about reopening those issues.

Alex Salmond: I know that the Secretary of State would never knowingly mislead the House, but earlier he said that the *Daily Record* was behind him in saying that the Bill implemented the proposals of the Smith commission. I have had an opportunity to consult today’s editorial, which says that

“there are serious concerns the proposed Scotland Bill does not fully implement what was proposed...This is an unacceptable situation that must be rectified quickly as the Bill makes its way through Westminster.”

Does the Secretary of State hold to his previous statement, or does he accept the concerns that he has not implemented what Smith proposed?

David Mundell: I do not think the right hon. Gentleman listened to my response, because I made it very clear that I felt that, after today’s debate and four days of detailed scrutiny of the Bill in Parliament, the *Daily Record*, its readers and, indeed, the people of Scotland will be satisfied that it meets the full recommendations of the Smith commission.

The coalition Government committed to bringing forward draft clauses to implement the Smith commission agreement by Burns night 2015: they did so on 22 January—another commitment met in full and on time. When the Prime Minister went to Edinburgh on that day in January, he gave assurances that he would listen to the views on those draft causes and, as I have set out to a number of Members, we have done so. Since January, the Government have engaged extensively with interested parties in Scotland. Hundreds of people have attended events, from the north-east to the borders, giving their views on the clauses and how they could be refined further.

Of course, work remains to be done during our deliberations on the Bill and we will listen to proposals. The Smith commission recommended, for example, that the Scottish Government should be able to create new benefits in areas of devolved responsibility. We are working closely with the Scottish Government to examine whether new powers, if any, are required to implement that recommendation.

I am proud that the Bill has already benefited from significant input from people and groups across Scotland. This Government will continue to listen to views from all parts of Scotland and from those in all parts of the Chamber as we take forward the Bill and refine its provisions to ensure that the spirit of Smith can be met in full.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): The Secretary of State has partially answered my question by saying that he will listen to all angles and to everyone in the Chamber, but will he set up some commission or congress so that the other parts of the Union have the chance to have their say before this all goes ahead and we find we are on a roll into the future that we cannot stop?

David Mundell: This Government are committed to deliver the Smith commission recommendations, and that is what we will do. We are bringing forward a Bill to implement the Stormont House agreement. Proposals that anyone makes in relation to their own parts of the United Kingdom, or indeed their say on other parts of the United Kingdom, will always be capable of being debated in this House. If, however, the hon. Gentleman is asking whether I support the idea of a constitutional convention, the answer is that I do not.

Stewart Hosie: The Secretary of State has now been on his feet for more than half an hour. Will he actually speak about the contents of the Bill today, or will he continue to waffle until he sits down and lets others speak?

David Mundell: As you are well aware, Mr Speaker, the hon. Gentleman would have been equally critical of me had I chosen not to take the numerous interventions. I have done so because I want this to be a debate and for me to be held accountable to Members of the House.

I am grateful to the Scottish Parliament’s Devolution (Further Powers) Committee for its work. I am due to meet its members shortly. In getting us to this point, my officials have worked extensively behind the scenes with their Scottish Government counterparts to listen to their views, and they will continue to engage actively with them throughout the process on this Bill.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for taking my intervention. So much of what I am hearing is a lack of trust—*[Interruption.]*—and my point is that that has to change. There is nothing that we cannot achieve together if we have a little bit of trust. I am very new to politics, as many Members will know, but I would not stand behind a Government who I felt just wanted to play their part and play the game. I think all that Members are hearing is just noise. *[Interruption.]* My question is: can we not take the Secretary of State at his word, go through the Bill line by line and find a route through this together, rather than assume that there is no trust and no will to give the Scottish people what they want? Unless we are presented with that mindset, we will achieve nothing.

David Mundell: I very much welcome that contribution, and I hope that that is the spirit in which we can proceed. Many people who saw the Smith commission agreement signed at 8 o’clock on a Tuesday evening were disappointed when, at 8 o’clock the following

morning the now Deputy First Minister suggested that there were parts of it that he did not like. I hoped that the agreement could and will be a comprehensive settlement for Scotland.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): Why are the Secretary of State and his party denying the people of England the right to have a constitutional convention, given that over the past two decades the Scots have had two referendums and the Welsh, the Northern Irish, the people of London and the north-east have had referendums? Why is he denying the rest of the people of England such a right, and fobbing them off with an idea drawn up by the Chancellor on the back of a fag packet?

David Mundell: We have had a general election in which the issues were debated extensively across the United Kingdom. What the Government are committed to do in relation to Scotland is to deliver the Scotland Bill.

You have not selected the amendment, Mr Speaker, but, as the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) stated, it mentioned a veto, and I want to clarify the issue of so-called vetoes. The Smith agreement is clear that matters such as the mechanism for paying universal credit across the UK and the Jobcentre Plus network will remain reserved. That was an important argument during the referendum and was endorsed by the majority of Scots. In order to deliver, we need a system that allows the Scottish Government to take responsibility for benefits, including by being able to top them up, but allows the reserved universal credit payments mechanism to carry on working effectively. That is what the Bill does.

It is wrong to call that a veto—as I said earlier, a veto means that someone can prevent something from happening if they do not like it. The Bill does not give the UK Government that power. In fact, it explicitly says that consent for a change cannot be unreasonably withheld.

Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): But that does mean that it can in fact be withheld, because a Minister here in Westminster will have to give agreement to when a change will take effect. That Minister is not obliged to give any agreement, so consent could be withheld and it is effectively a veto.

David Mundell: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis at all. The provision is not even about agreement to a decision. It is a timing arrangement as part of the systems that need to operate. It will work the other way, too; the UK Government will need to consult the Scottish Government when they want to make changes to devolved universal credit flexibilities that will have an impact on Scotland. Other clauses, such as those on transport and elections, also require the UK Government to consult Scottish Ministers before acting.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is helpful that the Secretary of State has said on the record in this Chamber what the intentions are in relation to the clauses in question. What will happen in the event of a dispute about the outcome of such a consultation process? Where will disputes be decided?

David Mundell: There are existing dispute reconciliation mechanisms in the Joint Ministerial Committee. There have inevitably been a number of disputes between the

Government of the United Kingdom and the devolved Administrations, and most of them have been able to be resolved through that process.

To respond to the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie), I will turn to the provisions of the Bill. It is a wide-ranging Bill that will bring about a transfer of responsibility to Holyrood that will touch just about every aspect of Scottish life, affect every pay packet in Scotland and have the potential to deliver real and tangible benefits to the people of Scotland.

I turn first to the provisions on taxation. Central to the Bill is the devolution of income tax. Although the definition of income tax will remain reserved, the Scottish Parliament will have full control over rates and bands. That builds on the tax devolution set out in the Scotland Act 2012, which provided for significant powers over income tax that will come into effect next April.

One notable change to the Bill, compared with the draft clauses published in January, is the confirmation that the Scottish Parliament will be able to set a zero rate of income tax on earnings if it so chooses. That effectively gives it the opportunity to reduce the individual's tax burden significantly if it can afford to do so and makes appropriate spending cuts or tax rises elsewhere. Of course, the reverse is true—if the Scottish Government want to spend more, they will be able to do so by taxing more, and they will be accountable to the Scottish taxpayer for it.

Alongside the devolution of income tax sits the assignment of half of Scotland's VAT revenues. Members will recall that it is against EU law to have differential VAT rates within a member state, so the devolution of VAT would not be legal.

Geraint Davies: Will the Secretary of State give way?

David Mundell: No, I have already taken an intervention from the hon. Gentleman.

Instead of the devolution of VAT, the Smith commission recommended that half the VAT revenues raised in Scotland should be assigned to the Scottish Parliament, thereby further linking Holyrood's funding to the performance of the Scottish economy. The more the Scottish economy grows, the greater the revenue from VAT that Holyrood will be able to keep. That is an incentive to achieve growth.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

David Mundell: No; let me make a little progress.

The devolution of income tax on earnings and the assignment of VAT revenues, when taken together with the devolution of air passenger duty and the powers under the 2012 Act, mean that the Scottish Parliament will have important decisions to make. The Scottish Parliament is now responsible for raising about only 10% of what it spends, but under the Bill Holyrood will be responsible for raising more than 50% of what it spends. It will truly be one of the most powerful devolved legislatures in the world.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): May I take the Secretary of State back to the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson)

[*Andrew Gwynne*]

and the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) on the impact of changes on the rest of the United Kingdom? Air passenger duty is a case in point. Regional airports in the north of England will undoubtedly feel the impact of any changes to air passenger duty in Scotland. Is that not yet another reason why, as we proceed with devolution arrangements, we need to have a proper constitutional convention so that all measures can be considered across the whole of the United Kingdom?

David Mundell: I have made my views on a constitutional convention known. Other hon. Members have raised the issue of air passenger duty. The Treasury has established a group to look at the impact any changes to air passenger duty in Scotland could have on airports in England.

On welfare policy, there will also be a highly significant transfer of responsibility. While the social security reservation remains in place, part 3 of the Bill means that the Scottish Government will be responsible for welfare, which last year accounted for around £2.5 billion of spending in Scotland. The Scottish Parliament will be able to make provision for a number of types of social security benefit, discretionary payments and employment support. The Bill also contains provision to transfer executive competence to Scottish Ministers to allow them to vary certain aspects of universal credit. It will give the Scottish Parliament more responsibility for benefits paid to carers, disabled people, those who are ill, those who require help with winter fuel costs, funeral payments and maternity payments. As a result of the Bill, when people most require help the Scottish Government will be able to tailor that help to particularly Scottish circumstances.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The new powers are clear. Is it not time we heard what the SNP will do with the new powers?

David Mundell: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. As ever, I have been working very closely with the Scottish Government. I am looking forward to speaking tomorrow with Alex Neil, the Cabinet Secretary responsible for welfare matters, and to taking forward the work of the joint ministerial welfare group. I have made it clear, in relation to that group, that we want to put in place transition arrangements to allow the powers to be transferred as quickly as possible. However, we need to know what we are transitioning to and so need clarity on the Scottish Government's position in relation to the operation of those powers.

Alex Salmond: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. There is a rumour sweeping the Benches that Conservative Members have been provided with a prompt sheet on questions to ask the Minister. If such a disgraceful thing had happened, would that be within the rules of the House?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I will deal with the right hon. Gentleman first.

I always enjoy the theatrical performances of the right hon. Gentleman, the last of which was marred only by the sudden emergence of a puckish grin on his face as he was making his point. The answer is that there would be nothing disorderly about that. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, there are very few novelties in this place. There is usually a precedent for everything.

Sir Edward Leigh: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I am not sure that a further point of order is required, but let us hear whether the knight has something new to say.

Sir Edward Leigh: For some reason, my Whips Office has not given me a prompt sheet. [*Laughter.*]

Mr Speaker: I think the hon. Gentleman knows the answer to that: they gave up on him some time ago.

Mr Jenkin: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You are incredibly indulgent.

There have been reports that some Members have been required to sign a piece of paper undertaking not to disagree with those on their Front Bench as a condition of being Members of this House. Would that be in order?

Mr Speaker: I gather it has been denied. I must say, I would not have lasted long in the House had I been required to sign any such paper. I am innocent of such matters. It is the first I have heard of it and I doubt it will last.

David Mundell: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Smith agreement does not stop at powers over tax and welfare. The Scottish Parliament will receive a transfer of legislative competence in a range of significant policy areas. I cannot list each power in detail now—as I have said, the House will have ample opportunity to scrutinise them in Committee—but I will provide some examples. The Bill will enable the devolution of the management of the Crown Estate's economic assets in Scotland to the Scottish Parliament and of the management and operation of reserved tribunals to designated Scottish tribunals. The Scottish Parliament will also have additional responsibility over roads, speed limits, road signs and the policing of railways in Scotland, as well as powers over onshore oil and gas extraction—

Ian Blackford *rose*—

David Mundell: I have already taken a small speech from the hon. Gentleman.

The Bill provides the Scottish Parliament with powers over gaming in new premises and for additional duties on the UK Government to consult with Scottish Ministers on functions carried out by a range of important public bodies. It will also enable public sector bodies to bid for rail franchises in Scotland; provide for the ability to state how schemes related to fuel poverty and energy efficiency are run; and increase the ability of the Scottish Parliament to require certain bodies to give evidence before it. In addition, part 1 will take forward in full the Smith agreement that the permanence of the

Scottish Parliament be recognised in UK legislation and that the so-called Sewel convention be put on a statutory footing.

Stewart McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Under the Bill, this Parliament will retain an incredibly broad power to legislate on devolved matters, even without the Scottish Parliament's permission. Why is that, and will the Secretary of State provide examples of when he thinks such action would be appropriate?

David Mundell: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that since the coming into existence of the Scottish Parliament, the UK Parliament has legislated in devolved areas only with the agreement of the Scottish Parliament, under the Sewel convention, and that the Bill will put that convention on a statutory footing.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): On income tax, what will happen if someone is resident in Scotland but works over the border for an English company? If the income tax rates are different, will that not add to the compliance costs for that business? Who will compensate that small business in England for the additional compliance costs of the income tax variation?

David Mundell: That point was debated in full during the passage of the Scotland Act 2012, which introduced the Scottish income tax rate. In simple terms, for the hon. Gentleman's purposes, it will be done by way of a tax code generally containing the letter S, allowing businesses to operate the PAYE system as they would normally do and without additional expense. There is a designation of "Scottish taxpayer" that is dependent on residence—and, as a point of fact for new colleagues, all Scottish MPs are resident in Scotland for Scottish tax purposes.

Finally, the Scottish Parliament will find itself largely responsible for how it runs itself, how it is elected and the people who can vote to elect it. I am pleased to confirm that we have already agreed to a request from the Presiding Officer to take action to ensure that the 2020 UK general election date and the Holyrood election date do not clash.

It is clear that a significant range of powers will be devolved to the Scottish Parliament and that the onus is now on the Scottish Government to be clear with the electorate about how they will use them.

Robert Flello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): My constituents in England will no doubt be listening to what powers are being devolved, but they are also waiting to hear what is happening to the block grant and the Barnett formula, for example. They will be interested to hear how the money is flowing. Will the Secretary of State say something about that?

David Mundell: The hon. Gentleman's timing is impeccable, because I was just coming on to the so-called fiscal framework that underpins the transfer of tax and welfare powers to Holyrood. Alongside the Barnett formula, the framework will deliver a fair and lasting financial settlement for Scotland and the rest of the UK. The framework will provide the Scottish Government

with the means by which they can determine a mix of taxation and spending specific to Scotland, but which fits with the UK Government's overall fiscal plan.

This means that Scotland will continue to benefit from the pooling of risks and resources across the whole of the UK, but the Scottish Government will soon be responsible for raising substantial amounts of its revenue through taxation. As a result, it will be more accountable to the Scottish Parliament and to the Scottish people. The Scottish Government will in future be responsible for more than 50% of their funding. Changes in the Scottish Government's funding will therefore be increasingly determined by changes to Scottish taxation.

The detail of the Scottish fiscal framework will be agreed between the UK Government and the Scottish Government on the basis set out in the Smith agreement. Discussions on the framework have already begun with the aim of reaching an agreement alongside the passing of the Scotland Bill. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has met the Scottish Government Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, today. This timetable demonstrates the Government's determination to make quick progress on the fiscal framework.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State clarify whether the final say on social security levels will rest with the Scottish Parliament?

David Mundell: The Scottish Parliament will have the capacity to top up welfare benefits. It could be said that it would have the final say on the level of benefit. UK benefits will obviously be determined in this House, but the Scottish Parliament will have the opportunity to top them up, as is clearly set out in the Bill.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Does not the notion of "topping up" benefits suggest that in and of themselves they are deficient?

David Mundell: What I think it suggests is the requirement for responsibility. If the Scottish Government believe that benefits are not at the level they should be, they will be able to ask the Scottish taxpayer for the funds to increase them. That is what I would regard as responsibility within a Parliament.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): A few minutes ago, my right hon. Friend described the fiscal framework of the Barnett formula as long-lasting and fair. Surely that would be the case only if the Barnett formula were based on need rather than on a historic anomaly. It is a formula that results in my constituents getting £1,600 less per person per year than they would get if it were based on need, which one would think a progressive party would wish to be the case.

David Mundell: My hon. Friend is a long-standing critic of the Barnett formula, and I acknowledge the point he makes. The Prime Minister, the then Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Liberal Democrats made it absolutely clear that their parties had no intention of changing the Barnett formula. That certainly remains the position on the Government side.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): The Secretary of State has acknowledged the point, but can he justify why English constituents will get £1,600 less?

David Mundell: I did not know that that was the policy of the Labour party. I had understood that it supported the Barnett formula, and I can reiterate the continuing support of Government Members for it.

One issue closely linked to the fiscal framework is the much talked-about issue of full fiscal autonomy. This issue was raised a number of times today and during the general election campaign, and some SNP Members have talked tirelessly about it. My party and the Government have made it clear that we will strongly oppose full fiscal autonomy for Scotland. As the analysis by the independent and respected Institute for Fiscal Studies told us, full fiscal autonomy would leave Scotland with a £7.6 billion black hole in its finances this year and almost £10 billion by the final year of this Parliament. This Government will never support a policy that leaves one part of the UK in such a perilous financial situation: we are members of a social union, too. However, given that the SNP set such store by the issue in its election campaign, I look forward to SNP Members bringing forward amendments on full fiscal autonomy in Committee. That is to be welcomed, because apart from anything else, such amendments would mean the people of Scotland might actually get to see what the definition of full fiscal autonomy is.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Is not the lesson of the euro that fiscal autonomy needs to go with monetary autonomy, and that if Scotland has fiscal autonomy it must also have its own currency?

David Mundell: That is a very good point and I think my hon. Friend and the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) will be able to spend hours debating it.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): The Secretary of State is being remarkably generous in giving way—very much like the SNP is with other people's money. The Secretary of State said it would lie within the power of the Scottish Government to top up—I think that was his expression—welfare benefits. We know how they like being generous with other people's money, but if they overspent at the end of one year—because of course benefits are demand-led—who will pick up the bill, the British taxpayer or the English taxpayer?

David Mundell: In relation to matters for which the Scottish Parliament is responsible, it will be the Scottish taxpayer who has to pay. So if the Scottish Parliament and Government want additional spending, the Scottish taxpayer will have to pay.

I wish to conclude my remarks, but I have sought to take as many interventions as possible because part of the Bill is about accountability. The Bill represents the fulfilment of a promise to the people of Scotland that a no vote in the referendum was not a vote for no change. It delivers on the all-party Smith Commission agreement, as the Law Society of Scotland and many others have already made clear. The Government and the Smith Commission engaged extensively on the agreement, and on the draft clauses since January, and the Bill before us today is all the stronger for that extensive engagement.

It will benefit further from four days of full line-by-line scrutiny in this Chamber. The challenge will then be for the Scottish Government to finally set out what they will do with the new powers they will receive. Now is the time for the Scottish Government to stop acting and start doing. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.8 pm

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): May I start by offering my congratulations to you, Mr Speaker? This is the first time I have been at the Dispatch Box since you were elected as Speaker. It is a tremendous pleasure to see you back in the Chair, especially after the events on the last day of the last Parliament.

I also congratulate the right hon. Gentleman the new Secretary of State, and not on his Castroesque speech—he spoke for nearly an hour—but because he has always been helpful, courteous and kind. I hope we will continue in that spirit now he is Secretary of State. The House may not know this, but we share something in common. We both share the distinction of being the most difficult choices that our party leaders had when choosing someone for our respective roles. I hear the Prime Minister mulled over the list of potential candidates for Secretary of State for hours before deciding on the right hon. Gentleman, but I am sure he will be a wise choice.

It would be remiss of me not to extend my congratulations to the Scottish National party Members on their unprecedented result in Scotland. There is a heavy weight on their shoulders—by the looks of it, on the end of their third Bench as well—to deliver the considerable promises that they made to the Scottish people during the election campaign. I say this sincerely to them: the political enemy in this place is on the Government Benches, and I hope that they will remember that in the coming years. Where we agree, I will endeavour to work with them and I hope that they will reciprocate; where we do not, and where scrutiny and principled opposition are required to hold the SNP Government to account in Holyrood, I will be a strong voice in such scrutiny. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who is chuntering from a sedentary position, does not seem to be starting off on the right footing.

I want to pay tribute to my many colleagues and friends who lost their seats in Scotland at the general election. They should all be thanked for their unstinting commitment to serving their constituents; they will be a big loss to this place and I wish them all well. No one epitomised that dedication to public service more than my predecessor as the Opposition's spokesman, Margaret Curran. She worked day and night in this place and beyond to stand up for the interests of Scotland and her constituents. We all owe her a debt of gratitude for that strong voice and for the position we are in today with the Bill.

Today marks a momentous point in Scotland's devolution journey. Whatever the outcome of the general election, the Bill would have been in the first Queen's Speech, regardless who was sitting on the Treasury Bench. In 1997 one of the first acts of the new Labour Government was to present a Bill to the House to deliver the referendum that gave us the Scottish Parliament. That was a promise made then and kept then; we should bear that in mind when debating the Bill today. The Labour party is and always will be the party of devolution.

“There will be a Scottish Parliament”—the words of the father of Scotland, Donald Dewar. When he uttered those words, however, it signified a journey in devolution. That journey has seen Scotland recently travel through an extraordinary democratic process. The referendum was a once in a generation—once in a lifetime, depending on who is speaking—experience, marking a defining choice about Scotland’s membership of the United Kingdom. It was a no vote, but it was not a vote for no change. We can draw a constitutional lesson from that: Scotland wants to be in the United Kingdom, but it wants to be unique and able to make its own political choices.

Labour argued passionately for Scotland to remain in the UK and we won the argument. Perhaps we sacrificed our own party’s interests in doing so, but it was certainly the right thing to do. It is important to understand what the agreement was, why Scots chose to stay in the UK and why it is so important for the Bill to deliver for Scotland. It is therefore worth putting the Bill in its constitutional context.

Over the past year we have had a debate about Scotland’s place in the world and how, in an uncertain international environment, Scotland’s interests are best served as part of a larger country and stable Union; a debate about Scotland’s economic interests, with more opportunities for jobs, for businesses and for investment as part of the wider UK; a debate about sharing economic and financial crisis risks, whether in the rebuilding of the Scottish-domiciled banks or the shared risks from the ups and downs in the oil price; a debate about shared tax and spending resources, about how Scotland can take greater control over tax and spending while maintaining the UK-wide pooling and sharing of resources that guarantees pensions and benefits, and safeguards Scotland’s public services; and, most importantly from a Labour point of view, a debate about social solidarity, about sharing across the territory of the United Kingdom so that together the nations of the UK can work together for the benefit of everyone who lives here.

In the end, this is about our sense of belonging: we are not simply Scots on our own, but part of a wider family of nations in the United Kingdom. The lesson of the referendum campaign is that those links remain powerful and valued by most Scots. However, it is clear that securing Scotland’s place in the UK is simply not enough. That is why the Bill really matters, because it guarantees not only economic benefits and UK social solidarity, but the scope under devolution to do more, to make different choices and to set a different course for Scotland, distinct from a UK agenda that might not always be—today certainly is not—in accordance with the public opinion of Scotland.

The Bill will make the Scottish Parliament one of the most powerful devolved Parliaments in the world—not my research, but that of the Scottish Parliament itself—with responsibility for more than 40% of tax revenues and more than 60% of public spending. Critically, the Bill provides more accountability. Lord Smith said that the agreement had the potential to increase financial discipline, promote greater budget transparency and enhance the debate on fiscal policy in Scotland. That is important, because the Scottish Parliament already has devolved responsibility for many of the areas that are critical to the day-to-day life of Scots: health, education, housing, justice, transport, economic development, local authority and business rates, 10p of income tax and all immovable taxes, borrowing powers and much more besides.

The problems in Scotland with accident and emergency waiting times, lower educational attainment and a crisis in housing show that the more important debate in this House is about how powers are utilised, rather than where they lie. After this Bill is passed, the Scottish Government, as the most powerful devolved Government on earth, will have immense power to change our society for the better—to create a fairer Scotland and a fairer country—but the Bill will also ensure that Scotland continues to benefit from the pooling and sharing of resources across the United Kingdom.

What is required now is the imagination and political will to deliver on that potential. That political will has always been a Labour priority, as demonstrated through the Calman and Smith commissions, to deliver progressive change for Scotland. The question becomes: will it be the SNP’s priority to start using new powers as a responsible Government or will it continue with a politics of grievance and blame? It appears to me from today’s exchanges that the SNP is desperate to be disappointed before the Bill has even started its passage through this House.

Labour has always been committed to ensuring that the infamous vow, negotiated by the cross-party Smith commission, was delivered in full. May I take this opportunity to thank Lord Smith of Kelvin and the 10 commissioners for their sterling work in getting us to where we are today? The Bill meets the commitment on the timetable and Labour will ensure, through the Bill’s passage in this House, that the legislation promises are also met in full, both in substance and in spirit. The original purpose of devolution was to keep the social solidarity that comes from being part of something bigger while recognising the uniqueness of Scotland’s role in the UK.

Ian Paisley: Does the shadow Secretary of State agree that one secret of devolution, and of this kingdom, has been parity for all of our peoples across all of the nations that share this kingdom and that the break-up of parity in social welfare payments alone has had the most destabilising impact in Northern Ireland? Indeed, more interest is given to the levels of disability living allowance than to the levels of IRA activity in Northern Ireland. Will the change to welfare payments affecting Scottish people also have a destabilising impact, not only on Scotland’s place in the Union, but on all of our place together as a people?

Ian Murray: I am grateful for the intervention, because the hon. Gentleman is describing devolution—that is how it works. It is up to individual Parliaments to make the choices, within the powers they have, on how they want to serve. Under a democratic system, the people will decide at the ballot box whether or not those decisions are ones they wish to vote for. Unfortunately, when there is devolution there will be disparities across the nations of the United Kingdom, but the important point is that the United Kingdom stays together.

Mr Anderson: I do not want to fall out with my hon. Friend, but it feels like the people of England will not get the choice to take any position in a democratic vote, because we are being told, “If you want devolution, you have to sign up to a regional mayor, whether you like it or not.” Without any debate, we are told, “If you don’t

[Mr Anderson]

do that, you can't get any money." That is not devolution. He has talked often about social solidarity, but where is the social solidarity for us in England when this is being done without our chance to have a real debate in this country?

Ian Murray: I am grateful for that intervention. The Scottish referendum debate demonstrated that when there is a proper constitutional debate, under a framework for proper constitutional debate, the results are there for all to see. The overall position of the constitutional convention that we were proposing in our manifesto would have been the way to take some of these issues forward. Colleagues across England would be significantly upset to see that the devolution structure across the UK is progressing quickly while they are being hamstrung with what is being offered to them. The Government really do need to get a grip of this whole constitutional settlement across the UK, so that England does not seem as though it is losing out.

Geraint Davies: On that point, does my hon. Friend think it bizarre that this Government are giving Scotland the right to increase and decrease its income tax, while legislating so that England and Wales cannot increase income tax? Is that not a bit strange?

Ian Murray: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention, because one key question for the Treasury Minister wrapping up today's debate will be: if the Government legislate for not increasing VAT, national insurance or income tax, what are they going to increase to cover the £23 billion of promises they made during the general election? I suppose the direct answer to my hon. Friend's question is to say that that is the way devolution works and it is up to the different legislators to decide what they wish to do. This Bill allows Scotland a settlement where the responsibility and the accountability goes straight to the heart of politics in Scotland.

I was saying that, as this Bill makes its passage through the House, Labour will ensure that legislation promises are fully met both in substance and in spirit. The original purpose of devolution was to keep the social solidarity that comes from being part of something bigger while recognising the uniqueness of Scotland's role in the United Kingdom. But we in the Labour party want to go further. We have been calling for more powers for some time and included most of them in our manifesto, so this is not a knee-jerk response to the general election result as some would say, but a continuation of the devolution commitment.

Alex Salmond: I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman, and he is not saying anything that was not said by Labour during the general election campaign. In many other areas, the Labour party is undergoing fundamental reassessment of policy. Having lost 40 out of 41 seats in Scotland, is there any new policy with which the hon. Gentleman wants to enlighten this House and Scotland?

Ian Murray: If the right hon. Gentleman wishes me to make some progress, I will come on to those very issues. Let me remind him that the devolution settlement was agreed to by all five parties on the Smith commission.

The Bill that is in front of us is to ensure that the Smith agreement is put forward in full, and we want to ensure that it is put forward in full both in spirit and in substance, as I have said twice already. [Interruption.] I hear someone chuntering, "It doesn't" from a sedentary position. Well, we are going through this parliamentary process and will seek to amend the Bill precisely because we want to ensure that it does fulfil everything in the Smith agreement, but we also want to go further.

We will seek to amend the Bill to go beyond the Smith agreement without compromising on the pooling and sharing of resources across the UK that guarantees the Barnett formula and the UK pension system for Scots. On welfare, we will ensure that the final say on benefit levels remains in Scotland by giving the Scottish Parliament a wider power to top up all reserve benefits. We will ensure that the Scottish Parliament can introduce new benefits in devolved areas funded from Scotland to meet Scottish circumstances; bring employment and welfare policy together with a positive vision for tackling the low skills, numeracy and literacy problems that hold back adults trapped in long-term unemployment; fully devolve housing benefit; and ensure double devolution by devolving job creation powers to local communities, providing real opportunities, as my private Member's Bill demonstrated at the tail end of the previous Parliament.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a very good speech. Will the ability to top up social security payments enable the Scottish Parliament to get rid of welfare vouchers that were introduced earlier this year?

Ian Murray: That goes to the heart of some of the discussions that we will have in this Chamber during the five days we will spend considering this Bill, as some of the choices that the Scottish Parliament have made fly in the face of its rhetoric both of being anti-austerity and of looking after the most vulnerable. With the £444 million underspend in the Scottish Parliament budget last year, many of the questions just raised by my hon. Friend will be asked by ordinary Scots up and down the country.

Robert Flello: I am delighted to see that at least my hon. Friend is in his place. Sadly, all too many of our colleagues are not. On the devolution Bill and these proposals, is there not a danger that if things go really well, the SNP will take all the credit, but if things go badly, Westminster will get the blame?

Ian Murray: My hon. Friend raises the fundamental principle of nationalist politics. I remember the former First Minister, the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), taking great credit when unemployment fell in Scotland, and then blaming everyone else when unemployment rose, and that was a regular trend throughout the time of his premiership in Scotland. [Interruption.] I can hear him chunter "Shameful" from the Back Benches. People just have to look at the record and determine the facts for themselves.

Pete Wishart: I would go further than my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond). The result for Labour a few weeks ago was catastrophic, and we have heard nothing thus far from the hon. Gentleman's contribution that suggests that he is addressing those

problems. What will he do? Will we hear a new story from Labour? Will it work with us on a progressive agenda across Scotland so that we can take on the Tories, address austerity and deal with the menace of Trident?

Ian Murray: Well, if my mathematics is correct, I have been on my feet for 15 minutes, and it is quite obvious that the hon. Gentleman has not listened to the first eight pages of my speech. It was about social solidarity and some of the changes that we want to see in this Bill. Let me put it on the record that I have just seen a tweet from him claiming that Labour will not vote on the SNP amendment tonight. Well, I understand that the amendment has not been chosen, so perhaps he would like to correct the record on his Twitter feed rather than yet again spreading mistruths in this House for political gain. This is a serious Bill that is trying to develop the constitutional settlement for Scotland.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) was that if things go right in Scotland, the SNP will claim credit, but if things go wrong it will always be Westminster's fault—*[Interruption.]* If this Bill is not good enough in terms of what the Scots Nats want, why are they not going down the route proposed in their “Stronger for Scotland” document and, which was a move to full fiscal responsibility?

Ian Murray: When my hon. Friend made his point about the SNP claiming credit when things go well and blaming others when things go badly, the right hon. Member for Gordon shouted, “Sounds like a good narrative.” We are talking about people's lives, and if we rule our country simply on a narrative we are in trouble.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) is absolutely correct, because it was in the SNP manifesto that they would deliver full fiscal autonomy for Scotland. In fact, the First Minister said that all the MPs elected to Westminster under the SNP banner would vote for it this year. It seems to me that there is back-peddalling on that at the first opportunity. Perhaps we will get some enlightenment on their current position on full fiscal autonomy when the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) speaks, but it certainly was not mentioned in the amendment.

Mr Jones: Is my hon. Friend not concerned and confused by the fact that the incoherent amendment tabled by the Scots Nats contains no mention whatsoever of what has just been suggested?

Ian Murray: Nothing in the amendment addresses the question of full fiscal autonomy, but perhaps during our consideration of the Bill we will find out whether that is a goal that the SNP wants to promote—*[Interruption.]* I hear chuntering again from the right hon. Member for Gordon from just behind my left shoulder. The level of public respect for politicians is pretty low and we are only a few weeks away from everyone having voted in the general election. When the party that won 56 out of the 59 seats in Scotland—as it consistently trumpets—dumps its manifesto just a few weeks afterwards, there is little wonder that there is so little respect for politicians in this country.

Tommy Sheppard: The SNP remains committed to a situation in which the Scottish Government will have full financial control over their own affairs and be able to raise their own revenues. We want that to be done in a responsible way that does not disadvantage the people of Scotland. During the election campaign, we were treated by your party to a grotesque caricature of our proposals. I point out to you and ask you to reflect on the results of that election campaign, when people rejected what you said. You said that if they voted SNP they would bring on themselves some sort of economic Armageddon. The people did vote SNP and rejected your view.

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not have a party and I did not say any of the things that have just been attributed to me, but I know that the hon. Gentleman will become a seasoned practitioner before very long.

Ian Murray: I certainly hope that the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) becomes a seasoned practitioner very quickly, because he might have forgotten that I went through the general election campaign as well. At hustings all over the Edinburgh South constituency, the SNP candidate was consistently asked his position on full fiscal autonomy and, as I have just said, the answer was that the SNP would vote for full fiscal autonomy in this Parliament. This is a legislative opportunity to bring that manifesto commitment forward and if we do not see it, people will rightly ask why.

We are promoting the additional powers on welfare because more devolution can protect the most vulnerable in Scotland from the worst of the Conservative Government. The major new powers coming to Scotland give us the chance to do things differently so that never again can a Government impose things such as the bedroom tax on Scotland's most vulnerable.

We will also seek to strengthen the Bill in other areas. I shall not give an exhaustive list. This might be a Scotland Bill, but it has implications for other parts of the UK so we will look for a UK-wide constitutional convention as part of it. Equalities are a significant part of it and we shall look to strengthen the relevant clauses to improve on gender equality in Scotland. Lord Smith heavily underlined the importance of improving relationships between the Scottish and UK Governments to provide greater scrutiny of Scottish Ministers and the need to devolve powers from the Scottish Parliament, so we shall seek amendments in that regard. The Bill offers an opportunity to deal with outstanding issues with employment tribunals and the permanence of the Scottish Parliament. Let me re-emphasise that we will ensure that Smith is delivered in full, to the letter, in both substance and clauses.

We must be vigilant as the Bill makes progress through the House, as the worst case scenario for Scotland would be an SNP asking for its top manifesto priority of full fiscal autonomy and a majority Conservative Government delivering it for them. There will be common ground on amending the Bill, and we will work together to achieve that, but I will defend Scotland night and day from the plan to cut Scotland off from UK-wide taxation and spending with full fiscal autonomy. Some people may not recognise the policy, because the SNP does not really want to talk about it now that the general election is over. First it was full fiscal autonomy; then it was full

[*Ian Murray*]

fiscal retention. It was adapted to full fiscal responsibility, and yesterday on Sky the hon. Member for Moray called it full fiscal manoeuvre. Indeed, this lunchtime, the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) confirmed that the SNP may amend the Bill to demand full fiscal autonomy. The picture is not clear, and Scots deserve an answer on this fundamental broken promise in their manifesto.

The SNP is uncomfortable with the name, because it is uncomfortable with the policy. It knows that the consequences of such a policy would be severe for Scotland. It is a source of great shame that it simply is not honest about it, and it has five days on the Floor of the House to explain it. Recent analysis by the impartial experts at the Institute for Fiscal Studies showed that by the end of the debacle the black hole in Scotland's finances could be as much as £10 billion, which would mean spending cuts or tax rises to fill the gap. That is over and above the cuts already imposed by this Government. That means austerity max.

I will not shirk from holding the Government in Scotland to account for their policies at the Dispatch Box regardless of how much SNP Members chunter. If there was no pooling and sharing of resources across the UK, there would be no secure extra spending coming north—extra spending that has built the schools and hospitals that educate our children and care for our grandparents. It would mean an end to the UK pensions system at a time when the proportion of pensioners in Scotland is set rapidly to outgrow the proportion of people in work, paying the taxes that fund the pensions system. It would mean an end to the UK welfare state—the idea that if someone has paid into the UK system they get at least the same basic minimum back regardless of where they live. In short, it would mean an end to the social solidarity that makes Britain what it is today. That is not a left of centre or even a progressive case. It is a recipe for disaster.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that this is the place where we hold the UK Government to account?

Ian Murray: We are debating the Scotland Bill on Second Reading, and I am making the Labour party's position clear. We will fight night and day to prevent full fiscal autonomy because it would be bad for the Scottish people. That is our job as a credible Opposition, and we will amend the Bill to make it better for Scotland, regardless of what other parties want to do in this place. If the hon. Lady is so confident about full fiscal autonomy I look forward to her tabling an amendment so that we can debate it on the Floor of the House.

Only last year, we were told that independence could be delivered in just 18 months. A 300-year old Union could be disentangled in a year and a half. We could apply to be an EU member state in 18 months. [*Interruption.*] I am sure that we received legal advice on that from the person who is chuntering behind my left shoulder again. We could set up our own treasury and foreign office; establish our own navy, army and air force; create intelligence and security services; develop a separate welfare state; and write a new tax code. All of

that, we were told, could be achieved in just 18 months, but we are now being told that full fiscal autonomy is not achievable in the short term. [*Interruption.*] Again, the chuntering says, "Oh yes, it can be achieved". Well, if it can be achieved in the short term, we look forward to amendments being tabled, and we can debate them on the Floor of this political House.

There is another danger: the Conservative Government having a clumsy and short-sighted approach to the wider constitutional issues of the United Kingdom. They talk of one nation, but I am not sure which nation they are talking about. As the sun was rising over Downing Street on the morning after the referendum, the Prime Minister linked the question of English votes for English laws with the referendum result. He said that just as the Scottish Parliament would vote separately on issues of tax and spending, so too would England. Linking these two issues could have unintended and undesirable consequences, weakening the very Union that Scotland voted to maintain. Devolution of power to England and its regions is essential, and we proposed a radical approach during the election. However, we must make sure that reform is coherent and that we understand the consequences.

It was rash and unwise of the Prime Minister to use the referendum result in Scotland, not to reach out, but to continue to divide the nation. It was equally dangerous for the Prime Minister to stoke division and grievance between the nations of our United Kingdom during the election campaign.

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend is making the case for a UK-wide constitutional convention, which is important for my constituents in Greater Manchester, where we are being offered a form of devolution by this Government. Is it not also about the city regions in Scotland? Should there not be devolution from Holyrood to the cities and regions of Scotland?

Ian Murray: My hon. Friend is right. Over the past eight years or so we have seen the Scottish Parliament become one of the most centralist Parliaments in the world, sucking up power from local authorities and ensuring that local authorities cannot raise their own taxation. What we want to see—we will table amendment to this effect—is double devolution so that we will devolve powers from Westminster to Holyrood and ask Holyrood to devolve those powers out to local communities, which are best placed to deal with the problems facing Scottish communities.

I was talking about the clumsy way in which the Prime Minister has dealt with the UK constitutional settlement. In our manifesto we called for a full and proper constitutional convention which would be able to examine some of these issues so that we could have a more coherent and sustainable approach to the way that the UK operates.

We will not oppose Second Reading today. We will seek to improve the Bill in Committee and I have set out some aspects of it where we will try to do that. This is a real opportunity to provide a stable and durable devolution settlement to create a fairer, more prosperous Scotland. When this Bill is passed and these new powers make their way to the Scottish Parliament, we look forward to the debate moving on to how the powers will be used, rather than who will use them. That is the real debate

and the one that the Scottish Labour party will relish in its historic fight for social justice, fairness and equality both in Scotland and across the United Kingdom.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Laing): Order. The House will be aware that there are a great many colleagues who seek to catch my eye and that we have limited time available. I am therefore obliged to put a limit of eight minutes on Back-Bench speeches.

5.36 pm

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State not only on his appointment as Secretary of State, but on surviving his election, with some glory to himself.

I commend the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) for his performance at the Dispatch Box because he did the House a great service just now: he put the Scottish National party on the spot. Let SNP Members put down that amendment in favour of full fiscal autonomy. The hon. Gentleman may oppose it, but he may find quite a number of Conservative Members voting for it. It might go through. We know that the SNP is calling for what it does not really want because it would leave the Scottish Government with a deficit in their budget of at least half the health service spending in Scotland. We want less of that kind of dishonest politics in the House. I commend my new hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen), who called for more trust in this debate. That needs to come first from the SNP, whose whole purpose is not to trust but to promote distrust so that it can break up the Union.

I am bound to ask the Secretary of State whether this Bill is really “it” for the future of Scotland. Is this the full and final settlement that will stabilise the Union of the United Kingdom? I hae ma doots. I will certainly support the Bill, but it comes with a number of problems. It is based on the vow during the closing stages of the referendum. We read that vow on the front page of the *Daily Record*, which, I say to the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), hardly represents the fount of learning and wisdom from which we would expect him to learn. Would he commend *The Sun* in England, for example, as our Bible, any more than I would commend the *Daily Record* as his Bible? *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman should not be provoked.

What did that vow mean? Interpreting that extraordinary vow has been part of the difficulties of the Smith commission.

Alex Salmond *rose*—

Mr Jenkin: I will give way in a moment.

We already have a devolution settlement that is pretty opaque, and this Bill will make it yet more opaque, more difficult to hold to account, and more difficult to explain to voters who does what. On the question of spending, the situation is now perverse. We have SNP Members, who do not think that they should be in this House because they want a separate country, seeking to use the funding mechanism—the outdated Barnett

formula—as a pretext for interfering in decisions that should now be wholly determined by MPs representing English constituencies.

Alex Salmond *rose*—

Mr Jenkin: I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman if he will declare his unwavering and unflinching support for full fiscal autonomy for Scotland.

Alex Salmond: I have done that many times. On the subject of the *Daily Record*, the Prime Minister seemed very happy to use it last September, so is it not quite reasonable to quote what it is saying today? Also, if I remember correctly, the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) once stood for election in Scotland. Will he remind the House how he got on?

Mr Jenkin: I beat the SNP candidate into fourth place—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]—and Tommy Sheridan into fifth place. At least I stood in a Scottish general election, unlike the current SNP leader. She seemed to take part in the general election as if she were a candidate, even though she was not; it was a rather odd way of conducting a general election campaign. I noticed that the right hon. Gentleman did not call for full fiscal autonomy. He is now in retreat from that demand, because he knows that it is not what he wants.

Alex Salmond *rose*—

Mr Jenkin: I have given way to the right hon. Gentleman once already. On the question of taxation—*[Interruption.]* I am tempted, so I will give way.

Alex Salmond: The acoustics of the House must require attention. I did, I do and I will continue to call for full fiscal responsibility. With regard to the First Minister, is not it remarkable that she emerged as the unanswered star of the general election campaign without contesting a seat?

Mr Jenkin: I hope that the House noted that the right hon. Gentleman has retreated from full fiscal autonomy to full fiscal responsibility. People do not like politicians playing with words, which is exactly what he is doing. The fact is that he does not want full fiscal autonomy because he knows that it would result in dramatic cuts to public spending in Scotland.

On the question of taxation, the hon. Member for Edinburgh South ought to reflect on the fact that one of the problems identified by his hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) is that Scotland would be setting tax rates and having effects that English voters do not have for their own tax rates, which is exactly the same argument that we made against the Scotland Bill in 1997-98. He might reflect on how we have got into that situation. *[Interruption.]* Oh yes, because the Scotland Act 1998 allowed the Scots a 3% variation in income tax. They never used it, but it set up the very anomaly that the hon. Member for Swansea West complained about.

Geraint Davies *rose*—

Mr Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I have given way several times and used up half my time already.

The point is that more than one intervention from the Opposition Benches has underlined what a mistake it was to believe that setting up a Scottish Parliament would resolve the grievances of people in Scotland. We now know—we can see it very graphically in this House—that it has just been a platform for those grievances, and it explains how we have got to this point today. I say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that to describe the referendum, with its promise of yet more powers, as truly historic is almost an understatement; it was a near-death experience for one of the most successful nation states the world has ever seen. I do not think that we should describe the devolution process, which has become never-ending, as a great success.

What we need first of all is an atmosphere in which we can build more trust, instead of fuelling mistrust. How can we generate that trust? We need some cross-party forum, outside the hurly-burly of daily politics, in which to start building up a consensus on what a full and final settlement for the whole United Kingdom might look like. We need a cross-party agreement, in principle, that we are going to establish such a full and final settlement and put an end to this never-ending process of instability and uncertainty about the relationships between the four parts of the United Kingdom.

I would go so far as to suggest that we need a new, 21st-century Act of Union to be ratified by a referendum in all four parts of the United Kingdom that the SNP would be quite free to campaign against if it wished—and if it won, then Scotland would be an independent country; let the SNP dream that dream. We ought to conduct that referendum on the basis of a coherent and agreed offer, not a rush job published on the front page of a tabloid newspaper after a failed ex-Prime Minister has been shouting down the phone at the Prime Minister in Downing Street, as occurred with the previous referendum. Such a new Act of Union would aim to provide a balanced and equal settlement of powers across the four parts of the United Kingdom—with respect to my hon. Friends on the Northern Ireland Bench—and a mechanism such as a new council for the Union for distributing UK tax resources on the basis of need and unanimous agreement rather than an outdated formula that was designed to equalise spending between England and Scotland but has actually determined precisely the opposite.

The House should not carry on like this, as though we have not suffered the near death of one of the most successful nation states the world has ever seen, and without an atmosphere of contrition and seriousness about what we have all got wrong in the relationship between our four great nations in this great country. Unless we approach this in a new spirit, I fear for the future. I am standing for the chairmanship of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, and I promise that I will approach these matters with the utmost seriousness and determination—[*Interruption*]—and with a mind to seeking the maximum consensus, even from those who are now scoffing and laughing at such an idea.

5.47 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) and his unique job application for the votes of the 56 Members from the Scottish National party.

Let me begin by thanking the voters of Scotland, because it is they who have put so much pressure on this place to deliver further devolution. The lesson of history about Scottish devolution is that when the SNP does well, Scotland's powers are strengthened.

I congratulate the Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell). In the previous Parliament he was one of 12 Government Members out of 59 Members from Scotland; now he is the only Government Member from Scotland, so he is uniquely qualified to speak on behalf of the Conservative party in Scotland. The hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) is similarly qualified to speak for the Labour party.

In the spirit of co-operation—it is sometimes not fashionable to say this in politics—we will make common cause on many matters, perhaps even on this Bill, and I would welcome that. I look forward to the amendments on full financial autonomy, which SNP Members will be voting for. I suspect that the hon. Member for Edinburgh South will be voting with the Tories as he worked so closely with them through the two years of the referendum campaign.

Mr Kevan Jones: If the hon. Gentleman is committed to full fiscal responsibility, why is there no mention of it in his ham-fisted attempt to amend the Bill?

Angus Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is usually assiduous in his research on these matters, but he has obviously not read to the end of the reasoned amendment tabled by the SNP, which I commend to Members across the House. It proposes that we would move

“to a position in the medium term where the Scottish Parliament and Government are responsible for all revenue raising”.

Clearly the Labour parliamentary research unit overlooked that point when sending round its briefings earlier.

David Mowat: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Angus Robertson: I would like to make a bit of progress, and then I will be delighted to give way to the hon. Gentleman, whose interventions thus far have been tremendously helpful to the SNP.

I feel a sense of déjà vu as we discuss the contents of yet another Scotland Bill driven once again by the success of Scotland's independence movement and party. The previous Bill, now the Scotland Act 2012, was the Government's response to the Calman commission recommendations; the Calman commission, of course, was a response to the SNP's first election victory in the Scottish Parliament in 2007, which enabled us to form an historic first minority Government. In 2011, though, the SNP had an even more dramatic and significant victory in Scotland. As Members will be aware, we broke the electoral system, gaining a majority in a proportional representation system designed explicitly to prevent that eventuality.

The constitutional response to the first majority pro-independence Government in Scotland in more than 300 years was the agreement to hold last September's referendum. That is how we have got here today. The Bill's genesis was in the referendum, and it flows from the desperate promises of the final few days of the campaign. The legislation before us comes from the vow made then, which was followed by the Smith commission and the five-party Smith agreement, albeit in watered-down form.

Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the UK Government have met every single deadline imposed during the process of delivering power to Scotland? The Bill must be viewed in the context of the no vote that the SNP finds it so difficult to accept.

Angus Robertson: First, to correct the record, the SNP recognises the result of the referendum. We were in favour of a yes vote, and we did not secure it, but 45% of the electorate voted for Scottish independence, and a considerable number of those who voted no did so on the basis of the vow that was given. That is why this discussion is so important.

The interventions and heckling from Conservative Members—and, sadly, from Labour Members as well—throughout this debate will inform the voters of Scotland of one thing: those Members have learned absolutely nothing since the general election, in which the Conservative party suffered its worst defeat in 100 years, making it, as far as I am aware, the worst performing centre-right party in the industrialised world to date. If Conservative Members took cognisance of that fact, they might not intervene in the way that the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) did a moment ago.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): On the issue of full fiscal responsibility, a lot of the SNP's economic prospectus was based on an increasing oil price and the much-vaunted arc of prosperity. How did the hon. Gentleman get on with that?

Angus Robertson: How we got on with it is that we won 56 out of 59 seats.

Mr Jackson *indicated dissent.*

Angus Robertson: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but it is a statement of fact. The Scottish National party won almost every single seat in Scotland, and it did so on the basis of the argument conducted during the general election. I advise Conservative Members, who apparently are in favour of the maintenance of the Union, that they should respect the views of the electorate that returned SNP Members in such great numbers.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Angus Robertson: I would like to make some progress, and then I will give way to the hon. Lady.

I will return in much more detail to the watering down of the Smith agreement in the Bill, because righting that wrong will be a central priority for the SNP. As we know, the vow was a direct response to the growing

momentum of the yes campaign, in which the Better Together parties—Labour and Tory, which had worked closely for two years—descended into breathless panic and promised the earth. More accurately, they promised “home rule” and as close to federalism as possible. At least they had the nous not to carve those particular promises on an eight-foot block of stone. There is no doubt whatever that the Bill does not match the pledges of the campaign or the spirit and letter of the Smith deal. On that issue, I give way to the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry).

Emily Thornberry: As I understand it, the Scottish National party's position is for full fiscal autonomy. There is a difference between autonomy and responsibility, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman would agree. Autonomy means a great deal. The amendment that was not selected states

“as Scotland moves to a position in the medium term where the Scottish Parliament and Government are responsible for all revenue raising”.

Does he agree that that is not full fiscal autonomy?

Angus Robertson: That is interesting. A moment ago, Labour Members intervened to say that there was no mention of our support for fiscal autonomy; now we are told that we did mention it, but the hon. Lady is not happy with the wording. I opened my contribution by saying that I look forward to the SNP amendment on full fiscal autonomy; I expect to see Labour Members trooping through the Lobby and voting with the Tories yet again on governance in Scotland. I suggest that if they want to retain their only seat there, they should think twice about pursuing that course of action.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Angus Robertson: I want to make some progress, but I will give way to the hon. Member for Edinburgh South.

Ian Murray: To be clear, can the hon. Gentleman confirm that he is saying that the SNP will introduce an amendment to deliver full fiscal autonomy for Scotland, and that the Labour party should support a measure that would put a £10 billion black hole in Scotland's finances? It is not about walking through the Lobby with anyone; it is about standing up for Scotland's interests.

Angus Robertson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for letting me intervene in his second speech in this debate. He needs to consider closely the impact of his party's collaboration with the Tories for two years on the independence referendum campaign. He can say whatever he likes about full fiscal autonomy, which the SNP supports and which the other parties oppose. They have this in common: they are unbelievably unpopular in Scotland, and it will take a while for them to learn the lessons from that.

The hon. Gentleman had the opportunity in his speech from the Front Bench to outline any new thinking, new ideas or anything else that the Labour party did not say in the Smith commission proposals. There was not a peep; not one new idea. That, along with his party's ongoing co-operation with the Conservative party, will consign Labour to the opposition position that it deserves in Scotland.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Angus Robertson: I have taken many interventions, and I will now make progress. There is no doubt that the Bill does not match the pledges of the campaign or the spirit and letter of the Smith deal. The Bill falls short and, more importantly, it has also been overtaken by another election—the general election of a few weeks ago—in which the SNP had overwhelming and unprecedented success.

Ian C. Lucas: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Angus Robertson: For the second time, I will not. I want to make progress.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Laing): Order. The hon. Gentleman is not giving way. We must not waste time arguing about it; there is much to be said this evening.

Angus Robertson: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The people have spoken, and it is clear that they want more power for Scotland than the Bill offers. I ask the Secretary of State: will the Government listen?

I am not usually given to quoting the traditionally Labour-supporting *Daily Record*, but I recommend that the Secretary of State and other Members look at today's issue. Across the front page is a headline that reads, "Failure to fully deliver all the new powers promised to Scotland will seriously damage your Union".

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Angus Robertson: No, I am making progress. The editorial that follows states:

"there are serious concerns the proposed Scotland Bill does not fully implement what was proposed...This is an unacceptable situation that must be rectified quickly as the Bill makes its way through Westminster."

Much of what we have heard so far today has been an attack on the SNP by both the Government and Labour. As the effective Opposition in this Parliament, we will ensure that we make progress with the Bill. The Government can be assured that strengthening the legislation so that it begins to satisfy the aspirations of the people of Scotland and organisations across Scotland will be another priority for SNP Members.

Both the convenor of the Scottish Parliament's Devolution (Further Powers) Committee and the Law Society of Scotland have urged the UK Government to ensure that the Bill proceeds in a way that will enable the Scottish Parliament to influence and shape it.

I endorse their view and ask the Secretary of State to confirm today that the Government will accept the cross-party changes proposed by the Scottish Parliament's Devolution (Further Powers) Committee to bring the Bill into line with the Smith agreement.

It might help colleagues who have not read the report if I highlight the fact that the committee's conclusions were reached unanimously on an all-party basis. The committee's deputy convenor is one Duncan McNeil of the Scottish Labour party and it also includes one Alex Johnstone of the Scottish Conservative and

Unionist party, Alison Johnstone of the Scottish Green party and Tavish Scott of the Scottish Liberal Democrats.

Huw Merriman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Angus Robertson: I want to make some more progress.

This is a cross-party committee and, as its convenor Bruce Crawford MSP said when launching the interim report in May,

"the current proposals do not yet meet the challenge of fully translating the political agreement reached in the Smith Commission into legislation."

This is really important. If all the political parties in this House believe that this Bill should deliver on Smith, and if all our colleagues in the Scottish Parliament say it does not fully do so, the Government must listen and they must act.

The errors that those in the Scottish Parliament seek to address go to the heart of what was agreed in the Smith commission. First, on welfare, the Bill as it stands retains a UK veto over changes to universal credit, among other things. That is unacceptable. The Secretary of State denied that there is a veto right in the Bill. I do not know how many Members present have read the Bill, but I invite them to turn to clause 24(4) on page 26, which states:

"The Scottish Ministers may not exercise the function of making regulations to which this section applies unless...they have consulted the Secretary of State about the practicability of implementing the regulations".

The veto rights are there in black and white. *[Interruption.]* I hear someone from the Labour Benches say, "So?" Do they think it is a problem or not? Their colleagues in the Scottish Parliament think it is.

Ian C. Lucas *rose*—

Angus Robertson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with his colleagues in the Scottish Parliament that the Smith proposals should be delivered?

Ian C. Lucas: I am not giving way at this point.

Angus Robertson: There was I being hectored and accused of being frit and not taking interventions, but when Members are put on the spot as to whether they support their own colleagues in the Scottish Parliament, they run away.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way on the extremely important issue of a veto. An ordinary reading of clause 24(4) shows that it clearly says that "such agreement" is

"not to be unreasonably withheld."

That means that it is not a veto and that it would be justiciable in front of the courts if an unreasonable decision were made by the Secretary of State.

Angus Robertson: The key point is that it does not have to be given. The hon. Gentleman will no doubt make contributions during the Bill's Committee stage, but I ask hon. and right hon. Members across the House: have they read what their colleagues in the Scottish Parliament have concluded, and will they act on it or not?

Stewart Hosie: The hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) talks about reasonableness, but how on earth can we trust this Government or any Secretary of State to be reasonable when they have just implemented £177 million-worth of in-year cuts to the Scottish budget?

Angus Robertson: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I was struck that the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen), who is not in her place, made an appeal for trust in this process. I totally agree with her. I look forward to the Government delivering everything that was promised in the Smith commission and more, because we all—every party—stood on manifestos of constitutional change, and the three UK parties were all defeated.

The Prime Minister has said that he will listen to what the Scottish Government have to say on more powers. I will take him at his word. The Secretary of State for Scotland has said that he is open to ensuring that the wording of the Bill is optimal to deliver on the Smith commission proposals. It is absolutely crucial that that takes place and that the trust mentioned by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire is delivered on. When a committee of our colleagues in the Scottish Parliament concludes, on a cross-party basis, that the Government's Bill does not fulfil that, the Government must listen.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Does it follow from what the hon. Gentleman has just said that, if the amendments that SNP Members will inevitably table are voted down, they will accept the consequences of the amendments not going through and their not getting the massive powers they seek?

Angus Robertson: I am not entirely sure whether the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that he and his colleagues should vote against his party colleagues in the Scottish Parliament. Is that what he is suggesting? The point I am trying to make is that all our political parties signed up to the Smith commission and all of our political parties in the Scottish Parliament have concluded that the Bill does not fully deliver on it. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that his party should not support our colleagues in the Scottish Parliament?

Sir William Cash: I am asking a very simple question about this House. The SNP has won a victory in Scotland and its Members have come here, so they are obviously bound by the circumstances that apply within the Westminster Parliament. If they are voted down, will they accept that?

Angus Robertson: I asked the hon. Gentleman for clarification, but unfortunately he did not give it. There is a central point—[*Interruption.*] I am getting heckled by Labour Members in relation to Tory interventions—again! We are very used to this in Scotland. We are used to “project fear”—the Labour party and the Tories working together.

Mr Kevan Jones *rose*—

Angus Robertson: No. I have given way very generously, both to Labour and to Tory Members, and I will now make some progress.

In addition to the points that have been raised thus far, the Smith recommendation for a power to create new benefits in devolved areas has not been adequately reflected in the Bill. Similarly, the ability to top up reserve benefits has been watered down. The Scottish Parliament would also be prevented from creating additional benefits to mitigate the impact of welfare sanctions and conditionality, which, as Members will know, are among the main causes of poverty. Their use has seen tens of thousands of people forced to rely on food banks, a scandal that should make Government Members hang their heads in shame. As the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee pointed out, the Bill contains unwarranted restrictions on the payment of carers' benefits.

Secondly, on the constitution, the Bill as it stands fails adequately to guarantee the permanence of the Scottish Parliament. As the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee made clear, this Parliament should not be able to abolish Scotland's Parliament against the wishes of the people. The consent of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish people is a necessary addition to fulfil the Smith agreement's promise of permanence.

Equally, as the Bill stands, the Sewel convention will not be translated effectively into law. It is not given full statutory footing in the Bill, as the Smith commission proposed. It is not good enough, as the Bill currently stands, simply to recognise the existence of the Sewel convention. The Bill's clauses are vague and, as drafted, do not in fact require Scottish Parliament consent for UK Government legislation in devolved areas. That is not acceptable.

In the Committee stage, we will explore the gaps in the Bill more fully, but I will provide the House with one final example of its shortcomings in the area of employment. The Bill does not include the full range of employment support services currently delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions, contrary to both the letter and the spirit of paragraph 57 of the Smith agreement. That, too, needs to change.

Mr Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Angus Robertson: I am still making progress.

These are matters of substance: shortcomings identified and agreed by all parties in the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Government have helpfully provided new clauses to the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee on those and other gaps in the Bill—amendments that would deliver on the Smith agreement in full. Will the Secretary of State agree now to introduce them as Government amendments? If he cannot offer that guarantee, I am happy to confirm that the Scottish National party will do so, so that the Bill can be given these most basic and essential improvements during its Committee stage.

In that respect, I want to remind the Secretary of State of the Government's stated policy with regard to England, as set out in the Queen's Speech, and to replace the word “England” with “Scotland” to create what I hope can be a new principle for the passage of this Bill—perhaps we can call it the Mundell principle—as follows: “That decisions affecting Scotland can be taken only with the consent of the majority of Members of Parliament representing constituencies in that part of our United Kingdom”. That means that if the majority of Scottish Members of this House, representing the

[*Angus Robertson*]

views of the Scottish Parliament, desire a change to the Bill that affects only Scotland, his Government must not and should not stand in our path.

The Scottish Parliament and Government have set out the steps that must be taken to ensure that this legislation delivers on the Smith agreement. The Bill is a response to the referendum, but we now need an adequate response to the general election and the clear mandate for more powers that was delivered. I agree with the words of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations in its briefing to Members on the Scotland Bill:

“As it stands, the Scotland Bill fails to recognise the sea change of opinion in Scotland and the wish for further devolution.”

That failure must now be remedied. If the Government are unwilling to give the people of Scotland what they want, the SNP will table the necessary amendments.

The manifesto on which I and my colleagues were elected was one that secured the support of more votes in Scotland than the Conservatives, the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats combined. We have been clear on our priorities for more powers, stating that

“we will prioritise devolution of powers over employment policy, including the minimum wage, welfare, business taxes, national insurance and equality policy—the powers we need to create jobs, grow revenues and lift people out of poverty.”

Those priorities will be the focus of our amendments in Committee and on Report. I hope that the Government will accept such changes as reflecting the clearly expressed will of a majority of Scottish Members on issues that affect Scotland only.

With meaningful powers over working-age benefits, we can protect Scottish society from the ideological attacks on our welfare state being undertaken by this Government. With responsibility for a full range of economic levers, we can work to support the job creators in Scotland. We can do more to create the wealth and share it more fairly. We can make more of our natural competitive and comparative advantages, boost exports and encourage innovation as we work to make Scotland's economy more competitive and more productive. These are more powers for a very clear purpose: to deliver policy that works better for the people of Scotland—policy for the many, not just for the few. As our manifesto made clear, we will seek to amend the Bill so that the Scottish Parliament can become responsible for all revenues raised in Scotland as part of a wider financial arrangement that includes borrowing powers. That is also part of our mandate.

The people have spoken, and the UK Government should respect their choice. We know that the UK Government blocked the devolution of many new powers during the very last hours of the Smith negotiations. They were wrong to do so, as the election result has made very clear. Press reports have revealed that very late drafts of the agreement, as negotiated between the Scottish parties, included

“proposals to devolve income tax personal allowances, employers' National Insurance contributions, inheritance tax, and the power to create new taxes without Treasury approval.”

We are also told that Labour representatives on the Smith commission blocked plans to devolve additional powers on employment law, including the national minimum wage. I hope that the Labour party, in particular, will now shift its stance so that we can ensure that minimum

wage levels are set by the Scottish Parliament, not by this Tory Government. I look forward to the Scottish Labour party adding its voice and vote in Committee to SNP amendments to devolve the minimum wage.

The delivery of substantial new powers for our Parliament has become the settled will of the Scottish people, as expressed in elections and opinion surveys. People want the devo-max that was promised in the final days of the referendum. Scotland deserves nothing less.

Huw Merriman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Angus Robertson: I am just concluding.

As a recent study by the Economic and Social Research Council has revealed, 63% of people in Scotland support the full devolution of both taxes and welfare benefits, including unemployment benefit. Our guiding principle should be that the people of Scotland get the form of government that they want. For almost two thirds of our fellow citizens, that is a Parliament in Scotland with substantially stronger powers than we have today and substantially stronger than are on offer in this Bill.

As our amendment on the Order Paper makes clear, we wish the Bill to progress into Committee so that it can be improved. Change is necessary, and I hope Government Front Benchers accept that reality. SNP Members will work with the Scottish Parliament to deliver the improvements to the Bill that are required—improvements that will first deliver the Smith agreement in full, and then give us the new powers Scotland needs to enable us to create more jobs and boost economic growth, to increase wages and opportunities across society and to deliver higher living standards for hard-pressed households.

The Westminster system has delivered growing inequality. The gap between the super-rich and the rest is growing at an unacceptable rate. We are among the most unequal societies anywhere in the world. Westminster is not working for the majority of people in Scotland—and arguably for the rest of the UK, too—and that is why there is such a clamour in Scotland for a new way of doing things and for the powers, in our own hands, to make a difference.

The UK Government have promised that this Bill will deliver the Smith commission in full, and that it will include proposals from the Scottish Government that were endorsed by the electorate in the general election. In the weeks ahead, the House of Commons will debate amendments that can strengthen the Bill. I hope that the Government will deliver on the vow, accept the verdict of the electorate and ensure that the Bill does deliver what the Scottish people require.

6.16 pm

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), although it would certainly have been more of a pleasure if he had taken my intervention earlier. I will ask the question that I would have asked then. He made the point that the end of the SNP Members' amendment says that they want full fiscal autonomy “in the medium term”. Would he care to tell the House when the medium term is? They were talking about a period of 18 months when the referendum was taking place.

The hon. Gentleman did say something that was correct: the people have spoken. The people spoke in the general election, and there is absolutely no question but that there is a mandate for the Bill before us. It is absolutely right that Members from both sides of the House move forward with the vow in all it means in a way that shows trust and good faith, and we will do that.

I will make a number of observations about the fiscal framework, and I would be interested to hear Ministers come back on those points. In his initial remarks, the Secretary of State used the phrase that the solution had to be long lasting and fair, which are big words. My concern is that a solution based on a fiscal framework that is not fair will not be long lasting. I do not believe that the use of the Barnett formula, as it is currently envisaged—even with changes through the devolution of certain revenue-raising powers—is fair on my constituents, or indeed those in Wales or in other parts of England. The flawed Barnett formula settlement is unfair on middle England, and as a result, this whole settlement may unwind.

Let me say a few things about the Barnett formula on which we need to be clear. The first is that it does not represent a subsidy to Scotland, or it has not over the past 25 to 30 years. I have never said that it was. Broadly speaking, the extra money that Scotland gets—£1,600 per head—has been paid for by the proceeds of Scotland's oil. We can look at the analysis year by year, but the Institute of Directors analysis has said that that, roughly speaking, has been the case over the past 25 to 30 years. It is not a question of subsidy, but of fairness and of need. When we are allocating public spending across our state, there should be cognisance of where that money is required to be spent to have the biggest impact. Indeed, a progressive party—we are continually told that the SNP is progressive—should surely be at the forefront of wanting a formula based on need.

Debbie Abrahams: Will the hon. Gentleman therefore explain why he has taken £254 per household from my constituency in Oldham and given it to an affluent area in Surrey?

David Mowat: I have not taken any money from anyone, or given any money to anyone. The hon. Lady's constituents in Oldham receive roughly £1,600 a year less from public spending than they would receive if they had the same demographic profile and lived north of the border. That is an anomaly, and it is an anomaly that causes a potential risk to a settlement that is necessary and right.

Conservative Members do not question the fact that there is a Scottish Government now, and that that Government have entitlements.

Stewart Hosie: The hon. Gentleman is knowledgeable about this matter, and he was right to say that no subsidy is implied by Barnett. Unlike most of his colleagues, he looks at both sides of the balance sheet. However, he spoilt that by talking about a needs-based assessment. Does he recognise that that would imply a £4 billion cut in Scottish funding, right now?

David Mowat: I recognise that a needs-based assessment—that is, an assessment that will result in public money being spent where it is most needed—is fairer. However,

I am not saying that it should be introduced immediately, as it would be with full fiscal autonomy, and as it would have been had the hon. Gentleman's party won the referendum. Such things can be done over a period, say, of 10 or 20 years. There can be a target for the achievement of fairness.

As I was saying, no one questions the right of the Scottish Government to provide free prescriptions and free tuition fees—if that is their priority—and to make different arrangements for social care. However, if such provision is predicated on a baseline of funding that is unfair and wrong, it is reasonable for us to question it, and not to let the Scottish Government get away with saying that they can take such action because it is progressive. That is neither fair nor right.

We are talking about a formula that is based on need, and a formula that the late Joel Barnett was desperate to get rid of. A House of Lords Select Committee made the position very clear. Moreover—this is not mentioned often enough—the Holtham commission identified the serious underfunding of Wales as a consequence of the Barnett formula. That problem will have to be addressed in Scotland. It is true that public spending must reflect sparsity, and must reflect the fact that Scotland's population is more spread out. However, it also needs to reflect relative ageing and relative measures of deprivation.

Alex Salmond: The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting speech, but at its heart is something of a contradiction. He says that we must implement the vow, but scrap the Barnett formula. Is he aware that the Barnett formula features in paragraph 6 of the vow?

David Mowat: Yes, I am completely aware of that. My point is that the whole settlement will be at risk if it is not perceived as being fair in, for want of a better phrase, “middle England.” I represent a constituency that is in the north but also in the middle, depending on where you start.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

David Mowat: No, I will not. I need to make some progress.

It is not right for my constituents to have £1,600 a year less than those who live north of the border. One solution that has been mooted is full fiscal autonomy, which one imagines is something in which nationalists believe. According to their amendment, they believe in it “in the medium term”, which was not the case when they fought the general election. That is indeed a possible solution, but it would result in a black hole. I think that we should be sympathetic, and deal with the problem in a way that would be fair to my constituents and those of the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond).

Another possible solution would be a proper, need-based review of public spending in this country that was fair to Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. That would take a while to achieve, and I am not suggesting that it would be easy or should be implemented immediately.

Dr Whitford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

David Mowat: No. I have given way twice, and I need to make some progress.

A needs-based review must be something that I would be delighted to accept if I came to Westminster representing a progressive party. Surely my progressiveness would not allow me simply to say, “We will have all we can get in Scotland”—which, as we heard from the right hon. Member for Gordon, is what was on the front page of the *Daily Record*. A progressive party should say, “We are not going to take all this money, because we are progressive. The settlement needs to be fair to Wales and to parts of England, where there is a great deal of deprivation.”

Mr Jenkin: And that would be a step towards full fiscal autonomy.

David Mowat: Indeed. I understand that full fiscal autonomy would take the problem away, which is, of course, why we are now seeking to implement it “in the medium term”, whatever that means.

Of course I support the vow. Of course I support the mandate that SNP Members have achieved through their spectacular election victory. It is right for us to implement this settlement, and I will vote with the Government tonight and in the future to ensure that that happens. However, I must ask the Secretary of State to reflect on the phrase that he used in his speech—“fair and lasting”—and to ask himself whether he really believes that a fiscal settlement that is absolutely and clearly not based on need can ever be described as fair and lasting. That may yet cause us problems.

6.25 pm

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): As one who has always believed in devolution, I welcome an historic Bill that devolves further powers to Scotland, granting real powers that local people have clearly demanded. Today, however, we heard the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) elevate victim mentality to a new art form.

It is fine for SNP Members to stand here in the House and say that what is on offer is not good enough, but to hear them speak, both in the House and outside, one would think that they had been no part of the Smith commission whatsoever, and that it had somehow been imposed on them from outside. They sound a bit like the Eurosceptics who claim that Brussels dictates what the United Kingdom does. Nothing could be further from the truth. SNP Members were part of the Smith commission, they agreed to the process, but then, on the following morning, they said that it had had nothing to do with them. We heard a continuation of that argument today, when it was suggested that what had been promised by all the parties who agreed to the Smith commission would not be in the Bill. Briefing from the House of Commons Library clearly states that

“there are no substantial differences between the tax powers that the Smith Commission proposed devolving and those contained in this Bill”.

We must recognise that the general election result caused a substantial change in the politics of Scotland. However, the SNP must recognise that in the vote on independence the people of Scotland voted to be part of the United Kingdom. I think that that puts working

people in Scotland in a better position. We should consider the SNP’s record. Earlier today, the hon. Member for Moray shouted at one of my hon. Friends, suggesting that we were in cahoots with the Conservatives “yet again”. Given that his party was propped up by the Conservatives in the Scottish Parliament from 2007 onwards, we will take no lessons from him.

Ian Blackford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Jones: No, I will not.

The hon. Member for Moray set the tone. We keep hearing from the SNP that if something is said, it is actual fact. I think that the movement towards full fiscal autonomy is one thing that the SNP wanted and actually did mention in their manifesto. I hope that they will table amendments, because it would not be in the interests of working people in Scotland. It might be in their interests with Barnett in place, but it is clear that Barnett would eventually wither away, and, given the demographics and economics of Scotland, there would then be a black hole.

Tommy Sheppard: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that the working people of Scotland were consulted on this matter, that they cast their votes in the general election, and that they voted for our party? Not only did they give us the majority of seats, but more than 50% of the electorate voted for us. Does the hon. Gentleman not respect that decision by the working people of Scotland?

Mr Jones: I do, and I expect the hon. Gentleman to respect their position in relation to how they voted in the referendum. [*Interruption.*] Hon. Members from the SNP say they do, but they conveniently forget that.

Tommy Sheppard: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Jones: No, I will carry on.

The important point is that we need a system that is not only fair to the people of Scotland but, as the hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) said, fair to the people of the United Kingdom. We cannot have the devolution in Scotland that the Bill proposes without it affecting my constituents in North Durham and the constituents of many other Members.

Devolution raises many practical issues. One example is air passenger duty. Newcastle airport is a great example of the local council, five local authorities and the private sector working together to ensure for the region a vibrant airport with international links. It employs 3,500 people directly, with a further 8,000 people employed in the region.

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend’s point about Newcastle airport could be made equally about Manchester airport and many other airports in the north of England. Is this not precisely why we need to have a UK-wide look at the devolution settlement? We need to ensure that parts of England, particular those in the north which are closest to Scotland, are not adversely affected by devolution?

Mr Jones: We do. I am not holding out a great deal of hope, however, because the Government seem to think that somehow, with this power being devolved to Scotland,

competition will ensue. I do not think that is going to work. I agree with my hon. Friend totally, but it goes beyond that issue. On landfill tax, a commendable initiative—the zero waste strategy, which has been much trumpeted in Scotland—aims for 70% of waste to be recycled by 2025. That is a very good policy; indeed, it is the only progressive policy I can think of that the SNP has introduced.

Stewart McDonald: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Jones: No, because I only have two or three minutes left.

If the Scottish Government choose to increase landfill tax, there will be a movement of waste across the border into England where people will be paying lower rates of landfill tax. That is already happening. In 2014, the Scottish Government introduced the Zero Waste Plan, which means that businesses and individuals now have to separate out their waste. There is clear evidence that in some cases it is not being enforced, and that some unscrupulous individuals and large companies are collecting separated waste and shipping it across the border into England where the Scottish Government have no jurisdiction. Those are just two of the practical issues that need to be considered during the passage of the Bill.

I look forward to the amendments that will be tabled by the SNP, but I have one plea. There is no difference whatever between the interests of the working people in my constituency and of those in the constituencies of SNP Members. I would just say that they should make sure that what is brought forward is not just in the interests of the constituents they represent but mine as well—they have a lot in common. We need to ensure a settlement that the people of Scotland want. They want to be part of the United Kingdom, although I accept that the SNP do not. We need a system that works not only for the benefit of the people of Scotland, but for the rest of the UK too.

6.34 pm

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): Thank you for calling me to give my maiden speech to the House, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a particular pleasure for a current Scottish solicitor to be called by a former Scottish solicitor.

I want to thank the voters of South Leicestershire for giving me the opportunity to represent them in this great House of Commons. I follow in a distinguished line of Conservative MPs who have served my wonderful constituency with such passion and dedication. My immediate predecessor, Andrew Robathan, has served our country for over 40 years. He began in the British Army serving in the Coldstream Guards, reaching the rank of major. He was elected in 1992 as MP for Blaby, as my constituency was then known, succeeding another distinguished Conservative MP, the former Chancellor the right hon. Nigel Lawson. Andrew served as Minister of State in the Ministry of Defence and, later, in the Northern Ireland Office. But he was also Opposition deputy Chief Whip and the skills gained in the British Army were put to excellent use in maintaining party discipline, earning him the nickname Robocop. We wish Andrew and his family every success for their future.

South Leicestershire is a truly delightful constituency, a semi-rural constituency, with much of the population in commuter towns and villages clustered close to Leicester itself, both in the suburb of Braunstone Town, including the large modern development of Thorpe Astley, and commuter villages such as Enderby, Narborough, Whetstone, Blaby, Glen Parva and Countesthorpe. The largest settlement to the south is the old market town of Lutterworth where Sir Frank Whittle, inventor of the jet engine, developed some of the world's first jet engines. The engine for the UK's first jet aeroplane, the Gloster E.28/39, was produced in Lutterworth and a statue of the plane stands in a roundabout south of the town as a memorial. Nearby is Magna Park, one of the largest distribution centres in Europe. As you travel west, Madam Deputy Speaker, you pass through wonderful villages such as Bitteswell, Ullesthorpe, Ashby Parva, Claybrooke Magna, Frolesworth and Leire. Further north, there are quintessential English villages such as Dunton Bassett, Broughton Astley, Sapcote, Stoney Stanton, Croft and Cosby.

To the east, there is Bruntingthorpe aerodrome, with one of the longest runways in the UK, where on Sunday 28 June, weather permitting, we hope to see one of the final flypasts of the British Vulcan bomber aircraft. The whole House is invited. Around Bruntingthorpe, there are more beautiful villages, such as Ashby Magna, Willoughby Waterleys, Peatling Magna, Peatling Parva, Arnesby, Shearsby, Walton, Gilmorton and Walcote. To the very south, we cannot forget Cotesbach and, where the M1 and the M6 meet, Swinford, Shawell and Catthorpe.

I would not be here today without the excellent assistance from my agent Ruth and my marvellous campaign manager Ann, who, along with members and supporters from my local Conservative team, led us to an increased majority. As well as Leicestershire County Council, South Leicestershire has two district councils. At the election, we succeeded in holding control of Blaby District Council, under the new leadership of Councillor Terry Richardson, as well as maintaining control of Harborough District Council, which covers the southern parts of my constituency, returning excellent councillors such as Neil Bannister. I will be supporting all three of my local authorities in calls for fairer funding.

Today, we are debating the Scotland Bill. It is perhaps worth noting my own background. As the son of Italian immigrants, I was born in England but raised in Scotland. As a dual qualified Scottish and English solicitor, I have worked across our United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I am proud to call myself British.

Those on the Government Benches are honouring the so-called vow to the Scottish people made during the Scottish referendum. It is right that we do this. It is also right, however, that we remind the House of another promise given by a senior member of the yes campaign, the former First Minister, the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond). During last year's Scottish referendum, he said there would be no second referendum, stating:

"this is a once in a generation, perhaps even a once in a lifetime, opportunity".

On this side of the House, we will ensure that that pledge—call it a vow, even—is honoured to the people of South Leicestershire and to the whole of our United Kingdom. The Scottish voters decided to remain part of the UK, and all British people are entitled to constitutional stability, at least for a lifetime.

[*Alberto Costa*]

As the Secretary of State said clearly and sincerely, the Scotland Bill is designed to implement the Smith commission agreement, the objective of which was to provide a durable but responsive constitutional settlement for the governance of Scotland. The Bill states:

“A Scottish Parliament is recognised as a permanent part of the United Kingdom’s constitutional arrangements.”

That is designed to ensure that the House accepts the permanence of the Scottish Parliament, while maintaining the ultimate sovereignty of the UK Parliament, of which the Scottish people voted to stay a part. However, having heard other hon. Members, particularly on the Government Benches, I think it is also right that we recognise the need to complement the Bill in due course with further changes in the House of Commons—if you like, English votes for English laws. It is a cry not for English nationalism, but for fairness to ensure that decisions affecting England can be taken only with the consent of a majority of MPs representing English constituencies.

Finally, those of us committed to keeping Britain intact—as one successful, secure, strong, sovereign country—will, I am confident, work towards a fair settlement, and in so doing, whichever party we happen to be members of, I am sure that together we can proudly maintain the integrity of our United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

6.41 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech and to take part in this important debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (*Alberto Costa*) on his interesting maiden speech, and I am sure he will work hard for his constituents over the next five years. I also congratulate my hon. Friends on their wonderful maiden speeches. I am sure they will also work extremely hard over the next five years.

It is a privilege and an honour to stand here today as not only the first SNP Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West, but the first female Member, although parts of the constituency—Blantyre and Hamilton West—had the pleasure of being served by the great Winnie Ewing back in 1967. I thank my constituents for placing their trust in me to represent them, and will work hard to repay that trust over the next five years.

My early days in the House have been, in equal measures, interesting and challenging: there is a lot to learn, not just about how to act in the Chamber, but about how not to act. However, I am sure that my hon. Friends will join me in saying that since we have arrived the staff have been more than helpful and attentive to our needs. The Doorkeepers have been particularly charming, keen to remember the names of all new Members. It is clear how much they love and take pride in what they do.

As is customary, I would like to mention my predecessor, Tom Greatrex. He was a Labour and Co-operative Member between 2010 and 2015, and was born on 30 September 1974 in Ashford, Kent. He held various posts within his party, before latterly taking on the post of shadow Energy Minister. I hope to represent my constituents as diligently as he did, and I am sure that whatever the future holds for him, it will be a successful one. Perhaps

now he has more time, he can enjoy spending it with his wife and twin daughters and supporting his beloved football club, Fulham.

Rutherglen and Hamilton West is diverse in every sense. Rutherglen received the status of royal burgh in 1126 by royal charter from King David I of Scotland. Cambuslang has a long history of coalmining, iron and steel making. Halfway, where I have made my home for the last 15 years, was given that name because passengers would stop there to change their horses and rest on the journey from Glasgow to Hamilton. The district has the older name of Gilbertfield, where a castle still stands, owned once by Hamilton of Gilbertfield, a friend of our national bard, Robert Burns. Blantyre was the birthplace of David Livingstone, the 19th-century explorer and missionary, whose former house is now a museum—to this day, Blantyre has strong ties with Malawi, one of the countries Livingstone explored. Last but by no means least, there is Hamilton, originally known as Cadzow. Many notable people have connections with Hamilton, including the blonde bombshell, as she was known, the late Margo Macdonald.

There are affluent areas in my constituency but also communities crying out for regeneration, investment, and love and attention. Within these communities, we are blessed with truly selfless, hard-working people contributing to our society daily, volunteers in many organisations, charities and community councils—these are the unsung heroes who make the larger community of Rutherglen and Hamilton West what it is. It will be a great pleasure to work with all these people over the next five years, and I look forward to meeting many of them during my tenure as their MP. I will do my very best to serve them with honesty and integrity.

The legacy I wish to leave my constituents is one of positive change for the communities we all live and work in. I have been elected to be their voice in Parliament and to speak up for those with no voice: the mother forced to visit the local food bank; the father in low-paid, zero-hours-contract employment; the carer who looks after a family member for no reward; the refugee reaching out for help in their time of need.

On 7 May, the SNP was given a resounding mandate by the people of Scotland to be their strong voice here in this Chamber. Why were we elected? It was because we listened to the people of our nation—and we will continue to listen to them. We will be the real Opposition, the real social democrats. We were told by Labour and the Conservatives during the independence referendum that we were a family of nations, and more recently one nation. If they truly meant those words, they will listen to our contributions in the Chamber and in the Committees.

There will be many important pieces of proposed legislation over the next five years, but I am particularly proud to be making my maiden speech in a debate on more powers for Scotland and the Scotland Bill. It has the potential to be much better than it currently is, and my party will take every opportunity to improve it, first by calling for full implementation of the Smith commission and then by adding additional powers over our economy and society. I hope that Labour Members will back us as we seek to take welfare out of Tory hands and into the hands of the Parliament and people of Scotland.

Walking within these corridors of power, I can see that it would be easy to fall under the spell of Westminster Palace—there is no denying the history and ornateness

of the building, and the archaic customs have a certain seductive charm—but that is why it is important constantly to remind ourselves of why we are here, who sent us and how long we will be here for. This, my hon. Friends, is but a moment in time. Our heads cannot be turned. Our rightful place is back in that place we all call home, Scotland.

All of us might have difficult choices to make within this Chamber, but we must stand up and be counted. We cannot shy away from making decisions that might have profound implications for our constituents. I will do my best to question each decision I make with careful consideration, and I am sure that my hon. Friends and I will scrutinise each and every piece of proposed legislation carefully, opposing any unfair policies or decisions from the Tory Government.

It is fitting that our day in Parliament starts with prayers. Our task is not an easy one, and divine intervention is welcomed, but ultimately one is responsible for one's own conduct and moral compass. It will be an interesting five years for me and my 55 hon. Friends. We relish the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead of us, and I hope that we can make progressive alliances across the Chamber, working together in a spirit of collaboration. Let us find common cause, let us respect one another and let us be guided always to do what is right, not for ourselves, but for those we serve. Saor Alba.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Laing): Order. The passion of today's debate has been such that speeches have taken a little longer than they might otherwise have done—perfectly properly, given the many interventions—so I am afraid that I have to reduce the time limit to seven minutes.

6.49 pm

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): It is an honour to follow the maiden speech from the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier), who spoke powerfully on behalf of her constituents. It is a great privilege for me, too, to address this House on behalf of my constituents in Eddisbury. I arrived ready to be a serious politician, but almost immediately, the first thing that happened to me was being selected for the ladies' tug-of-war team! I hope this parliamentary debut will not lead to my being flat on my backside.

I am acutely conscious that Eddisbury has been represented by a number of illustrious Members of Parliament, the most recent of whom was Stephen O'Brien, who served the constituency with distinction and dedication for the last 16 years. His commitment to his constituents has been accompanied by his achievements in office as a Minister for International Development between 2010 and 2012, as well being the Prime Minister's envoy for the Sahel. Stephen will bring substantial experience to his new role in the United Nations as Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. That experience will prove invaluable in the light of the challenges of the humanitarian crises that beset Syria and Nepal and the consequences of the conflict with ISIL. Members from all sides will want to wish him well.

The difficulties of others suffering the consequences of humanitarian disaster can sometimes feel a long way away from the delights of the Eddisbury constituency in

south-west Cheshire. Beautiful canals that criss-cross the landscape in Wrenbury can be enjoyed on narrow boats that can be hired for relaxing holidays.

The Cheshire plains form the bedrock of the dairy industry in the constituency, whose importance is recorded as far back as 1125 by William of Malmesbury. Concerns about the milk price do not quite go back that far, but the fact that it is cheaper to buy a litre of milk than a litre of water was as true 15 years ago as it is today, and it is something on which we need to take action if we want to ensure that British family farms survive. Farm diversification is strong in Eddisbury, and that can be seen with the milk being turned into one of the oldest of English cheeses—Cheshire cheese.

Scottish Members will be interested to know of the link to St Boniface, who founded over 150 churches in Scotland in the seventh century. We have the church of St Boniface in Bunbury. In the 18th century, the Reverend Butler recorded:

“St. Boniface, by preaching the word of God, reformed the manners of the people in the provinces of Angus, Marris, Buchan, Elgin, Murray, and Ross”.

Witnessing “Seatgate” in this House over the last few weeks, I am not certain that the reformation of manners he described was a lasting one.

Eddisbury is also home to the oldest church in Cheshire, which was built in 1190 in Shocklach. If quiet contemplation is not one's style and people prefer big engines and racing, they should come to the Cholmondeley “pageant of power”, which is on this weekend, or watch the racing at Oulton. Bolesworth park provides top-quality international eventing for those with a love of horses—and all these can be enjoyed over the next few weeks.

The real strength of my constituency, however, is the people who live within it, and their generosity of spirit can be seen in Winsford. St Luke's hospice, one with a history of being small, punches above its weight in terms of innovation and working with others. The Wingate centre provides life-enriching experiences to children with disabilities and provides respite care for those who need it. Then there is the neuro-muscular centre that provides unique help for those with muscular dystrophy—not just for people from my constituency, but for many others, too.

I got involved in politics as a single parent, having struggled to access childcare in the rural area in which I lived. Single parents come in all shapes and sizes, as can be seen. Many have jobs, and childcare is crucial to allow parents to make the most of themselves and their children. The Family and Childcare Trust has pointed out the particular lack of provision in rural areas. This Government's commitment to 30 hours of free childcare provides an opportunity for local councils to ensure appropriate provision during the school holidays and wrap-around care, which is vital for working parents and single parents in particular. Improvement of provision is crucial if we are to make the most of talented women and men who want to work, but often face barriers because of the high cost of childcare.

In the numerous villages scattered throughout the constituency, small local businesses typify the determination of those who are employers, employees and business owners—whether they be a high street shop, a local farm or a business located on one of our many industrial sites. Hard work is clearly evident in Eddisbury, and

[Antoinette Sandbach]

there is a quiet but steely determination for people to “get on”, to strive and to achieve. That can be seen in the streets of Alpraham, Kelsall, Farndon, Malpas, Tarvin, Tarporley and Tattenhall.

My constituents voted Conservative so that they could build on those hopes for themselves and their families in Cheshire. Aspiration and achievement are admired, yet my constituents watch as policies that could help them are placed under threat by MPs from nations that make their own decisions on childcare, health services and education. That cannot be right, so the West Lothian question needs to be addressed to ensure English votes for English laws.

It is important that we recognise the strong links we have in our area. Speaking as someone who has both English and Welsh roots, I have been accused of being too English in Wales, and too Welsh in England. I make no apology for being British, and we should perhaps reflect that what unites us is stronger than what divides us. Having experienced devolution first hand, it is clear that if decision making is taken closer to those affected by it, people will benefit. That is the benefit of the northern powerhouse to my constituents. This is the principle that we should perhaps bear in mind when considering the impact of the European Union referendum. It seems a contradiction that the SNP seeks independence, yet is apparently happy to cede sovereignty to Europe.

I will be a strong voice for my constituency in Westminster, and look forward to speaking up for my constituents in the years to come.

6.57 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow three exceptionally fine maiden speeches. As convention demands, I should like to say a few words about them before the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) leaves his place. As one former Scottish solicitor to another, I welcome him to the House. Maiden speeches always teach us something new that we did not know about a certain part of the world before. I confess that I always thought the world’s longest runway was at Machrihanish, but I say that only because the hon. Gentleman went on to give an impressive list of community names—villages and towns within his constituency. I am sure that the sound we might have heard in the background was the silent sobbing of *Hansard* writers trying to get the full list from him. He will soon learn, I have no doubt, that such lists bring a swift note from the *Hansard* writers.

The hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) has obviously already learned one important thing about the House of Commons—that if one wants to get on here, one has to keep in with the Doorkeepers. She, too, delivered her first speech with passion and humour. Knowing the part of the world she represents, as I do, I have no doubt that she will need both these qualities as she represents her constituents in the years ahead.

Finally, we heard from the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), who spoke first of all for her farming constituents. As a farmer’s son representing a farming constituency myself, I am pretty sure that we will all recognise elements of common concerns shared between her part of the world and mine. I was particularly

impressed by the way in which she brought in her own wider life experience. She gave a thoughtful maiden speech, and she will always be listened to in this House.

Let me add my welcome for this Bill on Second Reading tonight. It is not yet fully nine months since the Smith commission was established. In that time, there have been a series of deadlines which, as the Secretary of State indicated, have all been met or exceeded and today’s is just one of the long line. It is worth remembering that we had a report—the heads of agreement—from Lord Smith and his commissioners by the end of November. There was then the publication of draft clauses and the Command Paper by the end of January. Then there was a commitment in all three manifestos to bring forward legislation in the first Queen’s Speech and an early introduction of the Bill. I commend the Government on having brought it forward today, and I wish it a swift passage.

This Bill has already been the subject of some substantial and detailed scrutiny. Other hon. Members have spoken about the report of the Scottish Parliament special committee on the extra powers to the Scottish Parliament, and professional bodies such as the Law Society of Scotland have also given the Bill careful consideration. The nine-month gestation process in the context of these discussions has been undertaken at breakneck speed. If we consider how long it took us to get through the constitutional convention in the 1990s, or the time taken in the Calman commission and then in bringing forward the Scotland Bill which became the Scotland Act 2012, we can understand that to have got to this point within nine months is a considerable achievement. I pay tribute to the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State and his officials in the Scotland Office for the work they have done.

As a general principle, I would rather have things right than quick, but we have to appreciate that this is one of those occasions when we are going to have to do both. To do that requires of us all a particular effort and for us all to proceed in good faith and with goodwill on all sides. I hope the debate we have in the coming weeks will allow the widest possible range of opinions that reflect the issues discussed in the referendum and general election campaigns in Scotland. As the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) said from the Opposition Dispatch Box, the SNP’s very significant achievement in returning 56 of the 59 MPs must be recognised and I hope they will bring forward amendments that reflect full fiscal autonomy or responsibility—whatever term they choose to employ—and they will tell us the detail of what they mean by the medium term.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) said in an intervention that in the course of the election campaign his party’s policy had been the subject of grotesque caricature. If that is the case, as an elected representative, he now has the opportunity in this place to put that right, and I hope he and his colleagues will introduce amendments so we can have a proper debate. My objection to full fiscal autonomy remains that, in my view, it constitutes effectively independence by the back door, and therefore it does not respect the decision we reached as a nation last September.

The words of caution I give tonight are not directed only at the SNP. They extend to those in the Labour and Conservative parties who would seek to use this debate

as some sort of bidding war between those on different sides of the border. I am short of time tonight but this is my word of caution: remember always that within this great family of nations that is the United Kingdom it is possible to break the Union from either side of the border. We have always proceeded on the basis that we are a family where we give in and take out in different ways at different times. I hope the Bill we have tonight will be the next stage in the evolution of that family, and I look forward to taking part in its consideration in the weeks to come.

7.4 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): It is an honour to follow the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) who, apart from being a thoroughly nice bloke who is held in great regard in this House, was a most distinguished Scottish Secretary.

I want to make the Conservative case for as much fiscal autonomy, and therefore responsibility, as is possible. This is a big subject. It needs big positive gestures. We are talking about the future of the nation. We should frame our response to the general election not in the pettifogging detail of the civil service brief, but in the tradition of the great national declarations of the past. I call for nothing less than full home rule for Scotland—or self-rule as I prefer to call it.

The Smith commission really is a dog's breakfast. No one understands it, and it adds the brain of anyone who tries to read it, as I have done. We have to get out of this love affair with commissions of the great and the good. We are politicians. We must have the vision in this House, as politicians—and, dare I say it, as statesmen—to look at the overall picture.

The election changes everything. We have to come to terms with the sad fact that the SNP has just won all but three of the seats in Scotland. We cannot go on as if we have just had the referendum. We won the referendum, but it was nine months ago. We have had a general election since then and we have to respond to that. The Smith commission was in response to an earlier panicky scare, which led to the vow, and I think the vow has, in a sense, produced an inadequate response.

If we do nothing now—if we do not move forward—we will fall into the same trap as the disastrous response to Irish nationalism. We are about where Ireland was in the 1880s. We now know our response to Ireland was too little, too late. We were wrong to abolish the Irish Parliament in 1801. We were wrong to delay granting Catholic emancipation. We were wrong not to listen to Gladstone in the 1880s. We were wrong not to implement home rule in 1914.

If we are to keep Scotland in the United Kingdom, which is my primary aim as a Unionist, I believe we should move towards full fiscal autonomy for Scotland so that, in broad terms, the Scottish Parliament spends what it raises, with only foreign affairs, defence and pension liability—and the ultimate liability for financial shocks like in 2008—remaining at the UK level.

I do not argue for fiscal autonomy as some kind of cheap trap: “Ha ha, get rid of the Barnett formula, the oil is slowly running out, make them poorer and they’ll behave.” Aside from the obvious immorality of such a position, nationalism cannot be defeated by imposing poverty—quite the opposite.

The Union is asymmetrical. The English have 85% of the population, and we must be generous. We are never going to get some perfect federal solution. We are better off with the Union. It makes for a larger spirited nation, and it is in our interests as English Members of Parliament to be generous. That means, certainly, English votes for English laws in the very few cases where we are passing laws that only affect England, but Scottish MPs must be part of the discussion. It is a sensible compromise that grants them a role in that discussion but with an ultimate double-veto.

There are several arguments against full fiscal autonomy. First, there is the argument that we must keep something in reserve. That is a Machiavellian argument, but it does not work. If we must keep something so that we have a bargaining tool, what happens when we have just one chip left? If it cannot be given away, it has lost its effectiveness as a bargaining tool, and if it can be given away, the argument fails completely. So I do not accept it.

Secondly, there is the matter of tax competition. We are warned that Scotland will lower its corporation tax or other taxes—we have heard about airport passenger duty—but so what? We should have the confidence to accept competition in tax policy.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I totally agree with my hon. Friend. If Scotland has full fiscal responsibility, it can decide what taxes it sets and how much it takes, and it must have responsibility for spending as well.

Sir Edward Leigh: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

As Conservatives, we believe in responsibility and I believe that we have created in the Scottish Parliament a grievance Parliament. Even after these proposals, the Scottish Government will be able to spend only about 50% of what they raise. They will always be able to blame the United Kingdom Parliament for what goes wrong. Give the Scottish people responsibility and, ultimately, the wheel turns—it always does. The more responsibility one gives to people, the more difficult the decisions they have to take. For example, they might want to increase taxes, but that might lessen productivity; they might want to cut spending on social security, but that might make them more unpopular. Those, however, are decisions for a real Parliament, and they are what we should give to the Scottish Parliament.

It is argued that the EU will not allow us to give value added tax decisions to the Scottish Parliament, but that is something else that the Prime Minister can argue for. If he does not succeed in that negotiation, perhaps some Scottish people will form the view that there might be life outside the EU, but that is for another day.

I do not claim any expertise in the Scottish psyche and I might have got this wrong, but I think we can have closure if we give people ultimate responsibility and if we reassure Scottish people that this is not a trick and that we will keep pension liability within the United Kingdom, as well as the liability for great financial shocks such as those we saw in 1929 or 2008. We have heard about the £7 billion black hole and I understand the Secretary of State, but we can surely carry on having the discussion. We can also carry on discussing social security. People argue that we cannot give away social security, because we have to have a larger pot to help the poor, but that is something for an enabling Bill and to

[*Sir Edward Leigh*]

discuss with our colleagues in the Scottish Parliament. If they do not want to take full fiscal responsibility now, that is their choice and they must be allowed to make it. We should at least look at the Bill in an atmosphere of co-operation and toleration for each other's views, with a determination on the Government Benches—the Unionist Benches—to make things work, to have some sort of closure on the issue, and to re-create people's faith in our United Kingdom Parliament, because I believe that the result of the referendum showed that that faith is still there.

After the failure of his 1886 and 1889 Home Rule Bills, Gladstone warned:

“We are bound to lose Ireland in consequence of years of cruelty, stupidity and misgovernment and I would rather lose her as a friend than as a foe.”

No one is arguing that we are in that position, but we might still lose Scotland if we create an unsustainable situation, which we are in danger of doing. So let us use these four days in constructive debate. The referendum showed us that Scotland has not yet given up on us; nor should we give up on it. If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change; we must move forward in a spirit of co-operation.

7.12 pm

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): It is an honour to make my maiden speech in this important debate. I spent some time in Scotland on the referendum campaign and one of my lasting memories is how engaged 16 and 17-year-olds were, which is a point that I will come back to.

On the campaign trail, one of the things that came up on the doorstep was that politicians too often use language that people do not relate to. In my maiden speech and in future contributions to the House, I will ensure that I use language that the people of Lewisham, Deptford can relate to—not policy speak, buzz words or jargon, but plain, simple language.

I am not normally one for following convention, and I have to be honest that my short time here as an MP has shown me that Parliament has a lot of conventions, but one that is easy for me to follow is paying tribute to my predecessor. Joan Ruddock was a hard-working MP for Lewisham, Deptford for more than 28 years. She also worked extremely hard to reform this House. She was quoted as saying that this place had some of the worst working conditions that she had ever encountered. Some Members will remember the days when 40% of Parliament's sittings were beyond midnight, allowing little time in their constituencies. She rightly felt that that was not what people expected of their MP. Through her work with Members in all parties she got friendlier sitting hours, although I know she would say that things are still not ideal.

The people of Lewisham, Deptford were important to Joan, and they are important to me. Locally, we have a strong sense of community, which we are proud of. That can be seen in our successful campaign to save Lewisham hospital. Thousands of people took to the streets, signed petitions, put up posters and did whatever it took to save our local hospital. Ultimately, under the previous Government, we had to take the Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), to court, where we won. I hope that

we do not have to do the same again, but if we do, I know that we have the strength, the resolve and the passion to fight again to protect our local hospital and our community.

We are not only fighters in Lewisham, Deptford, we are creators as well. We have a vibrant community arts base: the Albany; the Brockley Jack Theatre; Midi Music; the Laban; the Second Wave; Goldsmiths, University of London; Crofton Park and New Cross community libraries; Lewisham Arthouse; and street festivals, such as Hither Green, Deptford X and Brockley Max, to mention a few. There is much, much more.

The creative side is important to the community and to me. I studied performing arts at college; I did not get any A to Cs in my GCSEs when I was at school, but further education was my second chance. Further education must be properly supported and properly funded. Lewisham and Southwark College is my local college and I want it to thrive. I want it to receive the support that it had under a Labour Government.

Some might say that learning drama and performing arts was a perfect training ground to be an MP, but if anyone had said to me when I was 17 that I would be an MP, I would not have believed them because, quite honestly, politics was just not for the likes of me. That is still the opinion of too many young people, and it has to change. We need every young person—every person—to recognise that politics is not only for a political class, but for everyone. That is why I will continue to meet with young people from our schools, colleges and youth groups to get them involved in politics. Their voice matters; they are the future.

For that reason, I want to use the opportunity afforded to me by winning a place in the ballot for private Member's Bills on a Bill calling for votes for 16 and 17-year-olds. I only secured 16th place in the ballot, but my voice must be heard, just as 16-year-olds should have their voices heard and their votes counted. They were rightly given the opportunity to vote in the referendum in Scotland. The future of their country was at stake and they turned out to vote. Is it right that they can fight and die for their country, pay tax, contribute to the economy and get married, but that they cannot have their views reflected at the ballot box?

In Lewisham we have a Young Mayor, Liam Islam, from Deptford Green school. I will work with him, his team and advisers, and any other groups that wish to join our campaign. I would love the Government to work with us to deliver it, but if they do not work with us, we will not be quiet about seeking to ensure that 16 and 17-year-olds have their voices heard in the EU referendum and beyond.

I am deeply concerned about the next five years and the detrimental impact that the Government will have on the people of Lewisham, Deptford and the country as a whole. I will, however, do everything that I can to protect the most vulnerable in our society from the Government. I will fight tooth and nail against whatever attacks fall on our public services, our housing and the people of Lewisham, Deptford.

As someone famous once wrote on a train to New Cross in 1889:

“So raise the scarlet standard high
Beneath its shade we'll live and die,
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
We'll keep the red flag flying here.”

Some Members may recognise those words from Jim Connell's song, "The Red Flag". I invite any of the Government Members to come on a train to New Cross; bring pen and paper, and you never know what might happen.

7.20 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow that inspiring speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft). It is also a pleasure to hear so many initial contributions from so many fine hon. Members.

I speak today as the new Member for Cambridge, and let me start by saying a few words about my predecessors. Dr Julian Huppert is a knowledgeable scientist and a committed defender of civil liberties, who argued hard in this House and well in the Select Committee on Home Affairs, where he won many friends. He has been a passionate advocate for cycling and for environmentalism, and he is extremely well regarded in the constituency, having fought hard to improve the funding situation for our local schools and to raise the status of mental health. But my predecessors in Cambridge set a very high bar. Some here will remember David Howarth, another Liberal Democrat MP who was also very well regarded in this House. Before that, we had my dear friend Anne Campbell, a Labour MP from 1992 to 2005, who has been a source of huge support and great wisdom for me.

I suspect that not every Member gets elected to this House at their first attempt. For some it will take two attempts, whereas for others it takes three or four. I am on my fifth, but I am here at last. I suspect that those who have followed a similar course may well have reflected early in their career on the merits of enthusiasm and youth. As one's career progresses, one recognises the benefits of experience and perhaps a little wisdom—one hopes.

I also suspect that many Members are full of enthusiasm and optimism when they are first selected—I was first selected to fight a rural seat in Norfolk—and find themselves writing their maiden speech. When I reflect on that speech from 20 years ago, I see that quite a lot of it is still valid today: I see a Conservative Government, a Labour Opposition and much talk of Europe. The biggest thing that has changed for me has been moving back to the fine city of Cambridge 10 years ago—it has been the biggest change in my life. What I have seen in Cambridge over those years is a city on the cusp of a technological revolution; the number of jobs in the knowledge-intensive sector is phenomenal. For me, there is the link with today's discussion about Scotland and devolution, because what our hugely successful companies such as ARM and the Babraham Institute need are more flexibilities, and people in Scotland are arguing for the same. As someone who has argued for many years for devolution to the English regions, I think we need to sort these issues out in a sensible way, which is why I did support the idea of a constitutional convention, as proposed by the Labour party at the last election.

Cambridge is also, like so many other places, a tale of two cities; the challenges our city faces are partly the challenges of success, but we also have divisions. Our businesses need an answer to the traffic problems and the appalling housing crisis we have. A terraced house in Cambridge costs £450,000 and our average rents are

double those in England for most homes. Our housing benefit bill has doubled in the past five years—why? It is because 12,000 people in the prosperous city of Cambridge are earning below the living wage—it is not always the way we imagine it. We need different solutions in different places.

I am glad to say that Cambridge now has a Labour council and it is trying to tackle those issues, but it is hard to do. The biggest issue is affordable housing, and I see fellow hon. Members here who have been involved in these debates with me over many years. The biggest problem we have is that although we have a valuable housing stock, we are not allowed to borrow against it. The city deal is welcome, but it is a drop in the ocean compared with what we really need to turn Cambridge into the economic driver that could so help our economy, right across the UK.

When we look at those issues, we ask: why can we not borrow? Some 18 months ago, there was a chink of light from the Treasury, when people began to talk about "tax increment financing"—I apologise for the jargon—or the possibility of borrowing against that value. What happened? The usual forces of conservatism in the Treasury won out yet again, as has happened to Governments of both complexions. So I say to both Front-Bench teams: we need to think imaginatively if we are to solve these huge challenges facing not only cities such as Cambridge, but our whole country and our other nations as well.

Creating the kind of tolerant, diverse city that people in a place such as Cambridge want will mean balancing a range of complicated and difficult issues, and recognising that even within a city such as Cambridge there are many different Cambridges. Cambridge has not only the university we all know and love so much, but three other universities: Anglia Ruskin University, which is doing so well; the University of the Third Age; and the Open University—my mother was pleased to be one of the first people to go to it back in the '60s. I recall one moment earlier this year when Cambridge United played Manchester United in a rather unequal battle—perhaps—in the FA cup and we held those mighty people to a goalless draw at the Abbey stadium. That was a brief moment when people saw that other Cambridge. I suggest that in our communities right across the country there are other cities and other places, and we need to understand all of them.

I stand before you today as a Labour MP for Cambridge who will represent the buccaneering investors and high-tech gurus of our city, who will create wealth. But most of all, I will be standing up and arguing for our public sector workers, who so often are forgotten, but without whom the rest of the city cannot do its job. I am proud to represent Cambridge and look forward to standing up for the city in the years ahead.

7.26 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak for the first time in the House today. I would like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) on her excellent maiden speech and the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft). I am truly delighted to have been called to speak in this Scotland Bill debate on behalf of my constituents, who

[*Patricia Gibson*]

have bestowed upon me the honour of representing them in this place as the first SNP Member for North Ayrshire and Arran.

One regret I have is that my mother is not alive to see me elected to this place, as I know she would have been so proud. She came to Scotland with my father in 1954, from Malin Head in Ireland, in search of work and a better life. I was the youngest of eight children, with my father dying suddenly when I was one. Life was a struggle and we lived in deep poverty. That is why I understand the struggles of so many of my constituents, who find making ends meet a challenging prospect every single day.

I represent a dozen or so distinct communities—Ardrossan, Barrmill, Beith, Dalry, Fairlie, Kilbirnie, Kilwinning, Largs, Saltcoats, Skelmorlie, Stevenston, West Kilbride and Kilwinning—and two beautiful islands, Cumbrae and Arran. Arran, of course, is an island famed for being “Scotland in miniature”. Much of my constituency faces many challenges in the post-industrial era, but the pride and determination of those communities and their commitment to a fairer and more equal society are truly inspirational. My constituency retains important businesses, ranging from the very small to DSM, which employs over 300 people and has the distinction of being the only manufacturer of vitamin C in the world outside China. We also have J & D Pierce, which is not just Scotland’s largest steel fabricator, but the largest steel fabricator in northern Britain, and the wonderful Arran Aromatics.

North Ayrshire and Arran is the place to be for those who consider themselves to be epicurean in their tastes, being an enviable source of seasonal produce. In addition, we can boast the Arran brewery and Scotland’s newest world-class distillery, in Lochranza. Arran blonde ale will satisfy the palate of even the most discerning ale drinker.

Over the years, the boundaries of my constituency have altered. My immediate predecessor, Katy Clark, represented the constituency within its current boundaries for 10 years. A very well known MP who represented much of the constituency when it was called Bute and Northern Ayrshire was Sir Fitzroy Maclean, who was a major-general in the second world war and rumoured to be one of Ian Fleming’s inspirations for James Bond.

I like to think that I share important attributes with the character of James Bond: I exude charm, as I am sure Members will come to recognise; I show courage when life becomes difficult; I have good self-defence skills that will enable me to disarm opponents; and, like Mr Bond, I am able to embrace change willingly. I know some Members of this House struggle to do so, especially with regards to voting behaviour.

The rebuke that SNP Members received for clapping in the Chamber reminds me of the outcry that Keir Hardie caused when he delivered his maiden speech wearing a tweed suit and deerstalker hat, instead of the expected frock coat and top hat. It seems that every generation of parliamentarians, in their own particular and modest ways, must push the House inch by inch into the future.

As has been said by so many of my colleagues, we in the SNP come to this House in good faith, armed only with the aspirations of our constituents and our

determination to be a strong voice for Scotland. The Scotland Bill fails to live up to the powers recommended by the Smith commission, as the UK Government retain a veto over key policy areas. The SNP will seek to improve the Bill to ensure that, as a minimum, it delivers on the Smith commission proposals in full.

It is an outrage, as we heard earlier, that the plan for English votes for English laws could prevent Scottish MPs from voting on issues that have significant implications for Scotland’s budget. To push through such a change would mean that no full and proper scrutiny of this measure could be undertaken.

Devolving more powers to Scotland is the best way to improve the lives of the people of Scotland. Scotland needs control over employment support, job creation and welfare. This Bill falls far short of what the people of Scotland were promised and now quite rightly expect.

We must give voice to Scotland’s priorities. That is why we are here and why we have been elected to this place. We in the SNP will work tirelessly and relentlessly to deliver the kind of policies that reflect the values and aspirations of the people of Scotland, and we will work with others in this House with whom we find common cause. That is my vow to the good people of North Ayrshire and Arran, and that is the SNP’s vow to people across Scotland.

7.33 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I am very grateful to be able to speak in this important debate. As a Welsh MP from the party of devolution, I am keen to see my Celtic cousins gain a strengthened Scottish Parliament while still enjoying the benefit of being part of the Union. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) on her excellent maiden speech and on her elevation to this place, where I am certain she will serve her constituency with integrity and passion.

I must pay tribute not only to my immediate predecessor but to the two Members who preceded her. My immediate predecessor, Siân James, made history by becoming the first female to represent Swansea East. As the second female Member to represent the constituency, the perception of this place as a male-dominated arena has been firmly dispelled in Swansea East. One needs only to look around the Chamber to see that women are very much in evidence in 2015.

Siân was involved in groundbreaking parliamentary work when she helped steer through the Sunbeds (Regulation) Act 2010. She is one of the few living Members of Parliament whose life experiences have been portrayed in a big screen movie—an achievement from which she can take great pride.

I need to jump a political generation as I pay tribute to the late Neil McBride. As a home-grown young girl of Swansea East, I was immensely proud that Mr McBride knew my name and never failed to speak to me as I passed his home en route to school. Neil McBride was MP for Swansea East from 1963 to 1974 and Government Whip from 1966 to 1974. He was one of my early heroes and his kindness and patience with an eight-year-old politically inquisitive child undoubtedly encouraged me to take a keen interest in politics at a very young age.

I turn now to my political pin-up, Don Anderson, now Lord Anderson of Swansea. I have known Don for many years and supported his campaigns election after election. I admire his incredible memory and his excellent political acumen. He is generous in spirit and with his time and advice, and his knowledge is boundless. To stand in his shoes is an incredible honour and I intend to repay his nurturing by representing Swansea East with great commitment and enthusiasm.

Swansea East forms part of the geographical area that Dylan Thomas referred to as the ugly, lovely town. I am afraid though that I have to challenge that description as today the view from Dylan's Kilvey is anything but ugly. In 2015, Swansea East boasts a vista that is economically exciting, architecturally beautiful, culturally and educationally groundbreaking, and environmentally innovative. It has a sporting track record that is the pride of Wales.

In September, University of Wales Swansea opens its Swansea Bay campus. Although it is technically in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), he has given me permission to mention it as it is literally inches from my own constituency. As an alumnus of University of Wales Swansea I would not be forgiven if I did not give it a mention. The new campus is a £450 million scheme that has created an architectural community with open spaces, integral streets and grand structures, which give the impression of a small city. It is estimated that, over the next 10 years, the development will have a £3 billion economic impact on Wales.

Closer to Swansea East and in the St Thomas community, just under the edge of Dylan's Kilvey, University of Wales Trinity St David is proposing to introduce and deliver on its plans for a "transforming education, transforming lives" project. In direct partnership with the Welsh Government and the City and County of Swansea Council, it is intending to develop a Swansea waterfront innovation quarter to support the university's aim of inspiring individuals and developing graduates. It will be a vibrant, modern waterfront, with purpose-built facilities for learning, teaching and research. A single faculty of architecture building in 2017 will eventually evolve into a vibrant, social and educational community within 10 years.

Swansea East is also home to several Government agencies: the Pensions Agency, the Land Registry and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, which is undoubtedly the largest agency in terms of employment. The DVLA is in a landmark building: a large white oblong that is visible for many miles from the M4, and the beacon that tells me that I am nearly home when it comes into sight. The public sector is one of the largest employers in my constituency and the presence of every one of those agencies is very welcome.

Tidal Lagoon Swansea Bay is hopefully to be the jewel in the Swansea Bay crown. I am very proud that one of the most exciting global environmental projects that we have ever seen will be coming to Swansea East very soon. The proposal for the world's first man-made, energy-generating lagoon, which is predicted to power more than 155,000 homes, is currently in the final stages; we are waiting for the development consent order, which is due imminently. Given the Prime Minister's enthusiasm for the project in this Chamber fewer than five days ago, I am very optimistic that there will be a

favourable outcome. The project will see a critical change in the UK's energy mix. It will harness natural power from the rise and fall of the tides. Swansea Bay will be the first in a series of six tidal lagoons that will eventually meet up to 8% of UK electricity demand.

In my home ward, Landore Cwmbwrla, we are very proud to have the Liberty stadium, which is the home of the Ospreys rugby team and of the only Welsh football club in the premier league. I am sure that all my Welsh colleagues will join me in congratulating the Swans on finishing eighth in the league and in wishing them well for the 2015-16 season. Without doubt, Swans supporters are the most intrepid in their trips for away games; it has been worked out that they have travelled more than 4,000 miles, the equivalent of a trip to the Bahamas.

Colleagues can now appreciate why I take exception to the proposal that Swansea is an ugly town. Lovely, I cannot argue with, not least because of the people. They are friendly, welcoming, open and hard-working and they have put their trust and their faith in me. I intend to be their voice in this Chamber and to represent them on everything they would want me to. Somebody once said that Swansea was the graveyard of ambition, but I hope that after this speech Members will agree that Swansea East is a treasure chest of opportunity.

7.40 pm

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for her welcome and expert maiden speech. It is not a place that I have been to, but I feel almost as though I have lived through the wonders of Swansea.

It is a great pleasure to take part in this debate and to give my maiden speech. It seems that the force of argument from the SNP Benches has cleared the ranks of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party from the Chamber, which is to a degree regrettable.

Aberdeen South is in many ways the classic three-way marginal seat—a three-way marginal that I and the SNP won last month from fourth place. That signifies why we are here: the people of Aberdeen South and Scotland have a desire for change and progress, for the Scottish Parliament to be empowered and for the country we live in to be made a stronger and fairer place to live.

My immediate predecessor, Dame Anne Begg, made her maiden speech in this Chamber during the debate on the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill, which gave the people of Scotland the opportunity of re-establishing the Scottish Parliament. History has shown that that Bill was not enough to satisfy the Scottish people's desire for control over their own affairs, and I have little doubt that the same will be said of this Bill in years to come. At that time, there was much talk about the settled will of the Scottish people, but I do not think that the people of Scotland are willing to settle for this Bill.

I know that it is customary to pay tribute to one's predecessor, but for me it is easy. Dame Anne Begg served Aberdeen South with great spirit, enthusiasm and passion for 18 years. She paved the way as the first full-time wheelchair user in this House since the 19th century and campaigned tirelessly for the rights of people with disabilities. Her defeat was in no way a reflection of her work or her dedication to her constituents, but part of the strong desire in Scotland for a more distinctive

[*Callum McCaig*]

Scottish voice in this place and a stronger and more accountable Parliament in Edinburgh. I pay tribute to Anne for her work on behalf of her constituents. I have no doubt that she still has a major contribution to make to public life, and I wish her well.

Aberdeen is fondly known as the granite city. The stone from the quarries in and around the city has been used to great effect all over the world. Stone from the biggest of these, the Rubislaw quarry in my constituency, is in the Terrace here in Westminster. Rubislaw quarry, which might be brought back to life as a visitor centre, is known as the biggest man-made hole in Europe. I have some concerns that that title might be in jeopardy given some of the actions of this Government, but for the sake of the country as a whole I hope that it is one that we retain.

Aberdeen South has many distinct and proud communities, from the picturesque village of Cove at the southern point of the constituency, round the mighty headland of Girdle Ness to the former royal burgh of Torry. My constituency follows the course of the beautiful lower reaches of the River Dee, the mouth of which forms a natural harbour that founded the development of our city as the economic powerhouse that it is today. Such is the demand for space at the harbour, even with low oil prices, that there is a prospect of expanding the harbour outwith its present realms, showing the might and resilience of our city.

The constituency is home to two wonderful Victorian gardens, Hazlehead and Duthie parks. It hosts the main campus of the young, ambitious and upwardly mobile Robert Gordon University in Garthdee as well as some of the finest state schools in Scotland. It is a constituency of growing diversity with people from across the globe enhancing and enriching a culture that is proudly Scottish but distinctively Aberdonian. In short, and to borrow from the Doric, it is an afa bonnie place and well worth a visit.

Aberdeen South is one of the wealthiest constituencies in Scotland, but among that great wealth lies great poverty: 10% of the children in the seat live in poverty, in a city with essentially full employment that is home to a world-leading oil and gas industry. I and my party want to address that, but I do not think that the Bill gives us the tools to do so. It might go some of the way, but more work needs to be done.

The low oil price is of course concerning, but Aberdeen remains that resilient city. Those who want to find work will by and large find it. The problem is for those earning the minimum wage. In a wealthy city like Aberdeen it is nigh on impossible to have a decent standard of life on the minimum wage. For me, the biggest failing of the Bill is that it does not give the Scottish Parliament the power to implement a genuine living wage.

Aberdeen proudly boasts the title of Europe's oil capital and we are in the transition to becoming a truly global energy city as we diversify into new markets and into a hub for renewable energy. Over the coming weeks and months I look forward to championing the industries of Aberdeen and ensuring they get the support that they need from Government.

As I said, I feel that the Bill will not be judged kindly by history. It does not live up to the Smith agreement, it falls way short of the modern form of home rule

promised before the referendum and it takes scant account of the election result in Scotland. The people of Scotland want a Parliament and a Government that care for the most vulnerable in society, that promote sustainable economic growth, and above all stand up for the weak in the face of the powerful. If this place is unwilling or unable to do that job, there is another place up the road that is ready, willing and able to take on that mantle.

7.46 pm

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): It is a huge pleasure to see you in that seat, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I hope that you are there for many years to come, comrade. I will get that one in first.

I praise all new Members for the tremendous speeches they have made tonight, and particularly—even though he is gone—my long-standing hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner). We had many happy years working together in the trade union movement, and it is there that I want to start.

In previous discussions about devolution, there was a marked difference in that there was consultation and the involvement of civic society. We saw that in the 1990s, through the discussions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and through those about London and my part of the world. Not only were people involved, but trade unions put in time, effort, politics and members' money to make a case for a referendum on devolution. They were responding to what their members wanted. Their members wanted relief from the pain and suffering they had seen through 18 years of Tory rule and they saw devolution as a route to that.

Perhaps even more important was the situation in Northern Ireland, where people saw a chance of devolution as giving them a chance for peace. I was sitting earlier talking to my colleague, our friend, the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley). In the mid-1990s I never realised that 20 years later I would be sitting in this House and working with his father to take devolution and the peace process forward. Sometimes people had to be dragged, but ultimately the will of the people was heard. Nobody can argue that that was anything other than positive.

Today, we have another chance to put right a wrong. I am glad that the vote last year in Scotland went the way it did, but we must address the problem of where we ended up. As a knee-jerk reaction to a rogue poll the leaders of the parliamentary parties in this House gave a vow to the people of Scotland that I believe some of them did not want to carry through, but they made that vow and should stick to the terms of it. I hope that between us we can ensure that that happens, but I must say to our colleagues from Scotland that that cannot happen in isolation. What we do with this Bill will impact on England and on my part of the world in particular, and in my part of the world people want to have a say. They want to be involved in the way other people across these islands have been involved. I do not think that that is too much to ask, but clearly the Conservatives do, as the Secretary of State already said tonight that there will be no constitutional convention for England.

The Chancellor, who runs the Government, despite what the Prime Minister might think, said that we can have semi-devolution if we sign up to elected mayors.

We know what that is about: it is about giving mayors from the Tory party a chance to rule parts of the world that do not want Tory rule, and would never, ever vote for them in local elections. That is all it is—it is being used to abuse the constitutional settlement. If it is good enough for the rest of this kingdom, it is good enough for the people of the north-east and the people of England. Why should we be short-changed? Why should we be told that we can have control of our daily life only if we do what we are told, instead of having a proper, adult conversation with people as we have done in this country over the past 20 years?

I am sad that we have lost 40 representatives from Scotland. Those people did a great service to their country, to the United Kingdom, and to the House. Quite clearly, the people in Scotland have spoken, and colleagues who have left the House are where they are because of things that were not true. They are victims of a story that said that they did not want to fight austerity—they were Tory-lite—and they deserted their original role as defenders of the poor, the weak and the vulnerable. No one can tell me that that was the case with people like Dave Hamilton, Jim Sheridan, Jim McGovern and Katy Clark. They are men and women who never wavered in their commitment to the poor, the weak and the vulnerable.

The truth is that my party leadership conceded, to an extent, to the austerity agenda of the Tory party. At times, when we were in government, we favoured businesses and power over workers and the poor, and we let people down. We pursued a neo-liberal tract on many issues, which jarred badly with the people of Scotland and parts of the UK such as the place I come from. My leadership has to understand that going forward.

Many people across these islands have a long-held belief in collectivism and the power of the state, and they struggle to get to grips with an agenda that promotes individuals and self-interest. I do not believe that many Scots voted last year to break up the United Kingdom because they hated the UK. What they hated was the austerity agenda—the poverty agenda that has been pursued by the Tory party for as long as it has been in existence, which says that it will let the poor pay for the failures of the rich, and that the wealthy should always be looked after while the poor take the hindmost. The people of Scotland rejected my party this year because it was too close to people who have pushed that agenda for years and years.

The people who have been in the driving seat for the past five years were in the driving seat for 18 years from 1979. We know the history: they argue that unemployment is a price worth paying because their people are not paying it. They argued that there was no such thing as society, because they had enough money not to depend on one another and the communities they came from. They try to tell us that we are all in this together, while nurses get a 1% pay rise and chief executives of trusts get a 17% pay rise. That is the world that Tory Members live in, and that is the situation that the people of Scotland are trying to escape.

It is against that background that we should judge the Bill, which must be seen as a way of people getting some respite from the damage that the Tory party has caused the country, the people of Scotland and the rest of the UK for many years. People can see no respite. Indeed, the Government are saying not only that they

are going to keep up the pressure on austerity but that when we are back in balance they will still do so, which means that the people of this country—working people and the people who can least afford it—will be put under more and more pressure.

Under the long-term economic plan, it was all supposed to be roses by now, but we all know what happened to that. It was all supposed to be happy by 2014, but that certainly did not happen. People have had enough of carrying the can for failure. The Bill is a chance to put things right. I say to comrades from Scotland: do not do this in isolation from the people of England, because we deserve the same as your people.

7.53 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech after the excellent maiden speech by the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig) and the speech by the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson).

I am pleased to make a speech in a debate about matters that have important implications for my constituents, even though they cannot take part in it. We are at an important point in the history of these islands. As a southern English MP, daughter of recent Irish immigrants, and a proud European, I hope to play my part in shaping the future constitutional arrangements of these islands on behalf of the people I now serve. The people of Scotland have debated these issues for many years, and in the past year, they have sent two strong messages. They wish to be part of the United Kingdom, but they wish to see something very different. The people of Bristol have also sent strong messages, and we all need to be mindful and find our own inner Gladstone. We need to understand those messages, be mindful of our shared history and proffer a way forward.

It is a great honour to serve as the Member for Bristol South. Dawn Primarolo, my predecessor, served as an MP for 28 years, and in paying tribute to her I should like to say what big shoes she has left for me to fill. In Parliament, Dawn took on shadow Health and Treasury roles, and in government, she served the Treasury as Financial Secretary and Paymaster General before subsequent ministerial roles at the Department of Health, and at Children, Schools and Families. As Mr Speaker said, Dawn served with distinction as Deputy Speaker from 2010 until she stood down this year. When first elected in 1997, she was the only Labour MP in the south-west. Now we are four—that is progress. She was one of only 41 women, but now we are 191, which is perhaps better progress. I owe her, and the women who have come before me, a great deal. It is a debt that I intend to repay to the women who will follow.

Dawn's dedication and commitment was evident for all to see, and her record is closely linked to that of the Labour Government in improving the lives of local people. There are too many examples to give, so I shall just touch on a couple. The building of a community hospital after a 70-year campaign is one, but I shall really pick up on education. All the secondary schools in Bristol were rebuilt under Labour's Building Schools for the Future programme. The sun shone and the roofs were not just fixed, they were rebuilt, and the infrastructure and standards were improved. Thanks to teachers, support staff and governors, all Bristol South secondary schools

[Karin Smyth]

are now rated good or better by Ofsted. However, attainment in some of our most economically challenged communities is still far below where it should be, and today in Bristol South new opportunities are needed to offer hope and aspiration for all, whatever path young people seek to pursue. It is a constituency whose people, down the years, have played a vital part in our country's prosperity.

Bedminster in my constituency was home to more than a dozen coal mines. Well into the 20th century, many local people spent their working lives underground in dark and dangerous conditions, paid only for the coal that they cut. Hartcliffe formerly hosted what was Europe's largest cigarette-manufacturing factory when it opened in 1974. Bristol South has a proud industrial heritage but, despite being manufacturers of growth, its people were rarely rewarded or permitted to share in its fruits. In fact, many paid a high cost—from lives lost in the Dean Lane pit disaster to industrial illnesses and the health problems caused by tobacco, in the manufacture of which the city played a pivotal role.

There is a special warmth and generosity among South Bristol people. They are, to use a well-known local phrase, "gert lush". They are forward-looking, ready to seize chances to help to shape a future for themselves, their families and their communities. Those communities are strong, and a great variety of community groups and enterprises have grown up to provide help and support. Having powered economic growth in the past, residents are eager to play their part in doing so again. Equipping the people of Bristol South with the skills and knowledge that they need to be part of that growth for the changes that lie ahead is the biggest challenge for my constituency.

In many ways, Bristol's story is a tale of two cities. It has thriving universities and booming finance, high-tech and creative sectors, but it also has areas of severe economic disadvantage. My constituency has immense talent in its workforce, young and old, but too often people's potential lies dormant, latent and untapped, waiting to be triggered by local leadership and economic opportunities. This is where the Government's grand design on devolution puzzles my constituents, prompting the question: where does Bristol—indeed where do Swindon, Exeter, Plymouth and the rest of the south-west—fit in to the emerging narrative dominated by Scotland, Wales and the north?

The Government say that they are intent on devolving power to English regions but only where there is an elected mayor—a depressingly familiar, unadventurous, command-and-control approach to power sharing from central Government. The proposal invests all power in one individual. There is no compunction on that individual, perhaps other than having an eye on an election every few years, to consult, co-operate and negotiate solutions with other elected and civic leaders, or with communities, however they are represented.

Bristol was the only city to vote in favour of an elected mayor when given an opportunity. Bristol's Mayor was elected by 9% of Bristolians on a turnout of 27%. Three years on, what is the lesson from this experiment to other English cities? Bristolians are still waiting for improvements to transport, housing, skills and jobs. Bristol should be at the forefront of the devolution

debate, not lagging behind. The west of England is already an economic powerhouse with an economy worth £26 billion a year, and a net contributor to the Treasury.

The sensible strategic way ahead for my constituents is for communities' real needs to be shaped not by distant legislators with a one-size-fits-all proposal or individual mayors with pet projects, but by the people and communities affected. I have spoken about the need for us to understand messages received from the people of Scotland about our shared history. One of the key lessons to emerge in recent years from Scotland and from Bristol is that power needs to be shared with communities and with individuals, not just with town halls and professional local politicians.

In recent years my constituents have heard much discussion about Scottish devolution, and in recent months about the so-called northern powerhouse. I know that collectively Bristol South's residents have the skills, energy and potential to create a western powerhouse if only they are empowered to do so, and I look forward to supporting them all to make it happen.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Hoyle): Order. Before I bring the next speaker in, I am going to raise the time limit to nine minutes.

8.1 pm

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech. It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth), who made an excellent speech. Many Members in all parts of the Chamber have made excellent maiden speeches today and raised the bar very high.

I begin by paying tribute to my predecessor, John Leech. John and I have had many political differences, but I respect his dedication to Liberal values, and no one would deny his commitment to his constituency or his hard work for the people of south Manchester. Despite our differences, we share one common cause. He is, like me, a long-time season ticketholder at Manchester City, and I wish both John and his football team the very best for the future. I pay tribute, too, to John's predecessor, Keith Bradley, now Lord Bradley. Keith was also a hard-working and committed MP for Manchester, Withington, as well as a highly respected Minister, and he has given me much support and advice over the years. I know he took particular pleasure in my victory on 7 May.

Above all, I would like to say thank you to the people of Manchester, Withington for giving me the huge privilege of serving them in Parliament. I am very proud to do so. It is the constituency where I was born into a Labour family. My parents met at a dance in the 1950s organised by the Labour party League of Youth. My uncle, Albert Winstanley, was Labour election agent in the 1960s for Old Moat ward in my constituency. His electoral ambition was to get close enough to the Tories to ask for a recount—an ambition which, sadly, he never quite achieved, so he will be pleased that Labour won the election in Withington with no need for a recount. Our majority of almost 15,000 was a decisive

verdict on five years of the Liberal Democrats propping up a Tory Government that made life harder for the people of Manchester.

I have always lived in Withington because it is the diverse, thriving, vibrant cultural heart of our city. It has areas of deprivation that have suffered badly under the austerity programme of the previous Government, but it boasts successful high-tech industry such as Siemens in West Didsbury. It has great public services, such as world-class cancer treatment at the Christie hospital. It is home to students, graduates and academics from our superb Manchester universities. Although mainly residential, it has fine parks, the Mersey valley and my favourite place, the Fletcher Moss botanical gardens. It is home to the excellent Chorlton and Didsbury arts festivals, and to many people who work in creative industries, such as musicians, artists, poets and—as I was in my former life—DJs.

Withington can even boast of being the birthplace of an Oscar-winning actor, Robert Donat, who won his Academy award in 1939 for his role as a teacher in “Goodbye, Mr Chips”. One of his rival Oscar nominees that year was James Stewart for his role in “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington”, where he played an innocent, decent and principled politician called Jeff Smith. It has always been a role close to my heart—a role emblematic of the difference one individual can make in politics, and I hope I can make a difference in that spirit.

My first political speech in Manchester, Withington was as Labour candidate in a mock general election debate at Old Moat primary school. I remember standing making my speech, aged 11, feeling nervous and somewhat out of place. Some things do not change. I am happy to say I won that election, and have won several since. I am proud to have served for 18 years as a councillor in Manchester—a great city of radicalism, innovation and creativity. It is often said that what Manchester does today, the rest of the world does tomorrow. One of the many areas where this is true is local government, where the city council and the Greater Manchester combined authority are pioneering new ways of working, delivering jobs and growth.

The debate today is about devolution of power and responsibility. Labour is the party of devolution so I welcome proposals for devolution of power to Scotland, as I welcome further devolution of extra powers to Manchester and other cities. The people of the Greater Manchester city region are ready to rise to the challenge of creating growth and improving services, but with the extra responsibility must come the resources to deliver. As a former cabinet member for finance, I am painfully aware of the impact on vulnerable people when local services are starved of Government funding. Local government has taken the hardest hit from Government cuts, and in England it is the poorer, mainly northern cities which have taken the biggest hit of all. If we want our communities to thrive, if we want localism and devolution to work, we must give local people the ability and the resources to make it happen.

After 18 years in Manchester town hall, I had spent a long time in a huge neo-Gothic Victorian building full of politicians, so this year I thought I would do something new. In coming to the House of Commons, I hope to work hard to represent the people of Manchester, Withington, but I hope to fight for wider progressive causes; to combat climate change, the biggest challenge

of our time; to tackle the housing crisis that affects so many people in my constituency; to argue for reform of our discredited and ineffective drug laws, and maybe even our discredited and ineffective Prime Minister’s Question Time; to fight poverty and defend human rights in this United Kingdom and abroad; and to create a better country—not one where we balance the books at the expense of the most vulnerable, but one where we build a more equal, more tolerant, more compassionate society.

This is a time to work together to face the challenges of the 21st century, not a time for separation, either within the UK or from the rest of Europe. We build a better world together. A belief in collectivism and fairness is at the heart of Labour politics. Last week I heard maiden speakers quote great heroes—Gandhi and Mandela—but I will end with some words from one of my personal heroes, Bruce Springsteen, who put it very simply when he said, “Nobody wins unless everybody wins.”

8.8 pm

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and let me welcome you back to your position in the House as I take up mine. Thank you for this opportunity to make my maiden speech in this very important debate. Unlike my taking of the oath, I hope I will have to make this speech only once.

I follow the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith), and I share his passion for football. It is a sport that I played as a young girl growing up, and I am still partial to a game of five-a-side. Perhaps if we cannot come to an agreement on the motions this evening, we can fight it out on the football field.

I have the honour to represent the constituency of Livingston in the county of West Lothian. I am proud to be the first woman to represent the constituency at Westminster, and I am also proud to be the third of three women parliamentary representatives for our county, following in the footsteps of Angela Constance MSP and Fiona Hyslop MSP, both of whom have given me great support. I have the honour to speak for my party on fair work and employment, and I want to leave this House in no doubt as to the weight of the issues at the heart of this brief. As I address those issues, I have my own family history, as well as the people and communities of my constituency, very much at the front of my mind. It is their and my expectation that the Scotland Bill should address those issues, with adequate powers to create a culture of dignity in work, tackle income inequality and thereby enhance economic growth in Scotland.

However, I wish first to pay tribute to my predecessor, Graeme Morrice, who served as MP for Livingston from 2010 and, before that, from 1987, gave many years of conscientious service as a councillor. Personally, I am particularly appreciative of his gracious comments to me on election night.

As with many constituency designations, the name Livingston does not convey the breadth and diversity of the many communities that lie within it. It encompasses the large new town of Livingston as well as many smaller villages boasting fine names, such as Fauldhouse, Pumpherston, Broxburn, Bents and Roman Camps, to name but a few. Those smaller communities fiercely defend their individual identities, even though the mining—

[*Hannah Bardell*]

coal and shale—railway and manufacturing industries that defined them have disappeared or changed beyond all recognition.

The constituency combines old and new, continuing a history of innovation and invention in ways that strive to look forward without losing the past. The oil industry began in my constituency with the first extraction of oil from coal and shale, and the town of Livingston has gone on to play its part in the development of, for example, sonar scanning, bionic prosthetic limbs by the company Touch Bionics and soft contact lenses. Mitsubishi is one of the biggest employers in my constituency, and its work to encourage young people into engineering and STEM—science, technology, engineering and maths—careers is to be commended. I am also delighted to be able to inform the House that, as confirmed during a meeting in New York with the First Minister, the manufacturing company Jabil is set to invest £12.5 million in its Livingston plant, creating 212 new jobs and safeguarding 147 existing manufacturing roles.

I also want to highlight the West Lothian Credit Union, which has done incredible work to give those on low wages the opportunity to save and borrow in a safe and ethical way. I would like to see such credit unions given greater powers to inject more investment into small and medium-sized businesses, which are the lifeblood of our communities.

My constituency also boasts many community projects, such as The Vennie in Knightsridge, which I visited recently, and Firefly Arts, which is giving young people great opportunities to develop valuable life skills. Two of many local charities in my constituency have been set up by families who lost their children way too early to cancer. Jak Trueman and Michelle Henderson both died tragically young, but their memories live on in the tremendous work their families are doing to raise awareness and funds. There is such inspiring ingenuity and determination in my constituency, despite the setbacks of deindustrialisation.

My brother and I were brought up in Craigshill, one of Livingston's original and smaller areas, by a single mother who worked full time in an era when childcare cover was an afterthought and single-parent families were often demonised. In the little spare time my mother had, she fought tooth and nail for our local area. I feel fortunate to have been educated locally, to have had a free university education and to have had a career that has included working in the media, politics, international relations and, most recently, the oil and gas industry.

My brother and I were also fortunate in having the support of our grandparents for a good number of years. Both were from mining families, forced from school by poverty at age 14, but none the less extensively self-educated and widely read. My grandfather began his working life as a "pit fitter", before going on to be an aircraft fitter in the RAF during the battle of Britain. He started one of the early small businesses in the new town of Livingston, his own precision engineering company. My grandmother was a time-served gents' tailoress who then worked for Rolls-Royce during the second world war. My great grandmother on my grandfather's side marched with the suffragettes. Political activism started many years ago in my family. Mr Deputy Speaker, you cannot know people like that and not be committed to

the dignity of labour. Those were people who knew their own worth, believed in strong trade unions and were prepared, at the risk of the direst poverty, to walk away from work that assaulted their dignity, and they did so on numerous occasions.

I hope to use every opportunity to remind this House that our mission for our citizens is not just to wrangle over how many hours makes an acceptable contract, or how many pence we should add to or take off employers' national insurance contributions, as important as those considerations undoubtedly are; our mission, in exerting our collective legislative skills, is to say to our citizens that we understand, we care about and we intend to promote and deliver on their right to secure, productive employment that contributes to this nation's economic progress and, crucially, supports the kind of life that every citizen has a right to expect.

In my experience, most of our citizens are not looking for executive directorships to top up already large earned or unearned incomes. Our citizens want a sense of self-worth from a valued contribution in work, the camaraderie of shared effort, enough time and disposable income to spend rewarding time with their families and to offer decent opportunities for their children. It says much for the direction in which the UK is headed that we are having to argue so relentlessly for that, as if it were a privilege. Neither is this need to argue just a reflection of global forces or immigration. Other countries, not least our northern Nordic neighbours, have long since made it the fabric of their societies. Those are the questions that Scotland asked itself at the referendum: what kind of country do we the citizens want? I am in no doubt that that is why we got the level of engagement we did. I am also in no doubt that, at the heart of people's aspiration—a much overworked but not much defined word—these are largely modest but enormously dignified desires.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you may understand, then, my desire to do all I can to try and influence this House to take seriously and address the urgent need for this country to declare its commitment to a culture of fairness and dignity in work, and to implement all necessary measures in pursuit of it. Scotland and my party are clear in their commitment to work to achieve that. My constituents and the overwhelming majority of Scotland's electorate voted for it. We require legislation with the requisite powers to deliver it, and we require it now. The Scottish Government are already the first UK Government to become an accredited living wage employer, and I urge the UK Government to make a start on reducing the scourges of increasing income inequality and in-work poverty by following where Scotland has led.

We are, as politicians, also human beings, none of us infallible and none of us indispensable. On the day I had to repeat my oath, I spent a few moments reflecting on my mistake and what great expectation and scrutiny there is on all of us as parliamentarians. I was sitting outside by the Emmeline Pankhurst memorial, and I was reminded of her struggle and of what she did for all of us. Thank you.

8.17 pm

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech in such an important debate.

It is an honour and a privilege, which I hope I will never take for granted, to stand here representing my constituency. I am sure that you will agree that my new colleagues have set the bar very high in their maiden speeches and done their constituencies proud, not least the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell), who delivered an excellent speech.

However, I have to disagree with many of my new colleagues: although they may have very pleasant constituencies, it is of course mine, Stoke-on-Trent North and Kidsgrove, that is the most beautiful and inspiring. From our industrial heritage in the mother town of the potteries to the beautiful Victorian parks and canals, I bow to no one in maintaining that I live in the most beautiful constituency in the country. But it is not just the architecture and the landscape that make Stoke-on-Trent North and Kidsgrove so special; it is the people, to whose industry and talent our city stands as testament.

My constituency was built on the blood, sweat and tears of working people. It was their labour in the great industries—pits, pots and steel—that drove our city forward. We gave the country and the world a celebrated ceramics industry, including the crockery used in this House, which, for the record, was made in my constituency. But our creativity goes far beyond that; it is reflected in the work of so many proud Stokies, from Josiah Wedgwood to Reginald Mitchell, who designed the spitfire, and from Clarice Cliff to Robbie Williams.

Local businesses are capitalising on this in the new and creative technologies, from augmented reality to tidal lagoon power. We need to harness this creativity in order to build a brighter future for my city and for my residents where the stories of these successes are the norm, where my constituents have more options for skilled work, where Stoke-on-Trent will no longer be a living-wage blackspot and a zero-hours-contract area, and where the blight of poverty and the use of food banks will be consigned to the dustbin of history where it belongs rather than being a daily occurrence.

I am lucky enough to represent the best of British—the kindest, most industrious people—but my community deserves better. They embody what Government Members would call the big society, but what we in Stoke simply call community. In spite of the savage cuts made by this Government and the impact on real people's lives, we have seen the best of humanity as they unite to look after each other and protect our city. From Mike and Pat at the Burslem Park Pavilion, where they have created a social enterprise to restore one of our country's original Victorian parks, to Rev. Ashley Cooper and his amazing team at Swanbank church who were granted the Queen's award for voluntary service for their community work. It is not just these incredibly generous community acts that I wish to celebrate, as we also have wonderful facilities protected by the community to mark our place in history, from our war memorial gardens in Tunstall to the Victoria Hall in Kidsgrove, which the Speaker of the House himself visited during the previous Parliament to promote local democracy.

All these organisations were well served by my predecessor, Joan Walley, who joined this House when I was only seven years old. I know how respected and well thought of she was by people from across the political spectrum. She was noted for her passion not only about our local football team, Port Vale, but about issues pertaining to the environment, serving my party

and our country as a shadow spokesperson on transport and the environment when we were last in opposition, and then as Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee in the previous Parliament. As our MP for 28 years, she has left huge shoes to fill, and I hope to do her proud.

Joan was not the first woman to represent our seat. In fact, I have the honour of being the third female Labour MP for my constituency since the war. The first was Harriet Slater, an inspiration, who was elected in 1953 in a by-election. She became the first female Whip to serve my party and this House. However, it is her passion against racism that I wish to comment on. Sixty-two years ago she sat in this Chamber as a new MP and was so horrified by the tone of the debate that she intervened to make her maiden speech without any preparation—something I really cannot comprehend. The subject of that debate was the colour bar, where Members of this House were actually debating whether black and white children should be educated in the same classrooms. This was abhorrent to her as it should be to all of us. She intervened in anger, and I hope to replicate her conviction and her passion in the years ahead to protect and promote the hard-earned equalities that we now take for granted.

It is with that thought that I wish to turn to the subject matter in hand. I stand here today, probably much to the confusion of hon. Members from the SNP, as a proud Scot. I was born in Edinburgh. I am the granddaughter of a blacklisted Scottish steelworker who became a miner, and my father was blacklisted for leading the first insurance industry strike in Scotland. My mother Lucy is also a proud trade unionist and quite simply my inspiration as a strong and determined woman who dedicated her life to fighting for those who could not fight for themselves. It is because of her commitment and support that I stand here today. I simply hope to emulate her. Her family were forced to flee the Russian pogroms, scapegoated in the name of nationalism and intolerance. My family were not militant, but rather proud socialists and, most importantly, internationalists. They saw nationalism, at worst, as an evil doctrine which poisoned working people against each other, and at best as a distraction from the true battles we fight to make the world a better place for the people who need our help.

For these reasons, I have spent most of my life campaigning against the politics of hate and division, against extremism and nationalism. I am proud of the leading role I have had with Hope Not Hate to defeat the BNP and to make sure that UKIP was limited in its success. But nationalism comes in many guises, and we need to stand united to fight for a better world and for the good of our communities, which is why I will also be fighting for the Union. I will be campaigning for a fair deal for the people of Scotland just as I will be fighting for a better deal for north Staffordshire. There is much more that unites the communities of Bonnybridge and Burslem than divides them. Poverty is poverty whether in Stoke-on-Trent or Stirling, and equality of opportunity needs to be the same in Kidsgrove as it is in Kirkcaldy. We are stronger when we are united.

We have much work ahead of us, but in the words of one of my more famous citizens, Arnold Bennett:

“It is easier to go down a hill than up, but the view is from the top.”

[*Ruth Smeeth*]

I will keep climbing that hill because I know the view will be worth the effort. I look forward to serving the people of Stoke-on-Trent North and Kidsgrove in the years to come, and I hope to live up to the faith they have placed in me.

8.25 pm

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): Let me begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (*Ruth Smeeth*) and the other Members who have made their first speeches so well today.

It is with a great sense of honour that I make this speech in this important debate here today, and with a deep sense of gratitude and responsibility to the people of East Renfrewshire. I chose to live in East Renfrewshire with my family, and there is no place that I would rather be. East Renfrewshire is made up of some of the most vibrant, active and diverse communities in Scotland. Just like the new Members on these Benches, East Renfrewshire benefits very significantly from the diverse backgrounds and traditions of its people. For those who may not be familiar with my constituency, it sits just to the south of Glasgow, stretching from the city boundaries right out to Whitelee forest in the south. The distinct areas that make up the constituency all have a strong sense of identity, and perhaps an even stronger sense of community spirit.

I am delighted to follow such a high profile MP as my predecessor, *Jim Murphy*. No one can dispute the mark that he made on Scottish and UK politics, and I wish him well.

There has never been an SNP MP in my constituency before. In the 2010 election, we were fourth. In fact, prior to 1997, East Renfrewshire was the safest Conservative seat in Scotland, and since then it has been considered to be one of the safest Labour seats. But the appetite for change in Scotland is immense. My constituents, just like people all over Scotland, want their voices to be heard, loudly and clearly. They expect to be listened to—so they should—and this House must recognise that.

East Renfrewshire is blessed with rolling countryside and farmland, with glorious parks and suburbia, and it is a beautiful place. The lovely rural village of Uplawmoor leads down to the ancient parish of Neilston, with its beautiful old church. We travel north to the bustling town of Barrhead, home to the famous *Arthurlie* football club, and east to our largest town, *Newton Mearns*, a modern area in many ways, but with roots stretching back to the bronze age, and on through our beautiful *Rouken Glen* park to *Thornliebank*, where the *Crum* family for many years combined their print works with philanthropy, and to *Giffnock* and *Eastwood Park Theatre*, and then to my own home area of *Clarkston*, with the *National Trust* for Scotland's *Greenbank* gardens, and *Busby*, where it is a pleasure to walk in *Busby glen*. There is a scenic route along the *White Cart Water* through *Waterfoot*, and up to *Eaglesham*, an historic conservation village, and gateway to the wind farm at *Whitelee*.

East Renfrewshire is in many ways a place of contrasts, just like modern Scotland. We are lucky to have active and energetic faith communities playing a full part in

local life. This includes being home to Scotland's largest Jewish community, a growing and vibrant Muslim community, and thriving Christian, Hindu and Sikh communities. We have an incredible community spirit in East Renfrewshire. Groups run by local people are at the heart of our area, and they contribute hugely to making it the positive and welcoming place that it is. Such groups include the *Neilston* and *Uplawmoor First Responders*, who have dealt with hundreds of emergencies in the past year, and the *Queen's award-winning Super Kids club* for children with additional support needs and their families. That great range of community and voluntary groups hugely enriches my area. People are incredibly community-minded. They turn out in huge numbers for events such as the *Eaglesham fair*, which took place successfully amid high winds and torrential rain on Saturday, and for elections. I am privileged to represent an area with such an engaged electorate.

Historically, industry in East Renfrewshire was based on cotton mills, manufacturing and farming. The balance of business has changed; we continue to have numerous farms in our rural areas, as well as a range of other successful businesses, many of which benefit from positive business growth schemes such as the small business bonus. Many more would benefit from the increased economic powers that we would like for Scotland. Our businesses now range from high-end international companies such as *Linn Products* to small businesses such as *The Wee Fudge Company*, which operates from a house in *Stamperland* and produces a most delicious Scottish fudge that would surely sell well in the Members' *Tea Room*. We need all of our businesses to thrive, no matter what their size. For that, we need levers to grow our economy and ensure that more of my constituents are economically active.

Many people in East Renfrewshire are doing well—they live comfortably in our lovely leafy suburbs and beautiful rural villages—but it is not like that for everyone. A great many people in East Renfrewshire would not recognise that reality at all. Many of them struggle badly to feed themselves and their families in lovely, leafy East Renfrewshire. We have food banks, because we need them; we have a school uniform bank, because we need one. That is a scandal. I have seen for myself the difficulties and indignities that people face, and I cannot begin to understand how, in 2015, families and children in my community are hungry. Children go to school without breakfast. They are children whose parents are doing their best but face barriers too great for them to surmount. They are families in which people are working, families in which people would like to work and families in which someone has become ill or disabled. If a measure of our society is how we treat the most vulnerable among us, we have a long way to go.

People all over East Renfrewshire see that, which is why they voted for change and for greater powers for Scotland, to allow us to make the changes that we need to ensure that we can have a sustainable, successful economy and ensure that we no longer neglect those of us who are struggling. Things have moved on significantly since the *Smith agreement*. The election result reflects clearly that people in my constituency and across Scotland voted for something more. They voted for real powers to create more jobs, boost wages and protect our welfare state. That is why it is vital that our voice is heard clearly here on the *Scotland Bill*.

People in this House have spoken a lot about aspiration over the past couple of weeks. Many in my constituency aspire—our schools are the envy of the country—but aspiration is an uneasy bedfellow for the ever-increasing inequality in our society and our communities. This Government have the opportunity in the Bill to ensure that Scotland has the powers to deliver successful economic policies and tackle that inequality, and we will push every day to do so.

8.32 pm

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): It is an honour to give my maiden speech after so many excellent maiden speeches in this debate. I am only the fifth Member of Parliament for Workington since the constituency was established in 1918, but I am the first woman to be elected to represent the constituency, and in fact the first woman ever elected to Parliament in Cumbria. It is an honour and a privilege, and I intend to serve my constituency diligently.

As this is my maiden speech, before I come to the subject of the debate, I shall follow the tradition of the House by paying tribute to my predecessor, Sir Tony Cunningham, who represented the Workington constituency for 14 years. I am sure that hon. Members from all parties will join me in wishing him well in his retirement. Sir Tony began his career as a teacher before being elected to represent Cumbria and Lancashire North in the European Parliament. He then worked for human rights organisations until his election to this House in 2001. His passion for that work made him the ideal choice to join the Front Bench as shadow Minister for International Development.

Sir Tony took his constituency responsibilities seriously, working hard for Workington and for individual constituents. In retirement, he continues to champion local charities. Throughout his career, he stood up for the poor and vulnerable both at home and overseas, and his commitment to helping others, some of them in truly desperate circumstances, will always define him and provide a humbling reminder to us all.

Sir Tony has said that his proudest achievement was saving Cumbria's cottage hospitals when they were under threat of closure. At that time, the Health Secretary was my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson), who listened to and understood Cumbria's particular needs. I hope that this Government will do the same over people's concerns for West Cumberland hospital and the services that are under threat today.

Sir Tony's predecessor, Dale Campbell-Savours, continues to serve the public, now from the other place. He remains greatly admired and respected in the Workington constituency, for both his fight and his intellect. No cause was too large or too small. If people needed help, he was there for them.

Many hon. Members have told us in their maiden speeches how beautiful their constituencies are. Mine runs from the summit of Skiddaw in the Lake District national park to the sparkling sea and spectacular sunsets of the Solway coast, an area of outstanding natural beauty and a wildlife habitat of international importance.

In addition to the country's most dramatic and beautiful landscape and coastline, the constituency has a strong and proud industrial heritage—from mining and steelworks

and the flourishing port at Workington, to the fishing boats of Maryport, the large farming community and the thriving tourism industry. It is also part of Britain's energy coast, which is bringing thousands of jobs and billions of pounds of investment to west Cumbria through nuclear, tidal and other energy projects.

The Solway forms the western border between England and Scotland and over the centuries, part of my constituency, like other areas of the borders, have been subject to Scottish raiding parties. I must say to hon. Members from north of the border how relieved I am that the famous Scottish national uprising of 2015 stopped short of Cumbria for once. They might also be interested to know that Mary Queen of Scots spent her last night of freedom in Workington hall, because we are renowned for our hospitality.

To go even further back in history, fortifications associated with Hadrian's wall were built in west Cumbria by the Romans as a defence against the Scots—and the native Cumbrians, too, for that matter. At Maryport's famous Senhouse Roman Museum, it is still possible to see the remains of the fort and many artefacts, which illustrate the importance of west Cumbria in the defence of the realm—a role the county continues to fulfil today through the vital Trident submarines in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock).

The gem town of Cockermouth is also in my constituency. The childhood home of William Wordsworth, Wordsworth house, has been opened to the public by the National Trust. Another famous—or should I say infamous?—local lad is Fletcher Christian, who led the mutiny on the *Bounty*. He now has a pub named after him on Main Street. Talking of pubs, Cockermouth's most famous export, the legendary Jennings beer, is still brewed at the old Castle brewery in the town centre.

More recently, Cockermouth became famous for the floods that devastated homes and businesses in November 2009 when the River Derwent swept through the town centre. Those same floods claimed the life of policeman Bill Barker in Workington when a bridge collapsed. Both towns showed extraordinary courage and resilience in rebuilding after the floods, and PC Barker's bravery that night will never be forgotten. The new footbridge over the river in Workington is named Barker's Crossing in his memory.

Sir Tony worked with the local communities to fight back after the floods, but the work is not yet finished and I have pledged to carry on campaigning for proper flood defences wherever they are needed, to try to ensure that such a tragedy never again happens in Workington or Cockermouth.

To finish the tour of my constituency, I must mention the beautiful seaside town of Silloth, with its famous golf course, and Aspatria, the old mining and market town, which shares a passion for rugby—both league and union—with its larger neighbours.

I would have thought that the grit, passion and heritage I have spoken of would mark out west Cumbria as a key part of the northern powerhouse. I am pleased that the Chancellor has recognised that the north of England can contribute positively to the UK, but I would like to take this opportunity to remind him that the north-west extends considerably beyond Manchester. The northern powerhouse is focused on cities more

[Sue Hayman]

than 100 miles south of west Cumbria. We have been shouldering heavy cuts to local government and public services, and the energy coast investment that I referred to earlier is still a few years away. Cumbria must not be left out. We need to see a proper devolution of powers across the region, not just to the big cities, so we can deliver our potential. We cannot allow areas such as west Cumbria to be left behind just because we are beyond the M6 corridor and the west coast main line.

As well as looking south to contribute to the northern powerhouse, we should also support the devolution of further powers to Scotland, because the time for rivalry has long since gone. Much of Dumfries and Galloway, for example, is as far from Glasgow and Edinburgh as west Cumbria is from Manchester or Leeds. We must forge cross-border alliances to bring investment in areas such as transport, energy, tourism, education and rural development that benefit the border communities on either side of the national boundary. There are already significant connections between people living in the borders region, whether on the English or the Scottish side. Many jobs depend on the business transacted daily across the border. Many families have members living on both sides of the border, and every day many commuters see the M74 turn into the M6 and back again.

We have a huge opportunity before us now to build social and economic prosperity that embraces both the diversity and the common interest of everyone in the border regions. We owe it to future generations to work together, rather than move apart, and I want the devolution of powers and resources to benefit everyone, not just those who live on one side of Gretna Green and not the other.

8.41 pm

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called in this debate and to speak after some excellent speeches. The hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) left us tantalisingly in the air for her quote, which we look forward to hearing on another occasion. I first met the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) while waiting for our IT to be sorted out—she was there two and a half hours after me—and I am glad to see she has resolved her problems and is in her place. She spoke passionately about her constituency, as did the hon. Members for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) and for Workington (Sue Hayman).

Right hon. and hon. Members may wonder why a Member of Parliament for one of the southernmost seats of England, North Dorset, sought to speak on the Second Reading of the Scotland Bill. I did so as a fellow Celt, albeit a Welshman, who fought two seats in Wales before securing victory in North Dorset. I was very much involved in fighting the then Labour Government's campaign in Wales. The genie was out of the bottle: there is now a settlement, and we live with the consequences—some of the downsides and some of the upsides.

In an intervention earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) talked about trust. At that point, SNP Members laughed slightly, though I was pleased that, in his speech, the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) accepted the

purpose of the point she made—that in this debate we need to have trust. It may be that my following remarks are out of keeping or out of step with what a new Member should say, but that has never stopped me in the past and it will not stop me now.

It is probably quite hard to build the relationship of trust required, because the political landscape shifted very considerably on 7 May. Those of us who would describe ourselves as strong Unionists—by intellect as much as by heart, gut and passion—were left aghast at the nationalist tide, coming so recently after a referendum that said, “No, we don't want to go down that particular route.” It has left the Labour party bereft of seasoned colleagues, expert opinion and wise heads in this House. It should be no surprise to anybody, not least the leadership of the nationalists, that their success has left a huge sense of head-scratching and bewilderment on the Conservative Benches as much as it has among Labour Members. We need to build trust among ourselves and with the nationalist party, just as it needs to build trust with us. I would guess that many SNP Members do not believe in their hearts that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Government are serious about that, but I do not think that anyone who listened to my right hon. Friend's opening speech could have been left with any impression other than one of his absolute and passionate commitment to delivering the additional powers that Scotland and the Scottish people want.

We will be judged on the basis of our actions in that regard. We will be judged on the basis of how we vote, and how we engage in the debate. I am pleased to see that the hon. Member for Moray is nodding. May I ask something of him and his colleagues? Conservative Members—along with Labour Members—take a different view of the final destination for Scotland. We want to see a proud Scotland in a strong and robust United Kingdom; SNP Members want to see a strong Scotland that is an independent force in the world. They have advised us that they are not seeking to pick off the scabs of the referendum debate, and that they are here to try to make the settlement—a settlement on which the Scottish people agreed back in September—work. May I ask them, and their leadership, not to freeze us out of that debate?

The fact that we are Unionists, and the fact that we may come from other parts of the Celtic regions or elsewhere, do not mean that we are any less sincere, or any less committed to the success that we want Scotland to be. The tone of some SNP speeches today seemed to suggest—almost as if certain Members were delegates for Miss Sturgeon and the Scottish Government—that those who were not part of the Holyrood project somehow had no right to take part in the debate. The hon. Member for Moray looks confused, but we all know that tone and body language are important, and as I sat on this side of the House, listening to all the speeches, that was the impression with which I was left. In my humble judgment, such a tone will not lead to the relationship of mutual trust and certainty that all quarters of the House need to build if we are to make this settlement work.

As I have said, our view and our vision of the ultimate destination is different from that of the SNP, but we want the Scotland Bill to work. Scotland is a proud and vibrant part of the United Kingdom, and we—Conservative Members—wish it to remain so. That

will pose some challenges if, for example, the SNP continues its tsunami of decapitation in next May's Holyrood election. I am tempted to call this the Madame Defarge Parliament, because I believe that more heads have been removed than at any time since the French Revolution. I am not complaining about that, for the will of the Scottish people was expressed in the ballot box, but if it continues next May it may destabilise a little further the foundations of trust that we are seeking to build and on which, through the Bill, we are seeking to deliver on the pledges and promises that were made after the referendum.

I wish my right hon. Friend success in piloting the Bill on the Floor of the House. We wish take part in the debate, sincerely, pragmatically and positively, but let me end by saying again that I hope SNP Members do not freeze us out of that debate.

8.48 pm

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare). I cannot say that I agree with all his views, but we can discuss that on another occasion. Let me also congratulate the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) and my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) on their maiden speeches, both of which were thoughtful and gracious. I am sure that the House appreciated them as much as I did.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to take part in this debate on the future governance of Scotland and the granting of further powers to it. It is unlikely that there will be such an important Bill for SNP Members to consider during this first Session of the new Parliament, and we approach it with great vigour and passion. We want to bring home more powers to the people who have put us here: the people of Scotland, the one nation that we hold dear.

Before considering the proposals, may I say a few words about my constituency and echo some of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) about the staff of the House of Commons? Every Member on this side of the Chamber has been really amazed by the generous, friendly and warm welcome we have received from all the staff. I want to pay particular tribute to my buddy, Catherine, who helped me through the first few days of being in what is a very strange environment for many of us.

The Dunfermline and West Fife constituency is a real mix of rural, village and large town settlements. Coastal villages, such as Kincardine, Limekilns and Torryburn mix with the rolling hillside villages of Saline and Hill O'Beath. They sit alongside former coalmining villages of Oakley, Blairhall and High Valleyfield. We also have former royal burghs such as Culross, with its magnificent palace, and Inverkeithing, which has its own distinct rich history.

We have many claims to fame. How many hon. Members know that Dunfermline was once the ancient capital of Scotland? Our abbey is the resting place of King Robert the Bruce, an iconic figure in Scottish history who has served as an inspiration to generations of Scots who, like Bruce, sought to reaffirm Scotland's place in the world as an independent nation.

Dunfermline is the birthplace of the industrialist, entrepreneur and, later in his life, great philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie made millions of dollars on the back of the railroads and iron and steel industries in America. He realised, perhaps belatedly, that the business of making money must also have a strong social conscience. The two go hand in hand. In today's terms, Carnegie would have been a multibillionaire. He said

“that a man who dies thus rich, dies disgraced”.

His generosity and philanthropy travel far and wide. Who has not heard of his funding for the great Carnegie Hall? And I do mean the one in Dunfermline, although I believe there is also one in New York. Who is not aware that it was Carnegie's generosity that brought books and learning to many communities through his support for Carnegie libraries across the world, and that he funded the magnificent Peace Palace in The Hague, where it still serves as a beacon to resolve conflict internationally?

Musically, the constituency has given us great talent over the years. For rock fans, Nazareth and Big Country are a part of our past. If there are any ageing punks in the Chamber tonight, we also have the band The Skids. I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) may know something about these bands.

More up to date, the skills and talents of the area are being utilised at the likes of Oceanering, a world-leading undersea technology company, and Rosyth dockyard, where the workforce are building both of our Navy's aircraft carriers. In recent weeks, I have met the management and the trade unions. They are fiercely proud of the expertise they bring to delivering the carriers project. Like with most activity at Rosyth dockyard, the workforce are bringing in these huge complex projects on time and in budget. Perhaps with a vain hope, I am looking at the Government Front Bench. If UK Government decisions on military procurement were as equally efficient and budget aware, perhaps we would be in a better position as regards the national finances.

Another high skill based project on time and under budget, is the construction of the new Queensferry crossing, funded by the Scottish Government. On completion in 2016, we will have three generations of new bridges over the Forth. It is truly appropriate that in a few weeks' time we are all hoping that the Forth rail bridge, an icon of Scottish engineering and the oldest of the three bridges, will gain UNESCO world heritage site status and put it up there with other world heritage sites. This recognition of the rail bridge will bring many new jobs to the west Fife economy as we improve the offer we can make to visitors and tourists to the area.

Government Members—I wish there were a few more here—will be made especially welcome in Dunfermline and West Fife, as we do not get to see many Conservatives in that part of the country. I assure Members, however, that irrespective of the Benches on which they sit, they will be made very welcome—and it says here, “Please bring your wallets”.

I would like to pay a warm tribute to the previous MP, Thomas Docherty, who served his constituents and pursued a wide range of issues here in the House. He served in Parliament from 2010 and rose to the position of shadow Deputy Leader of the House. I wish him well

[*Douglas Chapman*]

for the future. His main claim to fame was his appearance in the TV series “Inside the Commons” where Thomas was seen bedsharing—not at the same time, I might add—with the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) in order to secure more debating time. As a candidate at the time, I was worried that the level of exposure Thomas was getting on prime time television would damage my chances of being elected, but a 10,000 majority suggests my concerns were misplaced. It also reminded me of a valuable political lesson taught to me by my late father: never, never, never, get into bed with the Tories.

I also have a famous—some might say infamous—constituent: the former Chancellor and Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who promised much in the referendum campaign last year. By a slender majority, the no campaign won the day, but given the energy and interest in Scottish politics in recent months, the Bill offering new powers needs to be something special. Whatever measures are proposed, they should carry the support of the Scottish people. During the referendum, we had a huge and engaging campaign that brought to life the sometimes staid and distant world of politics. People felt part of a new, vigorous nation and thought that their views and ideas actually counted. The great challenge for the UK Government is to engage with the ordinary people of Scotland, who have fought so extraordinarily for more powers, and I urge them to consider our amendments as the Bill makes progress through Parliament. They are there for a purpose: to make Scotland stronger and more economically vibrant, to destroy child poverty once and for all and to make us a better nation that all the people of these islands can enjoy and benefit from.

We are in the 56th Parliament, and the SNP has returned 56 Members. I respectfully remind the Government that we are here to do business for our constituents and represent Scotland like it has never been represented before. I hope the Government will respect our mandate and the changing political landscape. The world as we know it has changed. It cannot be business as usual.

8.56 pm

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make a contribution in this debate, and I congratulate you on your recent election victory. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman) on his maiden speech. I was particularly pleased to hear the tribute to Andrew Carnegie and his well-known social conscience. I thought that his passion and commitment to his constituency shone through his speech, and I look forward to serving with him in the House in the years ahead.

James Keir Hardie said, when asked about his socialist beliefs, that he saw them as arising from a rooted local culture. His belief in localism and the de-centralisation of power led him to a firm belief in devolution. In the career and beliefs of Keir Hardie, a Scot who represented a Welsh constituency, there are lessons for us in this debate. Most of all, if we recognise the qualities and strengths of our family of nations here in these islands, we can strengthen our whole United Kingdom.

I welcome a number of aspects of the Bill, which takes devolution to the next stage. Let us not forget that devolution came about because the Labour Government

of 1997 to 2010 introduced the widest swathe of constitutional reform since the Great Reform Act 1832. I welcome the formal recognition in law of the status of the Scottish Parliament and, in particular, the increased financial responsibilities, which build on the third pillar of the Smith commission. I also welcome devolution and greater flexibility in several areas of tax, including income tax, VAT, the aggregates levy and air passenger duty. As was set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray), however, there are ways in which the Government can go further, and I look forward to that in the course of the debates on the Bill.

Prior to entering the House, I lectured in politics. The first thing I taught at the start of every academic year was the UK constitution, and the one thing I always said to my students was never to see any single measure of devolution in isolation; they have to be seen in the context of the overall settlement and argument for the whole of the UK. Lord Kilbrandon took over the royal commission on the constitution between 1969 and 1973, and it became known by his name. He said that any decisions and debates on public funding that we have here in Westminster affected

“the whole of the United Kingdom”.

That quotation comes from a period before our modern devolution journey began, but I suggest that it is as relevant in 2015 as it was back in 1973.

As we debate finance and funding, it is critical to bear in mind how those issues affect the different constituent parts of our United Kingdom. My point as a Welsh Member—it is important that the voice of Wales is heard during the passage of the Scotland Bill—is that there is a long-standing public debate on the underfunding of Wales in the United Kingdom. It goes back to the Holtham commission of 2010, which identified £300 million of underfunding for Wales, and the same issue runs through part 1 of the Silk commission. Even at this moment, the finance committee of the National Assembly for Wales is debating future funding for Wales. This is a crucial issue for Wales and my Torfaen constituents.

I remind the Secretary of State that the Prime Minister promised earlier this year that Wales would not be left behind. The Chancellor of the Exchequer originally promised a Wales Bill within the first 100 days of this Parliament. Unfortunately, all he has done so far for Wales is to promise a further £3 billion of cuts across the UK, about £84 million of which we expect to fall on Wales. That is hardly a great start when it comes to addressing fair funding for Wales.

The First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, has made it clear that this issue of fair funding has to be dealt with, so I say that a great devolution debate must go ahead in this Parliament and the Secretary of State must bear in mind all the constituent parts of the United Kingdom. History tells us that if particular issues are left untouched in devolution debates, they usually come back and need to be dealt with at a later stage. I urge the Secretary of State to think again about ruling out, from the Dispatch Box, the idea of a constitutional convention, which would not only give all politicians a chance to contribute to the debate, but would involve the wider public in all parts of the United Kingdom. It is important that we end this Parliament with strong devolution within a strong United Kingdom.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Hoyle): With two speakers left, I am increasing the time limit to 12 minutes each.

9.2 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): There seems to be cross-party support in this place for legislation that would substantially implement the recommendations of the Smith commission. We have heard some interesting contributions, not least from the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson). We all wait with bated breath to see what amendments will be tabled to the Bill to try to establish full fiscal autonomy for Scotland. We certainly hope that in order to fulfil that promise, the amendment will be a little stronger than the one on the Order Paper today, which is all about Scotland moving to

“a position in the medium term where the Scottish Parliament and Government are responsible for all revenue raising”.

That seems to me to be a lot of weasel words and very far away from full fiscal autonomy.

There has been a certain amount of interest in this pledge from people watching the debate in this place, and I have been asked by many where the Scots believe they will get the money needed to fill the hole—we understand it might be £7.6 billion or even £10 billion. However much it is, people in Scotland and presumably across the whole of the United Kingdom will want to know from the Scottish nationalists where that money is going to come from, if they get full fiscal autonomy. The prime opportunity comes from introducing an amendment to this Bill, and we all wait to see what it is going to say.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): When the hon. Lady’s party introduced devolution at the end of the last century, it said that it would settle the kingdom once and for all, and that Scotland would then live very happily in the Union. What went wrong?

Emily Thornberry: The right hon. Gentleman will, I am sure, realise that we have all moved on in the last 100 years and that things change and we have become different people, but I think the majority of people in these islands identify as British. We saw that in the referendum result and the feelings expressed across the whole of this nation, and the important thing is that we remain a United Kingdom. With the devolution being introduced today, which will be a continuing devolution, we must nevertheless remain a United Kingdom. I believe I speak on behalf of the vast majority of people in Great Britain when I say that.

What concerns me about the Bill, however, is how the Sewel convention will be implemented. The Smith commission recommends that the Sewel convention be placed on a statutory footing. However, despite the Secretary of State’s contention that the Bill will implement the commission’s recommendations in full, in my view clause 2 falls short of fulfilling that promise.

In the 1998 debate on the Scotland Bill of that year, Lord Sewel said:

“However, as happened in Northern Ireland earlier in the century, we would expect a convention to be established that Westminster would not normally legislate with regard to devolved matters in Scotland without the consent of the Scottish parliament.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 21 July 1998; Vol. 592, c. 791.]

In seeking to put this convention on a statutory footing, the Bill uses identical language, stating that

“it is recognised that the Parliament of the United Kingdom will not normally legislate with regard to devolved matters without the consent of the Scottish Parliament.”

What does that mean? Does that mean we will not normally legislate with regard to devolved matters without the consent of the Scottish Parliament unless the UK Parliament does not like it? It seems rather an odd way of proceeding and it is a funny way to write the law.

In its report on the Government’s draft proposals, the House of Lords Constitution Committee described this in much more measured terms than I would. [*Interruption.*] It says

“the use of the word normally...is unusual in legislation and is undefined.”

[*Interruption.*] The Secretary of State, who is the only Scottish MP on the Government Benches, should listen: the House of Lords Constitution Committee says his legislation is nonsense, and he should listen.

The inevitable question is what the Government mean by “normally”? Language that may be appropriately applied to a convention may well be inappropriate in statute. For instance, we might pass legislation that says, “Normally, it is illegal to steal someone’s wallet”—except when it is legal—or, “Normally, millionaires should pay their fair share of tax”, although perhaps that is a bad example. How about this example, then? Legislation might say, “Normally, it would be illegal to blow up the Houses of Parliament,” but there might be circumstances in which it was legal. This is the legislation being put before us by the Government today.

Simon Hoare: What is the normal response when the hon. Lady sees a white van?

Emily Thornberry: The normal response to silly questions like that is to pass on and not make comment, because the hon. Gentleman belittles himself and this place by descending to that.

Martin John Docherty (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Does the hon. Lady believe the Secretary of State for Scotland should give more credence to the unelected upper Chamber than a cross-party report by the democratically elected Scottish Parliament?

Emily Thornberry: I simply think the Secretary of State for Scotland should not introduce legislation that says that we

“will not normally legislate with regard to devolved matters without the consent of the Scottish Parliament”

because in my view that is not the sort of thing we normally put in legislation. The Bill has been rushed through at the last minute and has not been thought through properly. I strongly suggest that the Secretary of State pays attention to people who are better experts than he is, and makes sure his legislation is a little better than it is.

The Constitution Committee’s report went on to note that this measure, as drafted, would have

“little, or no, legal effect”.

[Emily Thornberry]

[*Interruption.*] I am sorry to interrupt the Secretary of State once more. The Committee says this clause would have little or no legal effect, and I suggest he pays attention to that. It says that the clause would simply

“recognise the existence of the Sewel convention rather than turn it into a legally binding principle”.

In other words, it is a gesture and it does not actually mean anything. I strongly suggest the Secretary of State considers providing some clarity on that point. What do the words of the statute mean? What does he intend? Tell us what “normal” means, and what “abnormal” means, so we all know what we are talking about.

That point is as nothing compared with the nonsense and mess that the Bill will cause in relation to the Human Rights Act. The Government may or may not be changing the Human Rights Act in some way in the future after consulting with people—who, we do not yet know. We do not know how it will be changed, but it appears that the Government do intend to change it. As the Secretary of State knows, an integral part of the devolution settlement is that Scotland has a role in the Human Rights Act, and that remains important. If the Government are to honour the spirit of the Sewel convention, they will need to seek the consent of the Scottish Parliament before proceeding on any wholesale reorganisation of the legislative framework upon which our basic human rights rest. The Government need to look at that.

The convention will be pushed to its limit whether it has a basis in statute or not. The Human Rights Act is embedded in Scotland’s devolution settlement, and while it remains for the UK courts to determine whether an Act of Parliament violates an individual’s convention rights, both schedule 6 and section 29(2)(d) of the Scotland Act 1998 gave the same power to the Scottish courts to invalidate Acts of the Scottish Parliament if they are judged to be incompatible with the UK’s obligations under the convention. The same prohibition on acting incompatibly with individuals’ convention rights is extended to Ministers in the Scottish Executive under section 57(2) of the 1998 Act. Since the passage of that Act, the Scottish Parliament has established a Scottish Human Rights Commission and a national plan for human rights, so human rights are without doubt a substantially devolved issue. What is more, the Scots were not exactly backwards in coming forwards on the need to preserve the Human Rights Act.

The Minister might remember that the Government spent the previous two years consulting on how to replace the Human Rights Act with their so-called British bill of privileges; they went around the country asking people their views, for suggestions, whether any rights had been forgotten and whether people would like to change this bit or that bit. The Minister might also remember the consultation’s reception in Scotland. When the Government asked Scottish people their views, how many were in favour of changing the Human Rights Act? None. The Government did not get a single person in Scotland to say that it was a good idea to change the Human Rights Act. So exactly how will they be able to implement the Sewel convention and somehow or other change the Human Rights Act in Scotland? How will that work? It is constitutional nonsense, and the Government should take it extremely seriously.

Following the election, the Scottish Human Rights Commission said:

“While we will examine any legislative proposals in detail, the Commission repeats its long-standing concerns about the regressive nature of many elements of previous proposals for a British Bill of Rights. These have included enabling the UK to pick and choose which judgments to accept from the European Court of Human Rights, reducing the scope of human rights laws so that they only apply to ‘the most serious’ cases, or to particular areas of law, and restricting the eligibility of rights on the basis of nationality or citizenship. Any and all of these changes would fly in the face of progressive protection for human rights and would have adverse consequences for people in Scotland”.

That is absolutely right. It is quite clear that the people of Scotland do not want the Government to interfere with their Human Rights Act, and the Government should leave it alone. Frankly, they should leave it alone for all of us.

The Government should not seek to change the Human Rights Act without first seeking the consent of the Scottish Parliament. It is clear that if the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), went up to Scotland and asked people there whether the Government could change the Human Rights Act, they would probably tell him to sling his hook—or possibly something a little ruder.

Will the Minister assure the House that the Government’s intention is to honour the Sewel convention on a matter of such importance as fundamental human rights?

Antoinette Sandbach: Does the hon. Lady accept that being a signatory to the European convention on human rights is different from the Human Rights Act? We are at liberty, in Parliament, to change the Human Rights Act while still remaining a signatory to the treaty.

Emily Thornberry: I have only two minutes and 46 seconds left, but I am happy to talk to the hon. Lady outside the Chamber. I would say that the Government should keep away from this—it is a devolved issue. They may think that they can implement the Sewel convention properly and still change the Human Rights Act in relation to Scotland, but it cannot be done.

Will the Minister give us a clearer outline of the Government’s definition of “normal”? Will he help us by telling us whether or not, in order to stay true to the spirit of the Smith commission’s recommendations, the Sewel convention can be placed on a much stronger statutory footing than today’s Bill achieves? As it stands, nothing in the Bill prevents this or any future Government from riding roughshod over the clearly expressed views of the Scottish Parliament and the people it represents. The first victim of such woolly legislation could well be the Human Rights Act in Scotland. Just as we will fight in England, we will fight in Scotland to make sure that we keep our Human Rights Act intact.

9.15 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to this debate on a significant piece of constitutional legislation—the next step in a process we have been witnessing since at least 1997, when the first steps to a devolved Scottish Parliament were put in place.

It will come as no surprise to the House that I take a close personal interest in this Bill, as a Scot by birth and upbringing who has lived in England for many decades. Not only is it important to me personally for that reason, but it is important to many of my constituents who share exactly the same family experience. These families have lived, and continue to live, on both sides of the border, and they feel an emotional and physical attachment to England and Scotland as a result of their history and their lives today. We have, again, heard from other Members who share that family experience, including in at least two maiden speeches—those of the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth). They, too, described exactly that experience, which is very common in this country of people who have strong family links and histories in both England and Scotland—and indeed in other parts of the UK.

The Bill is not only important to families across the UK, but it is an important financial, political and constitutional settlement that needs therefore to be fair to people in all parts of the UK. Clearly, there is cross-party support for the Smith commission principles and for the idea of greater devolution. This is a great opportunity for people in Scotland to tackle the poverty and inequality that still pertain in that country. It is very much one that I hope we will be able to replicate in my part of the country in the devolution settlement we achieve for Greater Manchester. But that cross-party support for devolution sits alongside our wish for the continued ability to pool and share risks and resources, and nowhere is that more important than in relation to welfare provision, where it is key that costs and risks must be fairly shared.

There has been much discussion this evening of the extent to which this Bill gives effect to the intentions of the Smith commission. Smith said that there should be “complete autonomy” over devolved benefits. We heard tonight concerns that, in practice, the UK Government will now be able to veto that autonomy, and questions were asked about what that would mean in practice and how things would operate.

It is important to say to those who speak for complete autonomy and expect that that would not involve a degree of negotiation and consultation between the two Governments that we must recognise the huge scale and challenge of the operational change the Department for Work and Pensions is facing now on welfare. Indeed, it is now in a state of perpetual revolution, which makes such negotiation necessary. It will not help people in Scotland or in England or Wales if the stability and resilience of our welfare systems is put at risk by an insistence on impractical solutions. Equally, however, the Bill’s wording as to what we mean by this process of consultation and this notion of veto is unhelpfully woolly. I hope there will be an opportunity to tighten it up in Committee.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Given the hon. Lady’s caution, what does she think of the example in Northern Ireland? On paper, the Northern Ireland Assembly has legislative power, but Westminster has basically said, “Unless you pass a karaoke version of our legislation, we will interfere in the rest of your Budget and create a Budget crisis.” That situation is now creating a political crisis.

Kate Green: We can see very clearly the importance of precision and of nailing down exactly what is intended in the wording of legislation and agreements. The Northern Ireland example is instructive of what can go wrong.

The Secretary of State gave us an assurance this afternoon about the process of consultation and resolution, but I hope that there is transparency in the way in which decisions are taken, negotiations are conducted and conclusions are reached. We must be clear about how decisions are taken, and we must be able to scrutinise that process. It will also be important to understand timescales and milestones for such decisions to take place. As I said to the Secretary of State, there needs to be clarity over how disputes between the two Governments are resolved. That is not clear to me despite the assurances that he gave us this afternoon. It is a matter that we need to firm up in Committee.

Alex Salmond: The hon. Lady made an excellent point very early on in her debate over who adjudicates in a dispute. The answer at the moment is that if there is a financial dispute with the Treasury and the devolved Parliament, the Treasury adjudicates. If it is the Joint Ministerial Committee, the Prime Minister does it. Unless it is specified in this Bill, yet again it will be the Prime Minister and his Government who will act as judge and jury in their own court.

Kate Green: The right hon. Gentleman and I might be able to agree that that would not be in the spirit of the discussions that we have had around the purpose of this Bill, which is to create the freedom for Scotland to operate within its devolved powers and to do so within the context of, and as an equal partner in, its relationships with the UK Government.

John Redwood: In order for England as well as Scotland to feel that justice is done, how would the hon. Lady recommend that the Scottish grant be adjusted for the money it will be collecting in its own right from taxation?

Kate Green: Clearly, the fiscal settlement will be of crucial importance to the people in Scotland, to my constituents and to the constituents of the right hon. Gentleman. That is a function of negotiation that I would expect to see as the fiscal settlement is worked out. One principle that was discussed under the Smith negotiations was the principle of no detriment. We can already see that there are issues to be ironed out here, such as those of operational costs, and the potential knock-on effects and costs of Scottish Government decisions about benefit levels, entitlements and top-ups. For example, it could be that a decision of the Scottish Government creates a passporting through to an entitlement, the cost of which falls to the UK Government. It could be that the decision of the Scottish Government in relation to crediting people into national insurance contributions creates a consequence for the national insurance fund. That is complex to disentangle, and it will be really important for this Parliament to have a mechanism for ongoing scrutiny. I hope that the Minister, in responding to this debate, will say how he thinks that scrutiny will work.

There seems to be surprise that the wording of the Bill appears to have fettered some of the scope of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament to

[Kate Green]

control the devolved welfare benefits. There is also surprise that only new welfare benefits can be created, and not benefits in relation to, for example, education or health. There are concerns that clause 19, which deals with disabilities, carers and industrial injuries benefits, may be worded too restrictively. It might not be possible to bring certain people into the ambit of the benefit, or people could have a question mark over their qualification for the benefit. For example, it might be that they live on one side of the border, but provide care for someone who lives on the other side of the border, and that needs to be sorted out.

There is concern over the provisions on topping up the reserved benefits and over whether there is an intention for the Scottish Parliament to take an across-the-board approach to topping up those reserved benefits, or whether it is merely a discretion to top up benefits for an individual in one individual case.

I think that we were surprised at the ambit of decisions on discretionary housing payments that will be delegated to Scotland in clause 22, which could potentially fetter the opportunity that colleagues in Scotland might wish to take completely to eliminate the harm done by the bedroom tax. There are also worries about clause 23 and the restriction of the application of short-term temporary assistance, which appears to leave out the possibility that families with children with an ongoing need for support could be excluded from the provisions of the existing legislation. These issues will need to be sorted out if the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government and the Scottish National party are to take advantage of the full fiscal autonomy that they have said is their medium-term ambition. We cannot wait for the medium term to resolve these issues; they must be resolved in Committee.

Important new provisions are introduced in clause 24 for the housing element of universal credit. Again, this could be a useful provision for the Scottish Government, as they would be able to reflect the characteristics of the Scottish housing and rental markets. For example—I hope that the Minister will tell me whether I am right to think this—they could vary their broad rental market agreement areas or the local housing allowance. However, there are again restrictions on the extent of the powers being devolved. They will not, as I read it, apply to those who receive housing benefit rather than the housing element of universal credit. They will not apply when people switch at pension age into receipt of pension credit. There is a gap in the legislation in ensuring that the devolution of housing benefit is sufficiently comprehensive to ensure that the Scottish Government will have the incentives and levers to use reductions in the housing benefit bill to enable them to build new homes.

I welcome the provisions on the devolution of employment programmes such as the Work programme and Work Choice. This is a sensible reflection of the different characteristics of different labour markets, although I remind SNP colleagues that the differences exist not just between England and Scotland but within Scotland. That is why Labour proposed in our election manifesto to devolve the Work programme and Work Choice to local authority or combined local authority level. I would expect to hear from Scottish parliamentarians and the SNP what their approach will be to that double devolution to reflect local labour markets.

I say to Ministers that I have read the provisions of clause 26 on “work for your benefits” on a number of occasions now and have absolutely no idea what they are getting at. I hope that there might be some clarity tonight.

Finally, there will be some significant operational questions, because the smooth delivery of benefits is as important to benefits recipients as the amounts and entitlements that the system offers them. Decisions taken in Scotland could of course affect operational workload elsewhere, such as in relation to decisions about mandatory reconsideration or changing the assessment process, which could have a significant effect on appeals workloads. I note that a fully functioning separate Scottish tribunal system will not be in place until 2023.

In conclusion, it is clear to me that we have a shared intention but a gap and a lack of specificity in providing for the intentions that we all understood to underpin Smith. They must be addressed before the Bill completes its parliamentary passage. We cannot leave issues of such grave constitutional importance in such uncertainty. It is clear that the scale of the constitutional change implied in the Bill is extensive, complex and impacts on the whole of the UK. That is why we will need to ensure that we have the mechanisms to keep its impact and effect under close and continuous scrutiny here in this House.

9.29 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to make a brief contribution to this fantastic debate. We have had some amazing maiden speeches today. I am very grateful to my Conservative friends who can claim that they made their maiden speech on the Scotland Bill and added to the rich tapestry of the debate about Scotland, and very fine they were, too, but I particularly want to pick out the incredible contributions made by my hon. Friends in the fine tradition of the SNP 56 group maiden speeches that we have heard so far. It has been great and I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier), for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig), for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald), for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman) and for Livingston (Hannah Bardell). I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline and West Fife, who reminded me of my punk days, and my time with the Skids and Big Country.

We have heard some astonishing contributions, as well as much repeated stuff. This is the third Scotland Bill on which I have had the great pleasure to be able to speak. It feels entirely different today: the context and environment in which the debate is being held feel totally different. For a start, there is no Scottish Labour left. They were all defeated and beaten by the fantastic maiden speakers we have heard today. Listening to the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray)—the one Member left from Scottish Labour, and who is not paying any attention to what I am saying—we can see why they are in such a diminished state. The almost catastrophic response to the debate and the legislation suggests why they are so diminished in the House. They have an opportunity—a great chance—to back the SNP as we seek to improve the Bill as it goes through

Parliament. This is the one chance they have to redefine themselves and say that they have learned the lessons of their crushing defeat to create a new narrative or story about how they want to approach Scottish issues.

As we seek to amend and improve the Bill as it goes through the House, I extend the arm of friendship to our colleagues in the Labour party and ask them to join us in a progressive alliance to tackle the austerity message to make sure that we can improve the Bill for the people of Scotland. They have an opportunity to make sure that we progress the Bill through Parliament and improve it. What a mandate we have. There are 56 of us, and we are here with the strongest possible mandate in Scotland to ensure that the Bill is improved.

Sir Edward Leigh *rose*—

Pete Wishart: I am sorry, I do not have time for interventions.

We have heard from the Joint Committee in the Scottish Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) repeatedly made the point that we have to listen to the people who will handle these powers—to Scottish parliamentarians. A Joint Committee in the Scottish Parliament concluded overwhelmingly that the measure was not sufficient. The spirit of Smith was not met in the draft clauses on which the Scotland Bill is based, so we must make sure that that voice is listened to and responded to. That is the challenge for this Government: the mandate that the 56 bring, with the strong voice of the Scottish Parliament, which says that the Bill does not meet what is required in the Smith agreement and the conclusions of the Smith Commission. The challenge as we go forward is to ensure that that agenda is progressed and that we get the Bill for which the Scottish people voted overwhelmingly just a few short weeks ago.

We have to try—and I say this to the Secretary of State, who is not listening either—to deal with the veto. If it is a matter of the wording in the Bill, the legislation should be amended so that it can be clearly understood. We should not be in the position where the right hon. Gentleman, bless him—he was the lone panda in the last Parliament—has the final say on something that is democratically decided and debated in the Scottish Parliament. If there is an issue with the veto—he does not agree that there should be a veto—he should improve the legislation, tidy up the wording and ensure that it is cleared up. The Conservatives talk about one nation and so on, but I will talk about my nation. The Conservatives got 14% of the vote in Scotland—their worst election result since the 19th century. They should not have the final say on things that are democratically decided in the Scottish Parliament. The situation must improve, and the measure must be worked on.

I want to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), who raised some important issues about the Human Rights Act. The Conservative Government have got into some sort of trouble over that Act, and it looks as if they have booted it into the long grass. We have to be careful how we progress legislation through Parliament. We do not have a guarantee or assurance that this Parliament cannot simply do away with the Scottish Parliament: that is something that the Smith proposals invited us to

consider. We still do not have clarity on that, so as the Bill works its way through Parliament, we should make sure that we get it.

We have a great opportunity to ensure that the strong voice—the overwhelming voice—of Scotland, and the mandate given by the 56 is progressed in the Bill. Let us improve it. Let us work together where we can, and make sure that the Scottish people get what they want, because this is what happens in democracies: when the people speak, Governments respond and listen. They improve the legislation. We have the strongest mandate. I appeal to the House to work with us to deliver the spirit of Smith, improve the legislation, and give the Scottish people what they want.

9.34 pm

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Today we have had a very good debate. We have had no fewer than 25 speeches and 16 maiden speeches. I shall dwell for a few moments, if I may, on some of the maiden speeches from both sides of the House today.

The first maiden speech was delivered by the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa), who informed us that he was a Scottish Member, though he was of Italian extraction, but that he was proudly British. We then heard from the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier), and from the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), who said that she had a great parliamentary ambition—she hoped to be a member of the ladies tug-of-war team. We hope that she is successful in that. She neglected to mention that she used to be a Member of the Welsh Assembly as well. I should have thought that that was of note.

I was pleased to hear the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) say that he had a Welsh—or Celtic, as he called it—background. We went on to hear from the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) in a very statesmanlike speech. We heard a notable maiden speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft), who distinguished herself by reciting “The Red Flag”. I hoped she would sing it as well. We had a maiden speech also from the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), who observed that she had characteristics similar to those of James Bond. I suggest that is because Sean Connery is an SNP supporter. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), who is carrying forward the socialist tradition with great pride, if Members understand what I mean.

We then heard from the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig) and from my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) and for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith), who mentioned Bruce Springsteen. That honourable and distinguished cast was reinforced with the mention of Robbie Williams by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth). We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman), the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald), and the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman), who recommended that hon. Members bring their wallets when they come to his constituency. I am certain they will take note of that.

[Wayne David]

The prize, if there is a prize, for the most engaging maiden speech this evening must go to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), who mentioned that he was successful in being elected to this House at the fifth attempt. He must have the House of Commons prize for perseverance.

Taken together, the speeches today demonstrated the geographic and cultural diversity of the House of Commons and of our country, and the political differences that exist across our nation. The debate today also demonstrated how politics in Scotland has changed over the past 12 months. In the space of less than a year Scotland has experienced two extraordinary democratic processes—the referendum and the general election. In the general election the people of Scotland decided who they wanted to represent them in the United Kingdom. At that point I expected a cheer, but SNP Members have probably run out of breath because of all the barracking they have been giving some of us today. In the referendum, after an unprecedented national debate in Scotland, the people of Scotland decided to remain part of the United Kingdom.

Many lessons can be drawn from those two events. What is clear beyond any shadow of doubt is that in the referendum the people of Scotland voted to remain part of a family. They voted to share economic risks and opportunities with the rest of the United Kingdom. They decided to pool resources. They voted for a fair distribution of tax and spending. They voted to tackle international issues on a collective basis and they voted for common domestic concerns to be tackled co-operatively.

Importantly, the Scottish people also voted for social solidarity with people from all parts of the United Kingdom, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) noted earlier. Today I am speaking very much as a Welshman and as someone who is proud of his identity, and indeed of his accent. I recognise that many of the concerns, hopes and aspirations of my Caerphilly constituents are shared by working people in Cowdenbeath, Carlisle, Coventry and Cornwall.

John Redwood: Can the hon. Gentleman sketch for us how Labour would have a fair financial settlement between Wales, England and Scotland? How would the block grant for Scotland be adjusted?

Wayne David: Well, we of course have an agreement—a fiscal framework—and we have a cast-iron commitment to ensuring that the Barnett formula remains in place. We have also suggested the need for a Barnett floor in Wales, in order to tackle underfunding, and I think that that principle should also be considered for the rest of the United Kingdom.

One of the key messages of the referendum campaign is that the ties that hold us together are important and real. Another lesson, however, is that there is a need for radical constitutional change. Yes, the Scottish people wish to remain part of the United Kingdom, but they also want the ability to determine their own priorities and shape their own nation's future.

Labour, as one of the signatories to the Smith agreement, welcomes the Bill. It will make real many of the commitments made by the Smith commission, and it will take Scotland forward in a number of important

respects, such as a new constitutional commitment on taxation and welfare. But the Bill also has its shortcomings. Scotland needs to have the ability to make different choices from those of a right-wing Government based here in London. That is why Labour will be putting forward amendments in Committee to strengthen the Bill. We want the Scottish Parliament to be unfettered in adding to UK benefits, and we want it to be able to create new benefits of its own. We will also seek to amend the Bill so that housing benefit is devolved in full.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) made a number of pertinent references to the Sewell convention and the need for it to operate effectively. Sound references were also made to the Human Rights Act, which needs careful consideration, because aspects of the devolution settlements in Wales and Scotland, and especially in Northern Ireland, are clearly based on that Act. Any tinkering with that Act by the Conservative Government, or even its abandonment, needs careful consideration of the implications for devolution.

Stewart McDonald: Given that the Scottish Parliament has voted to extend equality at every opportunity it has had to do so—something that this House cannot come close to claiming—does the hon. Gentleman and his party share my disappointment that full devolution of equality law is missing from the Bill?

Wayne David: There is already a reference to equality in the Bill, but it is one of the things that will need to be considered carefully in Committee, because the detail of the proposed legislation is important, but so too is the spirit.

Pete Wishart: I know that the hon. Gentleman is only here because there is no other Scottish Labour MP to make the speech, but does he not think that the Scottish Labour party really needs to rethink its whole approach to issues such as the Scotland Bill and to start reinventing itself in order to gain credibility in Scotland?

Wayne David: I think that it is important to recognise that meaningful constitutional change will require all sections of this House to unite wherever possible. I urge my SNP colleagues to recognise that this is not just a constitutional norm, but a way to make practical progress. I urge the hon. Gentleman to be gracious and generous in his comments, and perhaps we can have a discussion outside the House as well as in the Chamber.

When we consider this Bill in Committee, after discussions outside the Chamber as well as inside, it is important to take into account the work that the Scottish Parliament has been doing in this regard. I have been taking particular note of the Scottish Parliament's Devolution (Further Powers) Committee and the work of the House of Lords, which was mentioned earlier. It is also important that we refer to the work that has already been done by the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee. It is a great shame that the Government wish to do away with that Committee at a very crucial time.

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for his generous remarks about the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee and

the excellent job that it did on pre-legislative scrutiny of the Smith commission proposals. On the excellent list of devolved powers that are going to Scotland, is there anything in the water in Northern Ireland, Wales or England that would prevent us from having a similar list of powers should those nations within the Union feel that that was appropriate?

Wayne David: I thought that my hon. Friend might respond to the generous but accurate remarks that I made about him and his Committee. I hope that other Committees of the House will be able, in one way or another, to take forward the effective work that his Committee has done. We are naturally focusing on Scottish devolution, but devolution is a process that must encompass, in different ways, all parts of the United Kingdom. It is a principle that is in tune with the demands of the age. Devolution is undoubtedly the way forward for Scotland. It was Labour's Keir Hardie, a Scotsman who represented a Welsh seat—he was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds)—who pioneered devolution, it was Labour that created the Scottish Parliament, and it is Labour that really wants to take devolution forward within the context of the United Kingdom and is determined to press for it, in different ways, for the whole of the UK.

First, to consider how devolution can be developed most effectively and appropriately for different parts of the United Kingdom, we need a constitutional convention, for which Labour has argued for some time. Such a convention would look at not only devolution but the interface between those sets of constitutional changes and the other consequential changes that need to be made so that we can have a modern democracy fit for purpose.

Where decentralisation has not yet come about, people throughout the country want it, and they are right. Devolution is necessary if we are to meet the challenges we face in the modern world. In the 21st century, decision making needs to be as close to the people we represent as possible. Local, regional, Scottish, English, Welsh and Northern Irish decision making needs to be at a level that is effective, that can engage with people, and that reinforces all our people's diverse senses of identity. On that basis, we give our support to the Second Reading of this Bill so that this House, in Committee, will have a chance to make it much better and much stronger.

9.48 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): It is a great pleasure to conclude today's debate—a very good debate with a large number of contributions. We heard a large number of maiden speeches, all consistently of a very good standard.

Let me begin by saying a few words about those speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) delivered a fluent and thoughtful speech in which he covered the whole of his constituency. I think he mentioned every village—I hope so. He certainly mentioned a very large number, and if one was missed off I am sure that someone will notice.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) on an excellent speech in which she spoke passionately about childcare, the dairy industry,

and, indeed, devolution. She mentioned that she did not have an entirely successful introduction to being a Member of Parliament in terms of the tug-of-war competition, but she had a very successful maiden speech, and I congratulate her on it.

I also congratulate the SNP Members who delivered their maiden speeches today. They may, at one level, not want to be part of this House, but they certainly made very good contributions to this House today. The hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) delivered a passionate speech, which embodied her point that we in this House should respect one another. The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) told a moving family story. She also spoke passionately and will clearly be a strong defender of her constituents. The hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig) delivered a fluent and articulate speech, as did the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell); I suspect that both of them will have significant roles to play in their party in the years ahead.

The hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) delivered a strong and passionate speech, on which I congratulate her. The hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman) made an engaging speech, winning over the House with his remarks, particularly his well-made comments about the Westminster staff and the support that they provide to new MPs.

I turn now to the Labour Benches. I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) on her speech. She spoke about her background in drama and performing arts; she certainly delivered a fine performance today. She did not quite burst into song with "The Red Flag", but she recited it. Personally, I am not sure that that is the right direction for her party to be taking, but who am I to say? The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), after much determination to arrive in this place, delivered a thoughtful speech, mentioning the success of the innovative companies in his constituency. He also discussed devolution within Cambridge, and he will be aware of the measures that the Government are taking on that.

The hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) delivered an excellent speech, demonstrating a great knowledge and love of her constituency that was much appreciated. The hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) delivered an excellent speech as a successor to Dawn Primarolo; as someone who has been a tax Minister for a number of years, I too know what it is like to follow in her distinguished footsteps. The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) delivered a witty and engaging speech. He mentioned "Mr Smith Goes to Washington"; his was a "Mr Smith goes to Westminster" speech. As someone who also knows and loves that film, I hope that he does not engage in filibustering in quite the same way as James Stewart's character in that film.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) delivered a passionate speech, making the case with great sincerity that her constituency is the most beautiful seat in the country. I am not quite sure that she brought the House with her on that point, but she had a pretty good stab at it. An easier case, if I may say so, was made by the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman), who delivered an excellent speech highlighting

[Mr David Gauke]

some of the most beautiful scenery in the nation. All those speeches were excellent starts to parliamentary careers.

I also mention my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), who delivered his second speech, although he sounded like a parliamentary veteran; it was a fluent speech. Indeed, given that it was his second speech, he was one of the more senior Members speaking in this debate. A similar point could be made about the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), who also spoke extremely well.

This has been an excellent debate about an important matter. At times, there has been a strong sense of consent and a constructive approach, which I certainly welcome. To echo the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland when he opened this debate, I thank the members of the Smith commission, particularly Lord Smith, for helping us to take devolution in Scotland to the next stage after the referendum. Their hard work secured a consensus among all five parties, of which all participants can be proud. Implementing the Smith commission agreement will make the Scottish Parliament one of the most devolved in the world. The Scotland Bill represents the formal step by which we will make that transformation happen in full.

Alex Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Gauke: I appreciate that the right hon. Gentleman has not spoken for a little while, so I will give way.

Alex Salmond: The Minister will know that a lot of this debate is centred on what a dispute resolution and an adjudication would look like and in what circumstances consent could be reasonably or unreasonably withheld. He has been a Treasury Minister for five years. Can he point to a single occasion when a dispute between the Treasury and a devolved Administration—there have been many such disputes—has been resolved in favour of the devolved Administration by the Treasury?

Mr Gauke: The reality, as the right hon. Gentleman knows very well, is that there has been a spirit of working constructively from the Government across the piece. On the particular issue of welfare, concerns have been raised about what the SNP describes as a veto. Put simply, it is not a veto. The position is that there are clauses whereby, for practical reasons, the Secretary of State needs to give consent to ensure that something is practical. That consent cannot be unreasonably withheld, and if something is unreasonably withheld the courts can declare that it has been unreasonably withheld.

Ian Murray: I hope I do not get struck by lightning for agreeing with the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), but could the Minister and the Secretary of State look at clause 25, particularly subsection (3)(b), to see whether it could be redrafted to take away the ambiguity about whether or not there is a veto?

Mr Gauke: There is no veto. Our approach will be constructive throughout all stages of the Bill. I want to be clear with the House. The intention is not to block a measure in perpetuity; it is to ensure that something

that has an impact on the Department for Work and Pensions can be done practically, because DWP has to deliver it and needs to be able to ensure that it can do so.

I am pleased to say that earlier today the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury met the Deputy First Minister. They had a productive meeting and agreed to immediately start work on the fiscal framework, which works alongside the Scotland Bill, ensuring that the Scottish Parliament has the tools it needs to manage its significant new tax and spending powers. We have agreed to aim to finalise the fiscal framework by the autumn, alongside the passage of the Scotland Bill through Parliament.

Mr Graham Allen: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Gauke: I am short of time and need to make more progress before concluding.

Last year the people of Scotland made a clear choice. It is a choice that must be honoured, so it was a key commitment in this Government's manifesto that the all-party Smith commission agreement should be implemented in full. With this Bill, we deliver on those commitments. It will make the Scottish Parliament one of the most devolved legislatures in the world. It will deliver unprecedented new powers to Holyrood. It will give the Scottish Government the tools to manage their economy and make important decisions on behalf of the people of Scotland. This Bill demonstrates our willingness and determination to ensure that we fulfil our obligations. It implements the Smith commission and I hope it has the support of Members on both sides of the House. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

SCOTLAND BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Scotland Bill:
Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Committee of the whole House.

Proceedings in Committee

(2) Proceedings in Committee of the whole House shall be completed in four days.

(3) The proceedings shall be taken on the days shown in the first column of the following Table and in the order so shown.

(4) The proceedings shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the times specified in the second column of the Table.

<i>Proceedings</i>	<i>Time for conclusion of proceedings</i>
<i>First day</i> Clauses 1 to 11, new Clauses relating to Part 1, new Schedules relating to Part 1	The moment of interruption on the first day.
<i>Second day</i> Clauses 12 to 17, Schedule 1, Clause 18, new Clauses relating to Part 2, new Schedules relating to Part 2	The moment of interruption on the second day.
<i>Third day</i> Clauses 19 to 30, new Clauses relating to Part 3, new Schedules relating to Part 3	The moment of interruption on the third day.

Table

<i>Proceedings</i>	<i>Time for conclusion of proceedings</i>
<p><i>Fourth day</i></p> <p>Clauses 31 to 37, Schedule 2, Clauses 38 to 45, new Clauses relating to Part 4, new Schedules relating to Part 4</p> <p>Clauses 46 to 55, new Clauses relating to Part 5, new Schedules relating to Part 5, Clauses 56 to 58, new Clauses relating to Part 6, new Schedules relating to Part 6, Clauses 59 to 64, new Clauses relating to Part 7, new Schedules relating to Part 7, remaining proceedings on the Bill</p>	<p>Three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the fourth day.</p> <p>The moment of interruption on the fourth day.</p>

Consideration and Third Reading

(5) Any proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

(6) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

Programming committee

(7) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings in Committee of the whole House, to any proceedings on Consideration or to proceedings on Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(8) Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—(*Charlie Elphicke.*)

Question agreed to.

SCOTLAND BILL (MONEY)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Scotland Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure incurred by virtue of the Act by the Secretary of State.—(*Charlie Elphicke.*)

Question agreed to.

SCOTLAND BILL (WAYS AND MEANS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Scotland Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the imposition by virtue of a Scottish rate resolution of the Scottish Parliament of charges to income tax in relation to the income of Scottish taxpayers,

(2) the making of provision, by Act of the Scottish Parliament, for imposing a tax to be charged on the carriage of passengers by air from airports in Scotland,

(3) the making of provision, by Act of the Scottish Parliament, for imposing a tax to be charged on aggregate when it is subjected to commercial exploitation in Scotland, and

(4) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.

In this Resolution, 'Scottish rate resolution' means a resolution providing for the rate or rates payable by Scottish taxpayers for any tax year on income other than savings income, any such rate being a whole number or half a whole number or zero.—(*Charlie Elphicke.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Protection of green spaces at Capstone Valley and areas around Otterham Quay Lane (Gillingham and Rainham)

Mr Speaker: I am genuinely sorry that the Chamber is marginally less packed than it previously was, but that is no reflection on the hon. Gentleman or the quality of his petition.

9.59 pm

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I am very grateful, Mr Speaker. I wish to present a petition about the protection of green spaces at Capstone Valley and areas around Otterham Quay Lane in Gillingham and Rainham.

The petition states:

The Petition of residents of Gillingham and Rainham,

Declares that the Petitioners believe that the importance of Capstone Valley and the green lungs east of Rainham around Otterham Quay Lane should be protected from development.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to protect these much valued important green areas.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

[P001527]

Inward Investment: Southend

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Charlie Elphicke.*)

10.1 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Although it is a little disappointing that there is not a packed House to listen to what I have to say about Southend, from looking around the Chamber I can see that we have the quality. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister for Communities and Resilience on being re-elected as the MP for Rayleigh and Wickford with a huge majority, and my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) on similarly being re-elected with a large majority.

I could not be more pleased that my right hon. Friend will reply to this debate. He is only too well aware that there are not too Members left who can recall a Conservative majority Government. He and I worked together in the constituency of Basildon. During that time, we managed to change the public perception of Basildon, and it became the magnificent town it is today. We managed to turn round some negative things: with two days to go, we stopped the closure of the accident and emergency unit; we stopped the destruction of a silver birch forest; we saved three secondary schools from closure; and we got 10,000 council houses, which had been sold, repurchased because of clay heave.

I mean this in the nicest sense possible, but I say to my right hon. Friend that now there is a Conservative Government—and we are blessed with a Speaker who believes that every Member of Parliament elected to this place is equal, and that all our voices will be heard—I am absolutely determined that this Conservative Government, whom I support, will act not only on behalf of my constituents in Southend to make it an even better place than it is, but on behalf of the country. In future, I do not expect Ministers just to pay lip service to what I am asking them to do; I expect action, and tonight is the start of the action. At the end of this short debate, I hope that my right hon. Friend will see to it that Southend is granted city status.

In the position he now occupies, my right hon. Friend is following my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), now the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), now the Chief Whip, who both responded to such debates when we were in the coalition Government. Now we are a Conservative Government, I fully expect city status to be granted to Southend. In every respect, Southend qualifies to be a city. It certainly has its own distinct identity.

Southend's local authority has no overall control. There are 22 Conservatives, constituting far and away the largest party, and the Labour, Liberal, Independent and UKIP councillors have joined together to prevent the Conservatives from controlling the authority. Quite how that works from a philosophical point of view I do not know, but there is no doubt that the Conservative council did a magnificent job in restoring the fortunes of Southend. We enjoy excellent communication and transport links, and the A127 and A13 have been upgraded. The most recent development, of which my right hon. Friend is well aware, is the extension of the Tesco

junction along the A127, which has had to deal with congestion caused by employees at the RBS site and the Tesco Extra store—and, now, with the presence of London Southend airport. The extension has greatly relieved the congestion in the area.

I am not sure that constituents understand the constraints that affect Ministers. Ministers cannot ask questions or initiate debates, but I have discussed a number of points with my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge)—who is also the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—and our views on the local railway lines are very similar. For instance, c2c is absolutely magnificent. When I was the Member of Parliament for Basildon, it was known as the misery line. It is now known as the happy line, and I congratulate it on that.

However, my hon. Friend and I have some concerns about the Greater Anglia railway line. I recently made a public journey on the line with the chief executive. I was very frank with him: I said I thought it was a rotten service. The prices were too high, and the rolling stock was clapped out. I asked what he was going to do about it. The Secretary of State for Transport has now opened up a bidding process, and I understand that three companies are involved. I hope that, as local Members of Parliament all of whom enjoy, or suffer, this particular rail service—there is just one station in my area, namely Prittlewell—we shall be consulted as the bidding process continues.

If I hear another colleague say that London Southend airport is fantastic, I shall respond by saying that there is a very good side to it, but also a slightly challenging side, because the aircraft take off and land in my constituency, and not all the residents who were there before the airport expanded are entirely delighted about the increased noise. Nevertheless, I entirely accept that last year it dealt with more than a million passengers. I do not know whether my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) has flown from the airport.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): No.

Sir David Amess: My right hon. Friend must be one of the few Members who have not.

The airport now has five airline operators: Flybe, easyJet—I do not know whether Kate Moss was on a flight from Southend recently—Adria Airways, SkyWork Airlines, and Volotea. It is very popular, and it is bringing investment of all kinds into the town.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East and I are absolutely delighted that Southend United won the recent play-off and have now been promoted to the first division. I must confess that, when we were losing one-nil, the Member of Parliament for Southend West decided to leave two minutes before the end of the match. I was walking down Wembley way when I heard huge cheers, and discovered that Southend had equalised. I thought that it was too late to turn back. When I reached Stratford station, I managed to find the result on my mobile phone: we had won seven-six on penalties. That was a magnificent achievement for Southend United, and is another good reason for Southend to be declared a city.

My hon. Friend recently had the pleasure of visiting a company called Surgical Holdings, a family run business that manufactures and repairs surgical equipment for equipment for private and public hospitals. The repair of surgical instruments saves the NHS thousands of pounds, but my hon. Friend has told me that if the company continues to expand it will save even more money for the NHS.

There has already been tremendous investment in Southend. Under the coalition Government, 310 new businesses were created in Southend West alone. We now have a magnificent £3 million conference centre at the end of the pier. The longest pier in the world, it was brought down the River Thames on sailing barges. It is a wonderful thing for Southend to have. During the marvellous years of the Conservative council under the wonderful leadership of former councillor Nigel Holdcroft and Councillor John Lamb, who is now the leader, we received £2.5 million in funding as part of the city deal—I know the Minister is well briefed on that issue—and £34.5 million for infrastructure projects as part of the growth deal, including upgrades to the Kent Elms junction and the Bells junction. We received £800,000 funding for the continuation of the roll-out of the growth hub across South Essex local enterprise partnership.

My hon. Friend and I have recently been contacted by the leader of Essex County Council. It has a proposal that is being opposed by Southend council, which believes that the focus should be on achieving the best economic result rather than organisational changes. We are still to have meetings on that issue to find out what will be in Southend's best interest. I would certainly like to see the joint Anglia Ruskin, Southend and Rochford Business Park for medical excellence, which is in the vicinity of the airport, to be developed even further. This would be a major regeneration project to provide major development opportunities for innovation in medical technology.

We now have probably the best library in the country at the Forum. This is a marvellous extension of Essex University and a member of the royal family will open the building later this year. I hope that in years to come we will not just be celebrating the new year at Trafalgar Square and outside the House of Commons, but having the countdown at the Forum in Southend.

There is the problem of cliff slippage. The council has not used any Government money to tackle it. Having a picnic on the cliffs and looking across the wonderful Thames, people would think they were in the Mediterranean. The River Thames presents us with the most wonderful gift: a moving picture. If there is any way that the Minister and those in other Departments could find more private investment to deal with clay slippage, our constituents would be very grateful.

At the top of the cliff, there will be a new purpose-built museum to house securely the Saxon prince find at Prittlewell. In 2003, archaeologists excavated the site and discovered an undisturbed 7th century chamber grave beneath a mound just 100 yards from the entrance to Priory Park. This is a wonderful find. I hope the development of a new museum at the Thames will be supported by the Government. It has gained support from a number of agencies, including the British Museum, Thurrock Council and the Royal Opera House at Purfleet.

One of the many things that would make me happy as a result of this debate would be for there to be a marina in Southend. Many years ago, when Norman Clarke

and Norman Harris were the leader and deputy leader of Southend council, the proposal fell by just one vote. The last attempt to have a marina was in 2008. It would be an enormous attraction and a wonderful facility for local residents. It would provide a destination and a departure port for vessels from the upper limits of the Thames and Medway, with passages to the continent, the coast of Britain or further afield. The marina would be the jewel in the crown in achieving city status.

At the weekend, I had the privilege of attending Thames Estuary yacht club, which is an amazing development. Two years ago, it had only 130 members. Some 76 members volunteered to build this wonderful facility on the Thames estuary. The clubhouse cost £200,000, and now people are queuing up to join.

Southend pier is the most wonderful experience anyone could enjoy. It is not just about Rossi's ice cream, cockles, mussels and winkles; it is about the wonderful experience of going out on one of the trains to the end of the Thames. It is like walking on water. Any investment the Government might direct our way further to boost the pier's regeneration would be greatly welcomed.

We have found a shipwreck of international importance off Southend dating back to 1665. It is well preserved and second only to the Mary Rose. It was apparently part of the fleet that brought Charles II home in the late 17th century and is currently on the "heritage at risk" list. It would be great if a billionaire gave us some money to help with that investment opportunity.

Leigh-on-Sea is the most wonderful area anyone could have in their constituency. It is home to many thriving businesses, including Fancy Nancy, who is doing extremely well at the moment. However, the Leigh creek needs dredging, which costs about £200,000 to do properly. I am also slightly concerned about the activities of DP World and their effect on the Thames estuary.

Southend will be the alternative city of culture in 2017. This is going to be a much bigger event than that surrounding the official city of culture, but if we are to be the alternative city of culture it would be useful if we were actually a city. We have been recognised as a centre for excellence in terms of culture with the purple flag award, an accolade that only 31 towns and cities have received. We have a village green music festival, folk festivals and a gathering to rival the V Festival, and I pay tribute to Metal, the culture organisation, and, in particular, to David Stanley and his music project, a life-changing organisation enabling people with learning difficulties to demonstrate their great gifts. I am delighted to tell the House that they will be performing at the London Palladium, although unfortunately I have just had a phone call from Bruce Forsyth to say that he cannot be with us because it clashes with father's day, which I think takes precedence. We will, however, have some of the Tiller Girls there. This will be happening on Sunday 21 June at the London Palladium.

Southend is getting a sculpture done by someone called Rod Steward—not the pop artist—to mark the process of Southend becoming a city. I hope his application to the Arts Council will be successful.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to share with the House just what a wonderful place Southend-on-Sea is. It is probably the finest seaside resort not just in the country, but in the world. My right hon. Friend and other Ministers have the power to respond positively

[*Sir David Amess*]

to what Members are asking for in their constituencies. If he wants to make me happy, I hope he will do everything he can to ensure that Southend receives the investment it warrants and that it is declared a city.

10.18 pm

The Minister for Communities and Resilience (Mr Mark Francois): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) on securing this debate. As he has already told the House, we have known each other and been friends for many years, so I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate him on his knighthood and on being re-elected with such a healthy majority at the general election a few weeks ago. I am also pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) in his place. I congratulate him on his re-election. It is good to see him in good health tonight.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West has, as is customary, done a excellent job of promoting Southend, and rightly so. He listed some significant achievements of which Government and local partners can be proud. Southend is a key part of the Thames Gateway, which provides one of the biggest opportunities for investment in the UK and remains a very high priority for this Government. I am pleased to have been appointed as Minister with responsibility for the Thames Gateway.

South Essex has received some significant private sector investments in recent years—for example, the £1.5 billion investment in the new London gateway by Dubai Ports, in which the Prime Minister and UK Trade & Investment played key supporting roles, and the £100 million-plus investment in London Southend airport by Stobart. They give some idea of the scale of economic growth in the area.

Specifically with regard to Southend, I believe there are many encouraging signs of a new confidence in the area, on the back of which private sector investment is already following. National arts organisations such as Metal, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West referred, are championing and helping local artists from their base in Southend, helping to drive the arts sector locally. Metal puts on the annual village green festival in Chalkwell Park, which now attracts 40,000 visitors a year—and is growing. The Forum, in Elmer Square in the heart of Southend, opened in late 2013. It is an excellent facility where residents can access the combined resources of the municipal library, the University of Essex and South Essex college libraries—a very innovative approach. The relocated Beecroft art gallery is now housed in the old library building on Victoria Avenue with the new enterprise centre—the base from which business support services will be provided through the city deal-funded growth hub.

All these are positive signs of resurgence, as indeed is the successful promotion of Southend United to league one, after winning a nail-biting play-off at Wembley. A few moments ago, my hon. Friend gave us some insight into what happened. In football terms, Southend is literally “on the up”.

The Government have also been playing their part in the city deal. Eighteen months ago, my right hon. Friend, now the Secretary of State for Communities

and Local Government signed off the Southend-on-Sea city deal, capitalising on opportunities to increase entrepreneurship and innovation, and realise Southend’s full potential. The key ambition at the heart of the city deal is to transform the centre of Southend in order to make it a more attractive place in which to invest. Over time, the Victoria Avenue gateway to the town centre will be remodelled. The city deal will have a catalytic effect, signalling the Government’s confidence in Southend.

As part of the city deal, the Government contributed £1.8 million for the direct business support programme and over £650,000 of funding for the central library redevelopment. This is creating incubator space for up to 10 businesses at any one time, supporting over 100 jobs. It will lever in private sector investment, with over £4 million secured so far, and will provide direct business support for small and medium-sized enterprises across the south Essex area. Over 3,000 businesses have been engaged so far and over 170 assisted to improve performance. John Lamb, the Conservative deputy leader of Southend council at the time, said:

“Government is showing confidence in what we are achieving in our town”.

I know that city status is a subject close to my hon. Friend’s heart. The awarding of city status is part of the royal prerogative, and royal charters have tended to be awarded to mark significant occasions such as the millennium or royal jubilees. As with individual honours, there are no published criteria, but issues that are considered include the history of a town, its vibrancy, identity and community—all areas, to be fair, where Southend has a strong case to make. In recent years, the Cabinet Office has run competitions and sought bids, but we do not know when the next process might be, although I have to say that my hon. Friend’s intentions are now well and truly on the record. When there is next an opportunity to bid, I am sure that he and indeed our hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East will be very firmly at the front of the queue.

Building on the city deal experience, the Government have agreed growth deals with all of England’s 39 local enterprise partnerships. The South East LEP has one of the largest allocations of local growth funding—so far, £488 million has been committed through to 2021. For Southend, which remains a critical anchor at the eastern end of the Thames Gateway, the growth deal has committed £35.6 million to A127 improvements, which is on top of funding previously approved. A number of junctions along the route, including at Bell and Cuckoo corners and at Kent Elms, will be improved, and I am sure that all south Essex residents will be grateful for those improvements. The Government are also investing £6.7 million to develop the Southend growth hub and to help improve the area around the Victoria Avenue gateway to Southend, which I mentioned a few minutes ago. Growth deal expansion has also committed £3.2 million to the development of a 55-acre business park adjacent to London Southend airport, as part of the Southend and Rochford joint area action plan—the JAAP as it is known—and I pay tribute to those two authorities for their co-operation to make that a reality. I recognise the positive effect regional airports can have on economic growth and London Southend airport has certainly been a success—over 1 million passengers a year, scooping industry awards for growth and for service.

The Government have also very recently announced the three companies selected to tender for the renewal of the East Anglia rail franchise, which includes the Liverpool street to Southend Victoria line. Those three competitors are Abellio Greater Anglia, FirstGroup East Anglia, and National Express East Anglia trains. That process will begin in earnest when invitations to tender are issued in August, and we expect the new franchise to operate from October next year, which should benefit Southend commuters travelling to London—who, indeed, do deserve an improved service.

We have already seen new private sector investments on the back of this new-found confidence in Southend: a refurbished Palace hotel, a decision just the other evening to green-light the Marine plaza development, and an exciting proposal, with significant support from the coastal communities fund of about £1.2 million, for a new lagoon. Perhaps it will also be possible to see the marina development, which I know my hon. Friend has felt passionately about for some time.

We should not rest on our laurels, but the future for inward investment remains bright. It is important as we go forward that Southend capitalises on these opportunities. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor used his first speech after the election to announce a new round of devolution deals and city-county deals. This represents a further opportunity for Southend to work with its neighbours and take greater control of its own economic destiny, to build on the many advantages that it has and to work with the private sector to deliver the skills, jobs, businesses and investment that the country needs.

My hon. Friend made much of Southend's cultural advantages and a recent report from Warwick University business school claims that nationally the creative sector is growing at four times the rate of the economy as whole, so Southend can expect to benefit from its growing specialisation in this sector.

The attractiveness of Southend, of which the cultural offer is a key component, means that people want to relocate there, which in turn is leading to clear interest from the private sector in investing in Southend, in businesses and in new housing. These are all advantages Southend has been successful in exploiting over the past few years and we have every reason to believe it will continue to do so for the benefit of the town and its residents. They will have no firmer champion in trying to exploit those advantages than my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West. He has put the Government on notice tonight that he intends to be tenacious in promoting the interests of his constituents. We already knew that, as he has been doing that for over 30 years. Nevertheless, we cannot say we have not been told.

I believe the future for Southend is a positive one. I thank my hon. Friend again for his warm words and his recognition that this Government have helped to lay the foundations for the future growth and prosperity of Southend. We can fully expect my hon. Friend and his neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), to continue to keep us up to the mark in making sure Southend remains a wonderful place in which to live and work and a wonderful resort where people can take time on holiday—where they can enjoy the cultural advantages it has to offer and where they can enjoy themselves with their families.

For all these reasons, I believe Southend has a wonderful future, not least as it is represented by two excellent Members of Parliament.

Question put and agreed to.

10.29 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 8 June 2015

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): A meeting of the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council was held in Brussels on 18-19 May. Fiona Hyslop, Scottish Government Minister for Culture, Europe and External Affairs, represented the UK for the cultural and audiovisual section of the Council and Shan Morgan, the UK's deputy permanent representative, represented the UK for the sport section of the Council.

Culture and audiovisual

Ministers had a first exchange of views on the Commission's recently published digital single market strategy presented by Commissioner Oettinger.

The strategy was generally welcomed, although many member states, including the UK, raised concerns about the implication for copyright and for funding content. In a digital single market both consumer rights to access content, and producer rights to generate income from their material, need to be safeguarded. This would help foster innovation, cultural diversity, and economic growth.

The UK noted that there is now a real opportunity to look across the market and understand how to best deliver for Europe's creative industries and consumers.

It was also agreed that the audiovisual media services directive (AVMSD) remained valid in many domains, but needed to be adapted to take into account the consequences of convergence.

Driven by issues around the broadcast of Russian language content the Baltic states sought agreement to focus the forthcoming review of the directive on territorial jurisdiction and derogation possibilities as well as procedural issues. Most member states agreed to solve such issues through enhanced co-operation, stressing the importance of the principle of freedom of expression. There was also general agreement on the importance of the country of origin principle—whereby each provider of audiovisual media services comes under the jurisdiction of only one EU member state—as a cornerstone of European audiovisual policy.

It was also agreed that the review would need to take into account issues such as content funding, advertising, and protection of minors.

Following the policy debate, the Council adopted conclusions on cultural and creative crossovers to stimulate innovation, economic sustainability, and social inclusion. These highlight how culture and artistic creativity can trigger innovation and enhance competitiveness in industry and business, as well as in education, healthcare and the environment.

The cultural and creative sectors cover a broad range from arts, crafts, architecture, heritage, libraries and publishing, to film, television, games, music, advertising, and design. Despite numerous studies that have

demonstrated the significant contribution of these sectors to GDP, job creation and exports, the synergies with other sectors have not yet been fully explored.

The Council also adopted a decision designating Plovdiv in Bulgaria and Matera in Italy as European capitals of culture in 2019, following a recommendation from the Commission based on the reports of the selection panel and a positive opinion from the European Parliament.

The European capitals of culture initiative was launched in 1985, and over 40 cities have been designated since then. It aims to highlight the richness of European culture, and both its diversity and shared features.

Under other business, the Council was updated by the Commission on the culture and cultural heritage aspects of the Da'esh threat in Iraq and Syria: where on the one hand cultural sites are being destroyed for ideological reasons, and on the other archaeological objects are being illicitly traded to finance terrorist activities. The Commission was of the view that additional measures might be needed to prevent terrorist financing from illicit trafficking. The Portuguese Minister suggested, and offered to co-ordinate, a brief joint statement of Culture Ministers expressing condemnation and sorrow vis-a-vis the ongoing destruction.

The Council then took note of concerns from the Polish delegation, backed by several other member states, regarding the maximum threshold of €5 million for small-scale projects financed from the European regional development fund. The Commission noted that these projects are designed to benefit small-scale infrastructures, and that alternatives exist to complement this particular funding stream.

The Council also took note of information from the Latvian presidency on the main outcomes of the stocktaking exercise relating to Council conclusions on cultural governance which had been adopted in November 2012.

Finally, under this part of the agenda, the Council took note from the Luxembourg delegation of its main priorities in the field of culture when it takes over the presidency for the period July-December 2015. These will include cross-sectoral co-operation on cultural issues, and the role of culture in the EU's international relations, especially those relating to co-operation and development.

Sport

The Council adopted conclusions on maximising the role of grassroots sport in developing transversal skills, especially among young people. They highlight how voluntary activities in sport which act as a method of non-formal and informal learning can help young people acquire skills and transversal competences that complement formal education and enhance their employability.

Sport is the largest non-governmental movement in Europe. Voluntary activities in the sport sector mainly take place at grassroots level in the role either of facilitator, organiser, or participant.

There was then a policy debate on physical activity as an essential element of quality education. The promotion of physical activity is a priority of EU policy making in sport, and the debate included a comprehensive exchange on best practice. There was agreement that sport needed to be considered as an integral part of school life, with encouragement for young people to

engage in extracurricular sport and physical activity. The extension of the use of community facilities was recommended to ensure that sports facilities are widely available; as was the fulfilment of the necessary safety and technical standards in partnership with local sports organisations and clubs.

The Council was subsequently briefed by the presidency on the state of play regarding the European Union's signing of the Council of Europe convention on the manipulation of sports competitions. To date 18 countries—of which nine EU member states—have signed the convention, which is expected to come into force by 2016. With regards to EU signature, several delegations had submitted written questions to the Council Legal Service, who would provide a written opinion in June.

The Council was also briefed by the EU representatives on the outcome of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) meeting which took place in Montreal earlier in May. The meeting was focused on issues relating to the anti-doping code, the budget, and data protection.

The EU is represented on the WADA foundation board—its supreme decision-making body—by Belgium, Luxembourg, and Malta. There are 38 members composed of representatives of the Olympic movement and national Governments.

WADA was established in 1999 to promote the fight against doping in sport. Its main activities include education, research, the development of anti-doping capacities, and monitoring of the world anti-doping code.

Finally, under other business the Council took note of information from the Luxembourg delegation of its main priorities in the field of sport when it takes over the presidency for the period July-December 2015. These will include the promotion of physical activity in schools; double careers in sport; EU representation and co-ordination in WADA; and the potential adoption of the Council of Europe convention on the manipulation of sports competitions.

[HCWS17]

Petitions

Monday 8 June 2015

OBSERVATIONS

HEALTH

Parking outside Fairmore Medical Practice in Nelson

The Petition of residents of Nelson,

Declares that the Petitioners believe patients of Fairmore Medical Practice of 211-213 Leeds Road, Nelson are having difficulty finding suitable parking places near the practice, and that the Petitioners believe there is a vacant site on Leeds Road, Nelson near the practice that could be used as a car park facility.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to support the Fairmore Medical Practice Patient Participation Group in securing additional parking spaces and to encourage NHS England to reconsider their funding request to support extending car parking facilities at Leeds Road.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Andrew Stephenson, *Official Report*, 25 March 2015; Vol. 594, c. 1543.]

[P001485]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Health:

This is a matter for local determination. It is for NHS England locally to decide whether funding additional parking spaces near Fairmore Medical Practice is an appropriate use of public money.

SCOTLAND

Development on greenbelt land in Edinburgh

The Petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that the Local Development Plan 2015–2020 has proposed a number of sites on the south side of Edinburgh for development; further that local residents want the sites at Broomhills, Old Station Road, Burdiehouse, The Drum, Ellen's Glen and Moredun to be exempt from the new plan; further that local residents, community groups and the local community councils are concerned by the likely impact on local amenities if these plans are approved; further that the Petitioners call for the plan

to be scrapped and a proper process to be put in place to determine the future development of the city which works in conjunction with local communities and not against them; and further that a local petition on this matter was signed by 130 individuals.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Secretary of State for Scotland to encourage the Scottish Government to remove the sites on the south side of Edinburgh (Broomhills, Old Station Road, Burdiehouse, The Drum, Ellen's Glen and Moredun) from the Local Development Plan's proposals for development and to put a process in place to determine future development of Edinburgh which works in conjunction with local communities.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Ian Murray, *Official Report*, 25 March 2015; Vol. 594, c 1545.]

[P001488]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Scotland, received 5 June 2015:

The decision-making process for planning applications in Scotland are devolved and are properly for the relevant local authorities, the Scottish Government and their agencies.

Housing development on Midmar Paddock, Edinburgh

The Petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that Midmar Paddock in Edinburgh is used by hundreds of people every week for open air exercise with children and dogs; further that it is green belt land, a special landscape area, designated open space and a local nature conservation site; further that it is under imminent threat of housing development and a planning application is expected shortly; and further that a local Petition on this matter was signed by 330 individuals.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Secretary of State for Scotland to encourage the Scottish Government to intervene to stop housing development on Midmar Paddock.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Ian Murray, *Official Report*, 25 March 2015; Vol.594, c.1544.]

[P001487]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Scotland, received 5 June 2015:

The decision-making process for planning applications in Scotland are devolved and are properly for the relevant local authorities, the Scottish Government and their agencies.

ORAL ANSWERS

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