

Tuesday
9 June 2015

Volume 596
No. 13



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 9 June 2015

House of Commons

Tuesday 9 June 2015

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

EU Sanctions (Russia)

1. **Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): What his policy is on continuation of EU sanctions on Russia until that country complies in full with its obligations under the Minsk agreements. [900175]

7. **Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): What his policy is on continuation of EU sanctions on Russia until that country complies in full with its obligations under the Minsk agreements. [900181]

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): Sanctions were imposed because Russia invaded and annexed Crimea and intervened in eastern Ukraine. They can be rolled back when Russia has taken steps to comply with international law and its own commitments, starting with the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

Alec Shelbrooke: The sanctions on the Russian regime are clearly starting to have an effect, but does my right hon. Friend agree that support for the democratically elected Government of Ukraine is also important? Will he describe the action that the Government are taking to support the democratically elected president, President Poroshenko, in moving forward to defend Ukraine from Russia?

Mr Lidington: I completely agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of helping the elected Government of Ukraine. The United Kingdom has provided Ukraine with technical assistance to support economic and administrative reform as well as humanitarian aid and non-lethal military assistance. We stand ready to discuss with the Ukrainian Government in what further ways we might be able to help them in their task.

Mr Jackson: Will my right hon. Friend commit to working with the Defence Secretary to ensure that the toughest possible sanctions are applied to Russia until all the Minsk II protocols are met, and that Russia is aware that threats to Moldova and the Baltic states will result in the most severe repercussions?

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend is right to allude to the fact that sanctions can be strengthened as well as reduced. It all depends on what Russia chooses to do. We have demonstrated our strong commitment to our NATO allies in the Baltic states through our participation in air policing and NATO training exercises in that region, and our solidarity with them will certainly continue.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): We hear this morning of even more tragic deaths in Ukraine. When will all this stop? Sanctions are not enough. The Russians are looking closely at us as we run down our defence forces and do not commit to the 2% spending level. That is a fact—the Secretary of State does not like it, but the fact is that a weak Britain, weak in Europe, is not good for our country.

Mr Lidington: I think it is generally accepted that there is not a military solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine. That is why we are determined to continue with the diplomatic and political path on which we, together with our partners and allies, have embarked. We need to see the Minsk agreements implemented in full and, in particular, for the OSCE monitoring mission to be given access to the areas controlled by the separatists, which is still not happening.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I am pleased to hear the Minister say that there is no military solution in this case. Over the weekend the Foreign Secretary reportedly said that “unnecessary provocations” must be avoided when dealing with Russia but, when asked, he did not rule out the placement of US nuclear missiles on UK soil. Will he take the opportunity to rule that out very firmly?

Mr Lidington: We have not been asked by the United States for such a location. If we received such a request, we would consider it on its merits in the way that successive British Governments always have done.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Given that evidence was submitted to the Foreign Affairs Committee that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had no in-house Crimea experts at the time of the Russian annexation, does the Minister agree that greater investment is required in our analytical capabilities?

Mr Lidington: We have an extremely talented team of analysts working in the eastern European and central Asian directorate within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In the light of events over the past 18 months, we have taken steps to strengthen the capacity of that side of the FCO. It is fair to say that most Governments throughout the world had hoped on the basis of the past 25 years' experience that Russia was moving towards integration in a rules-based international order. It is clear from the actions that Russia has taken in the past year that that cannot be guaranteed and we need to respond accordingly.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The G7 communiqué agreed in Germany states that “we...stand ready to take further restrictive measures in order to increase cost on Russia should its actions so require. We expect

Russia to stop trans-border support of separatist forces and to use its considerable influence over the separatists to meet their Minsk commitments in full.”

Given the clear evidence that Russia continues to pursue its proxy war in the Ukraine, what more will the Government do to ensure European unity and maximum pressure on Russia in the sanctions process? On today of all days, does the Minister agree that our role as a strong voice for united European action in the face of Russian aggression would be helped if we did not leave the European Union—a move that would delight President Putin?

Mr Lidington: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his final words. If he looks at how the United Kingdom Government have been engaged since the Ukraine crisis began, he will see that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have been decisive in getting a tough EU sanctions regime in place against Russia. We are actively engaged in contingency planning should those sanctions need to be further strengthened in response to Russia’s actions. When I saw the Russian ambassador last week, I emphasised to him the need for the Minsk agreements to be implemented in full, including access to all territory for the external observers.

EU Reform

2. **Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): What discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on prospects for reform of the EU. [900176]

6. **Mark Menzies** (Fylde) (Con): What discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on prospects for reform of the EU. [900180]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have already started talking to our counterparts about our agenda for change in Britain’s relationship with the EU. We have set out British concerns with the status quo and the areas where we need to see change.

Graham Evans: The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, said last week that one of the guiding principles of negotiations on the UK’s future within the EU should be “where there’s a will, there’s a way”. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this clearly shows a real willingness of our EU partners to work with us on reform and find a flexible solution?

Mr Hammond: We were very heartened by the German Chancellor’s comments. The great majority, perhaps all, of our EU partners want Britain to remain in the European Union. They understand now, because the Prime Minister has set it out to them, what needs to be done to make that a possibility, and we are confident that they will now work with us to achieve that over the coming months.

Mark Menzies: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the crisis in the eurozone over Greece’s payments to its creditors provides us with yet another opportunity to reform some of the treaties of the EU?

Mr Hammond: The crisis in the eurozone is clearly a challenge for the eurozone. Part of our agenda is to ensure that a robust framework is in place to regulate the relationships between the eurozone countries that will integrate more closely in the future and the non-eurozone countries such as Britain that are in the EU and need to be sure that they will be treated fairly and appropriately as the eurozone integrates further.

20. [900194] **Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): Will the Foreign Secretary tell us what treaty changes the Government want to achieve?

Mr Hammond: The Prime Minister set out in a number of publications and speeches the key areas in which we need to make change. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has ever engaged in a process of negotiation, but if I were to produce a piece of paper with our red lines and bottom lines on it, we would be shot; our negotiating position would be destroyed. We do not intend to proceed in that way.

17. [900191] **Mr Douglas Carswell** (Clacton) (UKIP): Are there any circumstances in which, if the Foreign Secretary fails to secure agreement for real reform from our counterparts, he will join the out campaign—or is he in at any price?

Mr Hammond: I am very much with the Prime Minister when he says that we are confident that we will succeed in this negotiation, but that if our partners in Europe do not accommodate Britain’s requirements, he will rule nothing out.

22. [900196] **Lucy Frazer** (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Like many constituencies, South East Cambridgeshire contains many industries that compete in the international markets, as well as many small businesses. Will the Secretary of State engage as many of those businesses as possible in the debate on reform?

Mr Hammond: Yes, indeed. The business view is important, and I have no doubt that it will make its view clear during the referendum campaign, but I emphasise again that the British people must make the ultimate decision.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): Will the Government’s objectives, which the Foreign Secretary will not tell us about, require a treaty change, no treaty change or a deferred treaty change?

Mr Hammond: The Prime Minister has been clear about the areas in which we need change, and I have referred to one of them this morning: the relationship between the eurozone and the non-eurozone has to be definitive and protected so that we can be confident that our interests will be protected in the future. It is our belief and our understanding, and the legal advice that we are receiving, that the reforms that we want to see around access to welfare benefits, which were set out very specifically in the Conservative party manifesto, will require treaty change in order to proof them against judicial challenge in the European courts.

Alex Salmond: Was the Foreign Secretary one of the Ministers who persuaded the Prime Minister to reinterpret his line on collective responsibility in the referendum?

Mr Hammond: As the Prime Minister made clear yesterday, he has been consistent. Indeed, the comments that he made in his press conference yesterday afternoon were exactly the same as the comments that he made in this House last week. He feels that his previous comments were misinterpreted. He has now clarified the situation and we are able to move on.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): As a sign that Europe is open to reform and is willing to renegotiate, would it not be sensible for Her Majesty's Government to help Switzerland enforce its referendum result, getting it out of the free movement of people, as a model for British renegotiation?

Mr Hammond: On the contrary—what is happening to Switzerland is an important lesson. I have heard many people outside this House and one or two inside it talking about the Norwegian model or the Swiss model, implying that it is possible to partake fully in the single market without having to comply with single market rules. Of course, that is not the experience that the Norwegians or the Swiss have had. Access to the single market has a price, and the price is contributing to the EU budget, complying with all the EU's rules and having no vote on how those rules are made.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Prime Minister created utter confusion yesterday on the subject of collective Cabinet responsibility and the Government's position on the EU referendum. Can the right hon. Gentleman clarify for the House whether Ministers will be allowed to campaign against the Prime Minister's position during the referendum?

Mr Hammond: The Prime Minister has made the position clear. Ministers who are part of the Government are all signed up to our proposal to renegotiate Britain's relationship with the European Union. We are all committed to success in that exercise, but we do not yet know what the outcome will be, and until we know what the outcome will be, we do not know what position the Government will take. It is simply hypothetical at this point to talk about who will be allowed to do what in relation to a position that we have not yet defined.

Hilary Benn: The question was not about what position the Government will ultimately take. It was about whether Ministers will be allowed to campaign against the Prime Minister's view, whatever view he finally reaches. Having got no answer on that one, let us try another. Once the negotiations are completed, the Government will have a responsibility to put their view forward and provide the British people with information that they need to take their decision. With this in mind, and bearing in mind that the Foreign Secretary last year indicated that the Government would need to be prepared to stand up from the table and walk away if necessary, what assessment has the Foreign Secretary made of the consequences for jobs, growth and investment if Britain were to leave the European Union?

Mr Hammond: The Government's position on that is very clear. We believe that Britain will be better off in a reformed European Union. The British economy clearly benefits from access to a single market of 500 million people, but this is a democracy and we are very clear that there are areas of the way the European Union

operates which have become unacceptable to the British people. We need to get reform in those areas in order to have the continued consent of the British people for our membership, and thus access to that vital single market.

ISIL: Iraq and Syria

3. **Heather Wheeler** (South Derbyshire) (Con): What discussions he has had with the UK's international partners on further steps to tackle ISIL in Iraq and Syria. [900177]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): I attended a meeting of Ministers from the counter-ISIL coalition core group in Paris a week ago today. We discussed recent events in Iraq and Syria and progress in pushing back ISIL in Iraq since last summer. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also discussed ISIL with world leaders during the G7 summit and announced plans for increased UK support to Iraq.

Heather Wheeler: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Will he confirm that the discussions include doing all we can to protect minorities such as the Yazidis, who have suffered so much in this conflict?

Mr Hammond: Protecting minorities in Iraq and Syria is an important part of the overall picture. Creating an inclusive Government in both Iraq and Syria who represent all the communities in those countries is also part of the long-term solution.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): So far, 700 British citizens have travelled to Syria and Iraq, and some to Yemen, in order to fight for ISIL and al-Qaeda in the South Arabian Peninsula. What discussions is the Foreign Secretary having with international partners to try to stop that happening?

Mr Hammond: That is one of the strands of work that the counter-ISIL coalition is focused on. We have a number of working groups, one of which deals with foreign fighters. We have made considerable progress, particularly with our Turkish colleagues, in ensuring that we do everything possible to identify and intercept those seeking to reach Syria through Turkey. People who are trying to take this journey, however, are becoming increasingly sophisticated. I have seen reports recently of journeys that are routed via Canada to get to Turkey and then into Syria, rather than going directly from the UK. It is, therefore, a continuing struggle.

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): The US President says that the counter-ISIL strategy needs further development; the Sunni Speaker of Parliament said during a US visit that they need a Sunni national guard; and, of course, the Kurds are challenged to fight ISIL over a 1,000 km border. Is my right hon. Friend confident that we have enough resources on the ground and that our embassy is well enough resourced to be able to handle those challenges and to make sure that the strategy is developed and put in place?

Mr Hammond: I can tell my hon. Friend that we have surged our political support to our embassy in Baghdad and our consulate general in Erbil, with a number of

additional Foreign Office personnel being moved out there. He is absolutely right to say, however, that there is a need for a political initiative to address the alienation of the Sunni community. That involves the creation of a national guard and a repeal of the de-Ba'athification laws, in order to allow Sunnis to participate fully in the Iraqi state.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The Prime Minister has announced that an additional 125 British troops will be deployed to assist with counter-IED training and logistics in Iraq, but President Obama has said that US personnel sometimes have more training capacity than there are recruits for that training. Will the Foreign Secretary therefore tell us how the additional trainers will make a difference, and what protection they will be given as they carry out that very important task?

Mr Hammond: Yes; the hon. Lady makes an important point. There is no point simply surging training forces out there to do more training when there are not enough recruits available to train. What we have always said is that we will reinforce our support where there is something specific we can do and where we can bring some value to the table. Sadly, because of our experience in Afghanistan and in the previous Iraq campaign, counter-IED training is a British niche capability, and that is what our troops will be doing. It is a much-needed requirement and we are glad to be able to provide it. In terms of protection, the British forces deployed to Iraq proper will be within US perimeters and protected by US forces.

Economic Migrants: North Africa

4. **Mr Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con): What his policy is on the potential role of his Department in returning illegal economic migrants from north Africa to their countries of origin. [900178]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): We remain firm in our belief that a comprehensive plan is needed to tackle the problem of irregular migration. The most useful development towards stopping the flow of illegal migrants would be the formation of a unity government in Libya, and we are working with European Union partners to achieve that. We are also working with colleagues in the Department for International Development and the EU to support countries of origin; reinforce security in countries of transit; and, with the Ministry of Defence, save lives in the Mediterranean.

Mr Burns: Does my hon. Friend agree that the current instability in Libya means that its borders are not being properly policed and that, as he says, if the warring parties could get a ceasefire and form a unity government, that would help tighten up the borders and stop the tide of economic migration to southern Europe?

Mr Ellwood: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. Although the maritime component has much the highest profile, it is the transit and trafficking operations that need to be stopped. Parties and stakeholders in Libya are coming together in Morocco—in fact, the conversation started yesterday under United Nations envoy Bernardino León—and we hope they will finally be successful.

Mr Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): The problem in Libya obviously stems from much further away than Libya itself, so the stabilisation of Libya is not the solution. What will the Government do to make sure that people do not need to flee to southern Europe, because that is the root of the problem?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman is right in part, but as I have just pointed out, it is not simply the transit issues that are important. There is a maritime component, on which we are working with Operation Triton, and there is also the source countries, so there are three parts to the solution. However, if Libya is able to provide the stability that is needed and to provide its own security, the trafficking operations can be curtailed.

Mr Keith Simpson (Broadland) (Con): Has the Department been able to assess from intelligence exactly who is behind the trafficking? If we can only prevent the trafficking and prevent individuals from making a lot of money, that will dry up the problem.

Mr Ellwood: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. As I say, there are complex aspects to tackling this problem. It is important to understand what is happening in the source countries, notably Nigeria and Somalia. We are working with our DFID colleagues to make sure that happens. It is, however, worth pointing that the traffickers—terrorist organisations and criminals—are highly organised. They charge about \$1,000 a seat to make the journey from Africa to Europe. We must make sure that this stops.

19. [900193] **Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the Minister also look to the humanity of those escaping places such as Libya, rather than being driven solely by *Daily Mail*-style quotas? Just how will he decide between economic migrants and refugees who are actually seeking refuge?

Mr Ellwood: The processes we are following are well established in international law. I commend the work of Federica Mogherini, the EU lead on this. In April, she brought together EU member states on the common security and defence policy operation that will ensure we are able to prevent the boats from leaving Libya in the first place.

EU Referendum

5. **Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): What assessment he has made of public support for holding a referendum on the UK's membership of the EU. [900179]

14. **Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): What assessment he has made of public support for holding a referendum on the UK's membership of the EU. [900188]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): As it happens, I have made an assessment of public support for holding a referendum on the UK's membership of the EU. The only recent poll that actually matters delivered a clear mandate for the only party that offered a credible commitment to hold such a referendum.

Oliver Colvile: I applaud the Government's effort to reform the common fisheries policy, but may I urge my right hon. Friend to continue to reform the EU to help businesses further, including the fishing industry in my Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport constituency?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of course, we have already achieved some success in relation to the fishing industry, demonstrating that it is possible to change things in the UK's interest within the EU. One of the key drivers of reform is the need for Europe to up its game to generate more economic growth to create the jobs and the prosperity that the continent needs, which will be good for all 28 member states, not just for Britain.

Crispin Blunt: The opportunity presented by the referendum to resolve this profound choice over our role in the world for at least a generation will be wasted if the process is seen as a fix in favour of the establishment side of the argument. Will the Foreign Secretary ensure that he supports and enables independent analysis of the costs and benefits of the choice to be presented to the British people by Committees of this House, and that both sides of the argument in the referendum will be treated and funded fairly?

Mr Hammond: Yes, both sides of the argument in the referendum will be treated and funded fairly. I shall have more to say about that in the Second Reading debate later. In relation to Committees of the House, my Department always seeks to co-operate with them in any way it can.

Jo Cox (Batley and Spen) (Lab): The previous Government carried out a detailed assessment of what the European Union has delivered for the people of the United Kingdom—known as the balance of competences review—yet all has gone quiet. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell me when his Government will come forward with an overview of all 32 reports to show the British people what the European Union has delivered, and help to inform the debate?

Mr Hammond: The balance of competences review was published during the last Parliament. It was always intended to be a factual assessment of the balance of competences that could be drawn on by all parties in the forthcoming debate. As a body of factual information, it is already proving its worth. In fact, a number of other countries in Europe have started to draw on information in our balance of competences review for use in debate in their own countries.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I join the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) in urging the Foreign Secretary to use the negotiations as an opportunity to achieve the fundamental reform that we need of the common fisheries policy—a policy that has been an unmitigated disaster for fishing stocks, the fishing industry and the fishing communities that depend on them. Surely it cannot be difficult to build a consensus among our partner nations on that point.

Mr Hammond: As the right hon. Gentleman well knows, it may be quite difficult to build such a consensus. I promise that I will take on board the comments that he and my hon. Friend have made, as we put together our agenda.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The Prime Minister's in/out referendum is widely popular in north Northamptonshire. As my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) said, it needs to be a fair referendum if the result is to be accepted by the nation. Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that the Government will not seek to campaign, and that there will be a *purdah* period for the referendum?

Mr Hammond: I understand my hon. Friend's concern. I think he is referring to the media comments about the proposal to disapply section 125 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. I shall have more to say about that, including a detailed explanation, during my Second Reading speech later today. I hope that I will satisfy his concerns then.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Peter Grant.

24. [900198] **Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP):** Thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me to speak for the first time in this Chamber.

As part of the right hon. Gentleman's assessment of public support for holding a referendum, what discussions has he had with all parties in Scotland about the massive public support that there is for extending the franchise for the referendum to 16 and 17-year-olds, who will, after all, be the people who have to live longest with the result, whatever that might be?

Mr Hammond: Our position is that the appropriate franchise for a United Kingdom question—a question about the future of the whole country—is the Westminster franchise. I know there are people in this House who think we should review the scope of the Westminster franchise, and that is another debate. We are very clear that the franchise for this referendum should be the Westminster franchise, and that it would not be appropriate, as an exception, to include 16 and 17-year-olds.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): Many constituents in Basingstoke have expressed their support for a referendum on our future membership of the EU. Local businesses, in particular, are keen for it to happen sooner rather than later. What assessment has the Foreign Secretary made of whether the referendum can be held sooner—perhaps even in 2016—rather than waiting until 2017, as was indicated in the manifesto?

Mr Hammond: As my right hon. Friend will know, the legislation sets 31 December 2017 as the latest possible date for the referendum, but the Prime Minister has made it clear that we do not intend to wait until the end of 2017. We will hold the referendum as soon as we are ready to do so. The ball will be firmly in the court of our EU partners. If they embrace our agenda with enthusiasm and facilitate a rapid move forward, a referendum in 2016 may be possible.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): On the timing, and given the importance of this question for the country as a whole, will the right hon. Gentleman have regard to the respect agenda for the devolved countries of the United Kingdom and guarantee that the referendum will not be held on the same day as the elections to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly, in line with the Electoral Commission's recommendation?

Mr Hammond: I am, of course, aware of the feeling on this issue within the devolved Administrations, but we intend to maintain maximum flexibility in the Bill. I shall explain why that is in the debate that follows.

Burundi

8. **Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): What steps his Department has taken to address the security situation in Burundi and to support the emergence of conditions conducive to inclusive and peaceful elections in that country. [900182]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): The Minister for Africa, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), has called on all parties to end the violence and respect the principles of the Arusha agreement. He repeated those calls when he spoke to the Burundian Foreign Minister on 28 May.

Mark Durkan: I thank the Minister for that answer. He and the Minister for Africa will be aware that just this week civil society representatives have called for the replacement of the UN special envoy who is meant to be mediating the dialogue. The Burundi electoral commission's legitimacy is also being questioned, and it has now scrambled together a date for an election in circumstances that are particularly adverse, with repression still at play, refugees unable to return and armed youth groups not disarming. What will be the Africa Minister's message to international partners and the Burundi Government at the African Union meeting?

Mr Ellwood: We need to focus on the Arusha agreement. The UK Government are extremely concerned about the instability in Burundi that the hon. Gentleman articulates and are working actively within the region, with the African Union and the international community, to resolve the crisis.

23. [900197] **Stephen Phillips** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The instability is principally being caused, of course, by President Nkurunziza's desire to avoid the constitutional term limits, which threatens not only Burundi but the region as a whole. What discussions has my hon. Friend had with Ministers in Burundi's neighbouring countries about their attitudes to that extension to the constitutional term limits?

Mr Ellwood: First, I acknowledge my hon. and learned Friend's interest in and understanding of that part of the world. He is absolutely right that there needs to be a regional solution, and I believe that the only way forward for future stability involves President Nkurunziza stepping down and a political solution in line with the Arusha principles.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): The situation in Burundi reminds us of the risk of mass atrocities and the need for the international system to be more effective in preventing them and responding to them. What is the Foreign Office's attitude to the French initiative, which proposes veto restraint by the permanent five members of the United Nations Security Council in cases in which mass atrocities might have occurred?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to illustrate that the situation is about what is happening not just in Burundi but in neighbouring Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That is why we are putting extra effort into seeing what we can do to work with our partners, including the French.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Is it not the case that the office of the President, the Opposition parties and the constitutional court in Burundi need to ensure that peace breaks out, not violence, and that all parties need to agree a new date for the presidential and parliamentary elections?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend is right that the elections were delayed because of the dangers and the hostilities that were taking place. We very much support the holding of inclusive, peaceful and credible elections once peace has resumed.

MV Seaman Guard Ohio

9. **Ian Lavery** (Wansbeck) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with his Indian counterpart on the continued detention of crew members of MV Seaman Guard Ohio in that country. [900183]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I can only imagine how difficult the situation continues to be for the men and their families, and I share their frustration. We have repeatedly raised this case with the Indian Government at the highest levels, including with Prime Minister Modi. The case is now before the Supreme Court bench in New Delhi, and we expect the response in July.

Ian Lavery: There has been meeting after meeting and discussion after discussion with the Government and authorities in India, yet my constituent Nick Dunn and four other former British soldiers are still being detained in India. They are innocent people. What more can the Minister and the Government do to ensure that they are returned to the UK as soon as practicably possible? Can he give the families a glimmer of hope, for goodness' sake?

Mr Swire: The hon. Gentleman is right to continue to campaign for his constituents. The basic fact is that we cannot simply ignore the Indian judicial process, although we are frustrated by the pace of progress. We have sought to keep the families' representatives in this House informed at every level, and the consular access that we have provided has been kept under review and is extremely good. I say to the hon. Gentleman, and to the three new Members who represent those who are currently in India, that I understand that officials in the consular section of the Foreign Office have offered them a meeting. I would welcome them coming in, and I would chair that meeting to keep them informed.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): We should acknowledge that the Indian navy has been an excellent partner in the fight against piracy off the Somali coast and in the wider Indian ocean. However, as the case highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) shows, other parts of the Indian bureaucracy have not been as helpful. Frankly, do we not need the Foreign

Secretary and the Prime Minister to get off their backsides and strongly press the Indian Government to set these men free to get back to their long-suffering families, back to work and back to normal life?

Mr Swire: The right hon. Gentleman lets himself down by the content and tone of his question, and I am not sure what relevance the Indian navy has to this case. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised the issue with Prime Minister Modi in November last year, as did my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary when he met his counterpart in March. Perhaps when the right hon. Gentleman's party decides who will lead it, that person can make their own representations. We look forward to that day.

ISIL: Militia Groups

10. **Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): What estimate he has made of the number of UK citizens volunteering to fight in militia groups against ISIL. [900184]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): Given the volatile situation in Syria, it is difficult to ascertain exactly the number of British nationals who are fighting in militia groups against or for ISIL without the risk of being inaccurate. We advise against all travel to Syria and parts of Iraq and do not want British nationals taking part in the conflict on either side. There are ways to support the Syrian people more effectively and get aid to where it is most needed.

Robert Jenrick: A young and quite vulnerable Newark man with autism has recently been recruited to fight with the Kurdish peshmerga through their foreign legion, the Lions of Rojava, who recruit—somewhat indiscriminately—through Facebook and websites. While we all stand shoulder to shoulder with the brave peshmerga, will the Minister urge the Kurdish Government to exercise greater caution and, in particular, to review those websites?

Mr Ellwood: I am sorry to hear about the case of my hon. Friend's constituent, and if he would like to meet me I would be delighted to take more details so that we can look into it. I will be visiting the countries shortly and I will seek in Irbil to see how a better process can be established to understand who is coming into the country.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): The Minister will be aware that Cardiff, like many parts of the UK, has been afflicted by young people being attracted to fight for ISIL. What steps is the Foreign Office taking with the Turkish authorities to help to close that route into that part of the world?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary attended the meeting in Paris last week, where 20 of the 60 nations came together to work on the five key themes, one of which is countering the movement of foreign fighters, including the sharing of information between countries—including Turkey.

Middle East Peace Process

11. **Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): What assessment his Department has made of the likely success of the French initiative for a UN resolution for new peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians. [900185]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): We do see merit in a balanced UN Security Council resolution at the right moment, setting out parameters for a political settlement. But if such a resolution is to be part of a successful process, it must command the full support of the Security Council and, in particular, of the United States, which is the only power that has any leverage over Israel. Our judgment is that now is not the right moment for such an initiative, but I have regular discussions with my French and American counterparts on the middle east peace process. We will judge any proposal on the basis of whether it supports further progress in that process.

Andrew Gwynne: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his detailed reply. Given that Mr Fabius will visit Israel and the Palestinian territories at the end of this month to push for a United Nations Security Council resolution to revive the peace talks between the two sides, what more can the Secretary of State do to convince the United States of America and his EU counterparts that it is now crucial to get Israel and the Palestinians round the table again?

Mr Hammond: I agree with the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question: it is crucial that we move forward. The issue with timing is that until we have resolved the nuclear negotiation with Iran, which is an extremely sensitive issue in the middle east—including with Israel—our judgment is that we would be throwing away an opportunity to play an important card in the middle east peace process. We need to get the Iran thing dealt with first, and then we need to press the US Administration to deliver on the commitment that they have repeatedly made to us—that after the Israeli elections and the Israeli Government had been formed, there would be a new, American-led initiative.

Mr Speaker: Extreme brevity is now required.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): What has been the impact of the unilateral action last October by Sweden to recognise the state of Palestine?

Mr Hammond: We believe that European Union countries individually unilaterally recognising Palestine is throwing away an opportunity that the European Union has to exercise leverage by collectively holding out the prospect of recognition or non-recognition as a way of influencing behaviour.

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Last Wednesday, the Minister of State, Department for International Development, the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Mr Swayne) told the House:

“The international community has recognised that the PA is now ready for statehood.”—[*Official Report*, 3 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 575.]

When will the Government recognise the Palestinian state, in line with the vote of this House last October?

Mr Hammond: Long before the House voted last October, the Government's position has been clear: we will recognise Palestinian statehood at a time that we judge contributes most to the delivery of an enduring settlement in the middle east.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): What is the Foreign Secretary's present assessment of the extent to which the Palestinian side is unified between Hamas and Fatah?

Mr Hammond: In a word, it is not.

Persecution of Christians

12. **Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab):** What steps his Department is taking to protect Christians from persecution worldwide. [900186]

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): Freedom of religion and belief is one of the Government's core human rights priorities. We try to help Christians facing persecution overseas through our bilateral diplomacy and our participation in international organisations, most notably the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Jessica Morden: Christians suffer the most persecution globally, and many of my constituents with relatives in Syria and Iraq, and Church groups, rightly campaign to highlight that. People of different faiths and atheists are at risk in different parts of the world. What more can the UK do to promote more collaboration between faith communities to promote more religious tolerance?

Mr Lidington: Obviously, the approach that is likely to work best will vary from one country to another, but we do, for example, through the Department for International Development, fund a number of programmes that try to help community and religious leaders in particular conflict-torn parts of the world to learn the importance of religious tolerance and to apply that within their own societies.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): Given this country's excellent record in defending liberty abroad, may I strongly encourage Ministers to make religious freedom a strategic priority, as proposed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Religious Liberty Commission?

Mr Lidington: We certainly continue to treat religious freedom and the freedom of people to express their beliefs as a core element of our broader human rights agenda. It is often Christian communities themselves who say that it helps them if their own concerns are presented within that broader human rights context.

Mr Speaker: Last but not least, I call Cat Smith.

Israeli Settlements

13. **Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab):** What steps he plans to take in response to demolition of Palestinian homes to make way for Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem. [900187]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): Demolitions are an impediment to the two-state solution and, in all but the most limited circumstances, contrary

to international humanitarian law. We have made our concerns clear to the Israeli Government, and I raised our objections with the Israeli national security adviser last week and during my visit to the occupied territories in October.

Cat Smith: I welcome those steps, but that is broadly the same answer Ministers have been giving for a number of years. The demolitions are breaches of the fourth Geneva convention on war crimes. Given that the demolitions are continuing in spite of these steps, is it not time to consider stronger action, such as the suspension of the arms trade with Israel?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady is right to say that these complex issues have perplexed the House—and, indeed, the international community and the region—for a long time, but as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary articulated, we want the talks to resume as soon as possible. The Israeli elections are now out of the way and that is what we now need to be looking towards.

Topical Questions

T2. [900166] **Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con):** If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): The priorities of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for this Parliament will remain the protection of Britain's security, the promotion of Britain's prosperity and the projection of Britain's values in support of a rules-based international system. The three key immediate challenges on which I am focused are the struggle against violent extremist Islamism in all its forms; the containment of Russia's aggressive doctrine of asymmetric warfare and her incursion in Ukraine; and the renegotiation of Britain's relationship with the European Union.

Mrs Miller: I thank the Foreign Secretary for his response. The illegal sale of antiquities is not only a crime; it provides significant funding for organisations such as ISIL. Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that Britain supports the International Council of Museums updated red list, which classifies endangered archaeological objects and works of art to help to prevent their illegal sale and export?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's interest in this area. In an effort to remove connections to past civilisations, ISIL is indeed tearing down ancient monuments and selling them on the black market. The International Council of Museums, to which she refers, and its red list will help tackle illegal sales, and the Government very much support it.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): As more and more people try to make the perilous boat journey across the Mediterranean, the dedicated men and women of HMS Bulwark are having to rescue an ever-increasing number of desperate people in very difficult circumstances. Given that about half a million people are now gathering

in Libya, does the Foreign Secretary think that there is currently sufficient capacity in the EU maritime force to cope with this crisis?

Mr Philip Hammond: First, let me join the right hon. Gentleman in recognising the heroic work that the crew of HMS Bulwark, in particular, are doing. They have just landed another 1,200 migrants, bringing to well over 2,000 the total number of people plucked from the sea by that one single vessel. I think the best criterion by which to judge the answer to his question is the number of deaths, and, although we cannot be certain, we believe that since the naval force has been deployed in the Mediterranean the number of migrants' lives being lost at sea has declined to close to zero. I think that means that the scale of the operation is, for the moment, adequate.

T4. [900168] **Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): Back to Africa. The people of Africa are not the problem; the resources of Africa are not the problem; but so often, the governance of African countries is the problem. With that in mind, does the Minister agree that next year in the Democratic Republic of Congo it is absolutely vital that there is a peaceful transition and the constitution is respected and upheld?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is not too dissimilar a situation to the one we find in Burundi, where there is a constitution which should be recognised and should be honoured—and we expect President Kabila to do the same. Until that happens, unfortunately we will have further instability.

T3. [900167] **Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that leaving the EU will damage our economy, undermine business and have devastating consequences for the living standards of people in this country? Will he remind his own party of those facts?

Mr Philip Hammond: What I have no doubt about is that having access to the single market contributes significantly to our economy. But we live in a democracy, and the hon. Gentleman would have to be blind, deaf and dumb—although perhaps some of his former colleagues were blind, deaf and dumb in the run-up to the general election—[*Interruption.*] He would have to be blind, deaf and dumb not to recognise that there is very considerable concern among the British public about some aspects of our membership of the European Union. What we have a mandate to do is to sit down with our partners and negotiate to see whether we can deal with some of the problems that most agitate British public opinion, while retaining the benefits of access to the single market.

T7. [900171] **Mr Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that since the Arab spring there have been genuine improvements in north Africa? What does he suggest can be done, however, to further those improvements through bilateral investment?

Mr Ellwood: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right: following the Arab spring, we have seen huge advances in that area of Africa—in governance, prosperity and, indeed, stability. I was able to visit the region two weeks

ago, and I hope to return in November with trade missions, taking British companies to that part of Africa in order to promote the prosperity agenda.

T5. [900169] **Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Yesterday, Nobel peace prize winner Malala Yousafzai called on world leaders to halt the inhuman persecution of Burma's Muslim minority Rohingya people. It is time for the international community to back up its words with action. Will the Minister unequivocally condemn the Myanmar leadership and tell the House what steps he has taken to secure equal rights and opportunities for the Rohingya?

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): The hon. Lady will have had an opportunity to take part in the Adjournment debate last week, on 4 June, on the whole issue of the Rohingya people and Rakhine. If she reads the *Hansard* report, she will see that this Government have been right at the forefront in urging the Government of Burma to treat the Rohingya in the way to which they are entitled.

T8. [900172] **Karen Lumley** (Redditch) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the grave concerns about the political situation in the Maldives and the imprisonment of former President Nasheed. Will he update the House on the work being done by the international community to ensure that the current Government uphold democracy and the rule of law?

Mr Swire: I applaud my hon. Friend's continuing support for President Nasheed and her interest in the situation in the Maldives. I have raised these concerns several times with the Maldives Government, most recently with Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon on 28 May. In April, Charles Tannock tabled a resolution on the Maldives in the European Parliament, and a joint resolution of all seven political groups was overwhelmingly supported by the Chamber. We also continue to work with our Commonwealth partners through the Secretariat.

T6. [900170] **Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): I was pleased to represent the all-party group on the worldwide abolition of the death penalty to Suriname. Will the ministerial team welcome the fact that Suriname has become the latest country in the world to abolish the death penalty, but does that not contrast with the fact that Saudi Arabia has just advertised for eight executioners? What will the Government do to lobby this supposed ally of the UK?

Mr Philip Hammond: I welcome the news from Suriname. It is a slow process, but progress is being made. As I have said many times in the House, Saudi Arabia is an important ally of the UK. Our relationship is vital to our domestic national security and gives us access to senior levels of the Saudi Arabian leadership. That enables us to make our views known on these issues—and we do.

T10. [900174] **Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree with me and the CBI that the EU should take some lessons from the UK and adopt more flexible labour markets?

Mr Hammond: Yes, absolutely. In fact, labour market policy is by and large a matter for national Governments, but across the EU there is a clear gap in performance between those who have taken difficult steps to achieve radical labour market reform and those who have not.

T9. [900173] **Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): Will the Minister advise what discussions he has had with the Indian and Pakistani Governments towards realising the aspirations of the Kashmiri people for a plebiscite on self-determination?

Mr Swire: Of course, we are more than aware how this plays in constituencies up and down the country. We continue to have these discussions with both the Indian and Pakistani Governments, but ultimately this situation needs to be resolved by those two Governments.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Eric Pickles.

Hon. Members: Sir!

Sir Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): Given what the Foreign Secretary has said about the importance of the Iran discussions on the nuclear agreement, what is he doing to ensure greater clarity about the baselines, the extent of the inspection regime and the consequences of infringement? Given that the agreement will allow advanced centrifuge, the infringements might arrive a little earlier than anticipated.

Mr Speaker: A question worthy of a knight. I apologise to Sir Eric.

Mr Philip Hammond: We are working intensively with our E3+3 partners and Iran to conclude the nuclear agreement that we set out in principle in Lausanne a couple of months ago. It is essential that, as part of the agreement, the International Atomic Energy Agency can verify all Iran's nuclear-related commitments, including through access to all relevant locations. We are not going to do a bad deal with Iran. Proper access is central to the deal we agreed in Lausanne and has to be delivered.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Having apparently spoken to his own Back Benchers about the EU referendum, will the Foreign Secretary provide any information about the number of likely Tory Eurosceptics the Prime Minister might describe in the same way as John Major described his Eurosceptics, one of whom of course remains in the Cabinet?

Mr Hammond: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister would never describe any of his right hon. or hon. Friends in such terms. We look forward to a robust debate on this issue inside and outside the House.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): The Burmese Government often give the impression that the Rohingya people are not really Burmese. Will my right hon. Friend the Minister for Asia confirm that the Foreign Office has seen a map from the 18th century that confirms very clearly that the Rohingya people were part of Burma at that time and that this has been shared with the Burmese Government?

Mr Swire: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have got charts, which we have shared with the Burmese Government, and they show very clearly that there were Muslims, as they were described in the ledger, going right back to the 18th century. It is absolutely certain, as far as we are concerned, that the Rohingya have been in Rakhine for many, many years. Of course they are mixed in with probably more recent arrivals from Chittagong and the Chittagong area in Bangladesh, but a significant number of these people have clearly been in Burma for a significant amount of time.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): The Saudi blogger, Raif Badawi, is likely to be flogged again this Friday—a brutal flogging. The Minister can boast about our special relationship with Saudi Arabia, but really is there not some hypocrisy at the heart of British foreign policy when we continue to sell the largest amount of arms to the Saudi Arabian Government?

Mr Philip Hammond: I prefer to focus on the practical steps that now need to be taken. I have raised the issue of Mr Badawi with the most senior levels of the Saudi leadership before. The judicial process has now been completed. That is not the end of the story, because, as in many such countries, there is an Executive power of clemency and commutation. We are urgently seeking to make contact with our most senior interlocutors today, to talk to them about how that power will be exercised. It will be my intention certainly to ensure that nothing happens on Friday, and I hope that nothing happens at all.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Does the Secretary of State share my relief that the Turkish people have, for the time being at least, called a halt to the creeping Islamisation of their country? What assessment has he made of political stability in that important NATO ally?

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): The fact that there was a turnout of no less than 86% in the Turkish parliamentary election demonstrates the vigour of Turkish democracy. We are looking forward to working with the new Government, once they are formed, as there are many important political, economic and strategic interests that the UK and Turkey share.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): It is very important that a nuclear deal with Iran is not made at any price. The P5+1 must stand firm if Iran will not accept any-time inspections of all suspect sites or come clean on possible military dimensions of the nuclear programme, as suspected by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Should Britain and the P5+1 not engage much more closely with Arab states and Israel, who share concerns about an agreement that in a few years would allow Iran to greatly expand its nuclear programme?

Mr Philip Hammond: Perhaps for the first time, I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. The reality is that the alternative to an agreement that will restrict Iran's development of civil nuclear enrichment capabilities for a period of perhaps 20 years is no deal and a free-for-all. We have got to get this agreement right and we have got to carry the Gulf states and Israel with us, and the meeting at Camp David that the US President

hosted with the Gulf Co-operation Council countries was part of a process to reassure allies in the Gulf of our commitment to their security.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): A year ago, the then Foreign Secretary announced the good news that the British embassy in Tehran would reopen, following its closure in 2011. Given that it is still closed, could we have an update on progress?

Mr Hammond: Yes. I think I have told the House before that there are two issues that we are trying to deal with in order to reopen the embassy. One is around the visa regime and how we deal with Iranian overstayers in the UK, and the other is around the importation of communications equipment that we need to import, uninspected by the Iranians, in order to be able to safely operate our embassy. Until we have resolved those two issues, we really cannot make progress.

Mr Speaker: Last but not least, Andy Slaughter.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Many people, most of all Shaker Aamer's family, will be pleased that the Prime Minister raised his case again with President Obama this week, but they are dismayed that nothing has happened since the President told the Prime Minister in January that it was a priority. Given that Shaker Aamer was cleared by six national security agencies in 2009 for release, will that process have to be gone through again? If the Minister does not know the answer to that question, can he seek it from the US authorities, so that Shaker Aamer can be returned to his family in the UK?

Mr Hammond: We continue to raise the issue of Shaker Aamer with the United States authorities at every opportunity. As I think the hon. Gentleman knows, it is the United States Defence Secretary who now has the file on his desk, and there has recently been a change in the occupancy of that position. We continue to press the United States to make progress, and to make good the commitment that President Obama made to the Prime Minister last year.

Points of Order

12.35 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This concerns the deteriorating character of Prime Minister's Question Time, which is doing so much damage to the reputation of the House and the reputation of politics.

Last week the Prime Minister asked the acting Leader of the Opposition four questions, almost more than she asked him. Just before the end of the last Parliament, he answered a question by raising nine issues none of which was the subject of the question asked. Prime Minister's Question Time is becoming an exchange of crude insults and non-answers. As you know, Mr Speaker, I have written to the Prime Minister suggesting that he depoliticise the situation by convening all the party leaders with the aim of reinventing Question Time by giving it a format that would be dignified, still robust, but acceptable outside.

Might it not be a good idea to change the name of Prime Minister's questions to Prime Minister's answers, so that at least the Prime Minister would get the point? When he last answered a question from me, he handed the conduct of this matter over to you, suggesting that you take action.

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. As the House will be aware, my responsibility is to try to keep or, as necessary, restore order. I have no responsibility for the content of either questions or answers.

I do not mind saying to the hon. Gentleman what he may know in any case: that I have, on a previous occasion, written to the party leaders to make the case for a cultural change in the manner in which Prime Minister's questions are conducted, and I received positive replies from them. The start of a Parliament might seem an auspicious time to try to bring about meaningful change, and I think it would be to the advantage of the House if Members were to take account of, and accord weight to, the very widespread public disapproval of the way in which the proceedings are conducted.

One method of dealing with the matter would be the convening of all-party talks, but that is not for me to do. I would smile on it, but it is not for me to lead. An alternative method might be to ask the Procedure Committee of the House, under the excellent chairmanship of the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), to

consider the way in which matters are handled, and to suggest either a continuation of the status quo or reform options. I think that is all that I can reasonably be expected to say on the matter today.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I hope that it is a separate point of order, on an unrelated matter.

Ian Lavery: At the end of the last Parliament, Mr Speaker, the fire Minister told the House that firefighters in England who were found to have retired early would not face any financial penalty in relation to their pensions. Regional fire authorities are now challenging the legality of the Minister's statement, which is leaving our fire and rescue men and women in limbo. Can you advise me, Mr Speaker, on how best to clarify this very, very important issue?

Mr Speaker: Before I respond to the hon. Gentleman's point of order, I must correct myself. I should properly have referred to the hon. Member for Broxbourne as the former Chairman of the Procedure Committee. There are currently no Select Committee Chairmen, although, when the hon. Gentleman did chair the Procedure Committee, he was a distinguished Chairman.

The point of order raised by the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) is one of great importance, but it is not a matter for the Chair, and I therefore cannot rule on it. We will leave it there. *[Interruption.]* It is always helpful, when one makes a ruling, to have the sedentary support of the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), who is a notable parliamentary specialist himself.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. My constituent Mr Ali, a political asylum seeker, is facing deportation this evening to Balochistan, an area of political upheaval where political activists have been persecuted. Can the Home Secretary be encouraged to make a statement on such deportations to such unstable regions in the world?

Mr Speaker: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his ingenuity; he is newly arrived in this House, but he has already worked out how to get his point on the record. I feel confident that his words will be winging their way to the Home Secretary ere long on what is indeed a very important and urgent matter.

European Union Referendum Bill

Second Reading.

Mr Speaker: I must inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of Mr Alex Salmond. Before I ask the Foreign Secretary to move the Second Reading of the Bill, the House will not be surprised to hear that some dozens of colleagues are seeking to catch my eye and a time limit will have to be imposed. Front Benchers are not constrained by it, of course, but the Foreign Secretary and his shadow are nothing if not sensitive to the wishes of the House and I am sure they will want to balance the need to cover the subject thoroughly and take interventions with the interests of other colleagues in having the chance to contribute.

12.41 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is a simple, but vital, piece of legislation. It has one clear purpose: to deliver on our promise to give the British people the final say on our EU membership in an in/out referendum by the end of 2017. For those who were present in the last Parliament, today's debate will be tinged with a sense of *déjà vu*: we have, of course, debated this Bill before. So before I start, I would like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (James Wharton). His European Union (Referendum) Bill in the last Parliament was passed by this House, but sadly was blocked in the other place by the opposition parties. He deserves the credit for paving the way for the Bill we are debating today.

Let me also pay tribute to my noble Friend Lord Dobbs who sponsored the Wharton Bill in the other place, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) who reintroduced the same Bill in the following Session.

The commitment on the Government side of the House to giving the British people their say has deep roots.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr Hammond: I am going to make a little progress, bearing in mind Mr Speaker's exhortation.

It is almost four decades ago to the day that I, along with millions of others in Britain, cast my vote in favour of our membership of the European Communities, and like millions of others I believed then that I was voting for an economic community that would bring significant economic benefits to Britain, but without undermining our national sovereignty. I do not remember anyone saying anything about ever-closer union or a single currency. But the institution that the clear majority of the British people voted to join has changed almost beyond recognition in the decades since then.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): There must have been some strange juxtapositions in the campaign held in the 1970s, in which I took a very active part. Most of the debates I took part in were about the pooling of sovereignty and the direct applicability of European legislation without parliamentary intervention, which was a very controversial subject, and, besides, ever-closer union was in the treaty to which we were acceding.

Mr Hammond: Call me negligent, but as an 18-year-old voter in that election, I did not actually read the treaty before I cast my vote.

Treaty after treaty—the Single European Act, Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice and Lisbon—individually and collectively have added hugely to the European Union's powers, often in areas that would have been unthinkable in 1975, and that change has eroded the democratic mandate for our membership to the point where it is wafer-thin and demands to be renewed.

Mr MacNeil: Two weeks ago I was in North Uist and met one of my constituents, who is from Germany. She has lived in North Uist for 25 years and she voted in the Scottish referendum, but she cannot vote in this referendum. Why were the Scottish Government more generous to and more understanding of her rights as a citizen for 25 years than the Tory Government? Why is she excluded?

Mr Hammond: If the hon. Gentleman can bear to stop wagging his finger and wait for a little, I will come to the question of franchise.

To many people, not only in the UK, but across Europe, the European Union has come to feel like something that is done to them, not for them. Turnout in last year's European Parliament elections was the lowest ever, dropping to 13% in Slovakia. The fragility of the European Union's democratic legitimacy is felt particularly acutely by the British people. Since our referendum in 1975, citizens across Europe from Denmark and Ireland to France and Spain have been asked their views on crucial aspects of their country's relationships with the EU in more than 30 different national referendums—but not in the UK.

We have had referendums on Scottish devolution, Welsh devolution, our electoral system and a regional assembly for the north-east, but an entire generation of British voters has been denied the chance to have a say on our relationship with the European Union. Today we are putting that right. After fighting and winning the general election as the only major party committed to an in/out referendum, in the face of relentless opposition from the other parties, today we are delivering on our promise to give that generation its say.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): In the Foreign Secretary's opening remarks, he referred to the number of changes that have taken place since 1975, when there was last a referendum. Can I take it from what he said that unless the British people have a right to reject all those changes brought about without a referendum he will not be satisfied? Or, can he at least set out today what it is that the Government wish to take back, rather than simply condemning his and all previous Governments since 1975?

Mr Hammond: The answer to question No. 1 is no and the answer to question No. 2 is that the Prime Minister has set out in a series of speeches, articles and interviews, and in the Conservative party manifesto, the key areas where we require change to the way that Britain's relationship with the European Union works if we are to be able to get the consent of the British people to our future membership.

Conservative Members have long been clear that the European Union needs to change and that Britain's relationship with the European Union needs to change.

[Mr Philip Hammond]

Unlike the Labour party, we believe that Brussels has too much power and that some of those powers need to be brought back to national capitals. In a world whose centre of economic gravity is shifting fast, Europe faces a serious challenge. If we are to continue to earn our way in the world and to secure European living standards for future generations, the EU needs to focus relentlessly on jobs, growth and competitiveness. Bluntly, it needs to become far less bureaucratic and far more competitive.

With the European electorate more disenchanted with the EU than ever before and with anti-EU parties on the rise across the continent, it is time to bring Europe back to the people, ensuring that decisions are made as close to them as possible and giving national Parliaments a greater role in overseeing the European Union. Such issues resonate across all member states. Change is needed for the benefit of all to make the EU fit for the purpose of the 21st century.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): I applaud my right hon. Friend's opening remarks and the Prime Minister for making certain that we had the Bill. May I ask the Foreign Secretary one question? In the last statement made by the Prime Minister in the previous Parliament, he clearly said that he wanted reform and a fundamental change in our relationship with the EU. Will he explain what the second part of that means in practice and in relation to the debate?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend's question is germane to the point I am making.

For the good of all 28 countries, there are things that need to be done to reform the way in which the European Union works to make it more competitive, effective and democratically accountable. However, the British people have particular concerns, borne of our history and circumstances. For example, we are not part of the single currency and, so long as there is a Conservative Government, we never will be. We made that decision because we will not accept the further integration of our fiscal, economic, financial and social policy—[HON. MEMBERS: "We made it!"] The hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) says that Labour made that decision. Is it the position of the Labour party that we will never join the single currency? I have not heard that position being articulated from the Labour Benches. It would be a seminal moment in our parliamentary history if Labour was able to make that commitment today.

We made that decision because we will not accept the further integration of our fiscal, economic, financial and social policy that will inevitably be required to make the eurozone a success. So, in answer to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), we need to agree a framework with our partners that will allow further integration of the eurozone while protecting Britain's interests and those of the other "euro-outs" within the EU. Because we occupy a crowded island with a population that is growing, even before net migration, and a welfare system that is more accessible than most and more generous than many in Europe, we are far more sensitive than many member states to the impact of migration from the EU and the distorting effects of easy access to benefits and services and of in-work welfare top-ups to wages that are already high by comparison with many EU countries.

In the Conservative party manifesto, we therefore committed to negotiate a new settlement for Britain in Europe—a settlement that addresses the concerns of the British people and sets the European Union on a course that will benefit all its people. The Prime Minister has already begun that process by meeting 15 European leaders, and at the European Council in June he will set out formally the key elements of our proposals.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I understand my right hon. Friend's point about the pressures of increased numbers coming to work in the United Kingdom, but will he take a moment to pay tribute to the hard-working eastern Europeans from Poland and elsewhere who have come here, worked hard, paid their taxes and contributed to our society?

Mr Hammond: I am very happy to do so. I do not think anybody—or at least not very many people—in this country has a problem with those who come here to work hard, pay their dues and make a better life for themselves while contributing to the UK economy. They are not the focus of our concern. Our focus is on the distorting effect of easy access to our welfare system.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The Secretary of State said earlier that he thought Brussels had too much power. Will he tell the House which powers affecting the United Kingdom Brussels has too much of? Will he also tell us whether he would consider it a success or a failure if the Prime Minister failed to repatriate those powers?

Mr Hammond: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has just fallen into the obvious trap. He knows that a negotiation is a negotiation. He asks me to set out a list of powers for repatriation, then invites me to say that the Prime Minister would have failed if we did not achieve the repatriation of every single one of them. No sensible person with any negotiating experience would approach a complex negotiation in that way.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Hammond: I need to make some progress.

There are those who will say that this process cannot succeed, that Europe will never change, and that our negotiations will not be successful. Looking at the record of the last Labour Government, I can see why they would say that. Under that Labour Government, there was a one-way transfer of powers from Westminster to Brussels. They gave away £7 billion of the hard-fought-for British rebate but got absolutely nothing in return. They presided over a massive increase in the EU budget, they signed us up to the eurozone bail-out funds and they failed to deliver on their promise to give the British people a say before ratifying the Lisbon treaty. Labour's record on Europe was one of dismal failure.

In the last Parliament, however, we showed what could be done. We showed that, even in coalition with the Liberal Democrats, change could be achieved by adopting a tough negotiating stance and a laser-like focus on our national interest. We cut the EU budget for the first time ever, saving British taxpayers billions of pounds. We took Britain out of the eurozone bail-outs that Labour signed us up to—the first ever return of powers

from Brussels. We vetoed an EU treaty that would have damaged Britain's interests, we brought back control of more than 100 police and criminal justice measures and we secured exemptions for the smallest businesses from EU regulation. Our record in the past five years shows that we can deliver change in Europe that is in Britain's national interest.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): The Foreign Secretary is taking a lot of noise and advice from those on the Labour Benches, but many of my colleagues and I remember sitting here, Friday after Friday, while they bitterly opposed the European Union (Referendum) Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (James Wharton). I presume that my right hon. Friend welcomes the sinner who repents today, but as he takes all that advice will he just remember that if we had taken the advice of Labour, Scottish National party and Liberal Democrat Members, Britain would now be languishing in the euro?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When the electorate considers the stated positions of the parties, I would advise them to look not only at the positions they hold today but at the depth of the roots that sustain those positions.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Does the Foreign Secretary believe that, when the Prime Minister completes these unspecified negotiations and decides to campaign for a yes in the referendum, my next-door neighbour the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) and his allies who held the Major Government hostage will ever be satisfied?

Mr Hammond: I will let my hon. Friend the Member for Stone speak for himself in the course of the debate. I am sure, however, that he will await—with a healthily sceptical approach—the return of the Prime Minister from Brussels with that package, and that he will consider it carefully and analytically, safe in the knowledge that underpinning this whole process is an absolute commitment to allow the British people to have the final say on this issue in an in/out referendum.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): None of the concessions that the Prime Minister has so far obtained from the European Union, including the veto of the fiscal union treaty, has fundamentally changed our relationship with the EU. How does he intend fundamentally to change that relationship?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is right, of course. I have already mentioned an area in which we need fundamental change in the way in which the European Union operates. It is now a Union with a eurozone of 19 member states at its core, and those states will integrate more closely together. There needs to be an explicit recognition that those who are not part of that core do not need to pursue ever-closer union. There needs to be an explicit protection of the interests of those non-eurozone members as the EU goes forward. That is an example of an area in which we need specific structural change to the way in which the European Union operates.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab) *rose*—

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

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Hammond: I must make some progress.

Of course, negotiating with 27 member states will not be easy and it will not happen overnight, but we expect to be able to negotiate a new deal that will address the concerns of the British people about Britain's relationship with Europe, which we will put to them in the promised referendum. The Bill provides the mechanism to do that. It sets in stone our commitment to hold the referendum before the end of 2017. Of course, if the process is completed sooner, the referendum could be held sooner. So the Bill allows for the date of the referendum to be determined by regulations, made by affirmative resolution.

The Bill provides for the wording of the referendum question on its face. In 2013, the Electoral Commission assessed the referendum question posed by the Wharton Bill. The Commission recommended two possible formulations. This Bill specifies the simpler of the two:

“Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union?”,

with a yes/no answer. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members need not answer now; they can wait until the designated referendum day. The Electoral Commission will of course report again on this Bill and we look forward to its assessment.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): It would be perfectly possible not to accept the Prime Minister's negotiating stance but to want to remain a member of the European Union. Should we not have a specific vote on the Prime Minister's recommendations as well as on the retention of membership of the European Union?

Mr Hammond: No. We made a proposal to the British people, it was put to the test in the general election and we have received an overwhelming mandate to progress. That is what we will do.

The Bill also sets out the entitlement to vote in the referendum. Since this is an issue of national importance, the parliamentary franchise is the right starting point. It means that British citizens in the UK or resident abroad for less than 15 years and resident Commonwealth and Irish citizens can take part. The Bill extends the franchise in two very limited respects: to Members of the other place who meet certain qualifications and to Commonwealth citizens resident in Gibraltar. Members of the other place cannot take part in elections to this House on the grounds that they are already represented in Parliament, but it is clearly right that the franchise should be extended to them in the referendum. Gibraltar will also be deeply affected by its outcome. It is part of the European Union and its economy is closely bound to its relationship with the EU. Of course, Gibraltar already takes part in elections to the European Parliament as part of the South West of England. During debates on the private Member's Bill in the previous Parliament, there was cross-party support for Gibraltar's inclusion. I hope that that will remain.

We will extend the franchise to Gibraltar only with the consent of the Government of Gibraltar, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe has already agreed the principles for achieving that with the Chief Minister. Wherever possible, the Bill leaves it to the Gibraltar Parliament to make provision to implement the referendum in Gibraltar. The Government of Gibraltar intend to introduce their own referendum Bill, which will be complementary to the UK legislation.

[Mr Philip Hammond]

Some will argue that we should extend the franchise further to 16 and 17-year-olds, perhaps, or even to citizens of other EU countries resident here. We do not agree. This is an issue of national importance about Britain's relationship with the European Union and it is right that the Westminster parliamentary franchise should be the basis for consulting the British people. I concede that there are those in the House who will wish to debate whether that franchise itself should be extended to 16 and 17-year-olds, but the Government are not persuaded and that is a debate for another day. It would be wrong to include 16 and 17-year-olds in this referendum as an addition to the Westminster franchise.

I reject, too, the suggestion that EU citizens living in the UK should be included. The referendum is about delivering a pledge to the British people to consult them about the future of their country. It would be a travesty to seek to include EU nationals whose interests might be very different from those of the British people.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's comments about Gibraltar, which will be warmly welcomed by the people of Gibraltar and which recognise that Gibraltar is a particular case. Will he also accept that many of us who supported my Bill and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (James Wharton) in the previous Parliament did so on the basis of the parliamentary franchise? I strongly urge my right hon. Friend to stick to that and not be drawn into debates about broader issues of the franchise that are not part of this Bill's proposals.

Mr Hammond: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention and I intend to stick to the position I have set out.

Ian Austin: Speaking as somebody who worked in the Treasury between 1999 and 2005, may I remind the Foreign Secretary that it was a Labour Government that designed the five tests, a Labour Government that carried out the assessment and a Labour Government that kept us out of the single currency? It is thanks to a Labour Government that we are not in the single currency today.

Mr Hammond: The hon. Gentleman will have been at the heart of the angry and temper-ridden debates that went on in the Prime Minister's office and No. 11 at the time. Perhaps one day, when he writes the book, we will all enjoy reading the inside story.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I want to press the Foreign Secretary again on the question of extending the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds. The answer he gave about why we should not do it—because it is an issue of national importance—is the main reason he should do it. He said that he did not want to deviate from the franchise for Westminster, but he is already doing that by extending it to peers. Why not let young people have a say on their future, which is what this Bill is about?

Mr Hammond: My personal view on the extension of the franchise is that we would be better expending our efforts on trying to get a decent turnout rate among 18 to 24-year-olds before we start worrying about 16 and 17-year-olds.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Has the Foreign Secretary seen the national opinion poll today that shows that the majority of British people want to stay in the European Union, but a reformed European Union with a form that is in not only the British national interest but that of continental Europe and our 27 European partners? Does that not underline the importance of European leaders listening not only to this Parliament but more importantly to the British people, both through this Parliament and directly?

Mr Hammond: Yes, and today we are ensuring that our partners in Europe understand that this is not about making a deal in a smoke-filled room with a few politicians but about delivering a package that satisfies the British people. My assessment has been for a long time and remains that the great majority of the British people want Britain to remain inside the European Union provided we can get the reform of the EU and of Britain's relationship with it that satisfies and answers the crucial points we have set out.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Hammond: I shall give way one more time, to my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham), and then I shall make progress.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): On the question of European nationals voting in this referendum, will the Foreign Secretary confirm whether any of the referendums held in other European countries have been open to all other European Union citizens living in that country—[HON. MEMBERS: "Scotland!"] It is not a separate member of the EU.

Mr Hammond: As far as I am aware, that is not the case. I note with interest that just this weekend it was reported that Luxembourg, an open and very pro-EU country, has decided not to extend its parliamentary franchise to the very many EU citizens who are resident in Luxembourg.

Although the central issue at stake in the Bill is simple and the three key variables—the date, the franchise and the question—are dealt with in the first two clauses, running a referendum is not straightforward. The remainder of the Bill, which includes 38 pages of schedules, deals with three important but technical areas. First, in clause 4(1) it establishes a power to set the conduct framework that will determine how the referendum will be run. Secondly, in clause 4(2) it creates the power to set more detailed conduct rules and combination rules to determine how the vote would be run alongside other electoral events should the chosen dates coincide with any. Finally, the Bill establishes the detailed campaign rules, updating the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 where necessary, taking into account the lessons of both the Scottish independence and alternative vote referendums and the recommendations made by the Electoral Commission.

The Bill also disapplies section 125 of the 2000 Act, and as this aspect has received some media attention I shall elaborate on the Government's logic. Section 125 places statutory restrictions on Government publications in the final 28 days before the poll. There are operational and political reasons for disapplying it in this referendum.

If left unaltered, section 125 would stop the Government from “publishing” material that deals with “any issue raised by” the referendum question. In the context of this referendum, that is unworkable and inappropriate. It is unworkable because the restriction is so broad that preventing publication in relation to any issue raised by the referendum could prevent Ministers from conducting the ordinary day-to-day business of the UK’s dealings with the European Union and inappropriate because the referendum will take place as a result of a clear manifesto commitment and a mandate won at the general election.

That mandate is to renegotiate the terms of the UK’s relationship with the European Union and put them to the people in a referendum. In light of the outcome of those negotiations, the Government expect to take a position, and if we have been successful, as we expect to be, the Government will want to explain what has been agreed and how the British people’s concerns have been addressed. We will want to make a recommendation on where the national interest lies, and Ministers will want to be able to continue making the case, up to referendum day, without being constrained by fears that, for example, the posting of comments on Twitter accounts could constitute publication.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Is that not what a lot of people are concerned about—that the Government will use the apparatus of state to push a case, rather than letting the two sides have equal and fair access?

Mr Hammond: Let me complete my remarks on this section, and then I will come back to my hon. Friend’s point. I hope that I will clarify the matter for him.

Clearly, it will be for the yes and the no campaigns to lead the debate in the weeks preceding the poll. The campaigns will be designated by the Electoral Commission, and will receive a number of benefits, including a public grant and eligibility to make a referendum broadcast and to send a free mailshot to voters. I can assure the House that the Government have no intention of undermining those campaigns, and they do not propose to spend large sums of public money during the purdah period prescribed by section 125 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendum Act 2000. A vibrant, robust debate in the best traditions of British democracy is in all our interests. If my hon. Friend’s concern is that the Government are thinking of spending public money to deliver doorstep mailshots in the last four weeks of the campaign, I can assure him that the Government have no such intention. The Government will exercise proper restraint to ensure a balanced debate during the campaign.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): I remember that one of the arguments that I made on my party’s behalf during debates on the Political Parties, Elections and Referendum Act 2000 was that the purdah period should be extended, not restricted. While I understand the points that my right hon. Friend makes, and while I expect that I shall argue for a yes vote in the referendum—although I shall wait on the Prime Minister’s renegotiation—we have to be careful to provide a level playing field and make it clear that the Government will not abuse their position. For that reason, I hope that the Government will focus on this issue. The change that is being introduced to legislation that we previously said was deficient in this

respect could convey an impression that the Government will come in and try to load the dice, and that must be avoided.

Mr Hammond: I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend’s sentiments. I hope that he recognises that I have sought to reassure colleagues who have such concerns, and that the Government will continue to seek to reassure colleagues.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I want to ask the Foreign Secretary a particular question about the renegotiation. I think that there is virtually unanimous agreement in the House that the import duties currently imposed on cane sugar coming into Europe are unfair. Will he confirm that that item is on the list for the renegotiation that he has been telling us about?

Mr Hammond: I am delighted to see that the right hon. Gentleman is robust in his defence of the interests of Tate and Lyle—his constituents—and I will take that representation and put it with the many others from both sides of the House about particular areas that we need to raise in the course of the discussion.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Hammond: I need to conclude my remarks because many Members wish to contribute.

Few subjects ignite as much passion in the House or indeed in the country as our membership of the European Union. The debate in the run-up to the referendum will be hard fought on both sides of the argument. But whether we favour Britain being in or out, we surely should all be able to agree on the simple principle that the decision about our membership should be taken by the British people, not by Whitehall bureaucrats, certainly not by Brussels Eurocrats; not even by Government Ministers or parliamentarians in this Chamber. The decision must be for the common sense of the British people. That is what we pledged, and that is what we have a mandate to deliver. For too long, the people of Britain have been denied their say. For too long, powers have been handed to Brussels over their heads. For too long, their voice on Europe has not been heard. This Bill puts that right. It delivers the simple in/out referendum that we promised, and I commend it to the House.

1.15 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): This Bill will set before the British people a clear and simple question: should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union? It is 11 words, but the answer will have profound consequences for the future of our country, as the people of the United Kingdom make the most important decision on our place in the world for 40 years. It is a decision that will affect the future journey of our proud and great islands; it is a decision the consequence of which will be felt by the people of our country for decades and generations to come; and it is a decision that will shape not only how we view our place in the world but how the rest of the world sees us.

We support the Bill and its passage through Parliament, but we also support Britain remaining a member of the EU. The same cannot be said of all the right hon. and hon. Members on the Conservative Benches.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I am delighted that the Labour party now agrees that the British people deserve a choice and a vote, but does the right hon. Gentleman not understand that the British people want a very substantial reduction in migration into this country, and does that not require this Parliament to regain control of our borders from Brussels?

Hilary Benn: We agree that the European Union needs to change. Like many people, we want to see reform in Europe on benefits, transitional controls, the way the EU works and how it relates to national Parliaments. We also want to see the completion of the single market in services to boost jobs and economic growth here in the United Kingdom. We need to co-operate to achieve those things, but the EU needs to recognise that there is a growing demand across societies in Europe for greater devolution of power at the same time. We need to co-operate and devolve, and the EU's task in the years ahead is to reconcile those two forces.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Given that the EU has fundamentally changed since the early 1970s when we joined it, it is right that the Bill has been introduced. Whatever the result of the referendum, we can now all agree with that. Will the right hon. Gentleman address the issue of fundamental change in our relationship? Given that the majority of European capitals are moving closer and closer to political union, does he accept that the negotiations aiming to accommodate countries that do not wish to go down that road are terribly important? What guarantees will the Labour party be looking for when it comes to those negotiations?

Hilary Benn: The hon. Gentleman would recognise that there are differences of view within the EU about its future direction. Membership of the euro is an example of that. The last Labour Government took the decision that we would not join the euro. We are still against joining the euro, and I cannot foresee any circumstances in which it would be in the British economic interest to do so; but other European countries take a different view. The challenge for Europe is to accommodate those, while keeping together 28 countries for which co-operation is vital in the modern world.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The Conservatives criticised us when we were in office for taking the people further into Europe, but let us remind them when they complain about the free movement of labour that they signed up to the single market and the British people never got a referendum then; they signed up to Maastricht and the British people never got a referendum then; and they implied that we would have taken them into the single currency, but we had the five economic tests.

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend is entirely right. There are lots of people who have changed their minds on Europe. I remind the House that as recently as June 2012 the Prime Minister told a press conference in Brussels:

“I completely understand why some people want an in/out referendum. . . I don't share that view. That is not the right thing to do.”

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that those of us

who were in the House for John Major's Administration watched the Government party fall apart under the pressure of their rows on Europe, and that we look forward cheerfully to it happening again?

Hilary Benn: It is clear that my hon. Friend takes great pleasure from the discomfort that is already evident on the Government Benches. For those who wish to study the history, it is interesting that here we are, 40 years on from 1975, and the same thing is happening, but in mirror image. It is the Conservative party that has agreed to a referendum in order to try to deal with splits.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Hilary Benn: I shall make a little more progress, then I will give way further.

Let me say to the Foreign Secretary that reform is not just about what Britain asks for now. It is about the building of alliances and the making of friends, as the Prime Minister now understands only too well, and it is an approach that can bring considerable change over time. I think I made the point previously, with reference to the proportion of the EU budget that is spent on the common agricultural policy, that there has been a very significant reduction over a period of 40 years. That demonstrates that change is possible by building alliances and arguing the case. The EU will need to continue to reform in the years ahead.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does the shadow Secretary of State agree that an example of the need for radical reform of our relationship with the European Union and reform of the European Union as a whole is that if the UK were not currently a member of the EU, no one would be suggesting that we join? What does he think?

Hilary Benn: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr Douglas Carswell (Clacton) (UKIP): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that if this referendum is to be considered free and fair it would be wise to ensure the neutrality of the civil service and the machinery of government? Would he look sympathetically at any amendments to try to enshrine in the legislation an appropriate period of *purdah*?

Hilary Benn: We would be very happy to look at all amendments that come forward during consideration of the Bill on the Floor of the House. We have some amendments that we will table. I shall come to those in a moment. I agree with the Foreign Secretary in this respect: once the Government eventually reach a view, they are entitled to explain it to the British people. Indeed, they will have to explain their view to some of the members of the Cabinet. Therefore, it is reasonable to ensure that the Government are able to do that.

Mr Jenkin: Can the right hon. Gentleman explain exactly what he thinks Ministers will have to be able to do that they were not doing during the Scottish referendum or the AV referendum? I seem to remember Ministers giving lots of explanations of their view. Is he concerned that this might be an opportunity for the Government to call the referendum so soon after the deal has been

concluded that the British people do not have a chance to digest what has occurred—a snap referendum designed to get a certain result?

Hilary Benn: As I understand the argument, it relates to section 125 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 and the definition of “material”. That is what that section says. It would not be sensible for any Government to find themselves constrained from explaining to the people the Government’s view, because the people are entitled to hear from the Government of the day, as happened in 1975.

Clive Efford: My right hon. Friend will realise that the issue is so toxic to the Conservative party that it caused a previous Prime Minister, John Major, to question the parentage of some of the members of his Cabinet at that time. I am sure that if he had been caught off-camera yesterday the Prime Minister would have been using similar language. On the point made by the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin), is it not true that we might reach the date of the referendum but agreements significantly changing our relationship with Europe will not have been agreed? That will be subject to subsequent negotiation, particularly if treaty change is required, so we will be asked to vote for something that will take place in the future and we will not have the final detail agreed across Europe.

Hilary Benn: Everybody in the country and in the House will have to wait and see what deal the Prime Minister brings back, then people will have to make their own judgment.

Ian Austin: In order for the result to be accepted and for it to be long lasting and settle the question for a generation, it is very important that the process is seen to be fair on all sides. Ministers are perfectly at liberty to say what they like in interviews and as they go round the country making speeches, but there is a big difference between that and public money being used to send out leaflets and promote one side of the debate. It is very important that the spending limits are designed to ensure that spending is equal on both sides and both sides have a fair say.

Hilary Benn: Everybody in the House would agree that the referendum must be fair and must be seen to be fair, but at the same time the Government—any Government—are entitled to argue their case.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Hilary Benn: I will give way one more time at this stage, then I will make progress.

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who is extremely generous with his time. A number of constituents have already been in touch with me, as the House might imagine, about the issue, and some have raised the question itself. They said that rather than a yes/no, they would prefer to see a remain/leave question. Does my right hon. Friend have a view on that?

Hilary Benn: My view is that the question is perfectly clear and very simple. I do not think that anyone who goes into the polling station on the day, whenever it is, will not understand the consequence of voting either way.

As well the negotiations taking place in Europe, it is clear that an equally important set of negotiations is taking place within the Conservative party on this subject, and they are not going terribly well, are they? We have been asking the Prime Minister for his list of negotiating demands and we are still waiting. We are still not clear whether there will be treaty change or not. This week, the Prime Minister apparently told journalists at the G7 that he had decided that he would succeed in the negotiations and therefore all Ministers would be expected to support the line. We know that that did not go down too well with certain Ministers, who came face to face with the prospect of having to choose between their jobs and their Euroscepticism.

Then, lo and behold, faced with a choice between backing the national interest or the Conservative interest, the Prime Minister did what he always does—give in to his party. The explanation was that his remarks had been “over-interpreted”. I do not know whether this was a case of lost in translation, but the newspapers today were pretty disobliging about the Prime Minister’s decision, with references to “Downing St chaos” in *The Daily Telegraph*, “weak and uncertain” in *The Times*, and “great EU-turn” in the *Daily Mail*.

We are none the wiser as to where the Government stand or what the answers are to those questions, so for the benefit of the House let me try to summarise where it seems the Government have got to on our membership of the EU. The Prime Minister is probably for in, but he cannot say definitely that he is in or out because a lot of his MPs are for out, unless they can be persuaded to be in. Meanwhile, the Foreign Secretary, who used to be leaning out, now appears to be leaning in, while other members of the Cabinet who are for out read yesterday that they would be out unless they campaigned for in. Now it seems they might be in even though, after all, they are probably for out. In, out, in, out—it is the EU Tory hokey-cokey, a complete mess.

Mr Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): It is perhaps an ill-chosen day to talk about the history of parties changing views on the matter, as 32 years ago to the day Gordon Brown and Tony Blair were elected to this House, as was I. They were elected on a manifesto of leaving the European Union. They subsequently changed their views, as the right hon. Gentleman has changed his view on the need for a referendum and the need for a renegotiation. Can he explain the reasons for his change of view and what changes he wants to see in Europe prior to the referendum?

Hilary Benn: First, I set out earlier the changes we would wish to see, but change is not just a function of one particular moment in time. Secondly, there has been a general election and there is now going to be a referendum. As we argued consistently, uncertainty about Britain’s place in Europe is not good for the British economy, so we should get on and make this decision so that the British people can have their say, and I hope they will reach a decision to remain in the European Union.

Bill Esterson: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Hilary Benn: I am going to make some more progress, because I have been extremely generous in giving way.

[Hilary Benn]

On the franchise, the Government are right to use the same basic approach as 40 years ago in the last European referendum and as 33 days ago in the general election—in other words, the parliamentary voting register. I do not begrudge extending the franchise to a particular group of 790 people, but I say to the Foreign Secretary that if we are going to extend the franchise to 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80 and 90-year-olds in the House of Lords, I think we should also extend it to 16 and 17-year-olds. On this side of the House we are in favour of giving these young adults the right to vote in all elections. This is an issue of principle—it is about giving them as citizens the right to participate in our democracy.

I suspect that during the course of this debate and the Bill's Committee stage we will hear arguments against doing that, but I simply say that they will have a ring of familiarity about them, because on every single occasion in the past 200 years that someone has had the temerity to suggest that the franchise should be extended, the forces of conservatism—with a small c—have said, “Don't be ridiculous”; “It'll undermine the fabric of society”; or, “They are incapable of exercising the necessary judgment.”

After all, during debates on the Reform Act 1832, landowners said that the only people who could vote were those who had an interest in the land—the people who owned it. In 1912, Lord Curzon said about votes for women:

“Women do not have the experience to be able to vote.”

If we substitute the words “16 and 17-year-olds” for the word “Women”, we will see that exactly the same argument is being made today. Indeed, the same argument was made when a Labour Government lowered the voting age from 21 to 18. It is the same old excuse of an argument against giving people a say, and it is completely at odds with the other rights we already give to 16 and 17-year-olds, including the right to work, pay tax and join the armed forces. [Interruption.] I am well aware of what the Foreign Secretary is saying, but they can also be company directors and consent to medical treatment—it is a long, long list.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is odd that the Government's position on the Wales Act 2014 is to devolve to the Welsh Government the power to decide whether 16 and 17-year-olds can be given the vote? The Government are giving that power to Wales and it has been exercised in Scotland, yet they are blocking it in this instance.

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point as to why the franchise should be extended.

Paul Farrelly: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Prime Minister was not forced to give 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote in the Scottish referendum? He agreed that that would happen, so what is different now? Why should English and Welsh 16 and 17-year-olds, and Scottish 16 and 17-year-olds, be treated differently for this referendum?

Hilary Benn: I agree completely with my hon. Friend. When the Minister for Europe winds up the debate, perhaps he will give the House an explanation as to why the Government are not minded to move on this issue.

After taking evidence on the subject last year, the British Youth Council Youth Select Committee said:

“We are very proud of the democracy in which we live and of its history and traditions. We are absolutely convinced that 16 and 17 year olds have the aptitude and the appetite to take a full part in that democracy.”

I agree. This House has debated on many occasions how we can encourage more young people—the Foreign Secretary made the point about the lower rate of participation—to participate in our public and political life. How can we get more young people involved in our democratic life? What better way to do so than to give 16 and 17-year-olds the opportunity to take part in this momentous decision, which will affect their lives and their futures just as much as it will affect ours?

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Does the shadow Foreign Secretary agree that, since nearly one in four 16-year-olds can expect to live to 100 years of age and will be living with the consequences of this decision for far longer than Members of this or the other House, and given that they have the mental capacity to weigh up these decisions and the enthusiasm to take part, we should extend the franchise?

Hilary Benn: I agree with the hon. Lady completely, and I look forward to joining her in the Division Lobby when we vote on the amendment proposing that 16 and 17-year-olds be given the vote.

The second thing I want to say about the detail of the Bill is that we feel the referendum should be held on a separate day. The Bill specifically allows Ministers, by regulations, to make provisions to combine the referendum with other polls, but, as the Foreign Secretary will be aware, that contradicts the advice of the Electoral Commission, which could not have been clearer:

“The Bill should be amended to make clear that an EU referendum cannot be combined with the significant elections already scheduled to take place in May 2016, and should be held on a suitable separate day to any other poll.”

To those who argue, “If we combine it with other polls, that will lead to a higher turnout,” I simply pray in aid the example of last September's Scottish referendum, which was held on a separate day.

The evidence is very clear: if we put before the British people a big decision with very considerable consequences—that is what this referendum will be about—they will know what is at stake and they will come out and vote, and we should trust them to do so. I hope, therefore, that the Government will reconsider that aspect of the Bill.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Turnout is obviously an issue of concern for all of us. Does my right hon. Friend agree that using the low turnout of 18 to 24-year-olds to deny the vote to 16 and 17-year-olds defeats the object? Surely we should be using this Bill and a healthy, vibrant debate about the future of Europe to get both age groups out to vote in the referendum.

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and makes a powerful point. We want a debate and for everybody to participate, and we want the British people to make that judgment.

The third thing I want to say on the detail of the Bill is that, as I have already argued, the Government have a responsibility to ensure that voters have enough information

to be able to make an informed decision. That should include an independent assessment of the economic consequences of leaving the European Union and what that would mean compared with our remaining a member. I presume that that is why, as the Foreign Secretary has said, section 125 of the 2000 Act is to be disappplied.

Finally on the detail, the Bill requires that the referendum must take place by December 2017. That should give the Prime Minister long enough to conclude the negotiations, but I hope the Foreign Secretary will agree that the sooner the decision can be taken, the better, because uncertainty is not good for anyone, not least when businesses have begun to say, “We will need to consider our future place in the United Kingdom.” Uncertainty does not contribute to that.

Bill Esterson: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Hilary Benn: I am going to bring my remarks to a close, because so many other Members want to speak and I am bearing in mind Mr Speaker’s strictures, which were kindly put.

This Bill is important, because it will give the British people the chance to have their say, but it is in the end just a mechanism for that decision; the really important thing is the decision itself. The notion that Britain’s future prosperity and security lie somehow in turning away from the European Union, in the hope of somehow getting a better deal, makes no sense in a world that is increasingly interdependent. It is not that Britain could not manage outside the European Union—*[Interruption.]* I have said that before and I say it again, because we have to have an honest debate. The truth is that it would come at an economic cost, because our partnership with Europe helps us to create jobs, secure growth, encourage investment and ensure our security and influence in the world.

It is not that we do not understand that some communities feel more of the consequences of a rapidly changing world than others.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con) *rose—*

Hilary Benn: No; I am going to bring my remarks to a close.

All of us have a stake in answering the following questions. Where will the jobs for our children and grandchildren come from? How will we grow our economy so we can continue to support the NHS and an ageing population? How do we combat climate change, terrorism and insecurity? The answers lie in co-operation. We should have confidence: we are a nation full of ideas. We invented the television, the jet engine and the world wide web. The best way to continue to use the talents of this great country of ours to turn ideas into jobs is to work with others and to take advantage of the investment that comes from being in the European Union. We gain from ideas generated in other countries, from lowered trade barriers and from people coming in with their talents. We have always traded with neighbours near and far, and we must remain an outward-facing country.

We also believe that, in this year of all years, we should remember the contribution that European nations coming together has made to the cause of peace on this continent of ours. That achievement is all too easy to take for granted, but it would have seemed extraordinary

to our forebears and ancestors sitting here 100 years ago, after centuries of war across Europe, if someone had said, “I’ve seen the future, and this is what Europeans working together can achieve.” We believe in the strength of the argument for remaining part of the European Union. Labour Members are already making it, and we will continue to do so. It will be for the British people to decide.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. We will begin with a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

1.41 pm

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): This is a great day, a remarkable moment: we have a Conservative majority—now, I am delighted to hear, backed by the Labour Opposition—that will deliver a Bill to give the people of the UK a choice on who actually makes their laws and regulations. The mentors, sadly dead, who encouraged me to come to this place more than 20 years ago, such as my predecessor the late Lord Biffen of Tanat and the late Lord Ridley of Liddesdale, would be delighted that we have the opportunity to go back to the question of whether this country voted in 1975 to join a market and, as the shadow Foreign Secretary has commented, have the benefits of a market, embrace the world and get our full seat back on organisations such as the World Trade Organisation, and not be told what to do by the political and judicial arrangements that we are currently under.

This is a glorious moment in history, because the eurozone will inevitably move to become a co-ordinated country, in which significant amounts of money are shifted from the northern wealth-creating areas of Germany and Holland to southern Europe, and we have a chance of really radical change. I am delighted that the Foreign Secretary expounded that today and that the Prime Minister has made a start. We have a real chance.

Mr Jenkin: I would recall other mentors who were in the House when I first entered it, such as the late Lord Shore of Stepney and, indeed, the late Tony Benn.

Mr Paterson: I am glad to have the endorsement of those key figures from the Opposition Benches.

I want to touch on two points. First, I strongly advocate that the Prime Minister gets the maximum time for his negotiations, and I would like the referendum to be held in late 2017. Secondly, on the question, I favour two positives, rather than having one side as a negative.

The issue that really concerns me, however, is the suspension of *purdah*. I am afraid that I was dismayed to read the Foreign Secretary’s comments on ConservativeHome this morning, which are nonsense. The rules of *purdah* have developed steadily over 20 years. We have just fought a general election very satisfactorily, during which the wheels of government continued to turn without attempts to use taxpayers’ money to influence the way people voted.

I want to take the House through the long process that goes right back to 1996, when the Nairn report called for referendums to be brought within election law. The result of the Welsh referendum, when the Conservatives

[Mr Owen Paterson]

were in total disarray, was extraordinarily narrow: 6,721 was the majority across Wales, or 168 per seat. By any standards, that was a very marginal result. Particularly in north Wales, near where I come from, there was widespread dissatisfaction at the fact that the result was affected by very significant Government interventions.

In October 1998, Lord Neill of Bladen's Committee came up with some absolutely key recommendations. I want to cite Vernon Bogdanor of Oxford University—he taught the Prime Minister a thing or two about politics, philosophy and economics—who, in a very telling contribution, said:

“I hope also the Committee will make some suggestions about referendums because one purpose of a referendum... is to secure legitimacy for decisions where Parliament alone can not secure that legitimacy. For that legitimacy to be secured, the losers have to feel that the fight was fairly conducted.”

That issue is absolutely fundamental: the British public have a real sense of fairness, and if they have a sense that this referendum is rigged, the result will not be legitimate.

On that basis, the very distinguished figures on the Neill Committee stated:

“We believe it is perfectly appropriate for the government of the day to state its views and for members of the Government to campaign vigorously during referendum campaigns, just as they do during general election campaigns. But we also believe that, just as in general election campaigns, neither taxpayers' money nor the permanent government machine—civil servants, official cars, the Government Information Service, and so forth—should be used to promote the interests of the Government side of the argument. In other words, referendum campaigns should be treated for these purposes in every way as though they were general election campaigns.”

They also said:

“We believe that it is extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, for the government of the day to offer purely objective and factual information in the course of a referendum campaign, especially when, as will usually be the case, itself it is a party to the campaign. We believe governments should not participate in referendum campaigns in this manner, just as it would be thought to be wholly inappropriate during a general election campaign for the government to print and distribute, at the taxpayers' expense, literature setting out government policy.”

Their recommendation 89 stated:

“The government of the day in future referendums should, as a government, remain neutral and should not distribute at public expense literature, even purportedly ‘factual’ literature, setting out or otherwise promoting its case.”

I stress that very senior, respected figures on both sides of the House have participated in this long debate over the past 20 years. In an Adjournment debate on the Neill report on 9 November 1998, there was a significant contribution by the then Home Secretary Jack Straw, but, on the Conservative side, the now Lords Fowler and MacGregor of Pullham Market were absolutely clear in calling for full implementation of Neill. Sir Norman Fowler, as he then was, said:

“However, we accept the findings in the report and believe that legislation based on it should be introduced with the proviso that it should implement all the major proposals. There should be no cherry picking of one proposal, leaving the others to one side.”—[*Official Report*, 9 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 59.]

Second Reading of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Bill was on 10 January 2000, introduced by Jack Straw. Interestingly, Mr Speaker, there was a

significant intervention, at column 36, by the hon. Member for Buckingham (John Bercow). Only you could use such a phrase as this:

“I am sure that the House has listened to the right hon. Gentleman's historical exegesis with great interest.”

Very pertinently, as the first person to raise the issue of time, you went on:

“If he is against the purchase of votes, how does he justify promoting a Bill that will allow the issue by Ministers of official press releases in support, for example, of the abolition of our national currency, while regulating the activities of campaigning organisations in any such referendum for up to six months, thereby preventing the supporters of national self-government from effectively arguing their case?”—[*Official Report*, 10 January 2000; Vol. 342, c. 36.]

That was a most pertinent intervention because the issue of time reappeared in Committee.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who has sadly left his seat, argued hard on the amendments, and, Mr Speaker, you and I participated on the issue of special advisers. Respected figures such as my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), and a number of us who have held this party together through the long winter of opposition, all made the point that 28 days was not sufficient. We were absolutely clear that we did not like Jack Straw's proposals on 28 days. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield said:

“we are worried that the 28-day period on its own will be insufficient. The particular mischief is that there will be a preliminary period, in which the campaign that will be set up in opposition to the view that the Government want to put forward, but which they will subsume into their own campaign organisation, is not up and running because it has not received validation from the commission.”—[*Official Report*, 16 February 2000; Vol. 344, c. 1062.]

Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, another distinguished Conservative, said:

“I believe that purdah should apply during the whole referendum period. I consider that to be fair and equitable.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 22 November 2000; Vol. 619, c. 884.]

A helpful intervention came from the Electoral Commission yesterday:

“We are therefore disappointed and concerned that the Bill includes provision to remove the restrictions on the use of public funds by governments and others to promote an outcome right up until voters cast their vote.”

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Paterson: No, I want to finish my comments because other Members want to speak.

The question we have to ask is why this power, which has been debated by serious Members on both sides of the House over a 20-year period, resulting in what Conservative Members thought was the very unsatisfactory compromise of 28 days, is being lifted arbitrarily. We have fought a number of general election campaigns during which cars continued to be made, cows continued to be milked and the world did not stop.

It absolutely must be taken on board by the Government that if the British people sense that there is no fairness and that the referendum is being rigged against them, because a deluge of local government, national Government

and, above all, European government money and propaganda can be dropped on them—there will not just be election material, as the Foreign Secretary said, but reports, briefs and analyses on the terrifying consequences of the vote going in a certain way—it will be unacceptable and will go down extremely badly with the British people.

What really worries me is that this extraordinary, incredibly important event in our history could be seen as illegitimate, and that whatever system of government for this country emerges after the referendum might not be seen as valid. I appeal to the Foreign Secretary to go back, talk to the Prime Minister and remove this arbitrary suspension of the process of *purdah* that has been thrashed out over 20 years.

Mr Speaker: In calling the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), I remind the House that as his party's Front-Bench spokesman, he is not subject to the 10-minute limit.

1.51 pm

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and add:

That this House declines to give a Second Reading to the EU Referendum Bill because it fails to meet the gold standard set by the Scottish independence referendum in terms of inclusivity and democratic participation, in particular because the Bill does not give the right to vote to 16 and 17 year olds or most EU nationals living in the UK, the Bill does not include a double majority provision to ensure that no nation or jurisdiction of the UK can be taken out of the EU against its will, and the legislation does not include provision to ensure that the referendum vote cannot be held on the same day as the Scottish, Welsh or Northern Ireland elections.

I congratulate the Prime Minister on his singular achievement—his 31-day achievement. Thirty one days does not seem like a huge amount of time, but in terms of holding the Conservative party together on Europe, the last 31 days have been a great achievement. Hannibal crossed the Alps in 17 days, but that pales into insignificance compared with the 31 days of calm before the Bavarian blunder of yesterday blew the gasket on the Conservative party's divisions over Europe.

It said in *The Times* today that quoting your own speeches is the first sign of political madness. On that basis, the Prime Minister is pretty far gone. I want to share with the House the full bouquet of the absurdity, apparently in all sobriety, of the Prime Minister's statement yesterday. What he said, quoted on the front page of *The Times* today, was:

"That is what I said. I feel that there was a misinterpretation, which is why I woke up and read the newspapers and thought: 'I will repeat what I said and make that very clear.'"

Well, that puts that one to bed, doesn't it?

At Question Time today, I lost count of the number of times the Foreign Secretary started to answer a question by saying, "It's very clear". I have always had an enormous suspicion that when members of the Treasury Bench start their answer to a question by saying, "It's very clear," we can all be sure that it is pretty opaque. Opaque is exactly what the Prime Minister's position is right now on collective responsibility.

As was said to the Foreign Secretary at Question Time, this is not the hypothetical question of whether the Prime Minister and the Government will recommend

a yes or no vote, although most of us, if we could get a bet on that one, would be pretty certain of the outcome. This is the simple question of collective responsibility. When the decision is reached, whatever it may be, will it pertain to all members of the Government? Will collective responsibility apply?

John Redwood: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Alex Salmond: I give way to the right hon. Gentleman, who knows a great deal about collective responsibility, if my memory serves me correctly.

John Redwood: The nation would like to hear a debate about the United Kingdom's relationship with the EU; not these silly jibes. Will the right hon. Gentleman explain why his party is so keen to get powers back from London, but never wants any power back from Brussels?

Alex Salmond: I remember when John Major, as Prime Minister, ironically thanked the right hon. Gentleman for resigning from the Cabinet so that he could consolidate and secure his leadership of the Conservative party.

The SNP's attitude is that we are a pro-European party. We believe that controlling 99% of our taxation revenue would be genuine independence, as opposed to the sum of 12% that we control at the moment or the 20% or so that we will control under the proposals that we debated yesterday. That is why we are proud to say, as are so many other countries, that we can be independent within the European Union. The idea that the right hon. Gentleman portrays—that a country cannot be independent in the European Union—is not widely shared across the continent. It might just be that the right hon. Gentleman and his friends are wrong in being out of step with all other Europeans, as opposed to him and his friends being correct about their idea of independence within the European construct.

The question of whether or not there will be collective responsibility in respect of the referendum is capable of being answered as a matter of principle. I hope that the Foreign Secretary or his colleague will address it in those terms when they wind up the debate this evening.

Mr Jenkin: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Alex Salmond: I am in the fortunate position, as Mr Speaker said, of not being bound by the 10-minute rule. I will give way a couple more times, but I understand what Mr Speaker said about allowing other Members to get in.

Mr Jenkin: Will the right hon. Gentleman explain why the same arguments that were deployed by people like him to say that we should join the euro—thank goodness we did not—are now being used by people like him to say that we cannot possibly consider leaving the EU? Does that not underline that he is Braveheart in Scotland, but slaveheart in Brussels?

Alex Salmond: One wonders how long it took the hon. Gentleman, when he was lying in bed this morning, like the Prime Minister, working out how he would deploy that *bon mot* in the debate, to come up with that.

[Alex Salmond]

The hon. Gentleman mistakes me, incidentally. He should reflect on the speech that I made in this Chamber only last week. I am not one of those people who argues that the UK could not possibly be out of the European Union. In my speech last week, I warned against a parade of establishment figures talking down to people and saying, “You can’t do this. You can’t do that.” I am not one of the people who argues that case. The essence of my case for being in the European Union is a positive case about what Europe should be doing, not about what it should not be doing. I hope that at some point in this debate, we will get to the stage where what is said to be wrong with the European Union is not things like hard-working Polish people being able to repatriate their child benefit to Poland. There must be more to this country’s relationship with the rest of Europe than matters of such smallness.

I will move on to the essential nonsense of this referendum and why my party will oppose it in the Lobbies this evening. When someone proposes a referendum, it should be because they are proposing a significant constitutional change, whether it be the alternative vote, Scottish independence, Scottish devolution or Welsh devolution, and they are looking for democratic sanction—the sovereignty of the people—to back that change. That is not the position of the Prime Minister. Nobody seriously believes that he wants to take this country out of the European Union. The referendum is a tactic that is being deployed as a means of deflecting support from UKIP and as a sop to Back Benchers. Nobody believes that the Prime Minister wants to take the country out of the European Union.

The suspicion, which is already developing in this debate, is a result of that essential contradiction in the Government’s proposition. The suspicion is coming, incidentally, not just from the hardened Eurosceptics—or Europhobes, perhaps—from whom we have heard on the Government Benches, but even from the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) and the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who questioned why it looks as though the Government are trying to stack the deck in the referendum before the campaign has even begun. The questions about the campaign limits and the purdah period are coming not just from people who are opposed to the European Union, but from Members of great experience who are concerned that the Government are already moving to imbalance the referendum campaign.

Let me tell right hon. and hon. Members who do not share my view on Europe what exactly will happen if we go into the campaign and the polls start to close or perhaps the no side even moves ahead. We will find Sir Nicholas Macpherson parading things in front of Select Committees of this House; we will find civil servants compromising their impartiality; and we will find the Prime Minister suddenly making a promise, a commitment, a pledge or a vow, and saying that he has found some new policy initiative to turn the argument, in total defiance of any idea of a purdah period.

My advice—and it is free advice, honestly given—is that Members should lock things down in the Bill, otherwise all their worst fears will come into being. With great respect to the Foreign Secretary, they should not trust his bona fides in saying that he just wants a

fair game and fair play. If we want to secure a proper and decent referendum and avoid the deck being stacked, we should lock it into the Bill through amendments.

We have detailed reasons for opposing the referendum in its current form. I say to the Labour party that I am surprised by its argument, “We lost an election, and we therefore have to change our policy”, as the acting Leader of the Opposition said just the other day. Does that apply to all the policies that Labour fought the election on, or just to the policy on the referendum?

Ian Austin: I have to say, the right hon. Gentleman is doing absolutely nothing to reduce the reputation for self-satisfied smugness that preceded him before he was re-elected.

I speak as someone who has believed for well over a decade that we should have a referendum on our membership of the EU. If it was right for the Scottish people to have the referendums they wanted on establishing the Scottish Parliament and on Scottish independence, why is it not right for the vast majority of people elsewhere in the UK to have the referendum that they definitely want on Britain’s membership of the EU? Why should the right hon. Gentleman’s party troop through the Lobby to try to prevent that? Why should he deny people in Dudley their say on this issue?

Alex Salmond: If it was two or three weeks ago that the hon. Gentleman was campaigning against the referendum, why is he suddenly in favour?

Ian Austin: I wasn’t.

Alex Salmond: On a manifesto of—

Ian Austin: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. We cannot have two people on their feet at the same time. I hope that it is a point of order rather than of frustration.

Ian Austin: Is it in order for the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) to say that that I was campaigning against a referendum just a few weeks ago, given that one of my local pledges was to support a referendum and I have been in favour of a referendum for well over a decade? If he knew anything about what I have ever said on the issue, he would know that.

Mr Speaker: I do not think the right hon. Member for Gordon said anything disorderly. I think the safest thing that I can conclude is that he was not attending closely to election literature in Dudley, his mind being focused, perhaps, elsewhere.

Alex Salmond: You are correct, Mr Speaker, but the record will show that what I said was that the hon. Gentleman was campaigning on a manifesto. I did not realise that the Labour party had two manifestos, one for Dudley and one for the rest of the country. Perhaps in future elections it will accept the hon. Gentleman’s wisdom, and who knows, it might transform its political prospects if the Dudley manifesto becomes the UK manifesto.

With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, I was trying to point out that the argument that a party should change its position because it loses an election is being used selectively in the Labour party at the moment. Those of us who were in the House yesterday heard

Labour's spokesperson on Scotland put forward a position identical to the Labour party's position before the election, yet Labour's catastrophic result in Scotland makes its English result pale into insignificance. If the argument for the Labour party changing its position because it lost the election applies to a referendum on the European issue, why on earth is it not changing its position on the Scottish issue or many others on which it was soundly beaten? We will maintain our position against the referendum in the Lobby this evening.

In particular, we cannot see the argument against 16 and 17-year-olds being allowed to vote in the referendum. In an era when political engagement and turnout has been at its lowest ebb, the inclusion of that age bracket in the Scottish referendum contributed to its being one of the most exciting and engaging political debates of all time. I say to the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) that in fairness to the Prime Minister, I should record that he was not a deep enthusiast for 16 to 18-year-olds having the vote in Scotland. There was enabling legislation to allow the Scottish Parliament to go ahead with that.

Scotland now has a politicised population of 16 to 18-year-olds. Of course, the notion of education and engaging the young non-elite of the nation is a comparatively recent phenomenon in parts of these islands—we were doing it in Scotland some three centuries before it was applied around here. We have just sent one of the youngest MPs since the 17th century to this very Chamber from Scotland, and we are extremely proud of that.

Let us have a think about 16 to 18-year-olds in Scotland. Last September, they were voting in the Scottish referendum. This May, they were excluded from voting in the general election. Next May, they will be included in voting in the Scottish elections, and then they will be excluded again from voting in a European referendum. The right hon. Member for Leeds Central rather amusingly referred to the Conservative party's hokey-cokey position on the referendum, but what about the in-out position of 16 to 18-year-olds in Scotland? Those people have demonstrated that they are much more wise and able to understand politics than when the Foreign Secretary was a callow youth and did not understand what he was voting on in 1975. They have demonstrated their ability to engage in these debates, and it would be deeply insulting to the young people of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland to exclude them from the upcoming referendum.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I have a letter from a young constituent, Matthew Terras, who got to vote in the referendum and will be old enough to vote on Europe, but who speaks for the young people in his school. He points out that they feel "discarded" by being excluded from the Europe referendum. The referendum in Scotland has engaged our young people, and the Bill could be a chance for the House to engage young people across the UK. Matthew speaks up on behalf of his whole school, and I commend to the House thinking again about excluding young people from the referendum.

Alex Salmond: My hon. Friend puts her point extremely well, and I hope that the Foreign Secretary was paying attention and listening.

Paul Farrelly: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Alex Salmond: Yes, for the last time.

Paul Farrelly: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Conservative Government are playing into his hands in alienating 16 and 17-year-olds in Scotland from decisions taken in this Parliament?

Alex Salmond: Both the Conservative and Labour parties have played into the Scottish National party's hands on many occasions, but this issue is so important that I appeal to the Foreign Secretary not to play into our hands but to allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in the referendum.

Then there is the question of European citizens. Why should they not have a vote in this referendum? We allowed European citizens to vote in the Scottish referendum because our view of nationality has a civic basis. Unlike Conservative Members, with their narrow-minded nationalism and narrow view of people's interests, we take a broad view of the matter. We believe in civic nationalism—we believe that if someone engages in a country, lives in a country, works in a country and pays tax in a country, they are entitled to vote on the future of the country.

We have a Member of the Scottish Parliament, Christian Allard, who is my MSP—the Member for North East Scotland. I go to Christian whenever I have a difficulty across the north-east of Scotland that requires resolution. He is a fine, distinguished Member of the Scottish Parliament, but he is to be denied a vote in the European referendum. He has been in Scotland for 25 years, contributing to our community. Why on earth should he be denied a vote?

The franchise to be used is not the general election franchise, because Members of the House of Lords are to be empowered to vote. I know that Conservative Members are frightfully worried about the idea of prisoners being accorded the right to vote because of the European convention, but there are six ex-prisoners in the House of Lords who will be enfranchised by the Foreign Secretary's proposals. The Foreign Secretary says, "Of course Members of the House of Lords should be able to vote. However, this is an advisory, not a binding, referendum. The House of Lords will have its say on whether a proposal is enacted after the referendum." However, the Government cannot say that it is to be a general election franchise and then start to change the franchise.

What about the position of other Europeans? It is not the case that all other European citizens are to be denied a vote in the referendum. Citizens of the Irish Republic will have a vote. So will citizens of Malta and Cyprus, because of the Commonwealth entitlement. How can it be argued that some European citizens should be able to vote but others should not? *[Interruption.]* The Foreign Secretary says it is simple: I suggest—and I say this with some experience of having to conduct a franchise that can be defended in the courts—that the argument that some European citizens but not others should be included will be extremely difficult to sustain if subjected to challenge in the courts. I warn him that he will not find it as easy as just saying to the House that it is obvious that some people should be given the vote and some should be denied it.

[Alex Salmond]

On the question of the double majority or quad lock, why should it be the case that Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland—or, for that matter, England—should be taken out of the European Union against the will of that nation? [Interruption.] From a sedentary position, the Foreign Secretary says that it is because we are a United Kingdom, but it was the Prime Minister who said only last September that the essence of the United Kingdom was that it was an equal partnership of nations. He said that we in Scotland should lead the United Kingdom: he did not say that we should leave Europe. Of course, it would be outrageous, disgraceful, undemocratic and unacceptable to drag Scotland out of the European Union against the wishes and will of the Scottish people.

Mike Gapes: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Alex Salmond: As it is the hon. Gentleman, I will give way.

Mike Gapes: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. He is surely aware that the population of London, which is the powerhouse of our economy and dependent on relations with the European Union, is almost double that of Scotland. Using his argument, should not London have a separate say too?

Alex Salmond: I know that many people in the Labour party find the argument about the difference between a country and a county or city very difficult. I advise the hon. Gentleman that there are many routes to revival for the Labour party in Scotland, but suggesting that Scotland is not a nation, or is equivalent to a city or a county, is not one of the best avenues. All of the four component nations of the United Kingdom should be treated with equal respect.

The subject of respect comes to the issue of whether the referendum might be held on the same day as the Scottish, Welsh and, possibly, the Northern Irish elections. I am sure that Ministers on the Treasury Bench will have heard the huge opposition to such a proposal from all those nations, but that does not come only from representatives of those countries or even of London. It also comes from the Electoral Commission, which—last December—not only said that was a bad idea, but gave clear advice to the Government. It said:

“Any government introducing legislation for future referendums, not only in Scotland but also those held across or in other parts of the UK, should also publish at the same time its assessment of the implications of holding other polls on the same day. This will enable legislatures (including the Scottish Parliament and the UK Parliament) to consider the relative benefits and risks of the proposal as they scrutinise the referendum Bill.”

So the Electoral Commission recommended that should be done “at the same time”. We are now discussing the Bill on the Referendum. I ask the Minister for Europe where is the assessment that the Electoral Commission called for in such unambiguous language.

Mr Grieve: May I take the right hon. Gentleman back a moment to his arguments about the franchise? Is he arguing that prisoners should be empowered to vote in the referendum? If they should be in the parliamentary franchise, which arguably—under the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights—they should, that might be an argument for their inclusion, but I noticed

that, when he was First Minister in Scotland and the matter was being debated here, the silence of his Administration on the subject was deafening.

Alex Salmond: The silence was action. The Government that I led defended in court—I am surprised the right hon. and learned Gentleman did not follow the proceedings of the Scottish courts on the matter—an attempt to enfranchise prisoners in the Scottish referendum, and we were right to refuse that. I merely pointed out that ex-prisoners in the House of Lords will be enfranchised by the Government’s proposals while fine, upstanding European citizens who have never done a thing wrong in their lives, such as Christian Allard MSP, are to be denied a vote. I am truly surprised that someone with such a liberal reputation—the right hon. and learned Gentleman may be the last liberal in the House—should make such a point. Perhaps he is campaigning for some Select Committee and trying to garner support from the Tory Benches.

Before the right hon. and learned Gentleman attempted to distract me, I was making an important point about the clear injunction—to use an English term—from the Electoral Commission that if a Bill for a referendum left open the possibility of holding elections on the same day, an assessment should be published at the same time. That was what the Electoral Commission said last December. Ministers have said that they are considering that, so where is the assessment that the Electoral Commission required to be published? Where is the Government’s assessment of the pros and cons of holding an election on the same day? It would be unacceptable to the people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to have the European referendum held on the same day as our national elections.

The Bill is badly based on a nonsense and a contradiction. The Prime Minister, who is introducing the Bill—although he is not here with us today—does not actually want to withdraw from the European Union. Major constitutional referendums should be held on a proposition honestly held, whether for independence, devolution or proportional representation, and backed up by those proposing it. The Prime Minister proposes to hold the referendum as a political tactic, and that is the contradiction at the heart of the Bill. That is why there is so much suspicion already, not only among opponents of Europe but among proponents of Europe, and that is why the Bill should not be given a Second Reading later today.

2.16 pm

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): I have to tell the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) that, though I enjoyed his speech very much, he has not persuaded me to support the SNP amendment tonight. That is not because I no longer have fundamental doubts about referendums. Like every politician of my generation, I prefer parliamentary democracy, but we are where we are and it is obvious that we will have a referendum. I probably will not vote in favour of the Bill tonight, but I shall do nothing to stop it going ahead in principle.

I would only warn my right hon. and hon. Friends that since Harold Wilson made the unwise decision to introduce the institution into our British constitution it has never yet been used to settle any question. The question of proportional representation, for example, is very much alive and kicking. The question of elected

mayors does not seem to have been totally resolved by all the local referendums. The future of Scotland, and what I hope will be its continued relationship with the United Kingdom, has been enlivened, not quietened, by the result of the recent referendum. Now we are to have one on Europe again.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that politicians of conviction fight in referendums and accept that they have lost them, but they do not change their fundamental views. I do not believe that my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) will become an enthusiastic Europhile if he is on the losing side of the referendum, and he will not be surprised to learn that I am likely to be found supporting the yes campaign, but I hope that the referendum campaign will be of the same extraordinarily high quality as the Scottish one, in which I took some small part. I have never known the population be so politicised or have such an intense debate. So far, I have been on the winning side in all the important referendums, and I hope that I will be so again after an interesting campaign.

Mr Owen Paterson: I think that I have one over my right hon. and learned Friend in that I have been the president of a European trade association and he has not. He really must not muddle the idea of the European Union, which is a political and judicial organisation, and the European market, of which I am a most enthusiastic proponent.

Mr Clarke: My right hon. Friend appears to believe that we can somehow have all the advantages of the European Union and the market without complying with any of the obligations. I know of no trading bloc that allows anybody entry to its markets on the basis that they will decide whether to comply with its rules.

I approve of the form of words in the Bill for the question but I hope, as the campaign goes on and we all form all-party campaigns, it becomes crystal clear what the question actually means. It is not solely about the negotiations for reform. Personally, I completely concede that the European Union has a lot of defects and is ripe for reform, and I approve very strongly of some of the measures, particularly those in the Bloomberg speech, which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is pressing for—if he can achieve them. However, the yes vote involves a decision on the future role of the United Kingdom in the modern world: how we are best able to further the interests of our citizens, defend our security, develop our economy and bring prosperity. That is the big question.

Sir William Cash: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr Clarke: I will not, because we are under a time limit and other people want to speak. I apologise to my hon. Friend. He and I have debated this frequently.

We are 1% of the world's population and we represent 3% of the world's GDP. As a proportion, we are declining yet further. On the question of being in the European Union, we need to get across to people that our effective voice in the world, insofar as we have one, is best deployed as a leading and influential player in the European Union. There will be less interest taken in British views by the United States, Russia, China, India

and other emerging powers if we go into splendid isolation. As I have already said, the idea that we can somehow advance our future prosperity by withdrawing from the biggest organised trading bloc in the world, while at the same time, as a Conservative party, advocating wider free trade wherever it can be obtained, is an absurdity.

That leads me to the other argument: what does “out” mean and what does a no vote mean? I look forward to my Eurosceptic friends providing an answer to that, because Eurosceptics have always given different answers. My former hon. Friend who is now in the UK Independence party, the hon. Member for Clacton (Mr Carswell), has a quite different view of what a no vote means compared with some of my no voting colleagues on the Government Back Benches. Does it mean the Norwegian option? Do we stay in the trading area? That would mean we pay a large subscription, accept free movement of labour—Norway has a higher proportion of other EU nationals compared with Norwegians than we have compared with Brits—and comply with all the legislation, rules and regulations of the single market without having any say in them.

Do we go further than that and have the Swiss model? The Swiss model means we would have some access to the single market. However, in those areas we would have to comply with all the laws and rules that would be directly applied and have no influence on what they are.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr Clarke: I cannot as there is a time limit.

The Swiss do not have access to large parts of the market, although I would add that they accepted the free movement of labour. They have no access to European financial services, or any other services. Swiss banks are providing investment and employment in the City of London because Switzerland is excluded from the extremely valuable part of our financial services industry, on which a lot of our prosperity depends. Normally, I find that Eurosceptics do not address that.

Do Eurosceptics wish to go into the wide blue yonder and leave the trade area altogether? That would involve tariffs. That would involve 10% tariffs on vehicle exports to Europe. I doubt whether my hon. Friends are advocating that we should cease to have any access to the market at all. We need to be absolutely clear that the Eurosceptic case is usually that we are so important to Europe that the other countries, if we negotiate strongly enough, will allow us to keep the benefits of membership and give way on the obligations.

As I have said, there are some things that we ought to negotiate. However, we should be wary of getting too carried away by freedom of movement of labour, which is desirable in a trading area. It is a benefit to all members, including the United Kingdom. We should, of course, stop benefit tourism. Benefit tourists are unwise if they come here, because benefits are more generous in Germany, Sweden and in many other places. No doubt they will agree with us on clarifying the exclusion of benefit tourism.

What we need to bear in mind about seeking to go further is that 2.2 million British people are living and

[Mr Kenneth Clarke]

working in the rest of the European Union, and about 2.5 million EU citizens are living and working here. If we are going to demand treaty change to permit us to discriminate against European foreign nationals—not other foreign nationals, but European foreign nationals—in our employment laws, our tax system or our benefit system, are they going to forgo doing the same thing to British residents in other countries? There are more British people drawing unemployment benefit in Germany than there are Germans drawing unemployment benefit here. I think that an Englishman working alongside a Frenchman in an international company in France should, if he is doing the same job, have the same take-home pay. I find it difficult to argue why an Englishman and a Polish person working alongside each other doing the same job in Britain should not have the same pay either. Freedom of movement of labour benefits us.

Eurosceptics love to demand treaty change. They do that because they know it is not possible to get treaty change to a complicated 28 nation state treaty before 2017. It takes five or six years. We can have legally binding protocols on particular matters, which has been resorted to, and I am sure ingenuity in the Foreign Office and in the corridors of Europe will produce legally binding protocols for anything we produce. To make a touchstone of treaty change, when there are 27 other Governments who will follow our lead in the process and all start demanding things, is not worth pursuing.

The key issue is to have a campaign, as well as a question, that is absolutely clear. This is about Britain's role in the modern 21st-century world of interdependent nations. How do we maximise our influence? By using our powerbase in Europe. The alternative, I am afraid, is a fanciful escapist route into isolated nationalism which would greatly diminish our influence in the world and greatly damage our economy.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. On account of the level of interest, I am afraid an eight-minute limit must now apply.

2.28 pm

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my constituent and fellow diner at the wonderful Kennington Tandoori in Vauxhall, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), although he knows I do not agree with very much of what he said.

Today I am here to speak on this particular Bill. I agree with the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) when he said that this is a good day. This is a great day for democracy. Having sat through and spoken in two referendum debates, I am feeling great today, because I am actually going to be with the majority of my party. A small number of very good members of my party, including my hon. Friends the Members for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) and for Dudley North (Ian Austin), argued strongly that support for the right of the British people to decide our future relationship with the EU should have been in our manifesto. If my party had done that, perhaps the election result might

have been slightly different. I am very pleased that those on my Front Bench are supporting the Bill on Second Reading. This is a very important day for the British public.

I want to talk about a few aspects of the Bill. The most important thing about this referendum Bill, when it finally leaves this Parliament, is that it gives every single British person, in all of the United Kingdom, the clear feeling, understanding and belief that the referendum will be free and fair—that it is really going to be an opportunity for their views to be heard, and that the vote will mean that they have really been listened to. My concern is that some elements of the Bill could mean that in the end, with the result, they will feel they have not had a free and fair vote.

The first such element has already been alluded to, and I strongly support those on both sides of the House who believe that the *purdah* aspect is just wrong. I do not believe it proves to the British people that the Government want a free and fair vote. We have to change the *purdah* situation in the Bill. Any common-sense view would be that it cannot be right to change the *purdah* restrictions.

Mr MacNeil: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kate Hoey: No, not at the moment, thank you.

So, the question of *purdah* is really important.

The second issue is one where I am not in line with some members of my party. Although there is a real debate to be had about votes for 16 to 18 year olds, I do not think that introducing them at a referendum is the right time. If we are going to change our constitution on the right to vote and bring the voting age down, we must ensure it is seriously thought through and cannot just be brought in glibly for a referendum. It should be discussed in this Parliament and a decision should be taken for the next general election, but the referendum is too early for it, so I am not in favour of changing the voting system. I support the Bill on that point and absolutely on the non-rights of EU citizens, other than those who are mentioned, to be able to vote. It would not make any sense at all, and would alienate millions of British citizens.

Mr MacNeil: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kate Hoey: No, thank you.

So, I am very clear on that question, too, and glad that my party also supports it.

On the wording of the question, the Scottish Nationalist Member who spoke earlier, the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), talked about the Electoral Commission. We seem to want the Electoral Commission when we support what it says, then, when we do not support what it says, we do not. On the question, the Commission was very clear. It said that a fairer wording would be:

“Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?”

That is very simple, very clear—and not seen as in any way biased. If that were the wording, people would have a vote either to leave or to remain. That has to be looked

at, and I know the Commission is continuing to do so. I hope it is one of the provisions that is changed in the Bill.

I tried to intervene on the Foreign Secretary, because I am concerned about funding and about the money for the two campaigns that ultimately will be formed. How do we ensure that the biggest funder of all—the European Union and the European Commission itself—is absolutely clear about what it can and cannot fund? We already know that many of our institutions in this country, including the BBC, get huge amounts of European Union money. It will be absolutely disgraceful if the European Commission is allowed to continue to pour in money which is used for propaganda—that is certainly how it will be seen during the referendum campaign—in our schools and our educational institutions generally. That is a really important issue, and I hope that both Front Benchers cover it when they make their winding-up speeches, because it has not been covered anywhere.

Mr MacNeil: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kate Hoey: I will, because the hon. Gentleman is a friend—and he lives on an island.

Mr MacNeil: I am very grateful. The hon. Lady raises the spectre of the European Commission intervening. Is she worried that the European Parliament might produce reports prior to the referendum which are extremely biased, as the Westminster Parliament did prior to the Scottish referendum? Might José Manuel Barroso turn up on the “Andrew Marr Show” making ex cathedra statements on behalf of one side of the referendum? Do those types of things worry the hon. Lady?

Kate Hoey: If I can decipher that, I know the European Parliament does not actually have that much power; I am much more concerned about the unelected Commission, which has the money and spends our money after we have given it to the EU, in the way that it decides is best. I am very concerned about that and I hope it will be looked at.

I do not want to go into the arguments now, because I want to see the referendum campaign get out to the grass roots of the whole country, and to see the kind of campaign that we saw in Scotland on an issue where there were genuinely held opinions and great campaigns. I look back at some of the images from the campaigns in the 1975 referendum. We saw political leaders—including one of my great mentors and a person whom I am very fond of, Peter Shore—and some wonderful debates, all around the country. We have to have that and ensure that everybody feels they are involved. I hope that my party will allow a completely free vote, including for shadow Ministers and other Members, so that everyone has their own say. This campaign is not about politicians or Members of Parliament; it is about the British people, who for all that time have felt ignored and not listened to, and who have seen the European Union change radically since the day in 1975 when many voted to stay in the European Community.

I want to say one other thing: can we please distinguish—the BBC and the media have to distinguish—between people who say they are anti-EU and being anti-Europe? The two things are completely different. It is so annoying to hear supposedly educated journalists, who are supposed

experts on this issue, talking all the time about Europe and saying, “So, you’re anti-Europe?” No, I am not anti-Europe. I am anti the unelected, absolute dictatorship that we have from the European Union. That is not being anti-Europe, and we have to distinguish between the two. That is important.

I want to get in one other thing in the last 30 seconds available to me. I have said this so many times to the Prime Minister that I am sure he is fed up hearing it, but it should be conveyed to him. Could he—and my shadow Front Benchers—please stop talking about “Britain”? “Britain” excludes Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, and its people will have a hugely important say in the referendum. We must talk about the United Kingdom. It is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. And on that note, I say, “Support this referendum.”

2.37 pm

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Lady, who speaks for Vauxhall. I agree with almost every word she said. I have been sitting next to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), and, although he is a much revered Member and a man whom I have known for a long time, I am afraid I cannot agree with his remarks on this occasion.

I am very pleased to support and welcome the Second Reading of this Bill. For almost my entire adult life, Europe seems to have dominated the debate: whether it has been de Gaulle’s efforts to keep us out—in some ways it is a shame they did not succeed; the referendum, in which I voted yes originally; or indeed the negotiations on the Maastricht treaty. That was an exhausting process and, as a signatory with many colleagues to the “fresh start” early-day motion, one that is seared on my memory of my first term in the House.

I welcome this opportunity to clarify our relationship with the other 27 members of the EU, to recalibrate it and then to put it to the people of this country in a vote. It is quite right that we should re-examine that relationship, not least because, at a time when we are tightening the purse strings to pay off this country’s overdraft, we should look at the money we pay in subscription to that expensive club, which was about £9.8 billion on the most recent examination. To get a perspective on that, I was looking at what we contribute to the UN regular budget and to the UN peacekeeping budget, and they amount to £85 million and £301 million. I welcome the fact that the Government have got the review of the balance of competences, which has given us the necessary audit information to move forward, and I hope that the Chancellor and the Prime Minister can produce the reforms that this country and the institution of Europe need to make that institution and our membership fit for purpose. After all, 200 million more people have joined the EU since we signed up to membership of that club.

I have some concerns not just about the Bill but about what might happen. I am worried that this debate will dominate our political landscape for the next two years. It must not override and interfere with our domestic agenda so ably set out in the winning manifesto that took us to election victory, and neither should it be used to split our party, as it has done in the past; there has always been a range of opinions about the EU in our

[Mrs Cheryl Gillan]

party. We should have an objective negotiation and a plan of action set out by the Government, and then I hope that the leadership will allow individual MPs to promote their views without fear or favour, no matter their rank within or without government.

The timing will be crucial. I urge the Government to lay out more clearly their thinking about timetabling. My experience with the Welsh referendum was that the Welsh Government were determined not to have the referendum at the same time as the elections for the Welsh Assembly. I hear what SNP Members are saying, and I believe that there are some valid arguments to be deployed. In fact, I believe that the referendum is so important that perhaps it should be a stand-alone referendum. I hope that the Government will listen to the views laid out by others with whom I do not agree with politically in any way, shape or form, but with whom I am willing to make common cause when I think they are being sensible.

I hope that the Government will resist the call for the triple lock, quadruple lock—or whatever we are going to call it now. I asked the House of Commons Library to look at the disaggregation by UK constituent nation of the EU budget contributions and receipts. My right hon. Friend the Minister will be interested to know that it clearly shows that although the average cost across the UK in the last year for which figures were available was £48 per head, when that is disaggregated, we see that the real burden falls on England. The cost of membership is £72 per capita in England, whereas in Scotland, it is a mere £2; in Wales minus £74; and in Northern Ireland minus £160. So the devolved nations, which are effectively feather-bedded against the real cost of membership, should not be allowed to slant the results of any referendum by demanding an individual country lock on any result.

Alex Salmond *rose—*

Mrs Gillan: Basing an outcome purely on a selfish, regional—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Hoyle): Order. We cannot have two people on their feet at the same time. If the right hon. Lady does not want to give way, the right hon. Gentleman will just have to wait a little longer.

Mrs Gillan: I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Alex Salmond: I will not go into feather-bedding and 30 years of oil revenues, but I do wonder where this argument is taking the right hon. Lady. If she believes the referendum should be based on financial contribution, by extension her argument would mean that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should not get a vote at all. Is she aware that 3.5% of the population, or 13 states, of the United States of America can block a constitutional amendment there?

Mrs Gillan: This is not the United States of America, and the people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have a vote as members of the UK—and long may they remain so.

We will need clear and straightforward messages, because, as is obvious from the debate so far, there will be myriad voices in the referendum campaign, and the options will not be easy for the man in the street to

understand. However, I share the concerns of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) about the purdah. When I was Secretary of State for Wales, I ran a successful referendum on more devolution of powers to Wales, but I remained strictly neutral, because I thought that that was the right way to behave, and indeed it was a successful referendum and nobody felt that I had slanted it from my position as Secretary of State.

It is also important that the necessary intricacies of article 50 of the treaty on European Union be spelt out to people. On both sides of the argument, we need to know what would govern the processes and negotiations of unilateral withdrawal. However, the terms of engagement in and around the referendum period with other European institutions must also be made clear. For example, do the Front-Bench team know what plans any of the devolved Governments within the UK have for spending money on this referendum, or indeed what plans the European Commission or other European institutions have? I think we might find money being spent from other directions that will slant the results of the referendum.

I do not share the views of the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) on the franchise for 16-year-olds. I was at a school in my constituency when I expressed that opinion, and I thought I would be out of kilter with what they thought, but—surprisingly—many of those young people told me they would not be confident about making the decisions necessary in a general election or referendum campaign. I would, therefore, like the franchise to remain as it is.

We have been a member of the EU for many years, but for the past couple of decades it has been clear that the British public have fallen out of love with it. It is also clear, however, that we cannot stop being European—and nor do many want to stop. I hear from people that they want to reverse the feeling of impotence that has developed over the increasingly centralised European decision-making process. Specifically, they want a fair deal in Europe without disproportionate and disadvantaging regulatory costs. At a time when we are heralding devolution so widely at home, we need to see this principle applied firmly to our EU relationship.

The Bill is about an internal process and, as such, does not constitute the real substance of this debate, but before we can get on with putting our renegotiated position into a shop window for people to examine, we need to pass the Bill so that people know that the process will be fair and not loaded in favour of our remaining in an institution that has seemed to load so many processes in its own favour over recent years.

2.47 pm

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): As someone who has been involved in campaigning for a referendum on this subject for many years—alongside colleagues from both sides of the House—it gives me great pleasure to speak in this Second Reading debate. As others have said, it is indeed a great day for this country.

We are all conscious of the astonishing flip-flopping, reversals and clarifications that have accompanied the Bill, although we have to accept that it is right for the Labour party, the Lib Dems and others to change their minds about it—or at any rate for the people to have changed their minds for them. I very much welcome their change of mind.

The Democratic Unionist party has been a strong and consistent defender of the people's right to have their say on our relationship with the EU. Speaking for the only party that has been consistent and united on this matter in the House during the last Parliament and beyond—the only party that has consistently called for a referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, dating all the way back to the troubles over Maastricht—I am glad that it is almost upon us. Our long-held position has been vindicated. No one can seriously argue or reasonably maintain that the people should any longer be denied the right to express their democratic will on this subject.

We need to settle this matter for a generation, and whatever the result we will respect the will of the people of the United Kingdom, but that will does need to be expressed. Unfortunately, successive Government backtracking and broken promises have been the hallmark of efforts to deny the people of the UK a referendum. Labour refused to give a referendum on the Lisbon treaty, and in 2010 the cast-iron guarantee given by the Prime Minister was not delivered on. As I said, therefore, it is long past time the British people had their voice heard. That was clear as we went round knocking on doors during the general election. No one under the age of 57 in the United Kingdom has had any say on our relationship with the European Union apart from politicians and diplomats. The impact of the EU is vast, but the ordinary people feel that they have not given any authority for the decisions to be made by people they do not elect.

I do not want to stray into discussing the merits or otherwise of the UK's membership of the EU today. The Bill before us is about how the people will decide on that matter, so it is to the Bill that we must address ourselves. Unfortunately, there are already a number of grave defects looming. Let us take the timing of the referendum. With polls as important as the three devolved contests and the Greater London Authority elections in the offing, in our view there can be no question of the EU referendum being held on the same day. Yet far from there being a commitment on that, the legislation specifically allows for that possibility. I can envisage no circumstances in which my party would support the EU referendum being held either before the devolved polls or on the same day as any other ballot.

I hope that other Opposition parties, in their haste to abandon previous opposition to the referendum, do not neglect their duty on that front. I am reassured to some extent by what has been said on the Opposition Front Bench today, because to allow the vote to go ahead on the same day as those polls, contrary to the advice of the Electoral Commission and others, would taint the referendum at source, and that would fail utterly to give the clarity on this issue that we all want.

There are other matters that are disguised to make them look technical, but which are so wrong and so misplaced that they also risk vitiating the very point of this Bill: settling the matter of our membership of the EU one way or another. There is no point in the Government unduly influencing the referendum, because that will simply land them another one, and sooner than they think. If the people believe that the referendum is not fairly held and if they are not allowed fairly to have their say, the demand will grow soon afterwards for another say on this issue. Let us take the spending caps. Why on earth are the Government contemplating

a regime that could allow one side to so significantly outspend the other? Why not simply provide an equal spending cap? Why are foreign companies with offices registered in the UK suddenly allowed to participate in the poll? Does the Minister not see what polluting the poll at source will risk doing to its outcome?

Then we have the wording of the question, as chosen by the Government. We on these Benches have no fear of saying no. It is a proud and honourable tradition; it is one, moreover, that has had very little harmful effect on the result of referendums, certainly if we look at what happens in other Westminster-model countries. Our phrase during the Belfast agreement referendum was "It's right to say no", and sometimes it is. As a result of that, we have delivered a much better way forward. The question could be "Leave or stay?" or "Remain or depart?", or any other formula along those lines. Ignoring the clear advice of the Electoral Commission against a bald "Yes or no?" question is wrong in our opinion, and the Government's behaviour in getting the question in the Bill over the line this evening has been discouraging.

I cannot help but agree with those Members who have already publicly voiced their scepticism about why the Government do not intend to observe *purdah* over the referendum or why they will not provide in the legislation for a requirement on the European Commission or its many arm's length satellites to observe it here likewise.

There will have to be changes to the Bill in Committee if it is going to be acceptable, certainly to us. This is not yet the place to criticise the specifics of the Prime Minister's negotiations, whatever they turn out to be. We on these Benches wish him well in his attempts to renegotiate our relationship with Europe. We wish him well in conveying to European leaders the frustration and strong feeling across the United Kingdom on this issue. We support him in his attempts to re-evaluate and reform our relations with Europe, and I hope he succeeds.

Mr Carswell: The right hon. Gentleman has been a voice of consistency and reason on this issue for a long time. Will he look sympathetically at any amendment that seeks to enshrine in the Bill that period of *purdah*, which he recognises is a prerequisite for a free and fair referendum?

Mr Dodds: Yes, we certainly will. I detect across both sides of the House a desire to come together on some of the changes that have been referred to, such as *purdah* and the timing of the referendum date. I think there is room for people of good will to get together to ensure that we have a fair referendum that fairly addresses the concerns of the people, and that the decision made is reached on a fair basis.

In our view, the Prime Minister must deliver real and tangible changes to the European project and address the concerns that the people of the United Kingdom have with an ever-encroaching Europe, based on ever closer political union. He must deliver substantial change in those areas that most concern people, including the issue of those coming to this country from other parts of the European Union. The previous speaker, the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan), talked about areas such as Northern Ireland, Scotland and so on being featherbedded. When we have the debate, we will be able to show that the fishermen of County Down in Northern Ireland do not regard themselves

[Mr Dodds]

as featherbedded. They have been put out of their work and their traditional activities by the EU. Given the extent of our contribution to the EU budget—far more than we get out—they will not recognise themselves as featherbedded.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Dodds: I have to conclude because I do not have very much time left.

We will stand by our long held principle that the people of the United Kingdom have too long been denied their democratic right. The case for a referendum is overwhelming, and I am glad it is now supported overwhelmingly in this House, but it is time, when we come to the vote, that we have a real choice. It must be one that is based on the Prime Minister delivering real, substantial change, if he is to have any chance of winning the referendum.

2.56 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): This referendum Bill, which I in principle strongly applaud, is the culmination of over 20 years of campaigning, which commenced with the Maastricht referendum campaign in 1993. I congratulate the Prime Minister on carrying out his commitment, which disproves the allegations and claims made not only by our opponents but even by some of his friends. The reason for the Bill was that he listened. He listened to Back-Bench opinion, and in particular to the amendment that we put forward resulting in 81 colleagues voting for a referendum on the EU issue on 24 October 2011. I urge him to listen again now and ensure that this referendum is fair in its procedures, in its governmental and EU involvement, and in the impartiality of the broadcasting authorities. I also ask him to properly address the question of fundamental change in our relationship with the EU, as I mentioned in my intervention on the Foreign Secretary.

It was Churchill who said:

“Why be afraid to tell the British public the truth?”—[*Official Report*, 18 July 1946; Vol. 425, c. 1451.]

That is what we have tried to do since those Maastricht days. When I am under attack not only by Nigel Farage but by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), which I was recently, I know I must have got something right. Since Maastricht, we have moved the terms of trade on all essentials in respect of the historic question of “Who governs this country and how?”, which in one form or another has recurred throughout the centuries—about every 50 years from time immemorial. This decision will now lie with the voters, but for it to be conclusive, it must be a fair referendum.

I now turn to what the Prime Minister clearly stated on 23 March, in the full knowledge that it would be part of the general election. In the last week of the last Parliament, he said:

“we have the opportunity to reform the EU and fundamentally change Britain’s relationship with it.”

He then referred to the referendum and added:

“If I am Prime Minister, that is what I will do.”—[*Official Report*, 23 March 2015; Vol. 594, c. 1122.]

I referred to this in the meeting of the ’22 committee immediately after the general election.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): May I take up the hon. Gentleman’s point about the need for a fair campaign on the referendum? It is very important for there to be a balance of voices, representing both sides, in the broadcasting media in particular. Does he agree that for too long the BBC has tended to see the issue of the European Union as purely a Conservative party matter, although people on the left as well as the right take sceptical views?

Sir William Cash: I entirely agree. The European Scrutiny Committee was unanimous in its report, which was severely critical of the BBC’s failure to be sufficiently impartial in relation to European matters. There will be further discussion of that issue as we continue to debate the Bill.

At the 1922 committee meeting, I made it clear that we would engage not in wilful opposition but in a process of mutual respect and debate. In plain English, what the Prime Minister said on 23 March boils down to the following. He said that he wanted to change the basic principles by which the United Kingdom is connected to the European Union. He carefully distinguished between “fundamental change” in our relationship and mere reform of it. Reform may include some treaty change to include issues relating to benefits and so forth, but they pale into insignificance by comparison with the Prime Minister’s own assertion that he wants “fundamental change” in our relationship with the EU.

In its report on referendums, the House of Lords Constitution Committee made it clear that a referendum would be primarily necessary in the event of a proposition that we leave the European Union, as opposed to mere nibbling at the treaties. I have said repeatedly for years that if we do not achieve this fundamental change, we will have to leave the European Union. That becomes essential if we are to govern ourselves in line with the wishes of the voters in general elections. In his Bloomberg speech, the Prime Minister said:

“It is national parliaments which are, and will remain, the true source of real democratic legitimacy and accountability in the EU.”

Nothing is more important than that when it comes to the government of our country and its freedom.

Other member states may seek to block this action, but they do so at their own peril. They need us politically and economically, and they repeatedly say that they want us to remain in the EU; but then the handouts, the bail-outs, the subsidies and the ideology of political union get in the way. We have positive alternatives to the European Union. Our democracy and our national Parliament are what people fought and died for in two world wars, and it was through their sacrifice that we saved Europe in those two wars. It is not in the interests of Germany, Europe or ourselves for us to remain in the second tier of a two-tier Europe dominated and profoundly affected by a de facto eurozone, which is in reality at the epicentre of the legal framework of the European Union itself, in which we have been embedded by successive treaties and which does not work.

Mr Jenkin: That is the most fundamental point that must be addressed by those who want us to remain in the EU on the present terms. For 20 or 30 years we have had a dysfunctional relationship with the European Union because we do not want to be in political or monetary union, and do not want to be absorbed into

something that looks more and more like a state. If those people cannot answer the question how we can be at the heart of this Union on a completely different basis, we will indeed end up as a second-tier member state of an increasingly centralised European Union.

Sir William Cash: My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

Removing the words “ever closer union”—which have never been specifically adjudicated on by the European Court of Justice, and merely form part of the preamble to the treaties—will not solve the problem. It does not change the legal obligations of the accumulated treaties, from Maastricht to Lisbon. Notwithstanding their protestations, it will not be the establishment, the EU, the BBC or the self-appointed multinationals with vested interests who will decide these matters. None of those multinationals have advanced a rational argument to support their determination to stay in the EU. That is my response to what was said by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe, who asked the same question of us from the other side of the argument. They were hopelessly wrong about the euro, and have been hopelessly wrong about so many aspects of European debate.

It is the voters who will give their verdict by the end of 2017. It is the voters, and the voters alone, who will decide it, not the massed ranks of the Europhiles. The rolling back of the treaties is imperative to our national interest. Indeed, the 1971 White Paper, on which the European Communities Act 1972 is still founded, clearly stated that we must keep the veto precisely because it was in our national interest to do so. It went on to say that to do otherwise would

“imperil the very fabric of the Community.”

I look at my right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe because he knows that he supported that at the time, in 1971.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: My hon. Friend is quite right. In 1971 we had unanimity when making European laws, but once made, they were directly binding. It is the second issue that my hon. Friend is trying to reopen. In the Lisbon treaty, we went for weighted majority voting, because, with 28 member states, giving every Government the right to block any proposal would prevent any decisions from being made.

Sir William Cash: It was for precisely to deal with that problem that I set up the Maastricht referendum campaign. My right hon. and learned Friend and others have persistently and continuously opposed a referendum, because they have not wanted these matters to be reopened. However, they have been reopened by virtue of this Bill.

I was concerned to hear the Foreign Secretary say on Sunday that the unilateral repeal of EU legislation at Westminster was unachievable, and would lead to our leaving the EU. Of course, the second part of that proposition is inherent in the referendum itself; the voters will decide. The Foreign Secretary invoked the analogy of the yellow card, which has been a dismal failure. When it was applied in relation to the the European Public Prosecutor, the Commission simply ignored the result.

During the Maastricht debates, we were told by the then Foreign Secretary that the Maastricht Treaty was the “high water mark of federalism”.

That was patent nonsense, as has been demonstrated by so much of the Europhilic commentary that has poured out in a relentless tide of enthusiasm for European integration, and which has engulfed the United Kingdom and Europe as a whole, causing protests, riots and massive unemployment. It will drag Europe down, and will create the very instability that the project after 1945 was intended to avoid.

We need amendments to this Bill, relating to matters such as the purdah arrangements, the question of prohibiting European or governmental money, the question of the impartiality of the broadcasting authorities, the level of expenses, the timing and also, perhaps, the question in the referendum. According to recent opinion polls, trust among the European voters is at an all-time low, and that trust is what lies at the heart of the whole debate. In the words of Lord Randolph Churchill, we must trust the people.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I am now imposing a seven-minute limit. I call Mr Justin Madders to make a maiden speech.

3.7 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Thank you for calling me, Mr Deputy Speaker. I understand that during my maiden speech I am unlikely to be interrupted. That is good to know, as it is an experience that I have not had since my children learned to talk.

It is a privilege to follow such a long-serving and formidable parliamentarian as the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash).

I want to pay tribute to my predecessor, Andrew Miller, who served the constituency with distinction for 23 years. In his five years as Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, he commanded the respect of the whole House for his diligent, thorough and fair stewardship, just as he was respected in Ellesmere Port and Neston for his commitment to representing its people. I am personally grateful for all the help and advice that he has given me over the years.

The constituency is largely based on the footprint of the old Ellesmere Port and Neston borough council, on which I served for 11 years. It contains rural villages such as Elton, Willaston, Childer Thornton, Burton and Mickle Trafford—and, most notably, Neston, with its thriving market and natural beauty at Ness Gardens. However, the constituency is a largely urban area centred on Ellesmere Port and Little and Great Sutton. There is some major industry: Vauxhall and Essar, although sadly they employ a fraction of the number of people whom they employed 30 years ago, are still of critical importance.

The borough council’s achievements in diversifying the employment base mark it out for special note. Under the leadership of Fred Venables and Reg Chrimes, great efforts were made to tackle the ravages of unemployment during the 1980s, and decisions that were made then still benefit the constituency today. I subsequently served on the successor unitary authority, Cheshire West and Chester, where I was fortunate enough to work with another stalwart, Councillor Derek Bateman. All three of those men, whose combined time in office was 151 years, were the kind of community leaders who have been the backbone of public service. I for one will always remember

[Justin Madders]

the valuable lessons they taught me about respect, loyalty and basic decency—qualities that are too often forgotten in modern politics.

The constituency has historically benefited from investment from the EU and only last year Ellesmere Port was granted assisted area status, which will help accelerate growth. That status lasts until the end of the decade so is a very direct example of what my constituency could lose if we leave the EU.

Existing major employers who strategically invest on a Europe-wide basis will be looking at their plans and asking themselves whether they really want to take the risk and invest in a country whose future is unknown. We are in a very competitive world and we can be sure that major employers such as Vauxhall and Airbus, who between them employ thousands of people in my constituency but also have factories throughout Europe, will be having those other factories pointing out at every opportunity the certainty that they offer. I welcome the opportunity for the country to have its say, but let us have a swift decision and give everyone certainty for the future.

It is not just the investment that is at risk, but also hard-won employment rights enshrined in the social chapter. Do we really want to go back to a time when we had no right to paid holidays, no right to rest breaks, no limits on a safe working week? That would be a return to the dark ages. I saw first-hand as an employment lawyer the importance of those rights in a system that offers no job security. I have met too many people who have given half their lives to an employer, offering loyalty and fidelity, only to find themselves discarded at the stroke of a pen by someone based in an office halfway around the world.

Insecurity at work in all its forms is one of the most insidious facets of modern life. People not knowing whether they will be able to put food on their family's table at the end of the day and having the spectre of unemployment looming over them can be debilitating, destructive and deeply damaging not just for the individual but for their whole family.

Social justice includes workplace justice and the system as it currently stands does not deliver justice, but even access to that flawed system is denied to thousands of people every year. An 80% drop in employment tribunal claims since fees were introduced should be considered not a mark of success, but a mark of shame, for even the most begrudging would have to concede that some of those 80% have been denied justice and that poor employment practice has won.

I recall speaking to five women who had all worked in the same shop over a few months. All had been denied their pay for periods ranging from between one and six weeks, but not one of them could afford to proceed with an employment tribunal claim. Our rights are only as good as our ability to exercise them, and I do hope a serious appraisal of the fee system takes place as a matter of urgency.

We also need to look at the many ruses and mechanisms used to stop effective workplace protection—be it bogus self-employment, zero-hour contracts or the fact that people have to work somewhere for two years before they get any kind of basic statutory protection. Too many

people feel a sense of vulnerability and inevitability about their job and the challenge for us is to value the quality and security of work as much as the creation of the job itself.

So I intend to spend my time here standing up for the people of Ellesmere Port and Neston, but also fighting for a fairer and more secure workplace for everyone in the country.

3.13 pm

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) on making such a good maiden speech. He will clearly be a strong and eloquent voice for his constituency and he is very welcome in this House.

I rise to speak in favour of this legislation, and I do so as one who believes that it is significantly in Britain's interests to remain a member of the European Union, and that it will be even more in our interests as a result of the reforms the Prime Minister has now started negotiating.

I have huge respect and admiration for the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), but she said she objects to being called anti-European, which is fair enough, yet she then went on to describe the European Union as a dictatorship. It is a collection of democracies who come together in their mutual interest. Each of those countries is a democracy and to describe the institution as a dictatorship is an inflation of language of the type she disapproves of when she is accused of being anti-European. I do not think that is how the debate should be conducted.

Kate Hoey: I certainly think the European Commission dictates what it wants to do and, with majority voting and all that goes on within the institution, we in this Parliament have very little or no say in how the money is spent and what it does.

Damian Green: Our Government are represented in the Council of Ministers and the Parliament; that is the democratic check. It can of course be improved—nobody is saying that the EU is perfect—but there are many institutions that need improving. Indeed, Parliament needs improving, but that does not mean we should give up on the many and manifold advantages of parliamentary democracy. That is the attitude with which we should approach the EU.

I am also in favour of the Bill because I am happy to take on in friendly public debate those who want to cut our close ties with friendly neighbouring democracies, and because I believe it is appropriate to have this debate now. The subject of Europe is a curious one in British politics. For a small number of people—some of whom have spoken today—it is an all-consuming passion. For the vast majority of the British people, however, it rarely features in the top 10 things they want Governments to get to grips with.

I will be happy to play a part in persuading the British people that the risks of turning our back on our democratic neighbours massively outweigh the benefits, but I will do this in the spirit of removing a cloud that has hung over politics for too long. Having the in/out debate always hovering around adds an unnecessary level of uncertainty to our national debate on many

subjects, and it leaves the rest of the world, particularly our friends, unsure about Britain's view of its own place in the world.

It has been clear for some time that we are going to need a referendum to clear up this uncertainty. It has been 40 years since the last one. The world has changed, the UK has changed, the European Union has changed. So let's get on with it. Let us focus the British people's minds on the choice before us, and see what they say.

Sir William Cash *rose*—

Damian Green: I will, with some trepidation, give way to my hon. Friend.

Sir William Cash: I am glad my right hon. Friend has chosen to give way; my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) did not, so I am going to ask the same question. Does my right hon. Friend agree with the Prime Minister when he says that he wants not only reform but a fundamental change in our relationship with the EU?

Damian Green: I will talk about the change in the relationship in a few seconds, but first I want to turn to the Bill itself.

The Government are to be commended on passing the first and most important test in any referendum, which is that it asks a sensible and fair question. Asking whether we want to remain in the EU makes it clear that we are not starting with a blank sheet, but that we have an existing web of relationships, rules, and habits that would be put at risk by a no vote in the referendum.

Those who are most vocal in pointing this out are British businesses. They make the point that for the vast majority of our businesses the EU is not a straitjacket; it is a springboard to the opportunities provided by the global economy. This is as true for small businesses as it is for big ones.

The most recent CBI survey was interesting. It often says that eight out of 10 CBI members support our continued membership, and those who are against membership say it is just the voice of big business. However, if we drill down into that finding we discover that 77% of small and medium-sized businesses said that they support the UK's continued membership of the EU. All of us on both sides of the House who recognise the importance of small businesses in prosperity, entrepreneurship and job creation should listen to their voices. People often complain that politicians do not listen.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con) *rose*—

Damian Green: I am sorry, but I am running out of time.

Those who argue that we should pull out of the EU need to set out what Britain would look like—what our economy and country would look like—in their alternative, because there are many alternatives.

Many Members have used the word “historic” in this debate. I claim another historic point in that I think my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who made the case for our continued membership as passionately and eloquently as he always

does, slightly understated his case at one point. He was talking about the undesirability of Norway's situation, but there was one point he did not add, which is that Norway, not a member of the European Union, of course needs to have access to the single market and, in paying for that access, it is the 10th largest contributor to the EU budget. It has all the alleged disadvantages and none of the advantages of membership. That is a model that the British people would certainly not wish to follow.

Kelvin Hopkins: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Damian Green: I am sorry, I have had my two interventions.

The other option is that of Switzerland. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe also mentioned that but, again, did not make the point that not only does Switzerland not have access to the services market, which would be absolutely essential to the UK, but that it took nine years to negotiate its partial access to the single market. If the referendum vote goes the wrong way, therefore, and the British people vote to come out of the European Union, any British Government can expect to spend at least 10 years trying to renegotiate ourselves back into a position in which we would have any kind of reasonable access to what is, by a significant margin, our largest export market.

I put it to the House that that is not a sensible approach for any British Government to wish to adopt. It would do long-term harm to the economic interests of this country, as well as to our position in the world. I have never understood the proposition that making it more difficult to export to Germany and France makes it easier to export to China and India. I suspect that few businesses would agree with that proposition either. I look forward to it being tested in the coming months and years.

The debate is not only an economic one, and the Bill sets us off on a debate about our place in the world—how we see ourselves and how others see us. In the current state of the world, particularly with the dangers emerging on the eastern and southern flanks of Europe, what would we be thinking about to turn away from our closest neighbours? Are we so confident of a friendly reception in other parts of the world that we can turn to 27 other friendly democracies and say, “We don't want to be part of a club with you any more”? Would such an act increase our influence in the world, or damage it? Would it make it more or less likely that the US President would pick up the phone to Downing Street in a crisis? Would it make the Indians or Chinese treat us more seriously as trading partners, or dismiss us as a bunch of nostalgic eccentrics?

President Obama has already made clear this week the answer to my rhetorical questions. Our closest friends want us to stay in the European Union. We should listen to their friendly advice. The notion of an Anglosphere, in which English-speaking countries from all over the world can set the rules for themselves is a post-imperial fantasy that I do not think this country should follow.

There is of course—there needs to be—a positive case for continued membership of the European Union, and there is one. There is an idealistic vision of a continent that has spent centuries tearing itself apart

[Damian Green]

with wars that destroyed communities, but in the past 70 years has largely become a haven of peace and prosperity. Ask people in Krakow, Bucharest or Vilnius and see what they think. Britain can be proud of our part in building that peaceful and prosperous continent, and Britain can benefit hugely from continuing to play a full role in its development. Let us have that national debate and then vote yes in the referendum.

3.23 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech in this important debate. It is a pleasure to follow the well argued and reasoned case made so plain to all of us by the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green).

I am also delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), who I know from his outstanding leadership in local government will be a strong champion for his area. He and I come from the ranks of local government, and we will both be strong voices for local government in the House during this Parliament.

I am pleased to have my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) next to me in the Chamber this afternoon. Without him, I can honestly say that I would not be here. I must also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer), who is attending to some other matters outside the Chamber, for recruiting me to the Labour party some 17 years ago. He and I might not always see eye to eye on the question of Europe, but in the case of both my hon. Friends I could not ask for better parliamentary neighbours, mentors or indeed friends.

It is customary to pay tribute to former Members during a maiden speech and I am happy to report that I have been aided in the task by a note from a constituent providing an appraisal of each of my predecessors to have represented my area, whether the old Wanstead and Woodford constituency or, since 1945, Ilford North. He describes my Labour predecessor, Linda Perham, as “quite outstanding”, which is some accolade given that he describes his first MP, a certain Sir Winston Churchill, as “most unsatisfactory”. I cannot comment on the contribution of one of Britain’s most celebrated Prime Ministers as a constituency MP—some around the House and in the other place may be able to enlighten me—but I wholeheartedly endorse my constituent’s remarks about Linda Perham. A librarian, councillor and former mayor of the London borough of Redbridge, Linda arrived in Parliament in 1997, having lived in Ilford North for more than 25 years. Her commitment to public service has continued since she left this place in 2005.

In paying tribute to my immediate and Conservative predecessor, I do so with a warmth and sincerity that is rather unusual following such a closely fought race as ours. I have known Lee Scott for a number of years and our differences have always been political and never personal. He was characteristically affable in the campaign and gracious in defeat. His service to the people of Ilford North and the London borough of Redbridge more widely, both as a councillor and as a Member of this House, is rightly recognised and celebrated. Lee’s work on autism and on human rights in Sri Lanka, in particular,

earned him the respect of people across the political spectrum. I wish him and his family the very best for the future.

Ilford North is a large constituency, at least by London’s standards, ranging from Woodford in the west to Hainault in the east. Many have moved to my constituency with dreams of a larger home, good local schools for their children and a better quality of life. Some, like me, have walked a well trodden path from London’s east end, while others made their journey across countries and continents with the promise of decent work and better lives, or sanctuary from persecution. The diversity of my constituency, our community cohesion and the role that migrants have played in shaping our part of London is something I am proud of.

Ilford North is a great place to live, though it is not without its challenges. Our schools are excellent, but oversubscribed. Our NHS services are cherished, but people are waiting too long to see a GP and to get a hospital appointment. Post-war housing development has given generations the chance to enjoy our country parks and open spaces, but rents are becoming unaffordable and home ownership is a pipe dream for too many.

None of those challenges would be addressed by withdrawal from the European Union. The referendum debate will inevitably centre on the economic benefits, and many of those arguments about jobs, trade and inward investment are already well rehearsed and well made by British businesses of all sizes and from all industries. However, the debate extends beyond the simple question of Britain’s continued membership of the European Union to a far bigger question about who we are and where we see ourselves in the world. On the big issues of our age—eradicating poverty and inequality, tackling climate change and safeguarding the security of every citizen—nation states are no longer able to triumph by acting alone.

Globalisation was a trend foreseen by Sir Winston Churchill when he spoke in this House in 1950 of the growing “interdependence of nations”. It presents challenges. Many of my constituents feel left behind. Their concerns deserve to be heard and need to be addressed, but the truth is that withdrawal from the European Union will lead us on a race to the bottom in which deregulation, labour market volatility and a weakening of our industrial base will worsen their living standards. Globalisation presents a world of opportunity for this small island to punch above its weight in the 21st century, if we are willing to seize that opportunity and ensure that every community has a stake in it.

We should be leading Europe, not leaving Europe. This is a question that will define our future for generations to come and it is right that the next generation should have their say. I am proud of the numbers of young people we got involved in my campaign in Ilford North. Like the young Scots who voted in the independence referendum, they are a credit to their generation and demonstrate that they are ready to play a part in shaping their future, which is why I support the extension of the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds. It is their future, as much as ours, that is at stake. I want to see young people from all backgrounds in my constituency daring to dream and backed to succeed. Whether they want to be scientists or business leaders, artists or engineers, they will

have the world as their oyster only if they grow up in a country willing to play a leading role on the international stage.

This is the central test for our new Government: will they bequeath a nation more divided at home and more isolated abroad, or will they forge a future in which prosperity is shared and Britain looks to Europe and the wider world with optimism, confidence and leadership? For as long as I continue to enjoy this privilege of representing the people of Ilford North, I will fight for a future in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many, not the few. Every day that I arrive in this place, I will never forget who sent me here. I will be relentless in advocating their cause and campaigning to serve their interests.

3.30 pm

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): It is a great pleasure to congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) on his maiden speech, which was clear, generous and strong. I am sure that he will make quite a mark in the House of Commons, and I wish him the best of fortune and good health as he enjoys his career here.

Today is a day that we, as democrats, should be celebrating, because we are redressing one of the great democratic deficits in our country. No one in this country who is under the age of 58—happily including myself—has been able to have a say on our membership of the European Union. The world is very different from how it was in 1975 when my parents campaigned on opposite sides of the European question. Then, Britain was the sick man of Europe, with chronic high inflation and with state-owned industries bleeding us dry. It was dominated by the trade union barons. We looked at Europe as a sign of economic success. We looked at Germany and said, “Let’s have a little bit of that!”

But let us look at how Germany and the rest of Europe have changed today, with the chronic crisis in the euro threatening global financial stability and condemning millions of young Europeans to chronic high levels of unemployment. Europe was at the centre of a very different world in 1975. In the middle of the cold war, political interest lay in Europe and in its relationship with the United States and the communist bloc. Today, however, in the era of multi-polar globalisation, Europe finds itself increasingly diminished politically and economically. The choice in the referendum will therefore be made against a very different backdrop.

A question that is often asked, and has been asked in the debate today, is this: if people had known in 1975 what Europe would become, would they have made the same decision? When they joined the common market, they did not know that they were actually joining a mechanism that would have a ratchet effect, taking them nearer and nearer to the destination of ever-closer political union, with no means of redress. People in this country genuinely wanted to be able to co-operate with our European partners when it was in our mutual interest to do so, but they also wanted to keep separate the levers that we might need to use in Britain’s national interest, when that interest was different from that of our leading European partners.

Most people in this country today feel, deep down, that too many of our laws are made abroad, and that too many of the basic democratic decisions affecting

the way in which we live are made beyond our shores. They feel that the British people have no means of redress. This is part of a process in which those who live under the law in this country have less and less ability to shape those laws themselves. We simply cannot continue with a European model that is failing systemically. We cannot continue on a 1950s trajectory that is unyielding and unbending. If the European Union ultimately breaks, it will be because it cannot face up to the changing realities of the era in which we live.

Most people in this country do not believe that we should leave the European Union, whatever the circumstances; nor do they believe that we should stay in, whatever the circumstances. Instead, they believe that we should take a rational decision based on whatever renegotiation is achieved by the Prime Minister and the Government. They believe that we should take a rational view, and that we should have reform of all the European Union. This is key: it is not enough simply to change Britain’s relationship with the European Union; we need fundamental change in the Union itself. Unless we get that change, Europe will continue to go in the wrong direction. If we only change Britain’s membership, we will be negotiating a better membership deal for a bad club, and that is not in the long-term interests of the country.

John Redwood: Do not most British people still want what many of them wrongly thought that they were voting for in 1975? They wanted a trade-based relationship with political co-operation when it is in our interests, and they did not want to join a superstate in the making.

Dr Fox: My right hon. Friend is perfectly correct. People in this country wanted to join a common market and wanted an economic and trading entity. Many who voted in that referendum believe that by stealth they were sold a pup by being sold into a very different entity on which they were never allowed to give their opinion. That is why we should celebrate what is happening in the Chamber today. We are allowing those people to have a voice, which they have been denied by Governments of both political complexions for many years.

Kate Hoey: I agree with everything the right hon. Gentleman is saying, but will he also reflect on the fact that there are many people within the Labour movement who feel much the same as he does? I refer him to the leaflet from my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), “The European Union—A View From The Left”, which is well worth reading—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Hoyle): Order. I think the message has been received.

Dr Fox: Across the political spectrum in this country, many people believe we have been denied a genuine debate about the future of the country. Those people might come from different sides of the debate, but they have in common a profound belief in our democratic process and the right of the people to be heard rather than being involved in a cosy stitch-up by the political establishment of this country, which is what has happened over too many years. As well as needing profound change in the European Union and in Britain’s relationship with Europe—the question of sovereignty—we need to ensure that any of those changes are enshrined in treaty. As for the points that we cannot have that because it is impossible or that we are only demanding it because it makes the

[Dr Fox]

process more difficult, which have been made so far in the debate, let me say to the House that any changes or guarantees that are not entrenched in treaty will not be worth the paper they are written on. The European Court will continue to determine any elements according to the concept of and drive towards ever-closer union. That is why the process needs to be followed in that way.

We in this country are different from our European partners in many ways. That does not mean that we are in any sense better, but we are different. We have a very different concept of sovereignty that is deeply entrenched in our history. We have a different concept of what our democracy is and how it operates and we are one of the few countries, perhaps the only country, in the European Union that never felt the need to bury our 20th-century history in a pan-European project. We are different from so many different perspectives and the one thing with the European Union with which I have the greatest problem is those three words: “ever-closer union”. I do not believe in ever-closer union, because for me the logical endpoint of ever-closer union is union and I do not want to lose our status as a sovereign independent nation to be part of a union in which the union comes first and the nation states come second. That is why this is so fundamental.

Some of us still bear the scars of 1992. That is why we must not rush into the referendum. We must ensure that we have adequate debate and that people do not feel that they have been bounced, or the result will not be as binding as we would like it to be. Finally, the behaviour with which we conduct ourselves is crucial, and I say this especially to my own colleagues. We will have to work together after the referendum is over. How we conduct ourselves, the language we use and how we speak of and to one another will be fundamental to our ability to pull ourselves back as a united party after the referendum. We might do this passionately, but we should do it with tolerance and decency and how we treat one another will influence the judgment of the country on us all.

3.38 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting). He was very confident in his delivery and I am sure that he will serve his constituents well. I also pay tribute to Lee Scott, his predecessor, whom I knew through his activities with the Tamil community. He was very effective in that role and will be missed in this House for that reason and, I am sure, many others.

When the issue of Europe raises its head in this place, those whom John Major so colourfully and with such bitterness described as “the bastards” normally start to sharpen their knives and, with the mania of Oskar Matzerath, bang the Europe drum. The Eurosceptics are keeping their counsel at present. The Prime Minister’s pirouettes on the issue of collective Cabinet responsibility are worthy of the opening night at the Royal Ballet, but I do not think that the business community will be calling for an encore. The business community wants certainty about the Prime Minister’s negotiating stance and the circumstances in which he and the section of his Government who will follow him will campaign to stay in or come out of the European Union.

We in the Liberal Democrats have changed our position. The coalition had already legislated for a referendum if there were any proposals to transfer powers from the UK to the EU, but it is clear that in the general election a month or so ago people voted for an in/out referendum. It is going to happen and the focus should be on ensuring that we win it. The priority now for my party is first to help secure reforms in the EU that benefit all EU countries. We are not the Eurofanatics painted by the Conservative party. Indeed, the Secretary of State acknowledged in his opening remarks the reforms that the coalition was able to make in relation to the European Union.

Our second priority is to win the battle to stay in the European Union—a market of 500 million people and our largest export market. Some 2.2 million UK citizens live, work, travel, study and buy second homes in other EU countries. I want them to be given the opportunity that my father and our family had to live, work and study in another EU country.

John Redwood: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell us what powers the Liberal Democrats want to get back from Brussels. They never seemed to want to get any back when they were in government with us. Do they include controlling our own borders?

Tom Brake: The right hon. Gentleman needs to address that question to his own Prime Minister and get some clarity from the Government about what they will seek to negotiate. Clearly, we are in favour of reforms within the EU; we have pressed for some simple reforms such as ensuring that the Parliament meets in one place rather than two. There are many other EU reforms that we support.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Is the hon. Gentleman not worried as I am that, no matter the result, some Conservative Members will want to have another crack in a year’s time and a year after that, and that that will cause great harm to this country?

Tom Brake: Absolutely. I hope that the outcome of the referendum, whatever it is, will give a certainty about the future of the EU which, unfortunately, the outcome of the Scottish referendum did not give for Scotland.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Tom Brake: I will not give way. I have given way twice and many other people want to speak.

The Bill is flawed in two respects. The first relates to votes at 16, to which a number of hon. Members have referred. The Bill is about the future of 16 and 17-year-olds. When I visit schools in the constituency, I talk to people about both the disadvantages and the benefits of being in the EU. At some point in the future, those young people may want to pursue careers that take them to other EU countries. Conservative Members may say that they could pursue careers in countries beyond the EU. That is true, but they have a certainty about their ability to pursue a career in EU countries that they do not have for countries such as the US, China and New Zealand, because they would be dependent on the conditions that those countries impose. I want 16 and 17-year-olds to have the opportunity to work in EU

countries, so I want them to be able to participate in a decision that will affect their future directly, possibly in a dramatic way. It could reduce their opportunities.

The Bill is also flawed in respect of votes for EU citizens. This is not the general election franchise. We know that it has been modified. It seems strange to me that a French, German or Italian citizen who has lived here, whose children were born here and who has paid taxes here, is not able to participate in something that could affect them and their children in a dramatic way.

I hope that it will be possible to address those two flaws. We will vote for the Bill on Second Reading, but we will seek to extend the franchise because, as the Foreign Secretary said, I do not like it when things are done to people, not for them.

3.44 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): This referendum gives the British people the great opportunity to restore their precious but damaged democracy. For all too long, the British people have had to watch as successive Parliaments have given away their birthright by transferring important powers to the European Union. Big decisions have been taken away from the sovereignty of the British people and given to the bureaucracy of the European Union.

I believe in the sovereignty of the British people and I would like to help them restore it. Before we joined the European Economic Community, the sovereignty of the British people was clear and it worked well. The British people could elect a Parliament. The Parliament was sovereign until it had to face re-election. That meant that the Parliament was responsive to the British people between elections because those elected recognised that if they did not please, did not serve well—if the chosen Government did not govern wisely—they would be thrown out by the British people at the end of the five years. So the sovereignty of the British people required a sovereign Parliament that they could dismiss and they could influence, and much of the architecture of this building and the political architecture of our country was based on maximising the access to MPs and maximising the influence of MPs over the wider Government.

Mr Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that in what is now the European Union, it is quite usual for member states to pool sovereignty? Like the democratic process that he talks about, Members of the European Parliament are democratically accountable to their electors and can make decisions on behalf of their constituents in exactly the same way.

John Redwood: States cannot pool sovereignty. They are either sovereign or they have given their power away. The British people do not think the European Parliament exercises control or power over the Brussels machine in the way that this Parliament at its best exercises power over the British government machine. That can be seen from the way that the British electors do not turn out on anything like the same scale in a European election, because they do not believe in that Parliament and they understand that that Parliament has very limited influence over the unelected bureaucratic government in Brussels.

Now that we are in the EEC and it has evolved into the European Union, the fundamental condition that one Parliament cannot bind its successors has been removed. That has completely undermined one of the basic pillars of our democracy. We had the rule that any new Parliament can amend or repeal any law of a previous Parliament. It can reverse or change any decision relating to the future about the expenditure of moneys or the development of policy. The British people now do not have that full sovereignty. If they elect a new Parliament, the new Parliament discovers, as this one is doing, that there are a large number of areas where we cannot change things to reflect the will of the British people because it would be illegal under European law to do so. We find that, because so many vetoes have been removed, we can no longer prevent things happening from the European government that we do not want. Worse still, because there is a whole body of agreed European law and treaty that we inherit as a new Parliament and a new Government, there are very large areas where we cannot fulfil the will of the British people and we therefore cannot please them.

Fortunately, Britain still has a fairly powerful Parliament because we stayed out of the euro. Those countries that went into the euro are discovering that they now have puppet Parliaments. We see the terrible tragedy in Greece, where the Greek people have understandably said that they want a complete change of economic policy. They want to get away from unemployment and recession and austerity from the European Union and have a pro-growth policy at home, and they are told that they cannot do that because it is against European rules.

Mike Gapes: Did the right hon. Gentleman support Margaret Thatcher when she signed up to the Single European Act?

John Redwood: No, of course I did not, and I gave her very strong advice not to sign up to the Single European Act. She often took my advice. It was a great pity that she did not take my advice on that occasion, because I fear I was also right on that one. She was a very great lady who did hugely important things for this country—not least getting a lot of our money back, which Labour foolishly gave away, meaning that we are much worse off than we need be—but she was not always right. I think that on that occasion she thought it was going to help a market, whereas the truth, of course, is that we do not need European bureaucracy and a lot of laws to have a market; we just need buyers and sellers and one simple rule, which is that, if something is of merchandisable quality in Britain, it should be of merchandisable quality in Germany and France as well. We had that in the Cassis de Dijon judgment and we did not really need all the extra laws that were being imposed on us.

As we can no longer change things, the British people are going to get very frustrated. We saw their frustrations in the last election. Looking at constituencies that elected Conservative MPs and MPs of other parties, it was very clear to me that there was a strong majority feeling that this Parliament should be able to decide who comes to our country and who is given admission, and that this Parliament should decide how generous we should be on welfare benefits and to whom we should pay them. We might disagree among ourselves about how many people we invite in, how much money we give them and

[John Redwood]

when we first pay them—that is a healthy part of our democratic debate—but the position we find ourselves in today is that we cannot decide those things, because the powers to control our borders and to settle our welfare system have gone to the bureaucracy and courts of Brussels and the continent. They are no longer present in the United Kingdom.

Whenever we have these debates, they often come down to a simple issue of trade. I would like to reassure anyone watching or listening to this debate that our trade is not at risk, whether we stay in or leave. There is no need to accept my word for that—I am sure that many people will not—but they may accept the word of the German Finance Minister, who has very clearly stated that he would like Britain to stay in, but that if we leave, of course Germany would want to trade with us on the same terms as she currently does. And why is that? It is because Germany sells us twice as much as we sell her.

I say to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who would not take an intervention, that there is no way that Germany would want to pay a 10% tariff on exporting Mercedes and BMWs to the United Kingdom; and, because Germany will not want to pay a 10% tariff, nor will our motor manufacturers have to pay a 10% tariff. So worry not: our jobs and our trade are in no way at risk.

We should remember that Britain has faster growing trade with the rest of the world, where we do not belong to a special club, than it does with the rest of Europe, where we do belong to a trade club. There are many such trade clubs around the world, but very few of them are evolving in the European way of imposing more and more government and bureaucracy on their companies and traders, because they believe in prosperity and more free trade. We do not belong to any of those clubs, but we trade extremely successfully with the countries that are in them. If someone is in a club that genuinely promotes trade, they are happy to trade with people from outside that club as well, because they obviously need to be able to trade with the whole of the rest of the world.

Many of us feel that the EU as currently constituted is thoroughly undemocratic. It stifles and prevents the will of a once sovereign people from being properly expressed. It means that a Government cannot be elected on a prospectus that they can implement in all respects, because the European Union will not let them do so. Above all, the European Union represents the past: it is holding us back. It is something from the last century.

It is a complete myth that the European Union is a body that keeps the peace. The peace is being kept by NATO and by the fact that our partners—France, Germany, Italy and Spain—are all peace-loving democracies. I am amazed that pro-Europeans have such a negative view of our partner democracies in Europe that they think that, without a European bureaucracy, they would all be at war with each other. Of course, they would not, both because they now believe in peace themselves and because NATO and mighty America, as she has done since 1945, are guaranteeing the peace.

Let us get rid of these myths. Our economy is not at risk, and being out of the EU or in a better and new relationship with the EU is the future: it means we can

be more prosperous, have more freedom and, above all, restore the sovereignty of the British people. We can restore our parliamentary democracy.

3.54 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Following the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood), I must say that in my eyes it was new light from an old window to hear him want to escape the givens of history so readily. I would welcome that being applied in other directions.

Like other Members, the right hon. Gentleman rehearsed some of the strong and passionate arguments that he will bring to the debate that will take place on the back of the referendum, whenever it happens. I want to touch on some of those issues, but also to address the Bill and some of the questions about the quality of the referendum and what we will be afforded.

Hon. Members have made the point that compared with some of the debates on Fridays during the last Parliament, the Chamber looks very different. That is simply because many of us regarded the debates on the private Member's Bill in the last Parliament as an exercise in which the ADHD wing of the Tory party was pleasuring itself, and we did not wish to spectate or to participate in that exercise. We are now in a different situation as the Bill comes from the Government, and other parties seem to have adjusted their view of the potential of a referendum. That done, we need to ensure that we do not simply rush into pre-emptively debating the referendum, but look at some of the issues in the Bill.

One of the questions is whether the franchise should be extended. I fully believe that the franchise for the referendum should be extended to 16 and 17-year-olds. I openly admit that I believe that 16 and 17-year-olds should have the vote in all elections anyway. In the past, I have tabled amendments to Northern Ireland legislation to give the Assembly that power in respect of its own elections and those for local government, and I have voted for such an earlier franchise here.

I heard the Foreign Secretary say that the question of votes for 16 and 17-year-olds was a decision “for another day”. From listening to what people are saying, we are talking about a referendum on a decision for future generations, so it is wrong simply to dismiss the issue as a matter for another day. As the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) said, nobody is pretending that the arguments for voting at 16 and 17 are the same as those for votes for women, but it is true that the arguments against doing so are invariably the same as those against votes for women—that people were immature, could not make decisions of their own and would derive decisions from others.

The Bill will alter the franchise for the referendum by extending it to peers. When we ask what is going to happen to votes for the young, we should know that four lords named Young and even one named Younger will get votes in the referendum. That is what the Government have done in response to the question about votes for young and younger people in this referendum: five people in the House of Lords will get a vote, but all the 16 and 17-year-olds are ignored.

I share the important concerns raised about purdah. Once people think that there has been any jiggery-pokery on the basic rules, that will create questions and cause

consternation, some of which will be abused in a distorted and exaggerated way during the campaign to distract from the core arguments in the referendum. I therefore question why the Government have moved on *purdah*.

Similarly, on the questions about money, I again think it is important that the Government are not seen simply to be changing the rule in relation to this referendum, particularly given that there will be many questions about where a lot of it will be sourced.

There is also an issue about the wording—whether it should be a yes or no question, and whether it should be as advised by the Electoral Commission. I favour going the Electoral Commission way simply because of the experience in the Irish context, where a very powerful argument has continually been used in referendums: “If you don’t know, vote no.” That has been used time out of number in the context of Irish referendums, with people opposing the referendum creating all sorts of scares, arguments and detailed and technical confusions that nobody can quite settle. Not even the independent Referendum Commission can fully enlighten people about what is or is not involved. That makes it very easy for people to use the argument, “If you don’t know, vote no.”

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): So far, it seems the scaremongering and the fear is on the yes side. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Mark Durkan: The hon. Gentleman may make that argument, but that is not how I see it. However, the point I am making is that we need to ensure that the Bill frames the referendum campaign in the right context, so that we are not subject to any allegations that the yes campaign has tilted or framed the thing in a particular way, or that the no campaign is resorting to scares. We all need to be free of those allegations.

Sir Gerald Howarth: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the view that the Electoral Commission has taken on what is the most neutral form of question. Does he agree that if that view is confirmed by the research that the Electoral Commission is undertaking between now and August, the Government would be well advised to change the question, because that would build confidence in the whole process?

Mark Durkan: I do believe that the Government would be well advised to change the question. We have seen this week that the Prime Minister is able to have a second take on some issues. Even when he feels that he is restating a position, it seems to be somewhat different. It might be a case of “EU turn if you want to,” with this Conservative leader. The Government should accede to the advice of the Electoral Commission.

When the referendum takes place, we need to recognise that there are many different issues for many different people. I represent a border constituency in Northern Ireland and the implications of the UK leaving the EU would be pretty fundamental, not just for my constituency but for the political institutions in Northern Ireland. The common experience of EU membership provided the very context in which there were changed British and Irish relations, which in turn provided the context for the peace process.

It should be remembered that the institutions of the Good Friday agreement do not take as givens just the human rights provisions of the Human Rights Act and the European convention on human rights, but the common EU membership of the UK and Ireland. Even some of the cross-border institutions that were set up as a result of the Good Friday agreement directly address and reflect our common membership of the EU. Fundamental damage and change may be done when serious questions are raised about our commitment to human rights and to our membership of the EU. If we are facing a referendum, we will have to address those issues and carry forward the arguments responsibly.

We must recognise that people have more questions about the sovereignty of this Parliament than just where it stands vis-à-vis the European institutions. We heard that yesterday in the debate on the Scotland Bill. There are clear tensions and ambiguities around what the notion of parliamentary sovereignty means for this Parliament, and around the implications for devolved institutions and the rightful authority that they should have. Similarly, in terms of what comes out of any EU renegotiation, there will be tensions between this Parliament’s notion of its parliamentary sovereignty and what emerges in the new arrangements and treaty terms.

That is why, in my view, it would have been better to have had something like a constitutional convention before the referendum not only to address the longer-term democratic relations within the UK and create a new democratic charter between this Parliament and the other elected institutions in different parts of the UK, but to create a new democratic charter that clearly creates a delineation between this Parliament and the various EU institutions.

There is a danger that we will end up with a referendum campaign in which the yes side includes people who want to be both half in and half out, and a no side that is also confused because it includes some people who want to be totally out, as well as people who say that if we reject it, we can be half out and renegotiate in the way that Ireland did. The danger is that we will end up with a referendum that does not settle the question at all in the terms in which Members believe it will.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Given the number of Members who want to take part in this debate, we have to drop the time limit to six minutes. I call Mr Paul Scully.

4.3 pm

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech as the new Member for Sutton and Cheam.

I have received a number of kind messages of congratulations over the last few weeks, two of which particularly caught my eye: one from Sir Neil Macfarlane, the esteemed former Sports Minister, and one from Lady Olga Maitland, both of whom are former Members for Sutton and Cheam. I was reminded of the long Conservative history in the seat. There has been a long 18-year hiatus, however. That break can be explained by

[Paul Scully]

a number of reasons, one of which is my predecessor, Paul Burstow, who built up a deserved reputation for working hard for his constituents. I know that no matter whether we agreed or disagreed, his heart was always in the place of his birth. Paul built up a reputation for experience and knowledge of social care and elderly people's issues, and I hope that whatever he does in the future, that knowledge is not lost to the debate, because those are particularly pressing issues.

The *Sutton Guardian* reported a Department for Work and Pensions official last year describing Sutton as an "average place". There are a number of reasons why that is just not so. We have some of the top-performing schools in the country; education in the borough is predicated on five selective schools, which all perform particularly well. We have a large number of parks, green spaces and street trees, which make us a truly green, leafy outer-London borough. Our pride in our local hospital and healthcare is way above average, and that is why my top priority is protecting local healthcare. I will always do right by our local hospital, St Helier hospital, in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake).

When I was walking around this place trying to familiarise myself with it, I found myself in the Members' cloakroom and saw that, somewhat disappointingly, my coat hanger seemed to be the only one that did not have a pink ribbon from which to hang my sword. I do not know what you have heard about Sutton and Cheam, Madam Deputy Speaker, but crime is another thing that is not average. We actually have one of the lowest crime rates of any London borough, so I hope that puts your mind at rest that I can be trusted with pointy implements in and around the estate.

It gives me great pleasure, and is a real privilege, to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) and my right hon. Friends the Members for North Somerset (Dr Fox) and for Wokingham (John Redwood), who have spoken eloquently today and over a number of years about an issue that moved me from being interested in politics to being active in politics—an EU referendum. We have heard today that the European Union was not a major factor in the election campaign, but I would have to disagree. I believe that it became a major factor, mainly driven by the immigration debate. But for me, it is so much wider than that. It is about retaining sovereignty in this country. It is about accountability and transparency, and it is also about making sure that when we are breaking down barriers for the single market, we are not just replacing them with walls around our global trade and protection.

I have veered a little from the traditions of the maiden speech. I do not want to talk about history because I want to look forward. I do not want to talk about geography because for me it is not so much about representing the place of Sutton and Cheam as about representing the people of Sutton and Cheam. I am looking forward to representing them over the next five years. Last week I had a meeting and helped to secure 10 more parking places in Cheam. A couple of days ago we had an announcement that has helped us build a school in my preferred area, and today I am here helping to secure a European referendum for the people

of Sutton and Cheam and this country. I am going to have to go some to top that next week—I am not sure I can.

As I said, this place is all about representing people, and the Bill is about trusting the people of the UK to determine their future in Europe. I am really looking forward to the next five years representing my neighbours, the people of Sutton, Cheam and Worcester Park.

4.8 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the excellent speech of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully). This is an opportunity for me to make my maiden speech, and I would like to congratulate my colleagues who have already spoken, who have set a very high standard.

My predecessor was Danny Alexander, who first took his seat in 2005, when my constituency in its current form as Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey was new. I know that he was very proud to represent this highland seat, and he did what he thought was best in delivering on his duties as an MP. I thank him for his hard work. No doubt there will be Members on the Government Benches who would wish to thank him for his work as Chief Secretary in the last Government.

My constituency is a diverse and wonderful place in which to live. In sport, leisure, tourism and business, my constituency has much to offer. It is the home of the Castle Stuart golf links, which will host the Scottish Open next year and has just announced a second course, to be constructed in conjunction with one of golfing's greats, Mr Arnold Palmer. It will be his first course in Scotland. Beyond Castle Stuart lies Nairn, with its beautiful beaches, riverside walks and its own famous golf courses of Nairn and Nairn Dunbar.

South towards Aviemore we have the Cairngorms national park, the funicular railway, skiing and snowboarding, as well as fantastic camping and hill walking. Of course, we also have one of the greatest visitor attractions of the world in beautiful Loch Ness. Legend has it that Saint Columba banished the beast to protect the people, and a similar task faces the 56 SNP MPs as we seek to banish the beast of austerity, although by no stretch of the imagination do I claim that we are as saintly.

Inverness is a city now home to the holders of the Scottish cup, the oldest football trophy in the world. Inverness Caledonian Thistle are to be congratulated on their win. The city attracts tourists from around the world and continues to be an inclusive and welcoming place for visitors and workers alike.

I want to make special mention of Grantown 250. The splendid old town of Grantown—a new town in its day—is 250 years old this week, and it will host a variety of events to mark the anniversary. Its history has many lessons for the present day. It was reported that James Grant appeared to have founded the town mainly to save his clansmen from the poverty that had overtaken so much of the highlands. It was said of his actions that

"Never, surely, was power so gently used, or protection so gratefully acknowledged."

The need remains, 250 years later, to save people from poverty and protect them from an unjust use of power.

That is why it is vital to provide a stronger voice for Scotland. We must deliver an understanding of our constituencies to this House. In my constituency, for example, some 70 communities have no one or two-bedroom social housing. We never needed to build them that small, but that means that the bedroom tax would have an inevitable, devastating effect on people who are at their most vulnerable and unable to protect themselves through no fault of their own. I commend the Scottish Government for finding the funding to offset that insidious tax, but that will not be made any easier by the cuts to the Scottish budget announced the other day. I intend to try to make some headway in relieving the highlands from the housing debt—the unfair burden that has been left on our people—which should be written off, as it has been for other constituencies around the country.

My constituency continues to attract visitors and businesses from around the world, but I am aware that more can be done to improve our connectivity. As with other rural areas in the UK, it is vital that we are prioritised for mobile and broadband coverage. The next time mobile operator licences are granted, and when 5G is sold for the many billions of pounds it will attract, priority must be written into the contracts to provide for rural areas in order to even the playing field.

This debate is on Europe, and my constituency is just like others in that it benefits from inward migration. In the highlands, we have suffered for too long a population drain, especially of our young people. A different policy on immigration is needed to address our needs. Our connections with Europe are vital, especially in my constituency. A referendum on EU membership should reflect what we were told by the Prime Minister about this family of nations and should respect the decision of the Scottish people on whether they wish to remain part of the European Union. Participation by 16 and 17-year-olds and EU nationals must be part of that decision.

Connectivity is another reason why I am pleased to have been made the Scottish National party spokesperson on Transport. I will go into that in more detail at a later date as I see I am running out of time. There are many challenges to come, but with the desire to be constructive and with a commitment to imagination and innovation that is driven by sheer hard work, I look forward to meeting those challenges. I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your attention and I also thank right hon. and hon. Members. This is likely to be the only time when I will ask you not to clap.

4.15 pm

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): I rise to give the Government my wholehearted support.

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, and it is a joy to follow two new Members whose constituencies I know well. In the run-up to the 2010 election, I spent plenty of time in Sutton and Cheam and I listened very carefully to the maiden speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully). I particularly congratulate him on making his speech on the basis of light notes only. Like him, I know what it is to stand up and make a maiden speech when the time limit is short. I congratulate him on the grace and flexibility with which he made his speech.

I remember my time in the RAF at Grantown-on-Spey very fondly, exhausting myself running around the beautiful constituency of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry). He made a noble and bold speech, and I congratulate him on coping with a shortened time limit. I am sure both Members will be steadfast defenders of their constituents. I wish them both very well indeed.

When the Foreign Secretary opened the debate my heart was lifted. I got a real sense, listening to his words, of the betrayal he felt that he had been sold a proposition other than the facts of the treaty at the time. As he explained, as an 18-year-old he had not read the details. All of us in this House can now read the details. If we read the Lisbon treaty, we will understand that the current circumstances do lead to ever-closer union and a single nation state.

This is a very happy day indeed. There are many subjects I care about extremely deeply, but the one thing that got me into politics was the treatment of the European Union constitution and, in due course, the Lisbon treaty. I am a sinner who has repented. I confess to the House that for many years I annoyed my wife most sincerely by being thoroughly in favour of European integration. What I realised with the handling of the EU constitution was that integration meant surrendering our democracy and I decided that I simply would not have it.

The House does not need me, in the time available, to rehearse that process, but the Lisbon treaty was a mess. I fondly recall the cover image of an issue of *The Economist* with the headline: “Just bury it: what to do with Europe’s Lisbon Treaty”. It has, rather appropriately, an arrow through the heart of what looks to be a sparrow with the EU flag on it. That is indeed what should have happened to the Lisbon treaty when the EU constitution was rejected. It was not appropriate to continue positively with the process of European integration against the democratic will of the people. This is where I have common cause with Opposition Members from the Scottish National party. We wish to see democratic self-determination peacefully at the ballot box. I wholeheartedly say that I am delighted we have this common cause.

Some disputes have been rather synthetic. It has been posited that those of us who are Eurosceptic are against international co-operation. Actually, I am for international co-operation. The question is: on what basis? Is it to be voluntary or is it to be compulsory, without adequate democratic control? There is then the question of nationalism. Of course, some Eurosceptics are ugly nationalists with an aggressive—militaristic even—nationalism which is wholly unhealthy and is to be resisted everywhere it is found. My critique of the European Union, however, is a classic liberal critique. I rather regret I have only two and a half minutes of my speech left.

The issue of equal treatment has been raised. In a constituency such as mine, one of the most pressing problems is that a large minority of my constituents have family outside the EU, whether in Kashmir and Pakistan, Sri Lanka or the Caribbean. They face fundamentally different migration circumstances compared to people from the European Union. I recently dealt with the case of a grandmother whose visit visa was rejected repeatedly. All the family wanted was for her to

[Mr Steve Baker]

come from Pakistan to see the newborn baby and support the mother. The process of applying and reapplying for a visit visa was just causing more and more stress. It was, frankly, inhumane. Of course, if a grandmother wishes to visit from Spain, she can simply come.

I am for the free movement of people. I think it is a wonderful thing. All the great and liberal advantages of Europe are a wonderful thing, but surely most of us would accept that we cannot have open borders in relation to the welfare state. There must be some border controls. I would like to see a fair migration policy that applies equally to all. So as I have said, on co-operation, the critique of nationalism and equal treatment, some disagreements are rather synthetic.

We are reminded every day in this House during Prayers that we should keep in mind our duty to further the interests of all mankind. I will not pick up on the exact words, but in doing so we should remember that each and every one of us has a duty to promote peace and prosperity not only in the UK, but in Europe and the world. In doing so, we should oppose nationalism; we should proceed thoughtfully and with kindness to one another in this difficult time which will affect all our lives for a very long time.

I recently discovered a book by a very good trade economist called Razeen Sally. He described something called neo-liberal institutionalism, which is about the idea that we should impose liberalism from the top down rather than from the bottom up. I recommend his books and his work to the Government, because what we are suffering from, above all, is the imposition of a system of Government and a system of society to which people have not consented. The world has changed.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a fine speech. On the economy, is it not the case that one does not have to look any further than the eurozone itself to see what a complete and utter disaster—a basket case—putting everyone into one currency has been for the economy of free and loving peoples?

Mr Baker: My hon. Friend knows my view about money and banking, which is that we should have market-based moneys. That is one of the things that has gone profoundly wrong. He prompts me to say, however, that we are very clearly, across the world, in the midst of a profound crisis of political economy, and that is what we must wrestle and cope with. Some of the old, simplistic and unpleasant arguments of the past must be put to rest. We need to rediscover a true liberalism, one in which people are accepting of one another.

Sir William Cash: Does my hon. Friend also accept that the eurozone is a de facto entity, whereas the question before us in this referendum is about being part of the European Union? The eurozone is a basket case, but at the same time it is dominated by one country which causes a lot of distortion to the way in which it works.

Mr Baker: Indeed. It is important that there is a degree of flexibility in currency systems, and Alan Greenspan's wonderful book on gold and economic freedom is something I commend to everybody.

As the Minister knows, I have misgivings about some of the details in the Bill, which some of my colleagues have already fleshed out. But it is a happy occasion today, because our party is wholly united in supporting the principle of the Bill. It is long overdue. We are delighted that it has come forward and we look forward to its progress.

In due course the people will decide. On the one hand they have the choice of radicalism—political union across Europe. That is the radical choice. The moderate, conservative choice is trade and co-operation among friendly nation states. People in the end will choose either for the European Union, or for Britain.

4.23 pm

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is fantastic to see you in the Chair. This has been a brilliant debate with some absolutely superb maiden speeches, so I am delighted to be able to take part in it.

The EU has changed radically since Britain joined, when it amounted to a relationship between a small number of developed countries to promote trade through the creation of a common market. Today's EU is very different from that: 28 member states with vastly different economies, Governments and social structures; ever-closer political and economic union, with the free movement of labour and a European currency; and other European countries wanting much closer relationships on foreign policy and defence. It has been a controversial question in British politics for decades, and Westminster has not been able to settle it to the public's satisfaction. That is why I am delighted we are having this debate and very pleased that my party is backing this opportunity to let the British people have their say.

I have been saying for years that a referendum would be the best way to have a proper debate about the decisions that are taken in Brussels or in Britain, and about the jobs that depend on our membership of the EU, so that we can sort out those issues once and for all. But we can only settle the argument if it is carried out in a free, fair and balanced way, and if the public have complete confidence in the process. It is such a significant debate that everyone involved should have a chance to agree on the rules. There should not be any room for either side to say the contest was fixed or fiddled.

First, public funds should not be used to promote one side or the other and the spending rules should be designed to ensure that neither side has an unfair advantage. Secondly, this is such a significant decision that it should take place as soon as possible and be separate from any other election. It is a huge issue of great national importance and the issues need to be considered on their own merits, outside whatever other political issues are being debated in election campaigns at the time. Thirdly, the Prime Minister should have the confidence to give his Ministers the freedom to campaign as they see fit, as Harold Wilson did in 1975.

Mr Bone: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on taking a positive view of the referendum and on having done so in a party that has not always agreed with him. Does he agree, however, that his Front-Bench team should also have the right to debate on both sides of the argument?

Ian Austin: Absolutely; without question.

I can see the benefits of our being part of the world's biggest single market and free trade area—it has made a big difference to our economy, particularly in the west midlands, where the car industry is of huge importance—but I am worried about the impact of freedom of movement on low-paid jobs and the effect of high levels of immigration on public services.

Robert Flello: I am enjoying my hon. Friend's good contribution. During the election campaign and over the past 10 years, my constituents have time and again raised with me their concerns about the levelling down of wages when somebody comes along from another European country and about employers, rather than embracing the opportunity to widen skills, using it as an opportunity to drive down wages.

Ian Austin: That has been one of the impacts of our membership, and I know that my hon. Friend's constituents, like mine, will be very concerned about it.

I can see the benefits of membership, and I can see the costs. I think that Britain could survive outside—of course we could—but there would be massive risks, not least, as I said earlier, for the car industry. I think that that is where the majority of the British people are on this issue. Outside here, most people are not ideological or dogmatic; they are reasonable and pragmatic and hold mainstream views. They have a balanced view and can see the benefits and the cost on both sides of the argument.

The no campaign has to think carefully about how it presents a positive view. I do not think that the apocalyptic, doom-laden vision of Britain as a member of the EU that I have heard in speeches this afternoon will strike a chord with anybody out there. I suspect that if the yes campaign could pick a leader for the no campaign, they would choose Nigel Farage. He is clearly a good communicator and a charismatic leader—winning 4 million votes and coming third in the election was a huge achievement—but he is not regarded by most people as pragmatic or someone who holds balanced, mainstream views on Britain's membership of the EU.

In 1975, the campaign to stay in was led by leading mainstream figures from both the major parties and the business community, and that had a huge impact. The campaign to come out was led by people on the extreme left of the Labour party and the extreme right of the Conservative party, and it was unable to show that it could speak for the reasonable, mainstream majority. I think that the British people want a clear analysis of all the issues so that they can make their decision once and for all, and that needs two mainstream, reasonable campaigns putting the respective arguments.

The debate about our relationship with the EU should start right now, not after the Prime Minister has completed his negotiations. We should be involving the British people in that debate directly and listening to their views. We live in an age when people want to be engaged and to know that politicians will listen and take their views into account. I would like Ministers to involve people in the debate by commissioning a body such as the National Centre for Social Research to construct a detailed survey to find out exactly what the British people think about the benefits and costs of our membership of Europe, looking in detail at the jobs that depend

on it, the impact and benefits of immigration and the emerging questions of defence and foreign policy. Knowing what people think would strengthen the Prime Minister's hand in his negotiations. I am doing that over the summer in Dudley. I will be sending out a detailed but balanced survey to 30,000 households and inviting them to a dozen or so public meetings to discuss the issue, as we did last year on immigration.

I welcome this debate on our membership of the EU, but it has to be carried out properly. It has to be a fair debate that starts right now and involves all the British people. The truth is that people in places such as Dudley feel they have not had their say on the EU, and we should start this debate by listening to them. Let us use it to show there is a new way of doing politics, through a proper, serious debate and a real conversation. Let us use this debate to rebuild public trust in politics. I say to both sides: listen to and trust the people, and they will respond.

4.29 pm

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech in this House. I am honoured to represent the people of Havant and I thank them for placing their trust in me. I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) and the other, excellent maiden speakers, who have set the bar high.

Like many hon. Members, I suspect I will be spending some of the coming weeks and months engaging with voters on the EU referendum, probably standing at the front of school halls and community centres. But it was my father who first inspired me into public service, because he was more used to standing at the back of all the rooms he was in. He had escaped communism and dictatorship to find freedom and opportunity here in Britain. He worked as a waiter and a bartender, standing at the back of restaurants. It was tough work, but it allowed him to save up and open a small shop up in Yorkshire with my mother. We lived above our shop, and much of my childhood was spent working in it. That journey from the back of the room to the front—from the shop floor to the Floor of this House—sums up the spirit of the opportunity society that my family and I have cherished, and which we must safeguard for future generations.

One man who shares that view is my predecessor, David Willetts, who represented Havant in this House for 23 years. David was an outstanding local MP, a distinguished Parliamentarian and a successful Minister who served his country and his constituency with distinction and honour. David was a practical and innovative thinker, and many of his ideas became Government policy. David understood that a strong economy is the driver of social mobility. Building a country where everyone has the chance to succeed, no matter what their starting point in life, will be the focus of my work in this House. As many hon. Members will know, David was affectionately nicknamed "Two Brains". I want to manage the House's expectations for the future, because although I have twice as much hair as David, I must confess I only have half his brains, but I hope to make up for it with my passion for Havant.

Although the modern Havant constituency is named after the ancient market town between Chichester and Portsmouth, today the seat is a microcosm of modern

[Alan Mak]

Britain—leafy suburbs, social housing, a rural island and a coastal town—and each part of my constituency values its own identity. Emsworth, for example, is a beautiful market town overlooking Chichester Harbour that hosts an annual celebration of British produce. Emsworth also used to be famous for its oysters—until a banquet in 1902, that is, when some local councillors died from food poisoning after eating Emsworth oysters. I am sure that hon. Members would never want any councillors they know to suffer a similar fate. Further south, Hayling Island combines rural charm with a bustling visitor economy. Its beach has been awarded a Blue Flag for the last 24 years, and Hayling is a world-class centre for water sports and sailing. Bedhampton, Purbrook, Widley, Stakes, Warblington and Denvilles complete what is a wonderful constituency nestled between the south coast and the South Downs.

For centuries, Havant's economy prospered on the back of parchment making, brewing and manufacturing, powered by our famous watermills and natural springs. In fact, local tradition says that Havant parchment was used for Magna Carta and the treaty of Versailles. In the modern era, Havant is now a world-class centre for high-quality engineering, science and technology. Multinationals such as Lockheed Martin, Colt, Pfizer and Kenwood all have substantial operations there, joining our many small businesses. The IBM factory that David Willets mentioned in his maiden speech has reopened as Langstone Technology Park, an outstanding example of economic regeneration and one of the crown jewels in our local economy. Whatever the British people decide in the coming referendum, which my party has enabled, we must maintain our status as an outward-looking nation, working with our partners in Europe, but also strengthening our ties with the exciting, fast-growing economies of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

I am also mindful that in today's economy, every worker in Havant is facing competition, not just locally but globally. We must equip them with the skills to compete and win. Having benefited from an assisted place scholarship myself, I am confident that the Government's academies and free schools programme will do just that. The transformation of Havant Academy shows exactly what can be achieved. Five years ago, it was literally a different school. Then called Staunton Community Sports College, it recorded England's worst GCSE results, but by last summer it was England's most improved school.

Havant Academy largely serves Leigh Park, one of Britain's largest post-war housing estates. Some may ask me why my seat nevertheless returns such a large Conservative majority. I can tell them: Leigh Park is home to entrepreneurial tradesmen—some with white vans and England flags rightly and proudly displayed—small business owners, military veterans and hard-working families. They all want to get on in life, not just to get by. Most of them bought their council houses through right to buy, many work for local businesses and understand the importance of a strong economy, and they all care about their children's future. I am proud that they have turned to my party for a secure and prosperous future, and I am proud to represent them in the House.

My parents not only taught me how to serve people from all walks of life, but instilled in me an enduring faith in the enormous possibilities of our great nation,

our great United Kingdom. For example, I am proud to be the first-ever Member of Parliament—in any party—of British-Chinese heritage. In many places, a seat in Parliament is open only to the rich and powerful, but we are all privileged to live in a country where anyone, even a family of modest shopkeepers, can stand tall and achieve their dreams. I hope that, through my work in the House, I can help everyone in Havant to achieve the same.

4.35 pm

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): Let me begin my maiden speech by congratulating you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your election. I look forward to impartiality throughout the Chamber. I am also grateful to you for calling me to speak in the EU referendum debate. What an interesting debate it is in which to make a maiden speech, especially because it unites so many Members from different parties. By and large, it unites Members on either side of the political divide. I shall be interested to see what happens as the Bill proceeds, and how many members of each party support their leadership.

I pay tribute to the people of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, who took on a great challenge to elect me. The Fermanagh and South Tyrone voice has not been heard in this place for the last 14 years. I am grateful to the people who put their faith in me, and I know that they will want to be rewarded for that. I also want to record my thanks for the contribution of the previous Member of Parliament. Although she did not sit in this place, she went out of her way to campaign on mental health issues.

Some other quite flamboyant Members have preceded me, notably Ken—now Lord—Maginnis. He was quite reserved and backward about speaking; I am sure that people will remember that. [Laughter.] Over the past 65 years the constituency has changed from nationalist to Unionist, and vice versa, on no fewer than seven occasions, notching up some notable records on the way, such as what I understand to be the still unbeaten 93.4% turnout in 1951. I wonder whether there will be the same turnout for the European referendum when it comes about. In the 2010 election, not so far away, there was a majority of one: the seat was won by a single vote. I bet not many other constituencies can equal that.

Another former Member of Parliament for Fermanagh and South Tyrone was Frank Maguire. He did not normally turn up in this place, but, unusually, he did so on one occasion in order to abstain in person, and actually brought down the Government of the day. The Labour Government had expected him to vote for them, and to keep them in place.

Mine is a very interesting constituency, and I hope to be here for much longer than the short periods that became established some time ago. It is the most westerly constituency in the United Kingdom. Last weekend, in the constituency, I attended a commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the battle of Waterloo. What a privilege it was to remember the two great regiments that were raised in Enniskillen. It was a momentous occasion.

Coming from that area, I have a farming background. I make no apology for standing up for rural communities, because I think that they face a hugely difficult task. However, my constituency also has a strong engineering

base, which stretches from Severfield, a United Kingdom-based company with a branch in Ballinamallard, County Fermanagh, to Dungannon, where there are a number of light engineering companies.

We also have a great tourist industry in Fermanagh. The lakes of Fermanagh are known far and wide, and I say to any Member who might not have visited Fermanagh to see the beauty of the lakes, “Shame on you, and I hope you’ll do that in the not too distant future.”

I want to put on record what we have been through over the past 45 years. Things have moved on; things have progressed in Northern Ireland, and we are happy about that. We would, however, like to see more progress, and I want to remind people that we in Fermanagh and South Tyrone have suffered some terrible atrocities. Three individual family members were murdered in three different incidents by the IRA. We had the Enniskillen bomb, which killed—murdered—11 people; I am sure we all remember that.

Those victims and their families have still not got justice, and I will want to remind the House on every occasion I can that they deserve justice, as do all the other families in Northern Ireland who deserve such justice. We need a new definition of a victim, because the definition we have is not appropriate. How can we equate the perpetrator of the serious crime of murder with the family of the person they murdered? That is not fair or right. We are debating the EU referendum, and at least the European definition of a victim is much better than that which we have in Northern Ireland, and I would like to see that implemented much further than it is.

I thank everyone who voted for me, and I thank those who did not, because they will get exactly the same service from me in the constituency.

4.41 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is also a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott), who made a very good, traditional maiden speech, but in addition touched on the important subject of justice for victims in Northern Ireland. If he speaks in that way in the House in future, he will be listened to on every occasion.

I also thank the other Members on both sides of the House who have made their maiden speeches, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully), and of course my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Alan Mak) who made such a powerful speech just a short while ago.

The EU referendum is now taken for granted. It appears that almost every Member will vote for it tonight if there is a Division. [*Interruption.*] Yes, of course, except for the principled Scottish Nationalists, who hopefully will divide the House so we can show what immense support there is for the European Union Referendum Bill.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I ask the hon. Gentleman to reflect that the appetite for this referendum is not the same in all parts of these islands. At the recent general election there were parties who advocated a referendum and parties who advocated not having a referendum. Over 80% of the people in Scotland

voted for parties who did not want a referendum, and according to most of the opinion polls the great majority of Scottish people are content to be Europeans and with their relationship with the EU. I presume the hon. Gentleman does not support the amendment, so what is going to happen—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order.

Tommy Sheppard: What is going to happen—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Please.

Tommy Sheppard *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman’s contribution is an intervention, not a speech. When the Chair is standing, you sit down. That is a very long intervention and we are very tight for time. Thank you. I call Peter Bone.

Mr Bone: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I take on board the hon. Gentleman’s intervention and he makes a fair point, but I do not think SNP Members are here in numbers because they oppose the EU referendum Bill. I think they might be here for other reasons. Also, as a democrat, I am sure the hon. Gentleman was pretty pleased about the referendum that happened in Scotland, although he might not have liked the way the Scottish people voted.

If I had stood up here three years ago and suggested this House was about to vote for an EU referendum Bill, I would have been laughed at. Every party was against it. The coalition Government were against it, the Labour party was against it; it was just never going to happen. That proves that this House and MPs can change things. The people were ahead of Parliament. They wanted their say on whether we should be in or out of the European Union. We have seen how Parliament slowly changed its position and how the excellent Minister for Europe, my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington), has been on the same journey—I am sure I shall be cheering his speech tonight, as I was booing it three years ago. People say that this House and MPs do not matter and that everything is done by Government and by people sitting on sofas in No. 10, but that is simply not true. Another party, the UK Independence party, might have been born out of this, but I do not think that that is what changed things—it was Members of this House.

I remember that, under your chairmanship, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Backbench Business Committee—the first time that Back Benchers could schedule business in this House—put on a debate about whether we should have a referendum. The Government tried to manipulate things and brought the debate forward from the Thursday for which it was originally scheduled to the Monday. MPs went home on Friday night and talked to their constituents, local members and party chairmen—they thought about the issue—and when we came back on the Monday, we had the debate and I had the great pleasure of winding it up. Yes, the vote was lost, but 80-odd Conservative MPs opposed the three-line Whip.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Let us not be too horrible to our colleagues who disagree with us or to the Labour party, which changed its mind. After all, those who arrive last at the vineyard are equally to be valued.

Mr Bone: My hon. Friend is far too kind, as always, but I was not making a point about any individual Members. My point, to all Members sitting here, is that if we really care and campaign about something—as the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) has done consistently—we can get there in the end. We should never be scared to stand up and be in the minority, because after a while the minority often becomes the majority.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman welcome the fact that all UK nationals, including those in Gibraltar, will have a vote on this issue? We in Northern Ireland want to see it happen so that we, too, can make our choice. The only thing that I am a wee bit perturbed about is that we would prefer the referendum to be held earlier, rather than later. Does he agree that we should have it as soon as possible?

Mr Bone: This is a Second Reading debate, so I want to support the principle of what is happening and to celebrate the fact that we will have the in/out referendum. However, the hon. Gentleman raises an issue that slightly concerns me, which, it will be no surprise to learn, is the timetabling of the Bill's Committee stage.

The Bill is a constitutional one so, rightly, the Committee stage will be held on the Floor of the House. Today, immediately after Second Reading, we will vote on the programme motion, which we are not allowed to debate at that point, although by tradition we may refer to it on Second Reading. My concern about the timetabling is that the Bill is scheduled to be in Committee in the House for two days, which will be Tuesday and Thursday of next week. The programme motion states that the first set of clauses will be debated for four hours after the commencement of the Bill in Committee. We know what happens, however, especially on a Thursday—there will be business questions after normal Question Time, and that is two hours used up. If there is then a statement and an Urgent Question, although we will have been able to debate the first group for four hours, we will have no time at all to discuss the last group.

Before we have the business statement on Thursday, will the Minister ask the business managers whether they can change the programme motion so that, instead of the debate on the second group of new clauses finishing at the moment of interruption, it can go on for as long as necessary? This is an important constitutional Bill, and we should not be in a position of having only about 10 minutes to debate certain new clauses. That happened too often in the old Parliament. If we could just remove from the programme motion those two little bits that would cause the Committee stage to fall at the moment of interruption, it would help the democratic process a lot. Many people have said today, whatever side of the argument they are on, that they want a fair and proper referendum. I absolutely agree with that, and if the House has the ability to consider properly what is going to be in the Bill and what is going to happen in the referendum, we will be all the better for it. This is the one point that I ask the Minister to look at.

4.50 pm

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): First of all, Madam Deputy Speaker, may I say what an absolute pleasure it is to see you in the Chair and to speak under your chairmanship this afternoon? The only note of sadness I would sound is that you are no longer with us on these Benches. Your company was always a delight.

I am very pleased to be able to support the Bill. Indeed, I have campaigned in favour of a referendum on Europe for a long time. I speak as a former board member of People's Pledge, the multi-party campaign for an EU referendum, and as a member of Labour for a Referendum. Both campaigns have succeeded, albeit a little late in the day in the case of the latter. Labour for a Referendum has included EU supporters—Europhiles—as well as sceptics like me. Recent voter analysis has concluded, sadly, that had we persuaded our Labour leaders to support a referendum earlier, we would have won an extra eight seats in the recent general election and prevented the Conservatives from having an overall majority. That would have made this Parliament rather different from the one that we shall have for the next five years, so it was a significant decision not to support a referendum before the election.

I am pleased that my party leadership has now had a change of heart and is supporting the referendum. A few years ago, a mini-referendum was held in my constituency on whether local people wished to be granted an EU referendum. There was a 2:1 vote in favour. The wishes of my constituents are now being reflected on both sides of the House, and I am pleased about that.

I have a track record on EU matters going back to the 1975 Common Market referendum, when I was chair of the Luton Vote No campaign and the Bedfordshire agent for the no vote. I have not changed my view since then. Perhaps that just demonstrates rigidity of mind, but I believe that events since then have strengthened my view that the European Union is not a sound organisation—certainly not for Britain. Interestingly, the Bedfordshire agent for the yes vote was the late Sir Trevor Skeet, then the Conservative MP for Bedford. When I met Sir Trevor a few years ago and reminded him of his previous position, he was horribly embarrassed because he had since become a strong Eurosceptic who would no longer have wished to vote yes.

In 1975, however, the Conservatives were overwhelmingly pro-Common Market while Labour had a majority against it. It has been suggested that the Eurosceptics were just a small number of extreme left-wingers, but I have to say to my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) that we had a massive majority at the special conference on the Common Market that I attended in 1975. A great majority of Labour MPs were in favour of a no vote. It was not just a small group of left-wingers—I happen to be on the left myself—who took a Eurosceptic view; people on the right of the party did so as well.

Labour Eurosceptics have included many distinguished former Members of this House, including Hugh Gaitskell, Michael Foot, Barbara Castle, Peter Shore and Tony Benn. Indeed, I last met Denis Healey in the late 1990s at a meeting that had been called to oppose Britain's membership of the euro. I hope, therefore, that there will be no personal disparagement during the campaign on the referendum, and that the debate will focus on the arguments. I hope that those who take a critical view of the EU will not be abused, and that their arguments will be listened to. I have set out my own views in print, and I shall be writing and speaking on this matter much more in the coming months.

In simple terms, I believe that the EU is about economics, and the economics are failing. Low growth, mass unemployment and falling living standards—in swathes

of the eurozone in particular—are evidence of the EU's failure. But the overwhelming argument against our membership of the EU is about democracy. Democracy must mean elected national Parliaments making the final decision on how their people are governed and how they choose to be governed. My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) referred to a dictatorship. It might not be a dictatorship, but it is certainly an authoritarian bureaucracy. We want our laws to be made following debate in this House, not by bureaucrats in Brussels. That is of fundamental importance.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I support all the points that the hon. Gentleman is making. He mentions the importance of democratic decisions, so is he concerned about the increase in the spending limits for referendum expenditure in the Bill and the danger that that could undermine true democratic debate and put the decision in the hands of the big spenders?

Kelvin Hopkins: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. Spending limits are crucial and I remember the vast amounts of Euroslush poured into Britain to win the yes vote. Every corner shop in my constituency had a steel noticeboard cemented into the pavement with pictures of Harold Wilson on it saying "Vote Yes." That money did not come out of the pockets of ordinary people—well, it did indirectly—but it came through big business or from the European Union.

I have a final point to make, repeating what I suggested in business questions last Thursday. I suggested that all parties ought to have a free vote for all Members of this on whether they accept the terms that come back from Brussels when the Prime Minister has finished his negotiating. I hope that my party will observe that and I hope that the Government will too. It was probably my fault that the row broke out over the weekend, because clearly some Conservative Members were rather taken with my suggestion that there should be a free vote for all Members. I shall be voting freely and I hope that my Whips will understand when the time comes. Harold Wilson wisely allowed a free vote on his renegotiated terms of membership of the Common Market before the referendum and I hope that all parties will follow that wise example so that we not only have a free debate in which we discuss the issues and do not abuse each other but are free to vote with our consciences, as we should be in this Parliament.

4.56 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called to speak in this debate, Madam Deputy Speaker, for three reasons. First, I congratulate you on your rightful elevation to the Deputy Speakership. Secondly, I congratulate the makers of three excellent maiden speeches, my hon. Friends the Members for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) and for Havant (Alan Mak) and the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott). They have certainly set the bar for quality high. Thirdly, it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), who is not a Johnny-come-lately to the referendum campaign but has consistently been in favour of giving the people the vote and seems to be the only person who has spoken in this House today who voted no back in 1975.

Who remembers the words of the failed UK Independence party candidate for South Thanet, Nigel Farage, in the run-up to the general election, when he constantly hoodwinked the British public with his grandstanding with lines such as

"it is infuriating how the Conservative Party can string the British public along and constantly make claims over holding an EU Referendum when it was clear from day one that it would never happen"?

Not only is the European Union Referendum Bill already under way within days of the state opening of this new Parliament, but the Prime Minister has hit the ground running and toured EU capitals to start the serious business of renegotiating our terms of membership and the whole future of the EU, and the main Opposition party has belatedly come round to our way of thinking. Barring an affront to the democratic will of the people, in the upper House there will be a referendum on our future membership of the European Union, with a straight in or out vote, before the end of 2017 of the latest.

The only broken promises and stringing along of the public came from UKIP. Indeed, the biggest threat to a meaningful referendum came from UKIP. If we had listened to its siren voice and held a referendum immediately, all the polls suggest that it would have resulted in a yes vote to stay in before we had achieved any reform. It would probably have brought the nightmare scenario of the UK staying in a reformed EU, so that when the PM went to submit in search of reform in the future he would be met with a frosty "Forget it, chum, you voted to stay in the club. Like it or lump it."

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): My hon. Friend's point reinforces why it will be so important that the facts are clearly laid before our constituents. Will he welcome the Church of England's initiative to provide hustings so that our constituents can hear clearly and objectively both sides of the argument?

Tim Loughton: I absolutely welcome that, and I hope that one thing that will come out of this referendum is a full, frank and long debate engaging as many members of the electorate as possible, as was the case in Scotland, so that at last we can discuss the situation and familiarise ourselves with the facts.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that this should not be an in/out referendum but a referendum on whether we want further and closer political union or a common European market for all our goods and services?

Tim Loughton: The argument about an ever closer union has been won. That movement is dead, certainly as far as this country is involved. It will be a question of whether we can make the EU work not just for the UK but for the sustainability of the whole EU, or whether we are better going it alone. We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to achieve genuine, lasting and sustainable reform of the EU, not just in our interests but in the interests of the whole EU.

Many of us believe that the EU in its current form is not working. It cannot survive in an increasingly globally competitive world. The status quo is just not sustainable. If one statistic tells that story, it is the fact that within

[Tim Loughton]

five years the EU's share of world GDP will be just 60% of the levels that we enjoyed back in 1990. We are shrinking while the rest of the world gets bigger, and we are not getting a slice of that cake.

Some of us have waited a long time for this moment. Many constituency Fridays were brutally sacrificed in vain in support of the valiant efforts of my hon. Friends the Members for Stockton South (James Wharton) and for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill). I am co-chair of the Fresh Start group, which was set up with the hon. Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris) and for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom). We have produced with Open Europe detailed work on the amount of change that it is possible to achieve. We have had scores of meetings with European Ministers and Members of Parliament from across EU countries. One thing that we need to appreciate is that the 28 members of the EU all have their own reasons for wanting to be part of the EU.

Finland shares a 1,500 km border with Russia. Poland and the Czech Republic talk about the relationship with Russia. They want a bulwark against Russia, which is why the EU is so important to them. Other countries want the agricultural and trading links. The reasons are all different, and we have gone wrong in the past by assuming that all countries have one reason for becoming and staying members of Europe. The scenario has completely changed. We have a clear and present prospect of a referendum by 2017, in which the British people could vote, if they choose, to leave the EU. The dynamics of EU reform have changed drastically.

Inevitably, this debate is less about the Bill itself—goodness knows, its progenitors were scrutinised exhaustively in this place. I support the detail of the Bill. I do not support extending the franchise in the actual vote, which has become a recent talking point. The main issue will be how the next months and years pan out up to the referendum, and how its passing will change the dynamics of the debate in Europe.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tim Loughton: I will not, because I have given way twice.

I have a few words of advice for the Prime Minister. We have made a great start. Go for maximum reform. Take it to the wire all the way to 2017. It will be a long, hard slog. He will find many detractors along the way and also many allies, but the major players in Europe who will shape its future—like Germany—desperately need the UK to be part of it, shaping it along with them. We will achieve some things that we want, and other things that we had not expected. That is how negotiation works, and we will inevitably have to compromise. As the Finnish Prime Minister said:

“The EU without Britain is pretty much the same as fish without chips. It's not a meal any more.”

This is not just about a better deal for the United Kingdom, important though that is. It is about a sustainable future for the whole of the EU. There are encouraging signs already. The “ever closer union” mantra of Monnet is dead. The French Economy Minister said this month that it was time to accept the idea of a two-speed

Europe. The Prime Minister's notion that we need the flexibility of a network, not the rigidity of a bloc, is gaining traction.

We need to remember why we joined the EEC in the first place and in particular the advantages of the single market that so attracted Mrs Thatcher, despite the warnings from the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood). Yet the single market is far from complete, especially in services. Services account for 71% of the EU GDP, yet only 22% of this is from intra-EU trade; there are still some 800 professions in Europe that are subject to country regulation; and only 11% of internet shopping across Europe is cross-border. There is still lots to do, yet we seem to spend too much time sitting around the table in Brussels, working out ways of making regulations more complicated for our businesses and citizens, rather than looking beyond Europe to see how, working together, we can secure a larger slice of the global economy for all 28 members, for our mutual benefit.

I could talk about a shopping list of what we want, but now is not the time to do so. Now is not the time to hamper the Prime Minister's negotiation with emotional and artificial red lines. Now is the time to pass a Bill that will trigger a referendum, which will change the mindset of our EU partners to achieve sustainable reform for the whole of Europe. The Prime Minister's every waking conversation, discussion, breakfast, lunch and dinner with EU leaders must focus on getting the best possible reform package for us and our European partners. This Bill, at last, is an essential part of achieving that and some sort of cross-channel state of nirvana.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Before I call the next speaker, could I make a plea to Members to keep speeches as short as possible and interventions to an absolute minimum? We are really squeezed for time and I would like to get as many speakers in as possible. With that in mind, I call Mark Hendrick.

5.5 pm

Mr Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): May I start by congratulating you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on taking the Chair? It is well deserved. May I also congratulate those new Members who have made their maiden speeches today? They have caused many of us to cast our minds back to our own maiden speeches.

I rise as a Member of the Labour party, which did not want a referendum. I did not think that a referendum was necessary, and it is my view that we are better off in the European Union, with its current faults, if there are any. Indeed, whatever future circumstances arise, I think it is inconceivable that the UK could leave the European Union. I am happy with the status quo.

The reality, however, is that we lost the general election, there is now a Conservative majority and a referendum will go ahead, whether we like it or not. This is not, therefore, a policy change that has been brought about because we have suddenly had a change of mind, but a recognition of reality: there is going to be a referendum, whether we like it or not, so the best thing we can do is take part in it and do our best to ensure that Great Britain, or the UK, stays in the European Union.

The reason for the referendum has nothing to do with the high-minded argument that, “It’s about time we had a decision.” Some of the speeches made by Government Members have been beyond credibility. They seem to be suffering from collective amnesia and to have forgotten that the Prime Minister was dragged kicking and screaming into having a referendum because many of his own Back Benchers were talking about making a pact with the UK Independence party so that UKIP candidates did not stand against Conservative candidates. Some of those Back Benchers—one of them is here today—chose to jump ship and join UKIP, and the Prime Minister was scared to death of seeing his own party falling apart before his very eyes. No Government Member has mentioned that simple fact.

The reason we are here today has more to do with holding together the Conservative party in the run-up to the last general election, and the next two years will also be spent trying to hold it together, to the detriment of all the other issues of state that this Government should be dealing with. That puts today’s debate about the referendum in context.

Mr Carswell: Does the hon. Gentleman imagine that his party may have done better had it actually allowed voters the choice that other parties gave them?

Mr Hendrick: I think we may have done slightly better, but I do not think it would have greatly affected the measure of our defeat—let me put it that way.

Conservatives for Britain, which now has up to 60 members, neglects Britain’s interests in remaining in the European Union. Our place in Europe is about Britain being an outward-looking nation that sees the way in which the world is developing and that recognises globalisation and the opportunity offered by the 21st century and the modern economy. It is not an inward-looking Britain, which is what is suggested when some Members hark back to the days when we had an empire and then a commonwealth. Some Government Members give the impression that they still wish we had that empire, and some do not seem to have realised that the second world war is over and that the Germans are no longer the enemy. In my constituency, for example, we are working with the Germans to build military aircraft to fight other possible future foes. I come from a constituency that spent 100 years building aircraft to fight Germany, but now we build aircraft with the Germans to fight potential enemies elsewhere.

What is happening in the world is that nations are coming together and deciding that it is better to work as closely together as possible. Britain is not the little but extremely powerful nation it once was; it is a less powerful nation working with a much more powerful bloc of European countries—now 28 countries, with more than 500 million people—that can now take on, economically and politically, the likes of the United States and can start to compete with massive developing nations, such as China, India, Russia and Brazil. This is a new world for the 21st century. For Conservative Members still looking back at the loss of empire and our past relationship with European countries, we are a world away from that. They should sit down and think about that.

I have no problem whatever with ever-closer union. The more we can do to enhance our effectiveness through working with European partners on legislation that

affects all of us, the better. People say that we could manage on our own, but we would not manage as well. People say that the European Union is not as strong as it was in the past and has a lesser share of trade. Perhaps it has, but it still has far more trade, business and clout than we ever had in the past or ever will have on our own. We must look at superpowers such as the United States and China, as well as the emerging powers I have mentioned.

I genuinely believe that the referendum will be won by the yes camp. By our staying within the European Union, we will see a Europe emerging that is not a united states of Europe, but a unique Europe that will ensure Britain has stability, a voice and a bright economic future and that Britain counts on the world stage in the way it will not if we leave. This debate is a very historic occasion: we will soon have a referendum on our future. I look forward to the debates during the referendum, even though I did not think that it would be necessary and I think it is a shame to spend two years fighting on an issue that I see as a no-brainer.

5.12 pm

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulate you on your election. I also congratulate all hon. Members from both sides of the Chamber who have made their maiden speeches during today’s debate.

I, too, welcome the fact that this new Conservative Government have wasted no time in introducing the Bill. That will have immediately quashed the fears of the people of this country who thought the Conservatives were saying they would give them a say on our membership of the European Union simply to gain votes in the general election.

Some Members from the last Parliament will recall that I moved a motion to provide for the holding of a referendum with an out option in October 2011. Back then, Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat Front Benchers were all opposed to the idea. There was a three-line Whip against the proposal; nevertheless, 81 Conservative colleagues supported the motion that day. Today, after the promise of a referendum in the Conservatives’ election manifesto and its inclusion in the first Queen’s Speech in this Parliament, I am pleased that the Bill is having its Second Reading.

Alex Salmond: Does the hon. Gentleman really think that the huge issue of the future of this country in Europe should be entrusted to members of a political party who cannot even organise themselves to doughnut the right speaker?

Mr Nuttall: That is a very interesting point, but my hon. Friends would have difficulty getting behind me here; as the right hon. Gentleman might have noticed, there is a wall. I did think about sitting on the Front Bench, but I always like to speak from this seat on the Back Bench, as he would have known if he had been here in the last Parliament.

It is 40 years since the people of this country last had their say on this issue. Back then, the question was whether or not the United Kingdom should remain part of the Common Market—the European Economic Community. Since then, the nature of the organisation has changed

[Mr Nuttall]

beyond all recognition. The European Economic Community became the European Community and the “Economic” bit was quietly dropped. Then, the European Community changed its name to the European Union. It had its own elected Parliament, its own flag, its own anthem, its own currency, its own courts structure and its own foreign offices. One does not have to be a constitutional expert to realise what is going on: this organisation is turning itself into a united states of Europe—a single European superstate.

I believe that this country would not simply survive, but thrive, outside the European Union. We hear a lot about how important it is that this House reflects the country outside, but on this issue the House does not reflect what is going on outside. The proportion of Members of this House who believe, as I do, that we would be better off out of the European Union in no way reflects the millions of people outside this House who hold that belief.

I realise that the Bill is not about the merits of our membership of the European Union, but about setting up the mechanism to hold the referendum. It is essential that the British public accept and believe that the referendum is being held on a level playing field. There are a number of issues in the Bill about which they will rightly have concerns. First, there is the date on which the referendum is to be held. It is vital that it is held separately from any other form of election.

Perhaps the most contentious point is the precise wording of the question. I have never understood why the Government regard it as essential that we have a question that elicits a yes or no response. When the Electoral Commission looked at the private Member’s Bill on this issue in the last Parliament, it decided that the most neutral question was,

“Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?”,

with the answers being either

“Remain a member of the European Union”

or

“Leave the European Union”.

I believe that that would be a much clearer question.

I do not think that changing the franchise to include 16 and 17-year-olds just in this Bill would be the right way to proceed. The franchise should be based on the general election franchise. On the issue of purdah, it is essential that the Government, the EU itself and, crucially, EU-funded organisations are precluded from making any statements or from campaigning in the weeks in the run-up to the referendum.

I am delighted that my constituents in Bury, Ramsbottom and Tottington are finally getting their say on this crucial issue, which will determine whether our country has a future as an independent, sovereign nation or merely as a region of a European superstate.

5.19 pm

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): May I congratulate all the new Members who have made their maiden speeches today or are about to do so? There has been no more important debate so far in this Parliament in which to do so.

I chair the all-party British-German group here at Westminster, and on the morning after a difficult, disappointing election for Labour the German ambassador was kind enough to call me to congratulate me on retaining my seat in Newcastle-under-Lyme. During that call, I said that I feared the first casualty of the election result, policy-wise, would be our stance on the European Union referendum. I regret that it has been, but I understand the politics behind it.

I still think, however, that my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) showed great courage in not joining the chase for an in/out referendum on the EU. Like him and the very experienced right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), I think it is a reckless gamble with our country’s future and its place in the world, hastily conceived by the Prime Minister to throw red meat to the anti-Europeans in his party. They, of course, have just wolfed it up, snarled for more and will never be sated until Britain leaves. The referendum will clearly happen now, and despite Labour’s change of stance, I am glad that we will make the same argument that we made in 1975—that membership of the EU is in the best economic interests of our country’s trade, jobs and investment.

For many of us, membership cannot simply be reduced to statistics without regard to the history of war after war in Europe before 1945 and peace through dialogue, co-operation and more unity since. In my late teens and early 20s, I worked closely with the German War Graves Commission, organising camps for young people from across Europe and tending war cemeteries in Berlin during the time of the Wall, when reconciliation in Europe simply could not be taken for granted. The original connection came through the German war cemetery in Staffordshire, at Cannock Chase, which stands next to our Commonwealth war memorial.

My father was an immigrant, who came from Ireland in the 1950s, and his decent, generous employer, Hubert Steiner, was a former luftwaffe pilot who had been shot down and interned at Cannock. He fell in love with a local girl through the wire, stayed after the war and built a great local contracting and engineering business.

Working in Berlin between school and university, one of my great joys was playing chess with a colleague, Willi Lotz, who was then in his 60s. Willi could only do light shop work, because his withered arm had been shot to pieces on the Russian front in a battle that had claimed the lives of all his company. In 1961, months before the wall, Willi and his wife left the east for the west, going to West Germany. Now a united Germany plays the fullest part in the European Union, remembers its history and needs Britain as an ally now and in the future.

Later on, when I joined Reuters as a journalist in 1990, the civil war in the former Yugoslavia was about to erupt. I cannot help but think now that if Croatia, Serbia and the other republics were to join Slovenia in dialogue and co-operation with the EU, such a conflagration simply would not happen again. For the Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—joining the EU in 2004, as much as joining NATO, was an expression of their desire to be part of a union that guaranteed peace in our time and in the future. Like it or not, Britain plays a vital role in the European Union, and it would be simply unforgivable to our country, and all our European neighbours, if we withdrew.

Turning to the economics, in my area we have Siemens in Congleton, Bentley, owned by Volkswagen, in Crewe, and Toyota in Derby. All those companies believe that it would be bad for investment, jobs and Britain if we withdrew. Indeed, as soon as the Prime Minister announced the intended referendum, one of our local companies put on hold an £80 million, 10-year investment because the political risk was simply too great.

In the Potteries, we have regular meetings with the local ceramics industry, at which there are endless discussions about EU carbon and environmental regulations. It is frustrating fighting our corner in Brussels, but the thought never seriously occurs that if we simply break away, we can be free of the burdens of the rules while being able to trade in a single market without any tariffs.

Our biggest local employer in the Potteries is now bet365, which owns Stoke City. It does not want 28 different sets of gaming regulations in 28 countries—that would be bad for business. It wants us to remain in the EU, arguing from the inside and leading by example to extend the single market in the future. That will be good for business and good for Britain.

I was elected chair of the British-Norwegian group this week. Norway, for its own reasons—fish and oil—has decided to remain outside the EU, but that is in name only. To access the single market, Norway complies with its provisions and contributes to its funds, but—unlike Britain—it has no say at the negotiating table or in decision making. Becoming a Norway or a Switzerland would not be a panacea or an answer if Britain were to leave the EU but wished to retain the benefits of a single market.

To conclude, I turn back to an event at the German embassy a couple of years ago. An animated discussion about our place in the EU took place, including the Indian High Commissioner and the Chinese chargé d'affaires. Neither of the representatives of those huge and growing countries and markets could fathom why Britain would want to leave a market of 500 million people and strike out on its own in the world today. We would have no clout and no place, unlike our combined European neighbours, at their negotiating tables. I hope all parties will join a coalition of common sense in this campaign for an emphatic yes when the referendum is held.

5.25 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is a delight to follow the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) to give a slightly more positive view on how we can trust those who send us to this House to make the right decision on our nation's future. It is an honour to make my maiden speech in a debate on what will be the most vital issue of the next five years—Britain's place in Europe and in the European Union. The decision to be made in the referendum will decide what Britain's place should be, not just for the next Parliament but for a whole generation.

It is right that at the start I pay tribute to my predecessor in Torbay, Adrian Sanders. Over 18 years of hard work in this House, Adrian ensured that Torbay's view was heard, and his work on issues such as diabetes and animal welfare commanded my immense respect. It is also appropriate that I make my maiden speech on this issue, as Adrian was the only Liberal Democrat to vote for a referendum in the famous rebellion of some four years ago.

My constituency is made up of Torbay and Paignton, two of the most beautiful towns in the whole of England. We are famous for Basil Fawlty—played by a comedian who does still support the yellows—and as one of the best places to retire in the whole country.

Today's debate is on an issue that is so important to many people across the bay—securing a referendum. When people heard that I had applied to speak today, some of them asked whether I would vote yes or no, but today is not really about that. Today is about why it is so important that millions of people—not 650 Members of Parliament—decide the issue. It has been 40 years since the last time people had a direct say. We have heard lots of talk about how old people were then, but I was minus three when voters, including both my parents, took that decision for me.

It is always said that the British constitution is based on conventions. It is right to say that in the 21st century we now have a strong convention that certain changes—such as the voting system for the House of Commons, changes to the monarchy or radical changes to the other place—should have the direct consent of those who would be governed by them. We saw that in Scotland, where the Union is no longer based on the treaty of 300 years ago, but on what has been described as the sovereign will of the Scottish people. I am pleased to see the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) in his place, as I know that he was concerned that I was being unnecessarily squashed on these Benches a few moments ago—*[Laughter.]*

Looking at the Scottish referendum last year gives me a real excitement about what will happen with this referendum. We saw people who have never really been very interested in politics getting involved. The classic moment was in the early hours of the morning as the results were being announced, when someone asked, “Why has there been a low turnout of 75% in Glasgow?” One of the other pundits replied, “The very fact we have just described a 75% turnout as low shows what this referendum has managed to do.” I hope that we have the same positive debate across the whole UK as we saw last year north of the border.

The Bill contains a key principle: it is about one person, one vote. We are members as the UK and we should therefore vote as the UK. Others think that a new nation should perhaps join as a new member. I am clear that it was the UK that joined, based on the parliamentary franchise exercised in 1970, and therefore it is right that the parliamentary franchise should be used to decide the issue now. One thing we cannot have is a pick-and-mix approach. It would be somewhat bizarre if we had a referendum on one Thursday in which some voters could take part and a local by-election a week later with a different age limit.

On the role of public bodies, it is absolutely right that councils and others should promote the referendum. It is absolutely right that they should make the public aware of their vote—how to get a postal vote, how to have a proxy and what choice the country faces—but it is also right that it is left to the campaigns to persuade voters on what the answer to that question should be. There should, and perhaps will, be time for a proper debate on the franchise. The debate on the referendum Bill is not that time.

[Kevin Foster]

I am pleased that in my maiden speech I am talking about giving millions of people the chance to have their say on an issue that will define the future. Many businesses in Torbay trade across Europe. There are many debates that people will want to have. Some in the tourism industry will probably favour the yes campaign; others will favour the no campaign. The key is that it will not just be me, as their Member of Parliament, voting on the decision; it will be every one of them who sent me to this place.

Last year, I lost someone who played a key role in supporting and encouraging me to reach my goal of being elected to this House. The adverts say that a majority of people now survive cancer. My mother Linda did not. My mum said that in life success was not always guaranteed. Things would sometimes get in your way, but the key was to always do your best. That is what I intend to do as a Member of this House.

5.31 pm

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): Like all of my newly elected colleagues of all political persuasions from right across the green Benches, I am incredibly proud to be making my maiden speech here today in this historic Chamber. It is a privilege to have been chosen by the people of Halifax to represent them, to fight for them and, wherever possible, to protect them. Halifax has a proud history of sending tough Labour women from our town to represent us in Westminster. My predecessors worked hard, stood their ground and delivered for Halifax. This is a tradition that I very much intend to continue.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my predecessor, Linda Riordan. She dedicated herself to the people of Halifax, representing them first in local government before going on to champion our town and its people here in Westminster. She was a fierce advocate of workers' rights, and offered vital help and support to hundreds of people in Halifax. I wish her all the very best for her retirement.

Halifax has a lot to offer, with a rich industrial heritage. One could say that we have successfully upcycled a number of our mills into new business units, supporting both established and start-up companies alike. There are thriving communities boasting restaurants, cafes, art galleries and enterprise at both the Elsa Whiteley Innovation centre and Dean Clough Mills. We have the National Children's Museum, Eureka!, which has welcomed more than 6.5 million people through its doors since opening 23 years ago. I still remember Prince Charles making the trip to Halifax to mark its opening. I joined my mum and my younger brother, who was just four at the time, to go to see the prince drive past the bottom of our street on his way to Eureka! As the motorcade drove past and my mum told us both to wave at the prince, my brother instead waved at the police escorts, telling my mum, "I didn't know Prince Charles would be coming to Halifax on a police motorbike."

We also have the Piece Hall, which has served as a trading hub in Halifax for more than 230 years. It is currently undergoing a multimillion pound transformation and will once again attract investment and support jobs, just as it did all those years ago for those looking to buy and sell pieces of cloth—hence its name.

Halifax is a great place to live and work. Of course, many Members on the Government Front Bench do not need me to tell them about the charm of my hometown, as they all spent a great deal of time there during the general election campaign. It was rumoured to be the only seat nationally that the Conservatives were campaigning to take from Labour. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those right hon. Members for pledging to fix almost every problem that Halifax has ever had. We were promised the electrification of the Calder Valley line and an enterprise zone. Most importantly, the Prime Minister himself pledged that the accident and emergency department at Calderdale Royal would not close.

Despite the best efforts of hard-working and dedicated staff, the Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust, which oversees both Huddersfield Royal Infirmary and Calderdale Royal hospital, is facing a budget deficit of £1.6 million for the year 2014-15, partially due to a £4.4 million restructuring bill and an increase in agency staff. The trust runs an A&E department at each hospital, and best practice guidelines suggest that it needs 20 consultants, 10 for each department. The trust is currently coping with just 10 to serve across both departments, and in March last year it was down to just seven. We are now moving towards consultation on the possible downgrade or even closure of the A&E department at Calderdale Royal hospital, meaning that residents right across Halifax and the Calder Valley could face a trip to Huddersfield for their emergency healthcare provision. The Prime Minister's promise to save A&E has been a great relief to all those served by Calderdale Royal, and voters in my constituency have put the Prime Minister's word in the bank. I will be asking him at every opportunity just how and when he will be making good on that promise.

I also take this opportunity to echo the sentiments in the maiden speeches of a number of hon. Friends, but in particular in that of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer)—that we as British citizens have a long and proud history of establishing and promoting human rights both here and around the world. From the Magna Carta to the European convention, human rights have never been something that happen to us or are forced upon us. The origins of human rights in their current manifestation are entwined with our recent history. Having witnessed the brutal possibilities and reach of injustice, we have always sought to take the lead on human rights both here and around the world. Our very own Sir Winston Churchill is often credited with the original idea of the European convention in the aftermath of the second world war; British judges represent us in the European Court; and even the iconic building itself was designed by a British architect, Lord Richard Rogers.

We have been instrumental in the establishment and promotion of modern human rights, but, as we look to the rest of the world, as we take a stand against the atrocities committed by ISIL, as we speak up for Rohingya Muslims fleeing Myanmar, when we strive to lead the world in bringing about an end to the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, and call for an end to human rights violations in Kashmir and in Palestine, is our credibility not undermined when we are taking a backward step on human rights here on our own shores?

With that in mind, many of my constituents are growing increasingly concerned about our role in the international community, in relation not only to human rights but to our membership of the European Union. After graduating from university, I spent four years working for a dynamic and growing SME called Matrix Technology Solutions in my constituency. We traded right across the world, but it was no coincidence that our biggest trading partners were within the single market. Anyone who has argued that we will simply continue to trade with the rest of the world if we leave the European Union has not struggled as I have to sell products to some of the emerging economies which, for example, have import duties of anything up to 35% on certain products.

I hope to serve my family, my constituents and my party well in my next five years.

5.37 pm

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): I am sure Members will be unsurprised that I have stayed for the whole day of debate on a topic that is of great interest to me. Indeed, it is the topic that brought to the fore my interest in politics some 24 years ago.

It is 40 years since this nation has had a decision of any type made by the people of this country—by their hand alone—about where the European Union is going. I give great credit to the Foreign Secretary for his very wise words this morning and for his great preamble to this debate. He really had the heart that I have in some of the concerns he raised. I also pay tribute to the shadow Foreign Secretary, because he argued his case equally well, albeit from a completely different viewpoint. Indeed, I wonder how Labour Members will vote later and as this debate develops.

We have heard this afternoon from some very good right hon. and hon. Members about the pros and cons of various aspects of the European Union, and I do not suppose I need to expand on too many of them. However, when we compare what we have today with the 1975 settlement and the agreement that the British people gave to what was then the EEC, and we look at its move through the Single European Act, the Maastricht treaty, to the treaties of Amsterdam and of Lisbon, we find that we have a very different beast. It is only right that the issue is put to a referendum of the British people, so for me this is a day of great joy. It is, perhaps, the end of a journey; but it is also the start of a brand new one.

I suggest to Members on both sides of the House, but to more on the Opposition Benches, I think, that when they say they would stay in the European Union no matter what, which we hear a lot, they ought to consider where we were those 40 years ago compared with where we are today. If we cast our minds forward 40 years, we can imagine there being no purpose to this place whatsoever.

Referendums do not come round very often, so this has to be a proper referendum. It must not be pored and raked over after the event, with people saying, “It wasn’t quite right. It wasn’t quite fair”. I am fairly comfortable with the question as it stands. It has gone through the Electoral Commission, which, for many of us, has pluses and minuses—we used to run elections quite easily without thousands of sheets of paper—but on this I think it has got it fairly right. However, I was more than convinced by last year’s Wharton words, which had a

complete lack of ambiguity, were simple and did not favour one way or the other. The words in the Bill have the benefit of simplicity but still angle slightly towards the status quo, and therefore do not have the neutrality I would prefer.

The purdah period has been discussed widely this afternoon. It was good to hear from certain Opposition Members—as ever, I listened to the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) very closely. The Bill is full of clauses about loans, permitted persons and maximum expenditure, but it puts aside section 125 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, which causes me concern. On this, I actually agree with the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond). I would perhaps be more comfortable if it was set out in legislation exactly who could spend what, how and where. Of course, I am most concerned about how the European Commission spends public money. I want the Commission, in particular, excluded from what is a personal debate within these islands on a constitutional matter.

I was taken by other speeches this afternoon, particularly that by my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox)—there were others, but hon. Members must forgive me for not knowing everybody’s constituencies just yet. The important words are those in all the treaties: “ever closer union”. As one advertiser says of its product, it means exactly what it says on the tin. In fighting my election campaign over the past 10 months—I am only 90% of the person I was, having walked so much—I found that this referendum was on the lips of many. People want this referendum, and it is right that we have it, but I want it done pretty much for good. The lid must not come off again for 40 years. We must not pore over it afterwards and say, “It was not right and fair”. That is what I will fight and argue for in this place, and doubtless, when the debate moves to the streets of this country, I will make clear which side of the debate I am on. Currently, I could support staying in the EU. It would have to be massively reformed, but I am not one to close my mind; I am here to listen to arguments. That said, I want what we thought it was going to be: free trade and friendship.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I apologise for interfering briefly in this important debate. On Thursday, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, Mr David Anderson, is publishing a 300-page report on surveillance strategy. It is normal for the Government’s reports to be presented to the House first, before anybody else, but I understand that there are major press briefings tomorrow about it, meaning that we will not be the first to hear about it. We will hear about it first on the “Today” programme, rather than in the House of Commons. Can you advise me, Mr Speaker, on what we can do to bring the Government to heel on this matter?

Mr Speaker: If the Government have anything to say about the report to which the right hon. Gentleman refers, they should say it first to the House of Commons. He is extremely dexterous in his use of parliamentary mechanisms to flag up matters of importance, be they local, national or international, and I do not think that that capacity is likely to desert him in this case. Where a matter is judged to be pressing, there are means by which it can be brought to the Floor of the House. He is well aware of those mechanisms and can deploy them if

[Mr Speaker]

he so wishes, but this is a serious matter, and although we are pressed for time, I am genuinely grateful to him for drawing to my attention something of which until five minutes ago I was myself unaware.

5.45 pm

Stewart McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, for calling me to give my maiden speech in this debate. It is a pleasure to follow the maiden speeches of the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), who gave a moving speech, and, of course, my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry).

There have been many things said about the great city of Glasgow in this House over the years that have gone by, but I wish to submit the words of Sir Compton Mackenzie, the first nationalist rector of the University of Glasgow, who defeated the fascist candidate Oswald Mosley in that election. He noted, when gazing over Glasgow from the Campsie Fells, that it offered something that neither Rome nor Athens could:

“the glory and grandeur of the future and the beating heart of a nation.”

My constituency, in the south side of Glasgow, has a long tradition of playing a major part in writing the story of Glasgow. It is home to the battle of Langside, the national football stadium, Hampden Park, the last village in the city, Carmunnock, and vibrant communities such as Cathcart, Pollokshaws, Shawlands and Carnwadric, to name just a few.

I hope Members will indulge me for just one moment, as I note on the record that I am the first Member of this House to be elected from what is probably the most famous part of my constituency, Castlemilk. Castlemilk has featured in the maiden speeches of three of my predecessors in this House. It is often referenced when talking about urban deprivation and social and housing problems, but I wish to change that in my remarks today. Instead, I wish to draw Members' attention to the anthem of Castlemilk, the famous Jeely Piece song. “The Jeely Piece Song” is much more than a piece of fun. It has at its heart a fundamental message: that everyone deserves a decent start in life—a fair crack of the whip—no matter the circumstances of their birth. It is that message which has inspired people such as Maureen Cope and Bessie Anderson, two pillars of the community, to keep on fighting for a better future for their place and to write further into the story of Glasgow. It is these fundamental values that inspire my politics: justice, fairness and equality for all.

I would at this point like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Tom Harris, who I can honestly say I have had the pleasure of knowing for many years. He is a generous, spirited man with a great sense of humour, and I wish him, his wife Carol and their two children—and, indeed, his staff—all the very best for the future. As I have been advised to bring something for everyone, I should also note that one of my other predecessors, Sir Teddy Taylor, the last Tory MP in Glasgow, is still mentioned with much love in my constituency, not least because he attended to his duties with great diligence as a constituency Member.

The most famous son of my constituency is of course the great John Maclean of Pollokshaws. John Maclean never made it to this House, but there can be no question about the impact that he has had on our national politics. He is probably the best MP that Glasgow never had. He was an internationalist to his fingertips, but absolutely committed to Scottish home rule. That was not a dilemma for Mr Maclean and it should not be for this House. I am a European citizen; Scotland is an outward-looking European nation. Our history, our literature, our songs and our stories pulsate with internationalism and solidarity, whether they be the poems, songs and stories of Hamish Henderson, such as “Freedom Come-All-Ye”, or those of Liz Lochhead or Alasdair Gray.

I and my 55 colleagues have been sent to this House to argue for Scotland's place in Europe and for the rights of young people and European nationals to have a say on our future in Europe. However, so rose-tinted are the spectacles of some Conservative Members that they cannot see the problem that they are walking into: the problem that, in trying to kill one Union, they may end up killing two. If Scotland is to be dragged out of the European Union against its wishes, and on the back of votes from people in England, that may be the result that they do not see coming. If only they had a little of John Maclean's foresight, rather than engaging in the navel-gazing that we have seen this afternoon.

In a speech to the High Court in Edinburgh, John Maclean, who had been charged with unconstitutional behaviour, refused to accept that he stood there as the accused, and instead said that he was the accuser. So too do my party and I stand here, as the accuser of a Government who want to make our country small and inward-looking, and to divide our citizens. We will oppose that in the most vociferous way.

The Glasgow story will continue to be written, and it must continue to be told. I hope to add something meaningful to that story by emulating the diligent approach of Teddy Taylor, but with a political philosophy much closer to that of John Maclean.

5.50 pm

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak. It is a great honour to represent Wealden in Parliament, and I am thankful for the hard work of my volunteers and all the voters who placed their faith in me.

Wealden has always been highly selective in its choice of candidates and Members of Parliament. Fifteen years ago Charles Hendry, my respected predecessor, won the Conservative selection against a stellar list of candidates, most of whom ended up in the Cabinet. He even grabbed the seat from the present Prime Minister. I note that this time round, much of the Wealden shortlist has joined me in the House. No pressure, then.

Charles not only dedicated his life to public service and served our country as Energy Minister, but served twice as deputy chairman of the Conservative party and was chief of staff to William Hague when he was its leader. He and his wife Sallie were dedicated to the Conservative cause, and gave our party backbone, stability and common sense during the toughest of times. No doubt there are parties on the Opposition Benches that are looking around for a few Charles Hendrys of their own. They certainly need them.

Wealden is the most beautiful of constituencies, tucked away in East Sussex and described by G.K. Chesterton as

“the place where London ends and England can begin.”

The stunning Ashdown Forest and the market towns of Crowborough, Uckfield and Hailsham, as well as numerous community-minded villages, mark Wealden out as quintessentially English, but we are by no means insular. Small businesses flourish, trading beyond Europe in the world. We have winners of the Queen’s award for enterprise and innovation, and we even export Sussex wine to France. However, we depend on our connections with the rest of the country and the wider world, which is why the state of the local infrastructure is a source of deep frustration for my constituents.

We have a thoroughly inadequate rail service, which frequently lets commuters down. Delays, cancellations and short trains, combined with a lack of communication with passengers, are simply not acceptable. Similarly, the broadband and mobile networks in Sussex need to improve. This is not just about the rural economy; given an increasingly elderly population, it is a vital social issue as well. We also suffer Gatwick as a neighbour, and its demand for a second runway does not sit well with my neighbours.

Britain’s relationship with Europe matters deeply to my constituents, and I am pleased to say that they have a history of always supporting the policies of the Government of the day on Europe. Back when the Weald was the centre of the iron-smelting industry, it produced the arrowheads that were used at Agincourt, and later made many of the cannon that were used to defeat Napoleon. During the second world war it was home to the Aspidistra project, transmitting black propaganda to Germany. Of course, we have no need of that now.

I hope that the prospect of a referendum convinces our European friends that we are serious about reasserting our sovereignty, and I am proud that this Government will give the people of this country the chance to decide on their future relationship with the EU. However, we must be careful not to turn the debate about our membership of an institution into a closed-minded attempt to pull up the drawbridge. This country is at its best when it is open to the world, embracing opportunities and welcoming people who want to contribute.

It will not have escaped the House’s notice that my roots are from further afield than East Sussex, and it says a great deal about the constituency which contains the oldest Conservative association in the country that it chose someone with a somewhat different background. You see, Mr Speaker, I am from Birmingham. In fact, my parents arrived in this country over 40 years ago. My father exchanged his Kashmiri headmaster’s cloak for Birmingham biscuit factory overalls, and here I am, just one generation later, giving my maiden speech in the greatest democratic Chamber in the world, and with the great privilege to represent thousands of voters across Wealden.

I draw inspiration from a saying of my most famous constituent that politicians everywhere should take to heart. It was Winnie the Pooh, resident of the Hundred Acre Wood in the Ashdown forest, who said:

“You can’t stay in your corner of the Forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes.”

I shall endeavour to follow that advice in all I do here.

5.56 pm

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): I thank every Member who has made their maiden speech today, especially the hon. Member for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani), whose excellent speech we have just heard, and, on the Opposition Benches, my hon. Friends the Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) and for Halifax (Holly Lynch). If they, and all the others who have made maiden speeches today, continue to speak in the coming months and years as they have done in this debate, I am sure they will be listened to not just in this House but, more importantly, out in the country as well.

I want to say a few things about Europe, because Europe is very important to me and my constituents. The largest industrial estate in the north-east of England is in my constituency. The question of our future in the EU is important not just for my constituents but for the whole of the north-east and the rest of the country.

I agree with the Labour MEPs for the north-east, Paul Brannen and Jude Kirton-Darling, who outlined the five key factors of our membership of the EU: it creates jobs and growth; it means investment in the north-east; it protects our rights; it keeps us safe; and it improves the environment. It has done all these basic, essential things not just in the last two or three years but in the last 40 years, and it will do so well into the future. In addition there is the fact that, according to the North East chamber of commerce, over 63% of businesses in the north-east want us to be part of Europe.

We also gain in net terms from our contributions to Europe in respect of social and economic investment in the north-east. There will be £1 billion of investment in the north-east of England over the next six years for transport infrastructure, small business support, international trade support and digital skills.

The EEF and the North East chamber of commerce have called for less political game-playing, as that is causing greater business and economic uncertainty for firms in the north-east. I think a lot of games are being played in the Conservative party, because this referendum issue is ultimately not about what the people think but about whether it can keep the Conservative party together. The EEF has said:

“British manufacturers remain overwhelmingly of the view that our economic wellbeing is linked to the EU and we must stay in membership. It makes no sense to disengage from our major market where we would still face all the costs of compliance and enjoy none of the influence.”

I want to mention two major firms in the north-east. Everyone has heard of Nissan and of its importance to the economy in the north-east and the rest of Great Britain. Over 37,000 jobs in this country depend on Nissan. It employs 6,500 directly in its factory in Sunderland. Fifty per cent. of what the factory produces goes to Europe, into the EU, and the factory is part-owned by Renault.

Over the next two years or so, major new models will be coming out—the Juke, the Qashqai—and the Washington plant will be in competition with the Nissan plant in Spain for a new model. If it gets that new model, that will sustain the existing jobs and probably lead not only to more jobs in the Sunderland plant, but to other jobs in the north-east of England. That is why it is vital for us to stay in Europe: I do not want to see

[Phil Wilson]

the factory going to Spain, France or anywhere else. I want it to stay in Europe as one of the most productive car plants in the world.

There is also Hitachi in my constituency, which is bringing train building back to the north-east of England, where the first trains were built 190 years ago. Hitachi, with 730 jobs and thousands in the supply chain, has come to this country because it wants to export trains to the rest of Europe.

For all those reasons, I do not understand how any parliamentarian of any political party in the north-east can be against continuing membership of the EU.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): If any region in the United Kingdom is the perfect example of the necessity for inward investment and a relationship with the European Union, it is the north-east of England. In our area we have three Tata Steel factories and the largest potash mine in Britain, which, incidentally, was protected by European regulations from Russian dumping. Would the north-east not be severely harmed if we left the European Union?

Phil Wilson: The north-east of England would be severely harmed, but not only the north-east—it would be the UK and our position in the world, which is the other issue that we need to think about. Are we an outward-looking country that wants to embrace the EU and the rest of the world, or do we want to pull up the drawbridge? Some people want to pull up the drawbridge and to let the world get on and pass us by. Over the next five years one of the major issues for this Parliament will be the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. It is controversial and could regulate nearly 50% of the world's GDP. It could lead to better standards for labour, in consumer rights and in trade for, as I say, 50% of GDP in this country.

We would not get that kind of agreement for the UK alone; we can only negotiate something like that if we are part of the EU, part of a marketplace of 500 million people and a union of 28 countries. Yes, we do have to pool some of our sovereignty to achieve better things in this world. We are a member of NATO and could go to war for another country if it is invaded—that is what I call pooling sovereignty. Pooling sovereignty for economic gain is worthwhile if it benefits this country, which I believe that it will.

We are talking about the future of the UK, our future in the world and where we want to be in the globalised economy. We cannot close the door on the rest of the world. We have to remain part of the world, and being part of the EU is vitally important to us. That is why, when the referendum comes, I will be voting yes and campaigning to stay in the European Union.

6.3 pm

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): Anyone who thinks that MPs are all the same would do well to listen to the excellent maiden speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani) and for Havant (Alan Mak).

I was eight years old when the last referendum took place. My brother and I were given a long string of stickers saying, "Say Yes to Europe". Being young lads, we stuck

them to everything we possibly could and it was only later we discovered quite how difficult it is to get rid of orange, pro-European stickers.

The 2014 European elections indicated the scale of the public's concern about our relationship with the EU. We have long recognised the movement within Europe towards closer political union. We wanted to give the British people a choice on the European Union, and we are delivering on our promises. This has been called an in/out referendum, or a yes/no referendum, but the choice is far more complex than the question allows. It is rather a choice between closer political union with Europe and a free-trade and common market.

We each have our specific concerns about the EU and how it functions. In March, it became clear that the European Commission was pressuring our Government to scrap the exemption for small-scale producers of cider and perry who make less than 70 hectolitres a year. Fortunately, when I made representations to the then Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel), I was delighted by the positive response that I received. She assured me that the Government would make strong representations to the Commission about that ruling.

Various studies have been made to calculate the cost of membership of the EU. The estimates vary significantly, with one showing a cost of between 3% and 4% of GDP and a recent study by the CBI suggesting a net benefit of between 4% and 5%. Figures from the House of Commons Library show the EU accounting for 45% of our exports and 53% of our imports last year. The UK exported £227 billion of goods and services to other EU member states and imported £288 billion. That is compared with exports to the US of £90 billion and exports to China of £17 billion. It is also claimed that about 3 million jobs are dependent on the EU. However, the Treasury explained the 3.3 million figure to Open Europe, saying that it was

"not an estimate of the impact of EU membership on employment". That is because trade with EU countries would continue if the UK were to leave the EU.

Before we put the referendum to the people, we need to renegotiate our deal with the EU. The Prime Minister rather helpfully set out his proposals for reform in March 2014 in what was called the Bloomberg speech, in which he talked about powers flowing away from Brussels, not always towards it; national Parliaments being able to work together to block unwanted EU legislation; businesses being liberated from red tape; UK police forces and justice systems being able to protect British citizens without interference from the European institutions; free movement to take up work, not free benefits; and removing the concept of ever-closer union. That last element is the one that matters most to me.

Once renegotiation has been concluded, the referendum will be put to the British public. I am certain that every Member in this place has a list of changes they would like to see enacted. The Labour party has a long list, including scrapping the Strasbourg Parliament, but the elephant in the room is ever-closer political union, which means being in Europe and run by Europe. Without doubt, the Labour party was right to reject the euro, but that is a contradiction because if it really wants to become a European partner, it ought to want to join the single currency too. Happily, I do not want either.

This debate is only one of many more to come on this subject. When the campaigns commence, I would like those on both sides to be positive. I am optimistic that the campaign and the debate can be centred on visions of better futures. No one should be fearful of the unknown. Those on each side should fight by explaining why life would be better if we stayed in or why it would be better if we left. I hope that our constituents will hear such arguments. That is what they want, and it is what they deserve.

6.8 pm

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): I should like to begin by congratulating all the new Members who have made their maiden speeches this afternoon, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart McDonald), who made an accomplished and confident contribution that will stand him in good stead into the future.

Plaid Cymru is in favour of Wales remaining in the European Union, so the answer to the question in clause 1(5) of the Bill should be a resounding “dyla”, or even “ia” or “ie”. There are several ways of saying yes in Welsh. We are a critical friend of the EU, but our firm belief is that Wales should stay in. That is based on at least three counts, all of which have a bearing on the Bill and on the referendum.

First, we see ourselves as Welsh and European. The European Union reflects our multicultural and multilingual social reality in Wales. Indeed, that condition is normal throughout most of the world, although sadly not always in these islands. Secondly we value the peace, stability and openness between peoples that the EU has fostered over the decades. That is the true meaning for us of the phrase “ever-closer union of peoples”. Thirdly, although there are problems, not least in the lax enforcement of employment standards, Wales enjoys significant economic and social benefits within the EU. These might be endangered in a renegotiation that is heedless of our requirements and would certainly be put in jeopardy were we to be dragged unwillingly out.

Throughout our history, Wales has had links with other European countries beyond the valuable links with our nearest neighbours. Plaid Cymru’s support for the idea of one Europe stretches back right to the foundation of our party. We put enormous stress on our role as part of the struggle against the dehumanising effect of the large state with its oppressive drive toward uniformity and centralisation, and this stance has always been mirrored by the moral and political value we place on supranational co-operation.

As Common Market membership became a probability in the 1970s, we were sceptical of that very common market as an exclusively economic entity. That is of course very much what some Eurosceptics now long for, and we remain sceptical of their position. The European Union that emerged in the 1980s, however, allowed smaller nations more of a voice and we continue to work for a “Europe of regions and smaller nations”. That underpins our membership in the European Parliament of the Greens/European Free Alliance group of like-minded national, regional and green parties.

Our leader, Leanne Wood, has set out our standpoint on this referendum. The result should be announced nationally for Wales and if our nation decides to stay in

the EU it should not be dragged out against its will. The same goes for the other nations of the UK. Our 16 and 17-year-olds should have a say in the future direction of our country and EU nationals living here should have a vote, as they do for local, European and National Assembly elections and as they did in the Scottish independence referendum.

We want the EU to be reformed. We want a greater say for Wales with direct representation for Welsh Ministers, a reformed and improved regional policy, safeguards for our environment and in areas such as food standards, the reform of the tripartite structure to include the Committee of the Regions, and an end to the scandalous waste of the Strasbourg Parliament. We oppose the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. However, to want an end to all those things does not mean that we want out.

What happens if there is a no vote? Wales has some of the poorest communities in the UK and in western Europe. The UK Government must set out contingency plans to replace structural funds and the common agricultural policy, which provide billions of pounds to Welsh communities every year. We are deeply sceptical about the UK’s commitment to continue such funding as many of us still bear the scars of the protracted campaign to enable Wales to benefit from objective 1 funding in the first place and we well recall the institutional obstructionism from London that we had to overcome.

The family farm is the cornerstone of Welsh rural life and the rural economy. It is vital that support for the family farm and agriculture, which support our culture and language, continues. We know nothing of any replacement for vital funds to support our farming communities. Those are yet more reasons why Plaid Cymru will fight to keep Wales in the EU. Our reservations about the Bill are clear and tonight we will vote accordingly.

6.13 pm

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech in this debate. I had imagined making my maiden speech in some obscure late-night debate on a piece of legislation when the House was half empty, so this is nice.

I am immensely proud to have been elected to represent the people of North Devon and I am particularly proud to have been part of the blue tide that has swept through the south west. We are known for strong tides in our part of the world, but not all of them are as welcome as this one.

Let me begin by paying tribute to my predecessor, Sir Nick Harvey. Sir Nick served North Devon and this House with diligence and distinction for 23 years and served in the previous Government as well. We owe Sir Nick a debt of gratitude for spending so long in public service during his career.

Although I always hoped to take the seat of North Devon, there was a lot of uncertainty, as there was with the election as a whole. That was summed up for me perfectly on one sunny afternoon when my campaign team and I went into the front garden of a cottage in a lovely village called North Molton. The lady approached us and, seeing blue rosettes, said, “You won’t want to talk to me. I am a committed Marxist.” Then she took a deep breath and, with perfect comic

[Peter Heaton-Jones]

timing, said, “And I’m never voting Liberal Democrat again.” We knew from that moment that all the pieces were in flux.

My overriding priority in this House will be to stand up for North Devon. The overall theme is that we need our fair share. For many years now, under Governments of all colours, we have not had our fair slice of the funding cake in North Devon. I am here to say that that is something up with which we will not put. We need investment in our infrastructure, especially the North Devon link road, the A361. We do not look on it as our only link to the rest of the country; we look on it as the only means that the rest of the country has to be lucky enough to visit us. It is not fit for purpose, it is dangerous, it is slow and it is inhibiting economic growth and investment in North Devon. I have lobbied my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on many occasions, to the point that I think he is getting bored with me, but I am happy with that and I will keep lobbying. I am delighted to say that he has now made commitments, and I will see the project for the North Devon link road through. It is a long-term ambition; dare I say perhaps it is aspirational, to use the word *du jour*, but I am sure that we will achieve that.

The other main issue is rural broadband, or should I say the lack of it. The information superhighway should not stop just because we are west of Bristol and north of the M5, and I will do all that I can to ensure that we achieve improvements.

The tourism industry in North Devon is also high on my list of priorities. I shall unashamedly use this opportunity to promote everything that North Devon has to offer. We have quite simply some of the most beautiful coastline and countryside not only in the south-west but in the United Kingdom. We have some of the rugged north-facing coasts and the surf beaches that face west. The place where the two meet is called Baggy Point, which is derived from an old English word that means “full of holes”. I am told that some parties considered launching their manifesto there.

We also have Exmoor national park. We have beautiful towns such as Ilfracombe, South Molton and Chulmleigh and the biggest village in England, Braunton—woe betide anyone who thinks that it is not a village. We have our principal town in Barnstaple, an important commercial and economic centre, and a driver of the region’s economy, which is undergoing welcome redevelopment, with a major riverside development of shops, hotels and restaurants, homes and businesses now taking shape.

Obviously, it never rains when people take their holidays in North Devon, but I remember as a young boy more than 40 years ago being on a family holiday on the North Devon coast and retreating to the cinema in Barnstaple when the rain at the seaside became more horizontal than vertical. Little did I know that all these years later I would be representing North Devon.

It is a particular privilege to be making my maiden speech on the same day as my hon. Friends the Members for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) and for Havant (Alan Mak), with whom I have family connections. Indeed, more than 60 years ago my mother and father met at the Young Conservatives in the seat of Sutton and Cheam, so the Whips will be delighted to hear that I am literally a product of the Conservative party.

I will work hard every day to repay the trust that the people of North Devon have put in me. I will do the very best that I can for everyone in the area that we are so lucky to call home.

6.19 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones), who made a very eloquent maiden speech and was incredibly gracious about his predecessor.

The long-standing Green position on the debate about the UK’s membership of the EU is one of three yeses—yes to a referendum, yes to major reform, and ultimately yes to staying in the EU. I will say a little more about those three in a moment, but I want to add one more big yes to that list—yes to allowing 16 and 17-year-olds a say. That is one of the most important amendments we can make to the Bill. Although I believe we should change the voting age to 16 for general and local elections too, the EU referendum is materially different and the outcome cannot simply be reversed at the next election.

When given the vote in the referendum on Scottish independence, young people engaged strongly, intelligently and responsibly with the debate. An estimated 75% of them turned out to vote. This suggests that young people are not uninterested in politics; they are quite understandably disillusioned sometimes by what happens at Westminster. Denying 16 and 17-year-olds their say on an issue as historic, far-reaching and long-term as the UK’s membership of the EU would only compound that. That is why I say we must amend the Bill to give our young people a say.

On the Greens’ wider position of saying yes to the referendum, I welcome the Bill and will support it. Greens have long called for a referendum on EU membership, not because we are anti-EU, but because we are pro-democracy. That is not to understate the need for EU institutions to be dramatically more democratic and accountable, nor to understate the need for the EU urgently to change direction away from an obsessive focus on free trade above everything else. We must use this opportunity to have a real debate about the role and purpose of the EU. That means ensuring that civil society organisations are encouraged to play their full part as well. It is one of the most potent reasons for ensuring that the referendum is not held on the same day as other polls, notably those taking place next May.

As someone who was once a Member of the European Parliament for more than 10 years, I have seen up close that there is plenty wrong with the EU institutions, but one thing that struck me was that there is a lot of common ground among European parliamentarians from all parties about the changes needed. For example, MEPs from all parties would agree that the unelected Commission has too much power and the elected politicians not enough. Democratic renewal and curtailing the power of the unelected bodies must be a top priority. We also need to tackle the pernicious corporate lobbying that takes place in Brussels. It is quite wrong that on big issues such as international trade, MEPs still have no formal decision-making powers at all.

A more democratic EU matters more than ever at a time when an infamous trade agreement is being negotiated more or less in secret. That agreement, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, is one of the egregious

examples of corporate power run out of control. But who is the driving force behind that? Yes, some of those unelected EU bureaucrats, but most forcefully the UK Government. The redesign of trade rules along very different lines—guaranteeing decent work, achieving meaningful democracy, fighting poverty and driving transition to a low-carbon economy—should be at the top of our EU reform list. There are many other areas where reform is sorely needed, not least the common agricultural and fisheries policies, but I have no doubt that we have more chance of securing positive changes from a position of influence inside the EU than from a position of impotence outside.

I believe we need a people's Europe, not just a business Europe. We need to inspire people with a more compelling vision of the EU's role and purpose—how it could be a world leader in poverty eradication, promoting peace and spreading human rights and environmental protection. Too many people out there are not sure what the EU is for any more. That involves us having to make it much clearer how EU membership makes our lives better. So, to paraphrase Monty Python, what has the EU ever done for us? Well, perhaps not very much except for clean beaches and rivers, cleaner air, lead-free petrol, restrictions on landfill dumping, a recycling culture, cheaper mobile charges, improved consumer protection and food labelling, a ban on growth hormones, stronger climate policy, freedom to travel, funded opportunities for young people to undertake work or work placements abroad, access to European health services, labour protection, the right not to work more than 48 hours a week, and so on and so on. That is before I even get to the extraordinary role that the EU has played through its soft power, spreading human rights throughout the wider European area and playing a key role in maintaining peace in that area as well.

As we go forward, we need to make a much more positive case for the EU. We should not leave it to UKIP and the others to fill that space and spread their mean-mindedness and backward-looking policies. We should claim that space and make a positive case for a positive EU. We want radical reform of that EU, as do many citizens of the European countries, but the idea that the best way of doing that is by walking away from the EU makes no sense at all. So, finally, irrespective of pro or anti-EU views, I look forward to working with hon. Members from all parts of the House to ensure that this referendum is as fair, inclusive and democratic as it possibly can be.

6.24 pm

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): It is an honour to speak on a day of so many marvellous maiden speeches, and it is also an honour to speak in this seminal debate on an issue that I believe will define a generation of politicians.

I am privileged to represent the people of Boston and Skegness, succeeding Mark Simmonds. Mark's career ranged from safeguarding the future of Skegness hospital, working with a Labour Administration in a fine example of cross-party constituency working, through to chairing the UN Security Council. Hardly a day on the campaign trail went by without me being told that I had very big shoes to fill, and I will assiduously work as a constituency MP to do that.

Hardly a day went by, either, without a prospective constituent assuring me that Mark's own predecessor, Sir Richard Body, was another model of an ideal MP. Sir Richard was a Maastricht rebel back when the Conservative party had what was described as a wafer-thin majority of slightly double what it is today. His brave stance is a reminder to all of us that we are here to represent our constituents, rather than to toe any one party line. I hope I can live up to that responsibility as well.

Boston and Skegness is a constituency that begins at Swineshead in the south—where, incidentally, King John was poisoned—and quickly arrives in Boston itself. In 1204, Boston famously paid tax of £780, whereas London paid £836. One newly elected councillor recently pledged to dedicate himself to restoring Boston's status to those medieval levels, and I look forward to supporting him in that endeavour. Indeed, I thank him for taking the lead on it.

Elsewhere, the constituency is home to some of the best agricultural land in the country. I invite hon. Members from across the House to visit so that they might put faces to the names of those people mentioned on supermarket bags of potatoes. Afterwards, they might choose to spend a few hours joining the 500,000 or so people who annually visit Skegness, one of the few seaside resorts that is never described as faded. Indeed, Skeg Vegas is more glorious neon than faded.

I have not the time today to mention Wainfleet All Saints—home to the superb Batemans Brewery—or the Bubblecar Museum in Langrick, the Carrington vintage tractor show, the first Butlins or, indeed, the beautiful areas of my constituency that touch the Lincolnshire Wolds and, almost uniquely for my patch, merit a contour line on a map.

That is in part because I want to deal with the subject of today's debate. Since the expansion of Europe, tens of thousands of people from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and elsewhere have come from their home countries to work in and around Boston. They have made homes and lives in Lincolnshire and we should welcome taxpayers who have, to coin a phrase, got on their bikes. These, I would argue, are not just the best of Europe, but, in many cases, the best of Britain, too. In Lincolnshire today, following in the footsteps of workers from the midlands, Ireland, Portugal and, latterly, Bulgaria, they work in all weathers to put food on our tables, whether it is Brussels sprouts at Christmas or asparagus at the moment.

It is thanks to an open-door migration policy, however, that Lincolnshire's police, housing, schools, roads and hospitals now face unprecedented pressure from new numbers—and it is new numbers, not new nationalities, that cause those pressures. We did not plan for or predict their arrival, so we were not able to invest adequately and in a timely fashion in the services that we now urgently need. Social tensions have recently eased, but they have allowed divisive, single-issue political campaigns to flourish and to block out much of the light on what is great about my constituency.

I believe that only if our relationship with Europe changes fundamentally can we fix the root causes of our current problems and that, in the future, only if we can plan for those population changes can we adequately prepare. Of course, it is only because we have a Conservative

[*Matt Warman*]

majority Government that we truly have the chance to have our say as a country between now and the end of 2017.

My own motivation for standing for office stems directly from more than 15 years as a journalist. I believe we live in a world that needs more actors than critics. Writing about technology, I was lucky enough to cover Britain's world-beating, but still somewhat incomplete broadband roll-out, as well as to cover the rise of Apple, Google, Facebook and much in between. I hope that I can continue to make the case for every aspect of technology improving every aspect of government. I hope that we will see a world where we have more activists than clicktivists. Making those changes will require far more than technical expertise; it will require political courage. I hope that I may provide a small part of that courage to stiffen the sinews of colleagues when it comes both to Europe and to changes in how Government use technology. It is no less than all our constituents deserve.

6.30 pm

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (*Matt Warman*), whom I congratulate on a truly excellent maiden speech. Indeed, I congratulate all hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches today—my hon. Friends the Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston (*Justin Madders*) and for Ilford North (*Wes Streeting*), the hon. Members for Sutton and Cheam (*Paul Scully*), for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (*Drew Hendry*), for Havant (*Alan Mak*), for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (*Tom Elliott*) and for Torbay (*Kevin Foster*), my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (*Holly Lynch*) and the hon. Members for North Devon (*Peter Heaton-Jones*), for Wealden (*Nusrat Ghani*) and for Glasgow South (*Stewart McDonald*), the part of Glasgow where I grew up.

This debate has raised issues about sovereignty and co-operation that have reverberated through the House for decades. The Bill puts before the British people one of the most important questions in a generation: should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union? The answer to that question will impact on our trading relationship, our economy, jobs, exports and our place in the world.

Since we joined the European Union many years ago, British foreign policy has had two key pillars: the first is exercising a leading role in Europe; and the second is being the principal ally of the United States. As we were reminded by the comments of the President of the United States this week, leaving the EU would have an impact on not just one, but both of those pillars.

At root, this debate is about how to maximise Britain's opportunities and influence in the world. We are offered two alternative visions. On the one hand, there is a vision that this is best done alone, unencumbered by the rules that membership of the European Union entails. On the other hand, there is a belief that the challenges we face in the world are best faced up to in concert with others, whether about global trade, responding to climate change, the regulation of cross-border flows of people, money and ideas, or many other issues. This debate is

therefore about power and influence, as well as about rules, and it is about how to maximise British power in an interconnected world.

The Prime Minister has set out a strategy for the renegotiation of our relationship with the European Union. He has not set out in full detail what he is asking for; he has talked about the issue of ever closer union, migration and benefits, and the rights of non-eurozone countries. At the beginning of the debate, the Foreign Secretary said that he felt it would be unwise for the Government to display its full negotiating hand. Even as we debate the Bill, we do not yet know exactly what the Government are asking for.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be very unwise for the Prime Minister to raise false hopes about things like the free movement of people, and that he has undermined his negotiating position by saying that, whatever the outcome, he will recommend a yes vote?

Mr McFadden: I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes. I believe that the reason the Prime Minister has not outlined his full negotiating position is the problem, which we have seen in this debate, of how it will go down with many Members of his own party.

Almost before the Prime Minister has begun the process and before the Bill has even had its Second Reading in this House, a new group has been established on the Conservative Benches, anticipating the failure of his strategy. The hon. Member for Wycombe (*Mr Baker*), who spoke in the debate and who chairs the new Conservatives for Britain group, said at the weekend:

"We wish David Cameron success"

in his negotiation. At first glance, that looks like warm backing, but when one realises that the benchmark for success that has been set by the group is an individual parliamentary veto over all EU matters, one can see where this is heading.

Mr Baker: To be absolutely clear, as I said on the TV several times, the group has not laid out any red lines whatsoever. I have set out my red lines, but the group is not committed to any.

Mr McFadden: The hon. Gentleman is chairman of the group; I think it is reasonable to assume that he speaks for the group.

The Foreign Secretary, who is not exactly one of the leading Europhiles in the Government, made his view of that demand known within hours of the introductory article being printed:

"If you were talking about the House of Commons having a unilateral red card veto, that's not achievable, that's not negotiable because that would effectively be the end of the European Union." [*Interruption.*]

Some Conservative Members may cheer that conclusion, but what is happening is that the Government are learning the meaning of the term "transitional demands"—demands that are made by those who know that they will not be met, as a pretext for saying that they have been betrayed and then campaigning for what they always wanted, which in this case is exit from the European Union. The new group calls itself Conservatives for Britain; they are, in fact, the desperate to be disappointed.

This is the Prime Minister's problem: there is nothing he can negotiate that will satisfy a significant proportion of his parliamentary party.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): Is not the position that the right hon. Gentleman is outlining that there is no conclusion to the EU negotiations that would make him willing to leave the EU?

Mr McFadden: The hon. Gentleman gets to the heart of the Conservatives' negotiating stance. My answer to him is that holding a gun to our head and saying to our European allies, "Give us what we want or we're going to shoot ourselves," is not the only negotiating strategy available to the United Kingdom. Either the Prime Minister will cave in to his colleagues' demands or, sooner or later, there must be a reckoning between the Prime Minister and those in his party who are determined to take Britain out of the European Union.

The Prime Minister will come back and claim victory. Like the emperor in the fairy tale, he will say, "Look at my wonderful new clothes." Many of his Back Benchers will look at him with relief and loyalty, and say that he has got a good deal. However, we know that plenty of them will say that there is not a lot keeping him warm, and conclude that it is not enough.

Mr Nuttall: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr McFadden: I have given way a few times and would like to make progress.

Anticipating that situation, the Prime Minister appeared to put his foot down at the weekend about collective responsibility. He told journalists:

"If you want to be part of the Government, you have to take the view that we are engaged in an exercise of renegotiation...and that will lead to a successful outcome. Everyone in Government has signed up to the programme".

Every single newspaper and broadcaster interpreted that as meaning that all Ministers will have to vote yes if that is what the Prime Minister recommends at the end of the process. The Government even sent the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Stockton South (James Wharton), around the studios to say:

"On big issues like this... We have a long-established principle of collective responsibility".

But now the Prime Minister says that all of that was a misinterpretation. He is not blaming himself, he is blaming the media. He thinks that every single correspondent of every single national newspaper made exactly the same mistake. Is the truth not that, once again, he has been forced to retreat under pressure from large numbers of Eurosceptic Ministers threatening to resign if collective responsibility is enforced?

This matters because, once again, the country's position in Europe is being dictated by the politics of the Conservative party, not the national interest. Once again, when confronted by Eurosceptics in his party, the Prime Minister has retreated. He staked out his position, but even on the back of the authority of an election victory it did not last for 24 hours. He has demonstrated yet again to his party that on this issue, he can be pushed. Believe me, it will keep on pushing.

The European Union does have to change. The stresses within the eurozone are being played out daily. There must be a new momentum on how the single market

works in services, digital, energy and other areas. The European Union must learn to regulate less and respect the balance of powers between the institutions and member states. It must offer hope to the many young unemployed, and it must continue to guarantee decency for people at work. However, we believe those things can be achieved without the damaging threat to leave the European Union and all that that would entail.

Andrew Bridgen: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr McFadden: No, I want to make progress.

No one is arguing that the European Union is perfect, but it is our major trading partner. It is the destination for more than 40% of our exports in goods and the source of about half of our inward investment. Our position as gateway to the single market helps attract inward investment from outside the European Union, and the EU has helped to keep the peace in Europe for decades. It would be hugely reckless for us to take those real achievements for granted.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the issue of business and Europe is progressive, because bigger businesses will have the resources to relocate if they do not like the decision to pull out of Europe, but smaller ones will not and will be stuck here?

Mr McFadden: For businesses of all sizes, big and small, it makes no sense for us to put barriers and risks between them and their customers that do not exist at present.

As the debate unfolds, those who want to take us out of the EU will have to explain what it would mean for jobs, trade, exports and our collective security. On what terms will businesses want access to the single market? How much would they pay? What rules, including free movement, will they have to stick by? Is the strategy to walk away from the decision-making process and still accept many of the rules? Those who advocate Brexit in the name of sovereignty will have to explain why leaving the collective institutions where many of the rules of our economy are decided, and where we are currently represented, would enhance our power and influence. They will have to show why the major markets in the world outside the European Union would view us as a more attractive proposition if we walked away from where the rules are decided and were outside rather than in.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr McFadden: No, I will not give way any more.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) set out our response to the Bill and the ways in which we will seek to amend it as it goes through the House, including by extending the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds, because it is their future too. In seeking to amend the Bill in that and other ways, we will also be clear that we believe that the best future for Britain is to remain a member of the European Union and not to withdraw from a group of nations held together by both economic interests and common values. We do not believe that we should be forced into a false choice between trading with Europe and trading with the rest of the world, when we all know that we should be doing both.

[Mr McFadden]

As I have said, this is a debate about power, influence and our place in the world. Losing elections, as we have just done, does not absolve a party of opposition of its responsibility to do the right thing by the country. In fact, doing the right thing by the country is essential to recovery from defeat, and that is why we will continue to argue for a Britain that maximises its power, influence and opportunities, and for a Britain that plays a leading and important role in Europe, not one that retreats into the arms of nostalgia and nationalism. There has been much debate about whether Britain has lost its confidence as a country with global reach, and whether we are presiding over a quiet and unannounced decline in our influence. Be in no doubt, the debate that the Bill begins is very much part of that issue, and we will continue to argue for Britain to remain an open, engaged and confident member of the European Union in the years ahead.

6.45 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): Like the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), I first wish to congratulate all 12 hon. Members who made their maiden speeches today—the hon. Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott), for Halifax (Holly Lynch) and for Glasgow South (Stewart McDonald) and my hon. Friends the Members for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully), for Havant (Alan Mak), for Torbay (Kevin Foster), for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani), for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones) and for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman). I do not have time to do justice to their contributions, but what struck me listening to all 12 speeches was that each Member spoke with warmth and respect about his or her predecessor, regardless of which party that predecessor had come from. That is an important reminder to ourselves and the world outside the Chamber that we respect each others' views even when we profoundly disagree.

I notice that all hon. Members who spoke today for the first time rightly paid tribute to the glories of their constituencies, and also spoke with a sense of awe—that is not too strong a word—about the trust that has been placed in them by their electors. That is something that those of us who have been knocking around here for a few years need to remember and to strive to keep in mind. The House will look forward to hearing from all 12 of those hon. Members again in the future.

We have heard many other speeches today, some from relatively new and still enthusiastic Members of the House and other speeches that had more of the character of national treasures, with time-honoured arguments that had a certain familiarity for me, having sat through debates on Europe for the past five years.

In the little time that I have, I want to concentrate on some of the questions and concerns expressed about the content of the Bill, rather than on the broader debate about Europe, which we will have ample time to consider in the months ahead and during the referendum campaign. I simply say on that point that, as far as the Government are concerned, the objective that we are pursuing is that set out by the Prime Minister in his Bloomberg speech

in January 2013—to seek changes to the European Union to make Europe more competitive, more democratic, more flexible and more respectful of the diversity of its member states than it is at the moment. We believe that such changes would be in the interests of Europe as a whole, but would also have the benefit of enabling the people of the United Kingdom to feel comfortable with their place in the European Union in a way that they do not today.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Seventeen years ago I authored a pamphlet entitled, “Britain’s Place in the World: Time to Decide”. This is an opportunity to make a decision on the running sore in British politics of our relationship with the European Union, and it is essential that the Bill lays the foundation for a fair referendum.

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend is correct in what he says, and I believe that is what the Bill provides. The Bill is about delivering on the Government’s pledge to put the decision about the nature of our relationship with the European Union to the people of the United Kingdom so that they can take it on behalf of us all, whatever the differences between the political parties.

Alex Salmond: The Minister has been here throughout the debate. He will have heard, from representatives from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and indeed from across the Chamber and from all points of view, of the un wisdom and unacceptability of holding the referendum on the same day as the national polls next year. Will he now rule that out?

Mr Lidington: What we are providing for in the Bill is a power to set a date by order. The only thing on the face of the Bill is that the referendum must be held, at the latest, by the end of 2017. We are at the start of negotiations and we do not know when they will be concluded, but that is the right approach to take. It is Parliament that will have the right, when the order comes before it, to decide whether the date proposed is the right one or not. I will also say—this is the point the right hon. Gentleman made during his speech earlier—that when the Government come to set a date, if that date were to require combination with other elections of some kind, we would obviously at that point make our views known and provide a full explanation to the House in line with what the Electoral Commission proposed in its report of December last year.

A large number of right hon. and hon. Members spoke about the importance of securing a fair referendum. I agree with that. Many of the concerns expressed related to matters of campaign funding. The arrangements provided for in the Bill rest upon those provided in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. Campaigners who do not wish to register with the Electoral Commission are allowed to spend up to £10,000. Campaigners who are registered with the Electoral Commission—these have to be permissible campaigners and donors under our electoral law—have other rules that apply to them. The two designated lead campaign groups will have an equal maximum limit available to them of £7 million. Each of those groups will be entitled to receive a Government grant of £600,000. Each will have the right to a free mailshot to all homes and each will have the right to a television broadcast. Other permitted participants in the campaign will be subject

to a maximum of £700,000 each. Political parties are, of course, free to campaign. The ceiling on their permitted expenditure will depend on their vote share at the general election, in line with the provisions in the 2000 Act.

Mr Jenkin: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Lidington: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I have very little time and there were many points made in a very long debate to which I wish to respond.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) asked about the position of the European Commission and foreign Governments. They cannot be permissible donors under our law, so they would not be entitled to contribute to the lead organisations for either campaign, or make donations of any kind. We cannot pass law in this House that has extraterritorial impact on foreign Governments and international institutions. They have both certain freedoms and responsibilities under the Vienna conventions on how they operate in this country. I can say, from a recent conversation I have had already with the head of the European Commission office in London, that I think the Commission is aware that the very last thing that would help a yes campaign in a European referendum would be a flood of glossy literature from the European Commission going through people's letterboxes. I would trust the proper diplomatic relationships with Governments and institutions, and encourage them to stick by their duty to respect the right of the British people to take their own decision responsibly. I do not think that their intervention needs to be feared.

I will write to the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds), who raised detailed points about foreign companies. All I would say is that we are simply applying the rules as they currently exist within the overall legislation on political parties, elections and referendums.

Many right hon. and hon. Members spoke about section 125 of the 2000 Act and the Government's proposal that it be disapplied. I emphasise the points that the Foreign Secretary made earlier. Normal EU business will not stop during a UK referendum campaign, but the phrasing of the 2000 Act is so broad that it could prevent the Government from, for example, setting out in any published form its position on the mid-term review of the multi-annual budget, on ECJ court cases that have an impact here, on negotiations on annual budgets, on trade negotiations or on EU foreign policy initiatives. That would not be a sensible position for us or any Government to get themselves into. For this referendum the public will expect the Government, as the Government, to make their recommendation clear, to explain their reasons for that recommendation and to respond to questions put to them by electors during the course of the campaign. It is for those two reasons that we propose to disapply section 125.

The question I take from the debate is this: how do we provide the credible assurances that give effect to what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said—that the Government will be restrained in their use of public money and have no wish to compete with the umbrella campaign organisations whose job it will be to lead the yes and no campaigns? I acknowledge the constructive way in which the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) responded to the Foreign Secretary's speech on that point. As the Bill goes forward over future

weeks and months, within the House we will need to consider how we put in place the right framework so that what my right hon. Friend talked about will be given proper effect, while giving the Government the freedom to publish without being constrained in the way I have described.

We will come to questions about the franchise in Committee of the whole House next week. I simply say to those who have argued for EU citizens to be enfranchised that it is straightforward and in accordance with referendum precedent for the United Kingdom as a whole that we rely on a general election franchise, rather than on the franchise for local and national elections.

On the question of 16 and 17-year-olds, I accept that there are strongly held views in this House on both sides of that debate, but the proper occasion to have that debate will be in the form of legislation to amend our arrangements on the Representation of the People Acts, so that we can debate the principle and decide as a House whether to apply that rule to all future elections and referendums—not to make some one-off exception for this referendum on the United Kingdom's place in the European Union.

There have been a large number of detailed points made by right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House. I shall try to respond in detail to those Members whose points I have not been able to address in the course of my concluding remarks in the form of letters over the next week. We will have the opportunity very soon, in the form of Committee of the whole House, to explore some of these matters in further detail.

I believe, however, that this Bill provides a straightforward, fair and effective framework for the British people to decide our country's future in Europe. This Bill delivers on a promise that the Government of the United Kingdom made to the people of the United Kingdom at the general election, and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 59, Noes 338.

Division No. 5]

[6.59 pm

AYES

Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Grant, Peter
Arkless, Richard	Gray, Neil
Bardell, Hannah	Hendry, Drew
Black, Ms Mhairi	Hosie, Stewart
Blackford, Ian	Kerevan, George
Blackman, Kirsty	Kerr, Calum
Boswell, Philip	Law, Chris
Brock, Deidre	MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Brown, Alan	Mc Nally, John
Cameron, Dr Lisa	McCaig, Callum
Chapman, Douglas	McDonald, Stewart
Cherry, Joanna	McDonald, Stuart C.
Cowan, Ronnie	McGarry, Natalie
Crawley, Angela	McLaughlin, Anne
Day, Martyn	Monaghan, Carol
Docherty, Martin John	Monaghan, Dr Paul
Donaldson, Stuart Blair	Mullin, Roger
Durkan, Mark	Newlands, Gavin
Edwards, Jonathan	Nicolson, John
Ferrier, Margaret	O'Hara, Brendan
Gethins, Stephen	Oswald, Kirsten
Gibson, Patricia	Paterson, Steven
Grady, Patrick	Ritchie, Ms Margaret

Robertson, Angus
Salmond, rh Alex
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Stephens, Chris
Thewliss, Alison
Thomson, Michelle
Weir, Mike

Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Corri
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Ayes:
Marion Fellows and
Owen Thompson

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brake, rh Tom
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Mr Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, Alun
Cameron, rh Mr David
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse

Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Cooper, Julie
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Elliott, Tom
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Farron, Tim
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert

Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Herbert, rh Nick
Hermon, Lady
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hoey, Kate
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kinahan, Danny
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian

Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Lumley, Karen
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Osborne, rh Mr George
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Philp, Chris
Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pugh, John
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence

Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly

Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wilson, Sammy
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:

**Simon Kirby and
 Sarah Newton**

Question accordingly negatived.

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 62(2)),
 That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr Jenkin: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Would the hon. Gentleman care to come nearer to the Chair to make his point of order?

Mr Jenkin: I cannot speak from here?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not during a Division.

Mr Jenkin: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. There is a great delay in the Aye Lobby because there are so many Members of Parliament there. I am reminded that Margaret Thatcher once said that “the Road to Damascus has never been more congested.”

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order, and for bringing those pearls of wisdom to the House this evening. So far, however, an inordinate amount of time has not elapsed since the beginning of this Division. If an inordinate amount of time does elapse, I will—as I always do—send the Serjeant at Arms to investigate whether there is a delay in the Lobby.

7.36 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker: I must indeed now ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the Aye Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 544, Noes 53.

Division No. 6]

[7.16 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Mr Graham
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Mr David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Austin, Ian
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Barron, rh Kevin
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Bellingham, Mr Henry
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berger, Luciana
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, Karen
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Brennan, Kevin
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, James
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bruce, Fiona
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Buckland, Robert
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, rh Mr Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cairns, Alun
 Cameron, rh Mr David
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Carmichael, Neil
 Carswell, Mr Douglas
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Jenny
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colville, Oliver
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Cox, Jo
 Coyle, Neil
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crausby, Mr David
 Creasy, Stella
 Crouch, Tracey
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dinenege, Caroline

Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Grayling, rh Chris	Johnson, Diana	McDonald, Andy
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel	Green, Chris	Johnson, Gareth	McDonnell, John
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.	Green, rh Damian	Johnson, Joseph	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Donelan, Michelle	Green, Kate	Jones, Andrew	McGinn, Conor
Dorries, Nadine	Greening, rh Justine	Jones, rh Mr David	McInnes, Liz
Double, Steve	Greenwood, Lilian	Jones, Gerald	McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
Doughty, Stephen	Greenwood, Margaret	Jones, Graham	McPartland, Stephen
Dowd, Jim	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Jones, Mr Kevan	Mearns, Ian
Dowd, Peter	Griffith, Nia	Jones, Mr Marcus	Menzies, Mark
Dowden, Oliver	Griffiths, Andrew	Jones, Susan Elan	Mercer, Johnny
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Gummer, Ben	Kane, Mike	Merriman, Huw
Drax, Richard	Gwynne, Andrew	Kawczynski, Daniel	Metcalfe, Stephen
Dromey, Jack	Gyimah, Mr Sam	Keeley, Barbara	Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Drummond, Mrs Flick	Haigh, Louise	Kennedy, Seema	Milling, Amanda
Duddridge, James	Halfon, rh Robert	Khan, rh Sadiq	Mills, Nigel
Dugher, Michael	Hall, Luke	Kinahan, Danny	Milton, rh Anne
Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Hamilton, Fabian	Kinnock, Stephen	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Hammond, rh Mr Philip	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Dunne, Mr Philip	Hammond, Stephen	Knight, Julian	Mordaunt, Penny
Eagle, Ms Angela	Hancock, rh Matthew	Kwarteng, Kwasi	Morden, Jessica
Eagle, Maria	Hands, rh Greg	Kyle, Peter	Morgan, rh Nicky
Efford, Clive	Hanson, rh Mr David	Lamb, rh Norman	Morris, Anne Marie
Elliott, Julie	Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Lammy, rh Mr David	Morris, David
Elliott, Tom	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Lancaster, Mark	Morris, Grahame M.
Ellis, Michael	Harpham, Harry	Latham, Pauline	Morris, James
Ellison, Jane	Harris, Carolyn	Lavery, Ian	Morton, Wendy
Ellman, Mrs Louise	Harris, Rebecca	Leadsom, Andrea	Mowat, David
Ellwood, Mr Tobias	Hart, Simon	Lee, Dr Phillip	Mulholland, Greg
Elphicke, Charlie	Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan	Lefroy, Jeremy	Mundell, rh David
Esterson, Bill	Hayes, Helen	Leigh, Sir Edward	Murray, Ian
Eustice, George	Hayes, rh Mr John	Leslie, Charlotte	Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Evans, Chris	Hayman, Sue	Leslie, Chris	Murrison, Dr Andrew
Evans, Mr Nigel	Heald, Sir Oliver	Letwin, rh Mr Oliver	Neill, Robert
Evennett, rh Mr David	Healey, rh John	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Nokes, Caroline
Fabricant, Michael	Heapey, James	Lewis, Brandon	Norman, Jesse
Fallon, rh Michael	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Lewis, Clive	Nuttall, Mr David
Farron, Tim	Heaton-Jones, Peter	Lewis, Mr Ivan	Offord, Dr Matthew
Fernandes, Suella	Hendrick, Mr Mark	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Onn, Melanie
Field, rh Frank	Herbert, rh Nick	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Onwurah, Chi
Field, rh Mark	Hermon, Lady	Lidington, rh Mr David	Opperman, Guy
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Hillier, Meg	Lilley, rh Mr Peter	Osamor, Kate
Fleelo, Robert	Hinds, Damian	Long Bailey, Rebecca	Osborne, rh Mr George
Fletcher, Colleen	Hoare, Simon	Lopresti, Jack	Owen, Albert
Flint, rh Caroline	Hodge, rh Margaret	Lord, Jonathan	Paisley, Ian
Flynn, Paul	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Loughton, Tim	Parish, Neil
Foster, Kevin	Hoey, Kate	Lucas, Caroline	Patel, rh Priti
Fovargue, Yvonne	Hollingbery, George	Lucas, Ian C.	Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Fox, rh Dr Liam	Hollinrake, Kevin	Lumley, Karen	Pawsey, Mark
Foxcroft, Vicky	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Lynch, Holly	Pearce, Teresa
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Holloway, Mr Adam	Mackinlay, Craig	Penning, rh Mike
Frazer, Lucy	Hopkins, Kelvin	Mackintosh, David	Pennycook, Matthew
Freeman, George	Hopkins, Kris	Mactaggart, rh Fiona	Penrose, John
Freer, Mike	Howarth, Sir Gerald	Madders, Justin	Percy, Andrew
Fuller, Richard	Howell, John	Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Perkins, Toby
Fysh, Marcus	Howlett, Ben	Mahmood, Shabana	Perry, Claire
Gapes, Mike	Huddleston, Nigel	Main, Mrs Anne	Phillips, Jess
Gardiner, Barry	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	Mak, Alan	Phillips, Stephen
Garnier, rh Sir Edward	Hunt, Tristram	Malhotra, Seema	Phillipson, Bridget
Garnier, Mark	Huq, Dr Rupa	Malthouse, Kit	Philp, Chris
Gauke, Mr David	Hurd, Mr Nick	Mann, John	Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Ghani, Nusrat	Hussain, Imran	Mann, Scott	Pincher, Christopher
Gibb, Mr Nick	Irranca-Davies, Huw	Marris, Rob	Poulter, Dr Daniel
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl	Jackson, Mr Stewart	Marsden, Mr Gordon	Pound, Stephen
Glass, Pat	James, Margot	Maskell, Rachael	Pow, Rebecca
Glen, John	Jarvis, Dan	Matheson, Chris	Powell, Lucy
Glindon, Mary	Javid, rh Sajid	Mathias, Dr Tania	Prentis, Victoria
Goldsmith, Zac	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Prisk, Mr Mark
Goodman, Helen	Jenkin, Mr Bernard	Maynard, Paul	Pritchard, Mark
Goodwill, Mr Robert	Jenkyns, Andrea	McCabe, Steve	Pugh, John
Gove, rh Michael	Jenrick, Robert	McCarthy, Kerry	Pursglove, Tom
Graham, Richard	Johnson, rh Alan	McCartney, Jason	Quin, Jeremy
Gray, Mr James	Johnson, Boris	McCartney, Karl	Quince, Will

Qureshi, Yasmin
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Rayner, Angela
 Redwood, rh John
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rotheram, Steve
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smith, Royston
 Smyth, Karin
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevens, Jo
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Streeting, Wes
 Stride, Mel
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Ms Gisela
 Stuart, Graham

Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Tami, Mark
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Throup, Maggie
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Trickett, Jon
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 West, Catherine
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Phil
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wilson, Sammy
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Simon Kirby and
 Sarah Newton

NOES

Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
 Arkless, Richard

Bardell, Hannah
 Black, Ms Mhairi

Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Boswell, Philip
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Day, Martyn
 Docherty, Martin John
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Hendry, Drew
 Hosie, Stewart
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Law, Chris
 Mc Nally, John
 McCaig, Callum

McDonald, Stewart
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McGarry, Natalie
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Mullin, Roger
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Paterson, Steven
 Robertson, Angus
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Stephens, Chris
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomson, Michelle
 Weir, Mike
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Wilson, Corri
 Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Noes:
 Marion Fellows and
 Owen Thompson

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read a Second time.

EUROPEAN UNION REFERENDUM BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the European Union Referendum 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 taken in two 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>	
Clause 1; new Clauses and new Schedules relating to the subject matter of Clause 1	Three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the first day.
Clause 3; Schedules 1 to 3; new Clauses and new Schedules relating to the subject matter of Clause 3 and Schedules 1 to 3	The moment of interruption on the first day.

Table

<i>Proceedings</i>	<i>Time for conclusion of proceedings</i>
<p><i>Second day</i></p> <p>Clause 2; new Clauses and new Schedules relating to the subject matter of Clause 2; Clause 5; new Clauses and new Schedules relating to the subject matter of Clause 5</p> <p>Clauses 4 and 6 to 11; remaining new Clauses; remaining new Schedules; remaining proceedings on the Bill</p>	<p>Four hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on the second day.</p> <p>The moment of interruption on the second 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.—(*Margot James.*)

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN REFERENDUM 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 European Union Referendum Bill, it is expedient to authorise:

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(a) any expenditure incurred under the Act by a Minister of the Crown;

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided;

(2) and the payment out of the Consolidated Fund of charges payable to the Chief Counting Officer, Regional Counting Officers and counting officers in connection with the referendum on whether the United Kingdom should remain a member of the European Union; and

(3) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—(*Margot James.*)

Question agreed to.

Black Country University Technical College

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Margot James.)

7.40 pm

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss a matter of concern to my constituency and to the black country. In May 2011 I received a letter from the then Education Minister telling me that the Black Country university technical college was to be opened in my constituency in September. A funding agreement had been entered into for this to happen.

A year later the Baker Dearing Educational Trust, the body that promotes such colleges and plays an active role in these matters, wrote to me and said that more such colleges were being opened across the country. The age group involved was 14 to 19-year-olds. As was emphasised by Ministers and the trust, the purpose of such colleges, as the name implies, is to provide intensive and advanced technical schooling, combined with a normal secondary education. The hours are somewhat longer—from 8.30 am to 5.30 pm—and a further aim is to improve behaviour and reduce truancy. We are all in favour of such aims and objectives, and I was told that a good deal of that had already been achieved.

The cost of equipping each UTC was at that time around £10 million. The Minister may want to give us the latest figure. It should be emphasised that for UTCs and other forms of state education, such as secondary schools and academies, the money inevitably comes from the public purse, and rightly so. The UTCs were funded 100% by the Exchequer, as all state education is. There is no criticism of that.

The UTC in Walsall opened just four years ago in 2011, as I said. It was one of the first five in England. Of those first five, the one in my constituency is to close. Another, in Hackney, is to close at the same time. There is, I understand, a question mark over the future of yet another one. The Baker Dearing Educational Trust had brought out a glossy report, which I am sure the Minister has seen, to celebrate such colleges. Needless to say, everything in the pamphlet was positive. Nothing could be better, apparently, and there were plenty of quotes from well known figures.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman speaks about the technical college in Walsall. In my constituency the technical college, or the further education college as it is now, prepares and trains people for future employment. Has he been able to ascertain the impact that the closure of his college will have on the employment prospects of the young people in the area? That would concern me and I am sure it concerns him as well.

Mr Winnick: That is undoubtedly a useful intervention. I shall mention the issue to some extent and am glad that the hon. Gentleman intervened.

I want to make it clear from the start that I accept there is much to be said for an extensive and advanced technical education, not least in the black country. Such skills are necessary in the four boroughs, certainly in my own borough of Walsall. The new and latest skills are much in demand. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) and the

hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), who is also in attendance, totally agree with that. The skills will, to a large extent, replace the older industries, which tend to be described as metal-bashing industries. More potential engineers—both male and female—and others with specialist skills would certainly be welcomed by employers. There is no dispute about that. It is not part of my case that such extensive advanced technical education should not be given. How it is given, and how it should fit into secondary education, is another matter altogether.

It was after the last Parliament ended at the end of March that an announcement was made that the Walsall college on Vernon Way in Bloxwich in my constituency was to close. I must confess—I shall come to this in a moment—that I am not altogether happy about the way in which it was announced. In fact, I learned about it informally. Rumours were running around that the college was to close and the local authority had been told, but the official announcement was made a little later and during the election campaign, not afterwards. Currently there are 158 students, more than 100 of whom—this relates to what the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said in his intervention—will need to complete their secondary schooling elsewhere come the autumn.

There has been much concern over the college closing. The announcement has gone down rather badly, to say the least, in the locality. The president of the Black Country chamber of commerce said it was a sad day for such education and a hard day for students, parents and employers.

The Ofsted report on the Walsall college was highly critical. The inspection was carried out in March. A few moments ago I mentioned the glossy pamphlet that was sent to us. It said that everything was positive and successful, but the Ofsted report said that student achievement was inadequate, teaching was weak, attendance was well below average, and discipline simply was not good enough. Moreover, Ofsted was critical of the governors and sponsors. It criticised the fact that the governing body had failed to understand how students were doing and to tackle what Ofsted describes as the underperformance of staff. It also says, in all fairness, that the more recent principal has done good work in trying to improve standards. That should be said on the record.

The decision to close, and the manner in which it was done, does not provide much confidence in the way in which the UTC was governed. It should not be overlooked that the Ofsted report, however critical—indeed, it was highly critical, as I have already said—made no recommendation that the college close. It was stated that it should be put in special measures, which is the normal approach. Whenever Ofsted makes a highly critical report, it does not usually state that the institution should be closed, and it did not do so in this case.

When was the Department for Education notified of the closure? Was it at the same time as the official announcement was made locally? Given the acute weaknesses in the Ofsted report, has the Department been kept informed over the past two or three years, or did this come as a surprise? It would be interesting to hear what the link is between UTCs and the Department. The Department funds them with taxpayers' money, and rightly so, but are reports made to the Department?

Did the Department not realise what the situation was at the Walsall UTC until the Ofsted report? Some answers would be useful.

Interestingly, when a Tory Back Bencher intervened during the Prime Minister's first speech in this Parliament to ask about UTCs and say how useful they are, the Prime Minister's response could not have been more enthusiastic. I would say only this. Bearing in mind not only the college about which I am speaking, but the other closure in August of one the first five colleges as well as the one with the question mark over it, is there not a case for the Department to pause and look at what has happened over the past four or five years? I simply say that university technical colleges are necessary and provide a useful sort of education—I have mentioned all that, and I do not disagree—but there should be time to pause and reflect.

I quoted the president of the Black Country chamber of commerce saying how the closure was a blow to the locality. I want to emphasise that it is a heavy blow. There was much enthusiasm about the UTC. One did not know much about UTCs, but the site was that of a former secondary school and one felt that it would be a successful venture. It has not proved to be, which is very unfortunate. Perhaps the Minister has the latest information about the alternative places to which students who have not finished their secondary education will be going.

7.52 pm

The Minister for Skills (Nick Boles): I congratulate the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) on securing this debate on a very important issue for his constituents, as well as for those of the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) and of other hon. Members from the surrounding area. I thank him for organising this debate because it is very important at the start of a Parliament to look at the university technical college programme and ask whether it is as successful as possible before we launch into the process of opening more institutions like this one, which we as a Government are firmly committed to do. I will try to answer his questions, but if at any point he wants to intervene to press me on any particular question, I will be happy to take such an intervention.

I welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman acknowledged the importance of providing high-quality technical education in all parts of the country, and particularly the need to create new institutions to focus on technical education in a different way, to a different level and with a different focus from what has perhaps been available in existing institutions, whether schools or further education colleges. That is why it is very welcome to hear him and other Labour Members say that they, like us, support the principle of university technical colleges. We feel that these new institutions can make a real contribution.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will accept that, when we are trying to improve and innovate, we have to take some risks. We have to be willing to set up new kinds of institution that have not been tested within the system and try new ways of doing things. It will always be right for the Government to back certain risks, as long as they are calculated, well monitored and well judged. If, unfortunately, the risk does not pay off, there must be proper investigation so that we understand what went wrong, what failed and what lessons should be learned for future projects.

[*Nick Boles*]

I will now go into the particulars of the university technical college that closed, so sadly, in the hon. Gentleman's area. It is a matter of huge regret that the college has been forced to close so soon after it opened, after so much taxpayers' money was invested in creating it and, more than just money, after so many hopes were raised in his area about the potential for the college to contribute to the chances of its young people.

The Government would not disagree with the hon. Gentleman's judgment that the communications about the possible closure were not handled as we would have liked. Not least—although I am sure this is not the only source of his complaint—we feel that it would have been proper and advisable, as it was an election period, for the governors to contact all the parliamentary candidates for the constituency in which the college is located and, perhaps, parliamentary candidates beyond the constituency in advance of the public communications, so that he and others did not have to read about it in the news like everyone else.

Mr Winnick: My not being notified is not my No. 1 complaint by any means. I wonder whether the Minister will answer a question that I did ask. Was the Department for Education notified of what was happening over the past two or three years? Did the Ofsted report come as a complete surprise or did the Department, although he may not have been involved at the time, know what was occurring? Did the Department communicate with the college and say, "This doesn't seem very good. Taxpayers money is involved. What steps are being taken to improve the situation?"

Nick Boles: I was going to come on to what we knew in this specific case and to set out the monitoring process more broadly. I will start with the closure and work backwards, if I may.

The first that the Department heard about the possible closure being proposed by the board of governors was on 17 March, which was after the second Ofsted inspection that produced such a damning report. The trust that was running the college approached the Department to discuss possible closure. The Department, through the regional schools commissioner, who has responsibility for all the schools in the region, including the UTCs, looked at alternatives for the UTC. Obviously, it would have been hugely preferable, if it had been possible, to transfer the UTC into another academy group or into a relationship with other more successful institutions, so that it could have remained open. It was quite proper that that process happened swiftly. Obviously, it was getting very close to the start of purdah and the election campaign. Nevertheless, that work was done.

On 27 March, the governors formally requested the termination of the funding agreement. Ministers agreed to the request the same day, immediately before the pre-election purdah period. There was therefore a period of just less than two weeks in which the regional schools commissioner made contact with other institutions to see whether there was an alternative to closure. Ultimately, the conclusion was drawn that there was no alternative.

The hon. Gentleman asked, very properly, about our general oversight and communication channels. Because the university technical college programme is a small

and relatively new programme, it receives quite a lot more regular attention in the Department than ordinary schools, of which there are many thousands around the country. There are regular monitoring meetings at the officials level and Ministers also get involved in regular monitoring meetings, which look both at the proposals for new university technical colleges and at any university technical college that seems to be having problems, whether those are financial problems or problems relating to Ofsted inspections, the quality of the education or the recruitment of students.

It would therefore not have been a surprise to the Department or officials that the college was in trouble, but it was perhaps not until the second Ofsted report that the trouble crystallised as a threat to its very survival. Relatively swiftly after that, the governing body reached the conclusion that it should close the college. I believe that the communication of that could have been better handled, and I fear that one reason why it was not handled as well as it could have been was the fact that the purdah period had started and Ministers were off on election campaigns. I regret that, but I do not think the ultimate decision to close the college could have been avoided.

I would like to answer the question that hon. Gentleman properly asked about the position of the 158 students who were on the roll at the time of closure. I understand that 93% of them, which is 152, have offers of places at other educational institutions or of alternative arrangements, such as apprenticeships. Pupils continuing with their education have received offers from a range of providers, including local academies and colleges. Those wishing to continue with engineering or a technical education have been offered places at Walsall College and four other nearby university technical colleges—Aston; the JCB Academy; and West Midlands Construction UTC and Health Futures UTC, both of which are due to open this year. Siemens has provided financial support with transport costs for students to be able to transfer to those UTCs. Although I promise to keep a fairly close eye on what happens to those young people, to ensure that their education is not interrupted more than is necessary and that they are given great opportunities for the future, I am reasonably content so far that it looks possible that everybody will find a good place in a good college.

Finally, I will reflect briefly, as the hon. Gentleman invited me to, on what the Government can do to learn lessons from this unfortunate experience and the one in Hackney. We want to ensure that the university technical college programme, to which the Government are firmly committed and which has great support from the main Opposition party, flourishes and creates institutions that are educationally and financially successful, so that they can recruit sufficient numbers of young people and give them a great education. I can promise him that, as the Minister who has just been asked to take over responsibility for the programme, I am looking at all the questions about how a UTC works; who it recruits and when it recruits them; what specialisms are involved; what its partnership and sponsorship arrangements are; and how it involves universities and employers, and which ones are getting involved. I am determined to ensure that the programme ends up producing fantastic institutions that offer great opportunities for young people to receive a technical education.

Mr Winnick: As I said, my view is that there is a case for pausing, but clearly that will not happen. Does the Minister feel that it would be useful if he visited the college before the closure takes place and spoke to the staff and some of the students? He could also arrange a meeting with the governors, which might be on the same occasion. It would be useful if he went himself to see what is happening and to discuss the situation. Perhaps lessons could be learned that otherwise would not be.

Nick Boles: On the hon. Gentleman's suggestion of a pause, there is a natural pause in a sense, because there are certain times at which we solicit bids for new university technical colleges. We are currently considering what the appropriate time will be to open up a bidding round, and I can assure him that there will be a number of months before that when we can consider all the lessons from this and other experiences.

I would be very happy to meet the outgoing principal or members of the governing body if the hon. Gentleman would like to arrange such a meeting. From the Dispatch Box, I cannot absolutely promise to visit, because I would

need to check with the Whips, who seem to want to keep Ministers in Westminster at the moment. I also need to check on the appropriateness of doing so. I can guarantee the hon. Gentleman that I will get a report from the regional schools commissioner about what lessons he thinks we should be learning, but I would be happy to meet anyone else the hon. Gentleman would like me to meet so that we learn the lessons of this experience.

We must together guarantee that the 158 young people who had made a commitment to the institution receive a superb education, as they were properly hoping to receive. We must also guarantee that the university technical college movement, which has been so ably spearheaded by—among many others—Lord Baker and Lord Adonis, is a success and that the institutions created through that programme can thrive, prosper and create great opportunities for young people.

Question put and agreed to.

8.5 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 9 June 2015

[MR DAVID CRAUSBY *in the Chair*]

Air Pollution (London)

9.30 am

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered air pollution in London.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby. I congratulate those Members who have turned up at this early hour for a debate on a vital subject for the people of London.

I urge the House to take notice of the unseen, silent killer stalking London's streets—a killer unknowingly encountered by every single Londoner every single day. It is present when people drop their children off at school. It is present when they make their journey to and from work. It follows them throughout their weekends in the city. That malign presence is the noxious fumes that pollute the air we breathe. Specifically, the killer is made up of two components: particulate matter, comprising solid and liquid particles, and gases such as nitrogen dioxide. In London, the primary culprit for those killer chemicals is road traffic. Although industry is the biggest source of pollution nationwide, in urban environments such as London, where the accumulation of pollution and the related health impact is greatest, road traffic is responsible for up to 70% of all air pollution. Londoners are dying as a result. In 2008, across the capital, more than 4,000 premature deaths directly resulted from deadly levels of air pollution. In every year since then, thousands of Londoners have lost their lives early, and they continue to do so, simply because the air they breathe is slowly poisoning them.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Given that the stretch of the A406 through my constituency has one of the highest levels of nitrogen dioxide in the city, surpassed only by central London, and that Public Health England has linked air pollution to 7% of deaths in the London borough of Redbridge, does she agree that more needs to be done to address the problem, and particularly the congestion around Charlie Brown's roundabout and Redbridge roundabout, as a matter of urgency?

Ms Abbott: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I will come on to how Boris—the current Mayor—and the Government have failed Londoners, including his constituents, on the important matter of air pollution.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate on an issue that needs greater prominence. Is she aware of the impact of London's pollution on surrounding areas? In my constituency of Dartford, for example, westerly winds blow pollution from London on to the problems already caused by the M25, which adds to the bronchial and respiratory conditions suffered by local residents.

Ms Abbott: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that important point. He will forgive me if I, as a prospective candidate for Mayor of London, talk about London, but it is important that the House is reminded that the high levels of pollution in London have an effect on surrounding areas.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate, which I am pleased builds on the work of the Environmental Audit Committee in the last Parliament. Although she may be a candidate for Mayor of London, and if she were elected she would be able to play her part in addressing air pollution, does she not agree that local authorities also have a significant role in addressing air quality in their boroughs?

Ms Abbott: I entirely agree that local authorities have a significant role. If I were Mayor of London, I would try to bring them together and offer leadership on this issue. It is not just a matter for the Mayor or the Government; it is also a matter for local authorities. It is also about the personal choices we make about our travel and our children's lives.

Already this year, according to the latest research, up to 1,300 people have died across the city. The Clean Air in London campaign group argues that more than 7,000 Londoners a year are now dying prematurely as a result of toxic air. It is well established that toxic air is a direct cause of bronchitis, asthma, strokes and even cancer and heart disease. We all recognise that the level of childhood asthma is now far higher than any of us knew when we were at school. I cannot believe that there is no connection between those very high levels of childhood asthma and rising levels of air pollution.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate. I also thank the Clean Air in London campaign, Simon Birkett and others for their work. My hon. Friend makes an important point about childhood asthma, respiratory issues and the role of local authorities. Does she agree that it is important to raise public awareness of places where air pollution concentration can be higher, such as roadsides or places that are lower down, where the density of pollution can more greatly affect children in prams?

Ms Abbott: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. When I think about the number of primary schools in Stoke Newington alongside heavily used main roads, I wonder about the health of children who have to attend those schools. Young people in our city are particularly vulnerable to the effects of air pollution. Children growing up, or attending primary school, near the noxious fumes of busy roads have been clinically proven to develop smaller lung capacity and increased susceptibility to respiratory infections. Everyday exposure to air pollution, which is what children get when they walk to and from school daily, has been found to contribute to increased inflammation of the airways in healthy children, not to mention children already suffering from asthma. These chronically debilitating issues lead to serious medical problems that will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

We have a duty of care to children, because adults can make choices about whether they drive, cycle or walk to work. Given the particularly damaging impact

[Ms Abbott]

of air pollution on children's lungs, why are the Government not doing more to support the production and dissemination of accurate, practical advice to help schools reduce the impact that pollution is having on the health and wellbeing of children in London and further afield? Awareness is key, and the Government are failing in their duty to raise awareness. Those with respiratory and cardiovascular disease are at greater risk of worsening their conditions due to the adverse effects of air pollution. As a whole, London has very high rates of respiratory and cardiovascular disease, not least in Hackney. Our most vulnerable people are at risk, and not enough is being done to protect them.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The hon. Lady has referred to the action that the Government need to take, but does not Transport for London have a very large communications budget? TfL could and should use that budget much more effectively to publicise concerns about air quality and incidences of air quality issues in London.

Ms Abbott: When I refer to the role of the Mayor, I am of course referring to the entire Greater London Authority family over which the Mayor sits, which includes TfL, the Metropolitan police and the fire brigade. Now is the time for action. It is completely unacceptable that London's air is the filthiest of any European capital. The air pollution on Oxford Street ensures that it has the unwelcome honour of ranking among the most polluted streets in the entire world.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech, particularly about the problems near schools. In my constituency, I have some of the most polluted roads—the A4, the A40 and Hammersmith Broadway—and those roads have schools alongside them. In addition to talking about central London, will she talk about the other big problem in London? Heathrow also breaks EU limits. Does she agree that the worst thing we could do is increase the size of Heathrow by 50% with a third runway, thereby making it even more illegal and an even worse environmental danger?

Ms Abbott: My hon. Friend anticipates a later part of my speech. There is no question but that aviation is a major cause of pollution, and anyone offering solutions to the problem must mention it.

London has the filthiest air of any European capital. The need to improve air quality is recognised in EU legislation, which sets limits for a range of pollutants. As part of that legislation, member states are required to prepare adequate plans to reduce nitrogen dioxide to acceptable levels by 2015, but the UK has failed to do so. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs estimates that in the Greater London area, those limits—of which it is perfectly well aware—will not be met until after 2030.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I echo other Members in congratulating my hon. Friend on securing this important debate on a vital subject. She mentioned Oxford Street, but there are also suburban

equivalents. Horn Lane in Acton, off the A40, is one of the most polluted hotspots in London. Asthma UK, a neutral charity, has called the Government's approach "designed to mask the true scale of England's air quality crisis rather than make any real attempt to solve it."

My hon. Friend said that she would come to what the Mayor of London is doing. The record is atrocious: there have been attempts to glue down air particulates near air quality sensors, and there has been a failure to create the network of electric car charging points that was planned. Also, the ultra-low emission zone is also so far in the future that it will not help in the immediate term.

Ms Abbott: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her important intervention, which deserved to be made at length.

The programme for meeting EU targets has been delayed. I ask the Minister to estimate how many Londoners will die as a result between now and 2030. Most shamefully, as a result of the Government's abject failure to meet the EU targets, a UK charity, ClientEarth, had to take the Government to court. After referring to the European Court of Justice, the Supreme Court here in the UK has ordered the Government to submit new air quality plans to the European Commission no later than 31 December this year. We had to be taken to court before the Government would come up with sustainable proposals. Why did it take the Supreme Court to make the Government and the Mayor of London take the deadly matter of air pollution seriously? Is not the provision of a clean living environment a basic duty for any Government to fulfil? Will the Minister admit that on a wider scale, this Government are culpable of gross negligence leading to the premature death of up to 30,000 UK residents nationwide?

If the human cost does not move the Minister, will he stop to consider, as the Government busy themselves with their latest round of cuts to vital public services, that we spend £16 billion a year treating the adverse effects of air pollution? If the human cost does not bother the Government, the financial cost incurred by having such levels of air pollution might. For us here in London, it is essential that air pollution is tackled as a matter of urgency. In many locations throughout the city, pollutant levels regularly exceed EU limits by a multiple of two or three. To put the severity of the situation into perspective, Oxford Street managed to breach the hourly limit on nitrogen dioxide for the whole of 2015 by 4 January, in just four days. Each and every Londoner suffers daily from the continued inaction.

The responsibility to address London's air pollution scandal rests with central Government and the Mayor, although local authorities also have a role to play. As a start, I urge the Government to implement a new cross-departmental strategy to bring about change and reduce the impact of air pollution on public health. The strategy should involve Public Health England and non-governmental bodies such as NHS England. It is essential that it should include clear, measurable and time-bound objectives for the reduction of emissions, and for cost and health benefits, which previous strategies have sorely lacked.

It should become mandatory for all local authorities to monitor levels of smaller particulate matter, as they are already bound to monitor nitrogen dioxide and

PM10. The results must be published regularly and accessibly so that Londoners can remain fully informed about the dangers to their health and the health of their children. In addition, early alerts from DEFRA and the Met Office are crucial in order to guarantee that those most at risk from polluted air can plan in advance and avoid symptoms. Both bodies should continue to develop links with organisations such as the British Lung Foundation, which is well placed to convey such information to at-risk groups.

In relation to the role and inactivity of the Mayor, I believe that with his direct executive powers over TfL—

Mr Nick Hurd (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. Before she gets to the Mayor, there is one omission from the list of responsibilities on central Government: the ultimate no-brainer policy of avoiding wilfully increasing traffic at pollution hotspots. The third runway decision has already been cited, but according to DEFRA's own models, the plans for the construction of High Speed 2 will increase emissions of the most dangerous pollutants in my constituency by 40%. Is that not gross irresponsibility?

Ms Abbott: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point.

Throughout the Mayor's tenure, there has been a growing gap between what he has said about air pollution and what he has done on the issue. That is not unsurprising; Boris Johnson is a politician who talks a good game, but does not necessarily deliver. One example is the introduction of ultra-low emission zones, which would require vehicles travelling to central London to meet stricter emissions standards or pay a daily charge.

Since proposing the ultra-low emission zone nearly two years ago, Boris Johnson has taken a series of backward steps. His approach to the issue is inadmissibly weak. Waiting until 2020 to introduce the zone is simply costing lives. A range of organisations including the London boroughs, the London Health Commission, the Faculty of Public Health and the Royal College of Physicians have come together to call for the ultra-low emission zone to be strengthened, with early implementation, wider coverage, stricter standards and stronger incentives, but from Mayor Boris Johnson, we hear nothing. The financial costs to a fraction of drivers and voters must be weighed against the health benefits, including to those same drivers, who are the most at risk from pollution, and to the larger population, particularly children, who are exposed to air pollution in central London and beyond, all the way to Dartford.

Furthermore, Boris Johnson has paid no heed to the findings of the Marmot review of health inequalities, which linked higher exposure to air pollution among poorer communities with an increased risk of cardio-respiratory disease. Nationwide, 66% of man-made carcinogenic chemicals are released into the air in the most deprived 10% of English city wards. It is imperative that the incoming Mayor—I hope it will be me—widens the scope of measures and schemes designed to reduce pollution. By restricting his focus to central London and zone 1, Boris Johnson has abdicated his responsibility to the most vulnerable by excluding those in densely populated, heavily polluted and disadvantaged areas, and given no thought at all to areas outside London that are also affected by high levels of air pollution in London.

I want, and Londoners deserve, for London to become the world's greenest capital city. The proposed solutions are as follows. We cannot fight the environmental challenges facing London, including air pollution, in a silo. We need a Mayor of London who will advocate for sustainability, low energy consumption and efficient waste reduction ideas that permeate all sectors, including housing, transport, healthcare, education and business. Not all London's air quality issues result from the number of motor vehicles on our roads, but reducing the number and cleaning up their fuel sources would lead to big improvements. An incoming Mayor must incentivise use of electric cars and work actively to decrease the number of diesel vehicles on our roads.

With London's population growing year on year, our city is at a crossroads on the issue of the environment in general and air pollution in particular. Londoners must choose whether they want a change for the better. A London with cleaner air and an increased reliance on renewable energy, and that is a safe city for cyclists and pedestrians, is an achievable reality with the right political will; I contend that the current Mayor has not shown that political will. An incoming Mayor must take urgent action.

For instance, it is unacceptable that statistics from 2013 show that the City of London has the highest carbon footprint per person in the whole of the UK. The average Briton produces 12.5 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year, but emissions per head in the City are 25% higher than that. Maybe that is because the people there are more important or wealthy, but it is not acceptable.

The Mayor should consider the use of sustainable technologies. I visited a very interesting project in Hackney a week or so ago, where solar panels have been put on top of a big council block. That enables people there to get their electricity more cheaply, and it is also a sustainable energy source. It is a very interesting project, which could be potentially rolled out across London.

Current efforts are insufficient. Not enough progress has been made on increasing the number of hybrid buses in TfL's fleet; rectifying that deficiency should be a priority. The fact that Oxford Street remains one of the most polluted streets in the world is evidence that measures to reduce pollution from taxis and buses are not being pursued with sufficient energy. We need to establish more accessible grants for environmentally friendly infrastructure development. London can become a global leader in the proliferation of renewable energy sources, such as solar power. London would do well to adopt such good practices as the creation of last-mile delivery hubs, to ensure that the carbon footprint of final-stage delivery is minimised. There are firms in the City that encourage their employees to walk more—if not to work, then at least between offices. We need to improve London's sustainable infrastructure; that would create jobs in construction and logistics.

Also, the environmental future of our city must be considered when solving London's housing crisis; we should think about sustainability and environmentally friendly projects. For example, housing developments that incorporate super-insulation would help to reduce the ever-increasing energy bills of Londoners. We also need to step up our efforts to make the city a safe and accessible place for cyclists. If more people could be encouraged to drop their cars and get on their bikes,

[Ms Abbott]

London would be a greener and more liveable city. Not enough has been done to address that; it should be treated as an urgent necessity.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that Members of all parties understand that this is an important issue that has not been properly addressed. There can be no doubt that the airport expansion at Heathrow that is being talked about would be the death knell of efforts to improve levels of air pollution, because aviation is such a major cause of air pollution.

Toxic air in London is killing Londoners, and we urgently need measures to tackle it. Promises to meet EU guidelines by 2025 or even by 2030 are unacceptable, and it is shocking that it has taken direct action from the Supreme Court to force the Government and the Mayor to address this issue seriously. It is clear that we have a real opportunity to tackle air pollution through a wholesale shift in the way that we view our living environment. For London, Londoners and the wider population in the UK, it is imperative that we seize the initiative and put an end to this silent killer once and for all, and I am using this opportunity to urge all stakeholders to step up and take responsibility. Individual companies can encourage sustainable travel on the part of their employees; housing developers can encourage sustainable development that uses renewable energy; borough councils can do more to encourage cycling to school, and they can also give out information about air pollution; the Mayor of London, who I think we can agree has comprehensively failed on this issue, can do more; and so can the Government. People should not have had to go to court to force the Government to recognise their responsibilities under EU law.

This important issue is not being dealt with, and as we fail to deal with it thousands of Londoners die every year. I am grateful to the House for having been given the opportunity to bring it to the attention of Members.

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. Before I call other Members to speak, I point out that I intend to call the Front-Bench spokesmen from about 10.30 am. We have about 35 minutes before then, and a number of Members wish to speak. I will not impose a time limit, but if Members could keep their contributions to less than five minutes, and ideally to around four minutes, we will probably get everyone in.

9.55 am

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I will briefly raise three issues because I believe that all levels of Government have failed my constituents and London overall.

Let us make it absolutely clear that there is no way that central Government can abide by the European directives on air pollution if a third runway at Heathrow goes ahead. Heathrow Airport Ltd has admitted for the first time—despite our arguing this for four decades—that 4,000 properties in my constituency will be rendered unliveable or will have to be demolished as a result of the increased air or noise pollution caused by the expansion of Heathrow airport. It would mean 10,000 people being forced out of their homes.

In addition, during every inquiry on Heathrow expansion until now, and particularly before the last one, we have been told that air pollution will inevitably be reduced by technological improvements in the aircraft themselves. In fact, before the previous general election, those making the argument for the third runway were comforted by the idea of the development of a new aircraft, which was noise-free and did not cause air pollution. However, we then discovered that no such aircraft was envisaged; it was not even on the drawing board.

We are now being told again—fictitiously, I believe—that a whole range of mitigation measures will be introduced if a third runway goes ahead, which will not only cap air pollution, but reduce it, so that we become compliant with EU legislation. No one in the scientific world believes that.

Andy Slaughter: I have never believed any of the promises that Heathrow has made over the last 20 years, so I do not know why we should start now. However, even if Heathrow was right about quieter aircraft, one of the major causes of pollution is, of course, road traffic. If we increase the number of flights by 50%, we will increase the number of cars driving to Heathrow by 50%, and that would be a killer in itself on the most polluted roads in London.

John McDonnell: What worries me is that when we presented this evidence to the Airports Commission—the Davies commission—it was treated relatively truculently. Only legal action forced the commission to consult again on air pollution. In doing so, it undermined the Government's own guidelines about how to consult, including about the timescale for consultation. The commission's report will now be tainted as a result of its failure to deal with this matter correctly.

If Heathrow airport is expanded, we will never be able to comply with air pollution limits, because of the extra air traffic and road traffic that will be generated as a result. Therefore, the conclusion in Government must be that Heathrow expansion cannot go ahead. If it does, that flies in the face of all the scientific evidence.

The other failure of government is, as has been said, the mayoral strategies. Those strategies have come up with all sorts of different devices, such as air quality management zones. We have had those zones in my area, but they have been completely undermined by individual planning decisions that have been supported by the Mayor, the Planning Inspectorate and local councils. I will give just two examples of such decisions in my area, and then I will allow other Members to speak.

The first example is the Conway bitumen plant development in my constituency. For a number of years, the Nestlé factory in my constituency pumped out emissions. We worked co-operatively with it to reduce the air pollution from that plant. When people in my area woke up in the morning, they could smell coffee if the wind was in the right direction. It gives a whole new meaning to, "Wake up and smell the coffee". To give Nestlé its due, it worked over the years to reduce the emissions and it worked with the local community; I set up a consultative group. That factory is now closing.

Then, the local council, Hillingdon, gave permission for Conway to develop a bitumen recycling plant less than half a mile away. We are now regularly exposed to

fumes from that plant. It is not controlled by the local authority, because the cutbacks in local government expenditure have meant that Hillingdon council has cut its staff, and environmental and planning concerns are not being addressed effectively. The only reports on monitoring this company are produced by the company itself, which of course tell us that it is compliant with all the legislation.

Constituents of mine—and constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma)—wake in the morning and are nauseous and sick due to the overpowering smell of bitumen. Yet, as a result of the local council's not being effective in doing its duty, we have not been able to act. I should welcome a meeting with the Minister's officials to take advice on how we go forward in that regard.

In the same area, which is an air quality management zone, the Planning Inspectorate has allowed a huge out-of-town Asda shopping development with 500 car parking spaces. With a bitumen plant pumping out emissions at one end of North Hyde Road and an Asda development at the other end, there will be some 10,000 traffic movements a day on that road.

This is the way that central Government fails us. The mayoralty has proved completely ineffective. The local council either does not perform its duties effectively, because of cuts, or the Planning Inspectorate overrides even sensible decisions. Something is wrong here.

Mr Hurd: As a fellow Hillingdon MP, I stand shoulder to shoulder with the hon. Gentleman on the issue of the third runway. Does he agree that the other great threat to air quality in Hillingdon is the construction of High Speed 2? Will he join me in pressing the Government to consider more seriously the option of extending the tunnel to spare us the problem?

John McDonnell: I have always backed high-speed rail—

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman has now had more than five minutes.

John McDonnell: This is my final sentence, Mr Crausby. I apologise.

The hon. Gentleman is basically correct. I have supported the concept of high-speed rail for many years, but we have discovered that HS2 would generate more traffic in our area, rather than reducing it and overcoming some problems at Heathrow.

Government, local government and the mayoralty need to get their act together on this. Last year, I supported the Environmental Audit Committee's call for a proper inquiry into solutions to air pollution in London. We need it now and we need it urgently.

10.1 am

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) on her mayoral manifesto—sorry, on introducing a subject that is close to all our hearts. For the avoidance of doubt, Oxford Street is in my constituency, although it may one day be in her constituency. However, she is quite right about the problems on that thoroughfare, about which I also

have a lot to say. As the father of two young children, living in the increasingly congested Victoria station district, the issue of air quality affecting everyday living is critical.

London is the largest, most established post-industrial city in Europe. It is no surprise that many competing interests jostle with air quality for priority. Our capital is proud to be a global city and it is the epicentre of the UK's economy. Constant new investment in all our transport infrastructure is required for it to thrive, including—at times—roads. Only then can London maintain its position as a global leader.

More than 1 million people come to work in my constituency alone every day and the congestion this causes inevitably has a major impact on local air quality.

The 10-year age limit on taxis from 2020 should be welcomed, as these vehicles are responsible for a relatively large proportion of emissions in central London. It is essential that a taxi scrappage scheme is introduced to help drivers upgrade their vehicles.

It is worth praising TfL for its efforts on ultra low emission zones, which are set to be introduced in 2020, although that is perhaps a little bit further in the distance than many of us would like. Investment encouraging pedestrian, electric cars and cycle lanes is also welcome, but I fear that it is insufficiently radical properly to address the heart of this issue.

In a bid to tackle climate change, successive Governments have, through taxation, incentivised drivers to switch to diesel on the basis that it produces less carbon dioxide than petrol. I am sorry to say that this has helped compound the problem. The lobby group, Clean Air in London, led by my indefatigable constituent and good personal friend, Simon Birkett, continues to campaign for a new Clean Air Act to deal with diesel engines, which emit some 20 times more polluting particulates than their petrol equivalents. Clean Air London is rightly calling for a scrappage scheme to remove diesel vehicles from our roads and for widening the congestion charge beyond London, with charges set purely on the basis of emission levels. Drivers may need to be charged far more to drive diesel vehicles through the most polluted areas during rush hour and the ultra low emission zone should be expanded to include the heavily congested north and south corridors.

Diesel engines are dismally failing to meet nitrogen dioxide emission standards, by an average of some 4.4 times per kilometre in real-world driving conditions. Much of this is caused by the impact of congestion and speed humps, which are inexplicably not variants in the industry standard norms. As a result, nitrogen dioxide levels soar whenever a car's accelerator is used. This is borne out by the UK being in breach of the EU's mandated air pollution levels for nitrogen dioxide in no fewer than 38 out of the 43 air quality monitoring zones. These levels were meant to be met some five years ago, as the hon. Lady said, and that situation triggered the legal action that she mentioned. I suggest that, paradoxically, the EU-wide regulatory failing regarding diesel engine emissions has led to this problem.

In my constituency we have a number of hotspots, not just Oxford Street: Marylebone Road, parts of Knightsbridge and the area around Victoria have previously recorded the highest nitrogen dioxide levels in the world and this is causing major problems. Clean Air in London

[Mark Field]

is rightly calling for Oxford Street to be pedestrianised to a large extent and for shops and offices to be fitted with regularly maintained air filters to help reduce nitrogen dioxide levels. I am told that regulations for issuing fixed penalty notices for unnecessary idling of vehicle engines have so far proved ineffective. That needs to change.

The hon. Lady also mentioned the City of London, which suffers from the highest average levels of air pollution. According to an *Evening Standard* campaign last Friday, the City was advising people not to go jogging during the day because of the pollution levels.

There is much more than I should like to say, but I appreciate that other hon. Members want to speak. I finish by mentioning one of my favourite hobbies: walking in all corners of London. I know from personal experience, having been to Dalston and Stamford Hill and other parts of the hon. Lady's constituency, which are less polluted than bits of mine, that there is none the less a pollution issue there as well.

The problems to which we refer are by no means limited to the city centre or the area around Heathrow airport, although I am sure that that is an important issue for many fellow London MPs. I dread to think of the damage that is being done to the lungs of huge numbers of children and asthma sufferers, of whom there are now a staggering 5.4 million in the UK.

I am delighted that this debate appears to be building momentum across the media. I give particular credit to the *Evening Standard*, because its campaign is important and will run for months and years to come. I hope that the Minister will consider seriously a lot of what is being said today, because this is and will continue to be a major issue for all Londoners that will unite the political class within London across the House, and we need to deal with it with some urgency.

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): No one up to now has been near five minutes, never mind four. I now call Tom Brake, who I am sure will comply.

10.7 am

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I will do my best, Mr Crausby.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) on securing this important debate. I also congratulate my friend Stephen Knight, a London Assembly member for the Lib Dems, who has focused on the issue of air quality around schools. He did a survey that found, for example, that only 2% of teachers in schools were aware of a service call airText, which provides updates to people if air quality is poor. I understand that the Mayor's target is to sign up 250,000 people to the service and that the number currently stands at 7,000, so he clearly has a long way to go. I hope he gets there, because people need the information.

Only 5% of teachers were aware of the Cleaner Air 4 Schools initiative, supported by the Mayor. As I said in an intervention, the Mayor should be doing a lot more in relation to information about air quality. There are often adverts for TfL on LBC, *Metro* or in tube stations. TfL is a huge organisation with a large budget

that ought to be doing much more to prioritise communication on air pollution, and it can do that through its websites, emails and paid commercials. Given that the Greater London Assembly website has 200,000 hits a month and the TfL website no fewer than 20 million per month, there are lots of opportunities for the Mayor to communicate.

I welcome what the Mayor is doing on the ultra-low emission zone. However, I wonder whether doing it by 2020, as the Supreme Court has ordered, will be quick enough. We need incentives to encourage taxi firms to switch to cleaner vehicles. The Mayor first announced in 2008 that those would be available—but we are still waiting, seven years on.

One area where the Government and the Mayor can play an important role is with the Euro 6-standard lorries that are already available. I have been talking to a local constituency firm, Steve Frieze Removals, which has to rely on second-hand vehicles. Its worry is that there will not be enough appropriate second-hand vehicles on the market to purchase in advance of 2020, when its vehicles will have to meet the standard.

I turn briefly to the slightly different issue of air quality in Beddington Lane in my constituency. There is a proposal from Viridor to build an energy recovery facility on a site there. There is lots of opposition locally, but the opponents do not seem to be articulating an alternative solution, other than possibly trucking the waste much, much further than it currently goes. Do the Government intend to support a methodology that would allow the Environment Agency to control the total emissions from a range of sources, rather than simply linking the extra emissions associated with one site with the background pollution levels? My understanding is that that is how the Environment Agency has to handle things currently, but lots of facilities are emitting in Beddington Lane, and it is the totality of what is happening there that needs to be addressed.

I would have loved to have talked about Heathrow as well, Mr Crausby, but I think you are encouraging me to sit down.

10.11 am

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) on initiating this crucial debate.

The great smog of 1952 killed some 3,500 people directly and many more indirectly. The public outcry led to the hugely successful and almost revolutionary Clean Air Act 1956. Next year will be its 60th anniversary, as has been said, and air pollution is very much back as a significant public health issue. I will not go through all the bad news, because it has already been relayed, but I make one point: more than 1 million Londoners live in areas that exceed legal limits on nitrogen dioxide, and that should be enough to highlight the importance of the issue.

As London expands—its population is expected to hit 10 million by 2030—the problem will inevitably grow, and tackling it will require the same level of energy that stopped the 1950s smog. Despite some of the things that have been said, I think we have seen leadership from the Mayor. For example, no other city

in the world has a congestion charge and a low emissions zone, or plans for an ultra-low emission zone; I accept that there is a strong case for bringing forward the establishment of the ultra-low emission zone and for the zone to be bigger.

We have seen record investment in cycling over recent years in London and take-up has radically increased, but given that we cannot invent more roads, we will need that trend to ramp up massively if we want to avoid absolute gridlock on our streets. For the same reason, we should be investing in infrastructure to make far greater use of the river to carry freight and, for that matter, people. The numbers have improved in recent years, but they need to be ramped up dramatically.

London is growing by the equivalent of two extra tube trains a week—the equivalent of one bus every two hours—so it is hard to exaggerate the case for expanding our rail and tube network. We also need a revolution in electric car ownership. It is extraordinary that, despite falling costs, the fact that getting around in electric cars is dramatically cheaper than conventional alternatives and the installation of 1,400 new charging points in the past three years—a consequence of the Mayor's intervention—that revolution simply has not happened. It will inevitably happen; the market dictates that it will, but the market needs a boost. The economics are already such that there is no reason why new minicabs should not all be electric or zero-emissions, or why companies with big fleets, such as delivery companies, are not automatically replacing their old vehicles with electric alternatives. The maths already stacks up, but somewhere along the line we need a powerful nudge.

London has the largest electric hybrid bus fleet in Europe, but the vast majority of London buses are still diesel. Many cities, including New York and Rome, have introduced whole fleets of electric buses. We have to ask how long will it be before all our buses in London are electric—or at least zero-emissions in other forms. I only learned this recently, but construction equipment, such as diggers, accounts for a staggering 14% of particulate emissions in London. Surely contracts should be awarded only to construction companies that have retrofitted the engines or have vehicles that are new and clean.

There is masses that we can do in London—I do not have time to go through the full list—but central Government must play a role. Denmark and France have introduced highly successful feebate schemes; a new tax is placed at the point of purchase on the dirtiest cars, with all the proceeds being used to bring down the cost of the cleanest alternatives. It is revenue-neutral, it is not retrospective, it is popular and it works.

While I am on the subject of central Government and without wanting to repeat too much of what has already been said—although I am loving the consensus—I want to emphasise that if we are serious about air quality, the Government simply have to rule out Heathrow expansion. Heathrow is already in breach of legally binding air quality limits, and any expansion would make that far worse. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has just produced data showing that Heathrow is likely to be the second most polluted part of London by 2030, irrespective of whether it is expanded.

It is worth noting that one extra runway would lead to 25 million extra road passenger journeys, and, according to Transport for London, the cost of accommodating that by adapting our road networks is £15 billion more

than Heathrow bosses have admitted. To put the issue in context, Heathrow expansion is incompatible with any prospect of meeting any legal air quality standards. It needs to be removed from the agenda once and for all. I thank you, Mr Crausby, for your indulgence.

10.16 am

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) for securing this debate. I will cover two issues: Heathrow and Mogden sewage works. In my maiden speech, I mentioned the impact of Heathrow traffic on the A4 and the M4, which are important corridors through my constituency. People do not experience air pollution just as the silent killer of respiratory illness and morbidity, but also as that greasy dirt that can be seen on washing that is put out, on cars and on garden furniture. We know that the key pollutants around Heathrow are nitrogen dioxide and PM10. As previous speakers have said, the UK is already in breach of EU air quality legislation and that is likely to continue to be the case, whether or not Heathrow is expanded.

Some feasible improvements can be made at Heathrow, such as cleaner planes and a kiss and drop scheme. There could also be greater public transport use through increased capacity on the Piccadilly line, as well as through Crossrail and Airtrack. There is also the tunnelling of the M4, which would move the pollution, rather than decrease it. The modal shift from those public transport improvements, however, will not be significant. We are already seeing increased passenger numbers at Heathrow, even before additional runway capacity is built. There is no evidence that the changes would be adequate to meet the challenges of an almost doubling of air traffic movements, should the third runway or the Heathrow hub go ahead.

More extreme measures have been suggested. Clean Air in London talks about an ultra-low emission zone around Heathrow airport, but to be effective that zone would have to be so enormous that it would have a serious impact on the economy of the Thames valley area and be virtually impossible to enforce. Given what previous speakers have said, it is clear that on air quality grounds alone expansion at Heathrow, whether a third runway or the Heathrow hub, cannot go ahead, because it would imply further breaches of EU air quality legislation.

I turn to a completely different area that also creates air quality issues for local residents. Mogden sewage works is the second largest sewage works in the UK and is situated in the centre of my constituency. For those who live near Mogden in Twickenham, Hounslow South and Isleworth—Twickenham is not in my constituency, but is very close to it—air quality issues are an almost weekly occurrence. I had 16 email complaints from residents near Modgen in my inbox yesterday. In a couple of months, Twickenham rugby stadium will host the rugby world cup; the UK could be rather embarrassed if many matches are spoiled by the stench of sewage floating over the stadium.

The problems are occurring despite a £140 million expansion at Mogden sewage works last year that almost doubled its capacity. In my previous role as a councillor, I worked for many years with the Mogden Residents'

[Ruth Cadbury]

Action Group—MRAG—as well as with council officers and the MPs before me, to address the issue. My predecessor, Mary Macleod, met the Minister's predecessor, Dan Rogerson, to ask the Department to address the issue with some urgency. The storm tanks need covering and there should be more of them, because, apart from the smell, Mogden sewage works continues to discharge dilute sewage into the Thames regularly, every time there is heavy rain.

I know that time is short and others want to speak, so I will conclude by asking the new Minister to meet me and local residents and councillors to try to reach a solution to this problem.

10.21 am

Mr Nick Hurd (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): I will be very brief, Mr Crausby.

If we are to get serious about improving air quality in London, we must not lose sight of the ultimate no-brainer policy—not wilfully to increase traffic in pollution hotspots. If we are serious about improving air quality in the London borough of Hillingdon, the current plans for the construction of HS2 must be revisited. We are being asked to host multiple construction sites, some of which will be in existence for 10 years. They will flood narrow suburban roads with HGVs. The roads are already clogged and are surrounded by high-density housing. The area is home to clusters of schools, to which children walk. The impact will be disastrous.

I will illustrate my point by discussing three roads. Swakeleys roundabout is already highly congested and in breach of EU limits; the current HS2 plans will increase HGV traffic there by 1,672 movements per day. On Swakeleys Road, there will be 1,860 new HGV movements per day. On Harvil Road, there will be 1,360 new HGV movements per day. To make that live a bit, I should say that that means a new HGV movement every 25 seconds on key artery roads that my constituents use to get to work in and around the borough. This is in an area where pollution levels are already high—in some cases, already in breach of EU limits—but, through HS2, the Government plan wilfully to increase the traffic.

On HS2 Ltd's own traffic projections, fed into the Department's own forecasting model, emissions for PM10, PM2.5 and NO_x will be set to rise by between 30% and 40%. That feels like irresponsible madness, given the threat that the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) articulated so well—the silent killer that she described. This is Government policy pulling in different directions.

There is a solution: bury HS2, literally, by extending the proposed tunnel so that it crosses the Colne valley. It can be done technically, and the London borough of Hillingdon's report shows that it can be done for more or less the same price as the existing proposals. There are lots of reasons to do it, but today we add to them the opportunity for the Government to avoid wilfully adding to the terrible problem of the quality of air that Londoners breathe.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. I am going to call the SNP spokesman, Mr Sheppard, to speak at half-past 10.

10.23 am

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): I will be very brief, Mr Crausby. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) on securing this debate. She has demonstrated what an effective parliamentarian she is—and why she should stay in this House.

I will not repeat the description of the pollution in London, other than to say that, apart from Oxford Street, areas such as Putney High Street and Brixton Road are also heavily congested and have serious air pollution.

I want to mention schools. It is deeply worrying that, with life expectancy reduced by 11 years, so many London school kids are suffering with air pollution because so many parents are choosing to drive to school. London needs a new initiative, led by the Mayor, to encourage parents to walk to school. That will help to address both the issue of obesity and the fact that so many engines outside school gates in the morning and at the end of the school day are causing real problems for young people's lungs. The British Lung Foundation has had much to say on that.

It is also important to do something about cycling. Clearly, the funding must be increased, because 1% of the TfL budget is not sufficient. There are real problems relating to cycling in suburban areas, and we need to speed up cycling super-highways. Currently, London's 40% ethnic minority population is not choosing to cycle. Cycling proficiency training must come back into schools—it has largely disappeared because the money has left local government—because unless we increase cycling, we will not make any progress on air pollution.

The Mayor's electric car hire scheme has been a spectacular failure. Over the coming year, he should learn from places such as Paris, but I hope that the next Mayor—who, of course, I hope will be me—will do something about accelerating electric car use in the city.

Crossrail 2 will be hugely important in expanding our tube network and ensuring that people stay on the public underground system. As chair of the all-party group on Crossrail 2, I reiterate that it is important that as Crossrail 1 finishes, we move forward with Crossrail 2 in this city and over the next horizon.

Air pollution is chronically bad, and more needs to be done. Much has been said about airport expansion in this debate; I will add nothing—let us see what happens next week—except that, in the end, most pollution is down to diesel. The next Mayor must address that in the congestion zone as well.

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): I will now call the Front-Bench spokesmen. I would be grateful if they could divide the time evenly, and leave time for the Minister. Under the new proceedings, I can call the mover of the motion to speak again at the end of the debate.

10.26 am

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I speak on behalf of the third party. Perhaps I should make it clear at the start that the SNP is unlikely to have a

candidate in next year's mayoral race. Nevertheless, we are extremely pleased to be here today to support our colleagues in London in raising awareness of this important issue. Members can consider this one small step towards building the progressive alliance of which we have talked. We hope to be part of that alliance, and that it will go across party lines.

I used to be a resident of this city and have some affection for it. I lived here for 11 years, although that was some 20 years ago. Coming back to London, it is noticeable how much the city has improved in many ways—how much cleaner it appears to be on the outside and how things seem to be better organised—but today we are discussing the things that we cannot see. I have a personal interest in this debate, because five years ago I was diagnosed with asthma. Like other sufferers, I know more than the average person that just because we cannot see something, it does not mean that it is not there, doing us harm.

I found nothing to disagree with in the comments of right hon. and hon. Members. I very much support their ambition in trying to raise the profile of this issue. I would, though, like to make a couple of additional points. The first applies not only in London but throughout the United Kingdom, and particularly in Scotland: we value very much the quality of our air and our reputation for having clean air. That is true not only for the residents of cities, but for the people who intend to visit. If a place starts to get a reputation for having dirty air and being a polluted environment, that reputational damage will have a long-term effect on whether people will want to visit and spend time in our towns and cities.

This afternoon, we will start the debate on whether we should remain part of the European Union. If ever there was a response to the question, "What has the European Union ever done for us?", I think it would be: "It has set controls and limits relating to air quality, with which we have to comply." It is a simple fact that the pollutants in our air do not respect the administrative boundaries of cities or countries. Only by acting together and setting strict controls on emissions and pollution can we protect our citizens across such boundaries.

I am pleased say that my colleagues in the Scottish Government and Scottish local authorities have been working hard to try to improve the situation where we live. For the purposes of compliance, the UK is divided into 43 areas, of which 16 are not in compliance at the moment, though they were meant to be by this year. Of those, I am pleased that only one is in Scotland, the Glasgow urban area, and we anticipate that it will be in compliance by 2017, once the current road has been upgraded to motorway status and completes the M8.

We are doing our bit in Scotland, and we want to support colleagues here in doing what they can to raise awareness. We implore the Government to take action to improve the situation in London. Our support can be relied on for that.

10.30 am

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) on initiating this timely debate. She has laid down a serious challenge to both the Mayor of London and the Government.

Of course, the Mayor now has a dual role, as he is also the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson). I hope that his new responsibilities lead him to question seriously the adequacy of some of the measures that he has proposed as Mayor to tackle air pollution in this great city. In his constituency, the children at Pinkwell and Cherry Lane primary schools face carcinogenic air pollution that is twice the annual legal limit. We know that children attending primary schools within 150 metres of a main road grow up with lung capacity impaired by up to a third, and that they have an increased risk of asthma and heart disease. Indeed, along with others this afternoon, I will host an event with the healthy air campaign precisely to highlight those risks and to encourage hon. Members to press for real and urgent change.

The impact of air pollution on London's children is shocking. We know from Public Health England that London's toxic air has already caused more than 1,300 premature deaths this year. That the poorest children are worst affected, with those least able to defend themselves the most exposed to that danger, should make us feel particularly ashamed. In Britain, health inequality has become inseparable from environmental inequality, and it is quite simply the poor who live in the most polluted environments. No one would choose to live or go to school on a dangerously polluted road; those who do usually have no choice in the matter. They are forced to live with the risks, but the Government do have a choice and a responsibility.

The Government spent three years in court trying to wriggle out of the responsibility placed on them by annex 15B to article 23(1) of the air quality directive. They argued that the directive put no requirement on them to prepare a plan to improve the situation, but the judgment was absolutely precise about the seriousness of the breach. The ruling was:

"The new government should be left in no doubt as to the need for immediate action, which is achieved by an order that new plans must be delivered to the Commission not later than 31 December 2015."

The Government revealed in court that they did not believe they would solve the air pollution issue under their plans until 2030. Particulate matter alone is currently responsible for more than 3,000 deaths a year in London. When the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants is finally allowed to report its findings on nitrogen dioxide next month, it is predicted that that figure could double. A conservative estimate, therefore, suggests that by 2030 the Government's failure to tackle air pollution could lead to the death of more than 50,000 Londoners. In the words of the judgment, the Secretary of State has an

"obligation to act urgently under Article 23(1), in order to remedy a real and continuing danger to public health as soon as possible."

The Government and the Mayor have been playing a mutually convenient blame game. Last year, the Government wrote to every local authority in which air pollution exceeded legal limits to explain that ultimate legal responsibility for air pollution lay with local authorities and that any fines levied on the Government would be passed on to them. The Supreme Court judgment shows that that letter was wrong, so, in the light of that judgment, will the Government send a correction letter to all those local authorities?

[Barry Gardiner]

The Minister is not the only Member who needs to send out a correction letter. Over the weekend I received a briefing from the Mayor on air quality in London for today's debate. I am sorry that he could not be here—my office contacted his office earlier and found that he was attending an LBC pre-record, which clearly took priority. In bold type, the briefing says,

“London does not have the worst air pollution on the planet”.

We must all be relieved about that, though actually a presentation at the environmental research group at King's College London by Dr David Carslaw last year suggested otherwise. On Oxford Street, the annual mean nitrogen dioxide, measured continuously, was 135 micrograms per metre cubed, while World Health Organisation guidelines state that the average should not exceed 40. The WHO also states that levels should not exceed 200 micrograms per metre cubed for more than 18 hours in a single year, but Oxford Street recorded levels above that—not for 18 hours, but for 1502 hours in a single year.

While the Mayor's briefing is careful to talk only about average annual levels of nitrogen dioxide, Dr Carslaw is quite explicit when he refers to both the Oxford Street figures. He said:

“To my knowledge this”

level

“is the highest in the world in terms of both hourly and annual mean.”

Of course, as the Mayor has done so often, he has used distraction technique. This is not some perverse international contest of “my pollution is bigger than yours”. The real issue is that the average annual nitrogen dioxide level in London's busiest street was more than four times higher than the World Health Organisation says it should be. It exceeded the maximum permissible hourly spikes by more than 8,344%. That is the issue, and no amount of international comparison can render that acceptable.

The Mayor's briefing claims that since 2008, when he took office, there has been a 12% reduction in nitrogen dioxide. By my reckoning that still leaves us with a very long way to go. It also says that

“London is implementing the most ambitious package of measures of any world city”,

and it cites the ultra-low emission zone as proof of that. I am sorry that the Mayor does not consider either Berlin or Copenhagen to be a world city.

Low-emission zones have already dramatically reduced air pollution here, but the truth is that London's proposed ultra-low emission zone will not come into effect until 2020, and even then it will apply only in the central congestion charging zone and cover only 7% of the main roads in London that suffer from the worst nitrogen dioxide pollution. It will also exempt buses from meeting the highest Euro 6 standard and require only that all new taxis are zero-emission-capable by 2030. The other 93% of the most polluted roads in London will be outside the zone and may in fact experience greater pollution as more vehicles circumvent the zone and come into more residential and poorer parts of the city. If ever there was a perfect example for the phrase “Too little, too late”, that is surely it.

Andy Slaughter: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his speech; he is absolutely demolishing the Mayor's atrocious record on this issue. Perhaps he might like to think about standing for that position. We had heard two pitches for the post, but we have had three now.

Barry Gardiner: Enough, already. With cities across Europe adopting low and ultra-low emissions zones, there is a huge prize for manufacturers of low and zero-emission vehicles and there are significant risks for manufacturers that choose to bet against that trend. A responsible Government would reduce risk by adopting the highest standards here today. Will the Minister tell us what progress has been made to establish long-term goals and timescales for a step-by-step rebalancing of fuel duty and vehicle excise duty, consistent with reducing not just CO₂ emissions, but NO₂ and particulate matter impacts? Emissions-based pricing must be the way forward. To achieve that, I ask the Minister to initiate a strategic assessment of the relative benefits of the different options to encourage the manufacture and purchase of low and ultra-low emissions vehicles.

On one point the Mayor's document is certainly correct: the Government and the EU need to take complementary action and work with local authorities such as TfL to create a national framework of low emission zones, accelerate the uptake of zero-emissions vehicles and ensure that the Euro 6 standard does not reproduce the mistakes of Euro 4 and Euro 5, where the actual performance under road conditions is vastly inferior to that under test conditions.

The trouble for the Minister is that his Government's own reports show that, far from trying to improve the standards, they have been working to undermine those very EU air pollution regulations since 2012. On 1 April 2015—I assure you, Mr Causby, that I have not got the date wrong—the Government announced that, as part of their red tape challenge, they were working in Europe to undermine the enforcement of the air pollution regulation. The announcement said:

“Working in partnership with other Member States,”

the Government would

“negotiate to: reduce the risk of financial penalties from noncompliance, especially in relation to nitrogen dioxide provisions”.

Somewhat ironically the paragraph ends:

“whilst maintaining or improving health and ecosystem protection”.

The Minister is no fool. I respect him greatly. He must recognise that there is a causal relationship here. We cannot introduce amendments to the air quality directive that raise the permitted limits of nitrogen dioxide and improve public health at the same time. The Government need to wake up and take responsibility for this public health crisis. Extensive lobbying efforts by environmental and health organisations persuaded the Government and the European Commission to abandon efforts to dilute the clean air directive. The new Minister therefore has an opportunity to start with a clean slate. I ask him in his summing up to make a commitment today to dropping all objections to current European standards, except those made on the basis that the standards are too weak, and to work to increase air quality in Europe, the UK and London. If he will not make that commitment, will he answer one final question: what is the point of a Government who cannot and will not deliver clean air for their citizens?

10.42 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): It is a great privilege to have my first opportunity to speak in Westminster Hall on this subject. The attendance is fantastic. I begin by paying tribute to the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) for securing the debate. She expressed eloquently many of the reasons why this is such a deeply important issue. Part of the problem, as she said, is that we are considering an invisible substance—the air that we breathe. I also particularly welcome the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), who spoke powerfully about his experience as an asthmatic and made a great contribution by bringing brevity and common sense to our discussion.

Poor air quality is incredibly serious. As the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington pointed out, air is not simply an invisible substance, but is the very heart of our breathing and our organic matter. We are only just beginning to understand the processes that affect air quality. I have a lot of sympathy for her argument, but I want to pick up on two small points of fact, to frame the debate. First, it is not the case that when she was growing up the air quality in London was somehow better and that there is more childhood asthma because air quality has declined since she was young. There are significant challenges for air quality in London at present, but, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh East pointed out, it has improved significantly. Since 1970, PM levels have fallen by 70% and nitrogen dioxide levels by 62%. There is an enormous amount still to do, but we should not believe that it is somehow worse now than in the past. Things have been improving; we should work to improve them more quickly.

Although this may sound like a petty point, we do not spend £16 billion a year on health costs connected to this issue. That is the estimated figure for social costs. The amount spent on related healthcare costs is approximately 100th of that. It is not that there are not significant health costs—there are, possibly running into hundreds of millions of pounds—but when we are thinking about the implications for public policy, we do not want that figure of £16 billion in lights.

The hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington raised the issue of London's carbon footprint. That is linked to another major complexity, which was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field), namely the relationship between carbon emissions and nitrogen dioxide emissions from engines.

I turn now to the specific points made by the many Members who have spoken today. The hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) mentioned Horn Lane. It is a highly complex situation. A range of different industrial plants operates there, including a cement works and a waste transfer station, all increasing the amount of particulate matter in the atmosphere. Some mitigating measures could be introduced, ranging from walls to absorb particulate matter to cleaning the tyres of vehicles moving in and out of the stations in the area. Transport for London and Ealing Council have been looking at some technical issues, including using bus lanes to move road-cleaning vehicles more readily, and the Government have offered support to the council

if it is interested in applying for road-cleaning vehicles. It is a serious issue, but we have a clear idea of possible mitigating measures. I encourage the hon. Lady to work with me to put pressure on the council to bring those measures in.

Dr Huq: Is not part of the problem that local authorities are punished by EU fines if they do not meet the targets, but do not have the power to do anything? Our manifesto promised to put £30 billion of devolved spending behind the issue. That is not happening now. Does the Minister have any plans for anything like it?

Rory Stewart: Specifically on Horn Lane, I am afraid that I disagree slightly with the hon. Lady. Without wishing to be too controversial, I think that the local authority could have done a little more. For example, Government grants were available for road-sweeping equipment—I personally would have liked the council to apply for that money—and there could have been more imagination and flexibility on using bus lanes for road-sweeping equipment. However, I am happy to take the matter up in more detail with her. Similarly, I would be delighted to meet the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and his constituents to talk through the specific issues related to plants in his constituency.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster gave a fantastic speech that put London in context: it was the first city of the world in the 19th century, the first city to industrialise and the first post-industrial city. Colleagues in the Department for Transport will be interested in his specific proposals about taxis, and I am happy to talk to him about those. Speed bumps are also important and worth looking at. I join him in paying tribute to his constituent who has led the campaign by Clean Air in London.

The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) gave striking statistics about awareness in schools and put forward some good ideas about how we can work towards better communication on the issue. He asked whether total ambient emissions are reflected in permits. My understanding from my officials is that they are. If he or his constituents have discovered a specific case in which they are not, he may by all means come back to me so that we can follow that up, but the guidance should address total ambient emissions.

Tom Brake: My understanding is that when the Environment Agency looks at extra emissions from a particular plant it can do so only against the background level and cannot take into account the totality of emissions from a number of plants in an area, which might exceed permitted levels of pollution.

Rory Stewart: I am happy to follow that up in more detail. It is possible there is a distinction here between the responsibilities of the Environment Agency, which focuses on industrial plants, and those of DEFRA, which focuses on air quality in general.

My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) raised a number of important issues. I liked his striking example of two extra tube trains a week representing the population growth in London. He emphasised the need to increase the use of the river, although there are issues around pollutants even from river-borne vehicles, which account for a substantial percentage of nitrogen dioxide emissions in London.

[Rory Stewart]

Electric cars must be central, because if there is a single technology that can address many of these issues—air pollutants, public health and carbon emissions—it is them. The Government have introduced a number of quite striking measures, ranging from working with Formula E, to providing incentives to electric car manufacturers to locate in the west midlands and looking at charging points, including motorway charging points, for electric vehicles. I agree that electric vehicles are the most exciting area, and it would be fantastic to work with my hon. Friend to push us harder and to challenge us to do more.

That brings us to the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), who mentioned the Mogden sewage works and, in particular, the quantity and covering of the storm tanks. Again, I would be delighted to take up the request to meet her and her constituents. If we are lucky enough to get the Thames tideway tunnel through, it may be able to deal with some of those factors—

Ruth Cadbury *indicated dissent.*

Rory Stewart: The hon. Lady reckons it will not, so I am happy to give way to her.

Ruth Cadbury: The Mogden sewage works are upstream of the proposed tunnel, so they are not included in the proposals, which will, therefore, have no impact. At current capacity, Mogden will still be discharging dilute sewage into the Thames.

Rory Stewart: I clearly have a lot to learn from the hon. Lady about Mogden sewage works, and I look forward to having a detailed conversation about them with officials.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd) mentioned HGV movements. Again, we had a striking statistic. He estimates that HGV movements will happen every 25 seconds under the HS2 proposals. He has a great sense of what we should do, literally, about HS2—he used the phrase “bury HS2”. Again, I am happy to look at the issues in detail.

That illustrates the incredible number of challenges around pollutants and air pollution in London. As the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington pointed out, we would, in many ways, wish to support such proposals. HS2 could have considerable environmental benefits if it can move people out of vehicles. At the same time, however, it could create immense air pollution in London during its construction.

The right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) made a wonderful broadcast for his campaign to be Mayor. He said something that it is difficult to disagree with, and which I would very much like to get behind: we want to encourage parents and children to walk, rather than drive, to school. Of course, doing that is easier said than done, but it would address issues around obesity and public health. Also, those idling engines outside schools emit nitrogen dioxide at an extraordinary intensity, and it would be sensible to address that.

Investment in cycling also seems sensible. TfL has produced some impressive and startling statistics on the increase over the last five years in the number of people cycling, but I am sure the right hon. Gentleman is correct that more can be done.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that sustained investment in public transport is essential to deal with not only congestion, but air quality in London? I am thinking of strategic river crossings in east London, where, if we have investment in extra roads, which is often seen by some as a panacea for congestion and poor air quality, we will also need, at a minimum, to have sustained investment in public transport so that we can continue the modal shift from private vehicles to public transport.

Rory Stewart: That is absolutely right. These are issues of incredibly complex modelling. As the hon. Gentleman implies, the construction of a new bridge raises a series of new issues. Investment in public transport is essential, and I think TfL takes that on board.

The Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), made a number of striking arguments. I do not want to get too much into the details of where Oxford Street stands in international rankings. As he said, there are a number of issues about hourly measurements and mean average estimates. As somebody who lived in Kabul, in Afghanistan, for three and a half years, I find it difficult to believe that the levels of particulate matter in Oxford Street are higher than those we experienced there. As he said, the more legitimate comparison is with developed European cities, and we need to make sure that London is moving in the right direction.

The issues of fuel duty, nitrogen dioxide and emission-based pricing in general are important. The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to pre-empt the Treasury or to start disrupting markets by talking about such fiscal instruments, but he is right that they are, logically, one thing a responsible Government should investigate in looking at a panoply of responses to emissions.

European standards were mentioned by the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Edinburgh East. It is, of course, correct that we owe Europe a debt of gratitude in many ways for holding to account not only us, but 17 European countries that are in breach of their nitrogen dioxide thresholds.

We should recognise that the problem of pollution has faced London since the beginning of the 19th century. In many ways, the issues we face today are the end of nearly 200 years of struggling with pollution. As early as 1813, particles of carbon, dust and even faecal matter were so thick in the streets of London that it was not possible to see across the street. As my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park said, the smog in December 1952 managed to kill 4,000 people in just four days. That is where we are coming from in London.

Since then, we have severely restricted coal-burning in central London and introduced catalytic converters in vehicles. We have reduced sulphur dioxide emissions by 88%, we have reduced particulate matter by 70% and we have reduced nitrogen dioxide by 62% since 1970. Particulate matter is now below the EU-defined threshold. However, there is, as right hon. and hon. Members said, much more to be done.

Andy Slaughter: The Minister is giving a very thorough answer to all our points, but many Members raised the issue of Heathrow. Will he address it directly? What

concerns do the Government have about air pollution at Heathrow, particularly in the light of its possible expansion?

Rory Stewart: The responsibility of DEFRA—I am slightly evading the issue, because I am not going to take a grand stance on Heathrow—is indeed to police air quality and air pollution in London. We will continue to exercise our responsibilities—says he, evading the issue.

I was particularly struck by the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park focused on non-road mobile machinery and the potential there to reduce emissions by up to 40%. It is worth looking at that. There is also the issue of domestic and industrial boilers. We have focused a lot on vehicle movements, but there is potential in other areas.

I agree with the hon. Member for Brent North that Europe has done a great deal, but I am disappointed that, three weeks ago, we were not able to get other European member states to address the fact that the Euro 6 engines are not performing outside a laboratory. If we could get agreement on that, it would make a huge difference.

Although some progress has been made, each new step is becoming more and more difficult. We are not dealing simply with one issue, such as diesel cars, but with a dozen different issues, all of which contribute almost equally to diesel emissions.

Tom Brake: I hope I did not miss this, and I hope the Minister is not being evasive, but when will the Government publish their air quality strategy?

Rory Stewart: I do not have an answer for the right hon. Gentleman, but I am happy to sit down and talk through the details. We are certainly bringing together an air quality strategy, but I do not have a date for him.

To conclude, there are dozens of measures we need to take. This is a highly complex issue. However, I am very open to ideas from anybody in the room on how we can make improvements on this extraordinarily important matter. We face enormous challenges of scientific prediction. As London addresses these issues, we should be certain to share best practice with other countries—

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Dyfed Powys Police Helicopter

11 am

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of the Dyfed Powys police helicopter.

I welcome the Minister to his place and congratulate him on his appointment following the general election.

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): To give an opportunity for the Chamber to clear, so that I can hear what the hon. Gentleman is saying, I should say that I have been reappointed rather than appointed. I was in this role before the election. *[Interruption.]*

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. Will hon. Members leave the Chamber quietly, please?

Jonathan Edwards: Thank you, Mr Crausby.

The helicopter is a prominent and vital asset for policing the communities of Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion and Powys. That can, of course, be said about any police helicopter, but Dyfed Powys is a special place—geographically, it has the largest police force in Wales and England. The landscape is dominated by some of the most stunning mountainous terrain in these isles. Dyfed Powys covers about half of Wales and serves a population of about half a million. It has unique policing challenges, and the helicopter is a vital tool in policing operations. It is used for surveillance, vehicle pursuits, gathering intelligence and evidence, and aerial photography. It is also used to search for missing people, suspects and vehicles. It transports specialist teams around the police force area and is used for casualty evacuation.

The police helicopter has been prominent in our communities for many years. Indeed, Dyfed Powys was the first place in the UK to operate a police helicopter. The reason for my debate today is that, under current plans from the National Police Air Service, our dedicated helicopter will be lost from 1 January next year and our state-of-the-art helicopter base, which recently opened at a cost of millions of pounds, will be closed. As the Minister will be aware, NPAS is the result of the Police (Collaboration: Specified Function) Order 2012, which provides for police air support in England and Wales forces to be exercised in accordance with a single police collaboration agreement. A crucial point is that the order is a Wales and England measure, as policing is devolved in Scotland and Northern Ireland. If policing were devolved in Wales, as my party advocates, it is highly unlikely that we would be having this argument.

The order does not dictate the number of aircraft or bases to be used by the new NPAS service, and that cuts to the fundamental reason for today's debate. In 2010, 31 helicopters were used in policing operations around Wales and England, from 29 bases. In 2011, 30 helicopters were operating from 28 bases. After consultation with police authorities and chief constables, NPAS's business plan was amended to recommend a delivery model of 23 aircraft, plus three spare, from 23 bases. In November 2014, NPAS announced that it would operate 25 aircraft from 22 bases. Crucially, in its prepared communication

[Jonathan Edwards]

briefing last November—which I am not completely sure was meant for the public to see—NPAS said that its 22-base model was the right one to deliver the operational capability needed for the public. Just three months on, it announced that it would be operating 19 helicopters and four fixed-wing aircraft from just 15 bases.

The creation of NPAS and the model that it intends to introduce next year will mean the number of active bases in Wales and England being halved, and the number of helicopters being reduced by almost 40%. I would particularly welcome the Minister's comments on the merits of the current 15-base model, given that NPAS itself previously said that a 22-base model was the right one for the public.

Maps of proposed future coverage accompanied the recent NPAS announcement about reducing the number of bases. They show great swathes of the Dyfed Powys force area that will be reachable only after a minimum of 30 minutes' travel time from bases at St Athan or Bristol. It does not take a detective to work out that extended travel times will significantly diminish safety and the service available to my constituents.

The proposal flies in the face of one of NPAS's main objectives: to reach 97% of the population within 20 minutes. To add insult to injury, NPAS proposes one fixed-wing aircraft to serve the whole of Wales in addition to the west midlands and the south-west of England. That is completely at odds with the findings of the fixed-wing aircraft trial that took place in Dyfed Powys in May 2012, which concluded that such an aircraft had few positive features when operating in the Dyfed Powys terrain, and that it spent 80% of its time manoeuvring and only 20% locating lost or injured individuals. The main drawback cited was its inability to land and hover.

The crew at the Pembrey base is not made up just of pilots. It is also made up of trained police officers who often, metaphorically speaking, swap their aviation hats for their police hats when they land the helicopter, to help catch criminals, find lost persons or assist the injured. Such tasks would be impossible without our dedicated service for the force. The various maps produced by NPAS imply that a fixed-wing aircraft will be based in Llandeilo in my constituency; on that basis, estimates are made of average flying times to the rest of Wales. What the maps do not show is that that fixed-wing aircraft will be based in the midlands. For the maps to be accurate, the aircraft would have to be circling Llandeilo constantly; it would have to be refuelled in mid-air when required, before being dispatched, which is plainly ridiculous. The arguments being put forward by NPAS to justify its new enhanced coverage are purely hypothetical and deeply misleading.

The aim of NPAS, of course, is to centralise police air support services to cover the whole of Wales and England. Police forces that sign up to NPAS hand over their assets for the promise of increased coverage and reduced costs, as the Minister will no doubt argue. Unfortunately, that has not been the case. NPAS has been tasked with finding efficiency savings of 37%—23% in 2012 and now a further 14%. It is simply unable to deliver what it promised to individual police forces when they signed up. The assurance of a more efficient and effective service with increased coverage is undeliverable. Indeed, the opposite is happening. A simple internet search will

tell the Minister of the concerns that police commissioners and the public throughout Wales and England are raising about the lack of cover that their forces have been witnessing since joining NPAS.

We are told in Dyfed Powys that we will enjoy 24-hour coverage under NPAS, in contrast to the present 12 hours a day. I understand that on only 13 occasions has a helicopter been needed in Dyfed Powys outside the usual operating times over the past four years. That averages just three times a year, with support always available from neighbouring forces. That is a voluntary air support service, so to speak. There is minimal demand for a 24-hour service in Dyfed Powys and the seemingly undeliverable promise of such coverage cannot make up for the loss of our local dedicated service.

The deal between NPAS and Dyfed Powys police announced by our police commissioner in November set out how Dyfed Powys police would pay about £890,000 a year to join NPAS, instead of paying about £1.1 million a year to run and maintain our own dedicated helicopter. The intention to restructure a service to save money is honourable, but it cannot happen if that service is diminished.

Maps produced by aircraft pilots who actually operate police helicopters suggest that air support for priority calls in my area of Dyfed Powys would be completely non-existent within a 20-minute timescale. Not only is that at odds with what NPAS promises, but there is a strong argument to suggest that instead of Dyfed Powys saving about £200,000 by joining NPAS, it will pay about £900,000 a year for little or no emergency coverage. That is without considering the state-of-the-art Pembrey helicopter base opened only a few years ago, at a cost of £1.2 million to the public purse, with a planning condition permitting its sole use as a police helicopter base. Its closure would be a colossal waste of public money.

The most notable and emotive recent uses of our police helicopter were the searches for little April Jones, who was abducted from outside her Machynlleth home, and for young Cameron Comey, who fell in the River Towy in Carmarthen three months ago and is, tragically, still missing. Additionally, although the air ambulance had been called out to Monmouth, our police helicopter was first on the scene at Cilyrychen quarry, Llandybie, to rescue Luke Somerfield and transport him to Morriston Hospital. That is without mentioning the countless times when the helicopter has been called out in recent weeks to assist in surveillance, or its arrival first on the scene to assist a little girl who was sinking in quicksand at Llansteffan beach. It is impossible for me to list all the incidents in which the Dyfed Powys police helicopter has been involved, but I can say that the prompt response of our local helicopter crew gives innocent young children a fighting chance, and criminals fewer chances.

The police and crime commissioner for Dyfed Powys has been heavily involved in NPAS, and has served as the police commissioner representative for the south-west region on the NPAS strategic board. A freedom of information request was made to obtain the minutes of those meetings. Those minutes left many people in Dyfed Powys saddened, as they showed that their local police commissioner has sat on his hands and is allowing the Pembrey base to close.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. I represent Ceredigion, which is part of the 4,188 miles covered by

that invaluable service. The hon. Gentleman spoke of his disappointment and puzzlement, but does he share my bewilderment at the fact that in November we were given clear, unequivocal assurances that the service would remain intact, yet several months later it is in doubt again? That undermines the process and, as the hon. Gentleman said, sadly brings into question the commitment of our police commissioner.

Jonathan Edwards: I will get to that point later in my speech. As a Member of Parliament representing Ceredigion, the hon. Gentleman knows that the police helicopter from Pembrey can get to his constituency within 20 minutes. Based on NPAS's current models, it is unlikely that when the service is closed the helicopter will be able to get to Ceredigion in that time. He is right to raise that important point.

Despite the announcement in November that Dyfed Powys would join NPAS and would retain our helicopter and base, the minutes state that when the new proposals were presented the commissioner, Mr Christopher Salmon was "reluctant to oppose" the removal of our helicopter from service. The commissioner wrote in one of my local newspapers last week that he was powerless to stop the loss of our helicopter. His words were a far cry from his pledges to the electorate. His second election pledge in 2012, which was still live on his website this morning, states that he will

"Fight to save Dyfed Powys police helicopter so police can reach all areas".

Mr Salmon did not pledge to save general helicopter coverage. He did not say he will get the best deal for the area, as he appears to be saying now in the press. He said he will fight to save the Dyfed Powys helicopter.

The commissioner has broken his promise to the people with his reluctance to oppose the NPAS model, as the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) said. I would like to take this opportunity to put on the record my deep disappointment in Mr Salmon because of his abject failure and apparent unwillingness to stand up for the best interests of the residents of Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion and Powys. If the commissioner feels powerless, perhaps it is time for him to leave his job.

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene on this hugely important issue for my constituency. Does he agree that the key issue is to have an efficient helicopter service? We know how important that is. Parts of my constituency are almost five hours away from Pembrey by road, and perhaps an hour and a half away from Hawarden. When looking at the whole service, we need an efficient helicopter service that serves the whole of Dyfed Powys and is not confined to an administrative boundary. There are a lot of other issues, but I hope the hon. Gentleman will address that fundamental principle.

Jonathan Edwards: It is precisely because of efficiency that I am raising this issue. If I thought the NPAS proposals would lead to enhanced coverage for my constituents, I would happily support them. The reality is that the NPAS proposals will lead to a second-rate service, compared with the dedicated helicopter service we have at the moment.

Mr Mark Williams: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that the concerns he is expressing, with which many of us want to be associated, are also those of Dyfed Powys police authority, which is concerned that there will be a diminished service.

Jonathan Edwards: That is a valid point, which is why the campaign being run in west Wales by the *Carmarthen Journal*, the *South Wales Guardian*, the *Llanelli Star* and many other local papers is gaining such traction in our local communities.

The Minister and the Home Secretary would be well advised to read the minutes of the NPAS strategic board meeting of 19 February and satisfy themselves that the decision to operate a 15-base model is not open to judicial review. One chief constable on the board states that it was

"virtually impossible to have effective consultations with Forces in a region 4 days before a meeting".

The chief constable stated that it was

"highly problematic to accept an operating model without an understanding of the costs and savings distribution."

The minutes state that the approved 15-base model

"had not gone to National Chiefs Counsel."

Even the Dyfed Powys police commissioner, although reluctant to oppose the new model, acknowledged that the agreement he had previously signed with NPAS had changed without his knowing. On the face of it, it seems that the process followed to approve the 15-base model is on extremely shaky ground.

The weekend before Dissolution, the *Teesside Gazette* reported that the Home Secretary had ordered a review of the NPAS decision to remove a police helicopter from Teesside and relocate it to Newcastle. Having seen the story, I wrote to the Home Secretary on the morning of Dissolution outlining the strong case for a review of the decision to close the Pembrey base.

One of my first letters in this Parliament was to the Home Secretary to request a meeting to discuss this issue in more detail, and once again to press the urgent need for her intervention in this matter. I am disappointed that I have not received a response to the first letter. I have received a response from the Minister to my second letter, which arrived in my constituency office yesterday, but I am disappointed that the Minister will not meet to discuss this issue.

The residents of Dyfed Powys have been failed by their police commissioner and ill-served by NPAS. If the Home Secretary is not prepared to order a review, as she has done in the north of England, it will be seen, quite rightly, as if the residents of mid and west Wales are being ignored by the Government. To satisfy my constituents, the Minister must say that the Home Office will initiate a review of the NPAS proposals for Wales, and Dyfed Powys in particular.

The Dyfed Powys police helicopter has undertaken incredible work in our community and has been at the centre of operations—some of them heartbreaking—across the force area. The reduced NPAS model appears to be focused on more densely populated areas; as far as it is concerned, it seems, the rural communities of mid and west of my country look deserted. Going ahead with the current plans would send a strong message to Wales that our communities are an afterthought. If one police force needs a dedicated helicopter service, it is the one

[Jonathan Edwards]

that serves the largest and most rural population in Wales and England. The value of our dedicated helicopter service is immeasurable.

In closing, I would like to quote from a piece by a former police officer and best-selling author, Mike Pannett, who said of NPAS:

“Cutting police helicopters is a charter for criminals and real worry for police on the ground that search for vulnerable missing persons on a daily basis. Criminals will act with impunity outside of the helicopter coverage and escape into the night and the lives of the missing and vulnerable will be lost where every minute counts.”

I implore the Minister and Home Secretary to intervene and ensure that Dyfed Powys maintains its base at Pembrey. Diolch yn fawr iawn.

11.17 am

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): I am very grateful indeed to the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) for allowing me to make a short contribution. I congratulate him on securing a debate of huge importance. This is a long-standing issue, and he went through the record of the changes. I was closely involved in a debate about fixed-wing aircraft, which are entirely unsuitable for rural areas such as the whole of rural Wales—not just Dyfed Powys.

I share the hon. Gentleman’s concern, because helicopters are important not only for police and security work but for the health service. Wales Air Ambulance has become a crucial part of service delivery in rural Wales. This issue is therefore really important, and I am looking forward to the Minister’s response.

As I said in an intervention—I did not know whether I would get the chance to speak—Dyfed Powys is a huge area. For example, it would take almost five hours to get from Pembrey to Llangynog, a village I represent, if one remained within the speed limit, and from Hawarden it would take perhaps an hour and a half. Clearly, it is not the same in every part of Dyfed Powys. I hope that the Minister will reassure me that any new system will serve the whole of Dyfed Powys. I am concerned that the helicopter service is limited to a geographical area defined by an administrative boundary, not by the ease with which the helicopter service can deliver services to the people that need them.

There are advantages to the new system. It will be a 24-hour service, and it will be cheaper. One cannot discount the importance of cheapness for the police service. If one is spending money on a helicopter service, there is clearly less money to spend on the visible presence of policemen on the beat, which we all want to see. This is therefore not a straightforward issue.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate on behalf of everybody who represents Dyfed Powys, and everybody who lives in the south and the north of that huge area. We all know that the issue is important, and we are all looking forward to the Minister’s response.

11.19 am

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby, in my first debate after being reconfirmed as Minister with responsibility for

the police—and now for crime, too, including organised crime. I am at both the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice—buy one, get one free, apparently. On a serious note, it works very well being the Minister both for the police and criminal justice.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) on securing this debate. If I were the MP for his constituency, I would probably call for a debate on this subject as well; I hope he understands exactly where I am coming from on that point. However, I am not an expert or a police officer—I do not believe there is one in this Chamber, unlike in the old days, when there would have been one—so I take my advice from the frontline.

I will try to address some of the issues raised, but if hon. Members do not mind, I will not address the personal attacks on the police and crime commissioner. I do not think they were appropriate for this Chamber, when we are trying to work together. The PCC is duly elected; when the next elections come, perhaps the party political stuff will start—who knows? At the moment, however, I am sure that he is trying to do the best job he can for the people he represents, as we all are in this Chamber.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): I thank the Minister for allowing me to intervene. As someone who represents a very rural constituency in the Dyfed Powys area, I thank the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) for securing the debate, because it is absolutely vital that we discuss this issue.

Will the Minister comment on just how hard our police and crime commissioner has worked to get benefits out of this system? I understand that the helicopter broke down—the gearbox had to be replaced—and was off-air for three weeks, during which we did not have any cover in Dyfed Powys. Under this new system, we would have cover constantly. The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr spoke of criminals escaping into the night, but said that we would have 24-hour cover under the new system, whereas there had been just 12-hour cover, so if anything, we will have a better system and larger coverage.

Mike Penning: My hon. Friend has been reading my speech—or perhaps he wrote it for me. He is absolutely right. As my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies) said in his intervention and short speech, we need to get away from the constabulary boundaries—the old, artificial boundaries—as NPAS has done. The truth is that the helicopter was offline extensively; it was not available 24 hours a day. There will be facilities now; there will be more cover. The North Wales, Birmingham, South Wales and Avon and Somerset forces will all be providing cover, so with this new scheme, we have broken away from saying, “This is ours. You can’t have it, and if you do, it’s going to cost you a small fortune.” The police have bought into that, and it is a really important thing to have done.

There are obvious and understandable concerns. I remember when I did a review of the coastguard and everybody said to me, “This is a very dangerous situation”, but just because we had things in a certain way, it did not mean that that was right. The changes that we made to the coastguard stations have worked, not least—interestingly enough—because we get more cover at times than we had before.

It is not for a Police Minister or a Member of Parliament to tell the police their operational duties or how they should run their forces. We can only dream of having the sort of expertise that they have.

Jonathan Edwards: Will the Minister give way?

Mike Penning: I will give way, but I am conscious that because of the interventions that have been allowed, I will be cut off in a moment, and I want to try to respond to what has been said. Before I give way, I say to hon. Members that if I do not answer all the points raised, because of the time restrictions, I will write to them. I will meet the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr, too; there is some logic to doing that once we have had the debate, rather than before.

Jonathan Edwards: I thank the Minister for giving way and for agreeing to meet; that will be welcomed in the communities that I represent. If it is not the role of Government Ministers to intervene in strategic decisions by NPAS, why has the review been held of the situation in north-east England?

Mike Penning: I will be perfectly honest: I have not had an opportunity to look at that, but I will find out and write. I am not in exactly the same role as I was before—I was responsible for this, but I had no opportunity to look at it. The Minister in the previous debate, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), was brutally honest, and anybody who knows me knows that I am brutally honest as well. If I do not know the answer, I will get back to people. There will be a review. It was due to be 12 months from when the scheme started, and it started slightly late. I will check and write to the hon. and right hon. Members here today, but my assumption is that it should be 12 months from when it started, so if it started after Christmas, that is when it will be.

The key to this is flexibility. As the Police Minister, I know the value of helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. We should not undermine the value of fixed-wing aircraft. I was a Minister with responsibility for counter-terrorism in the Northern Ireland Office; I have to be slightly careful about how I say we use fixed-wing aircraft, but they are enormously useful in policing in particular parts of this great country of ours. We must not underestimate the fact that if there is 24-hour cover, there is the facility to fly anywhere. That is greater than having something on the tarmac at any base at any one time, but not being able to use it.

The police commissioners and chiefs bought into the scheme, and I think they were right to do so. I have looked at the plan that the hon. Gentleman alluded to, and I am comfortable with the situation. I have been judicially reviewed before, when I did not expect to be, but there we are. I am comfortable with the decision that has been made. I did not hear representations that caused me concern about that meeting. However, we never know what is in the post in the morning.

We have to be really careful and look at the big picture, which is what my role involves as Police Minister for England and Wales—for the greatest police forces, I believe, in the world. I say that day in, day out. They are let down occasionally by some individuals, but in general, we have by far the best police in the world. We police in

a way that most other countries would love to, but do not. I am particularly referring to the fact that we do not have universally armed police.

The role of NPAS is strategic throughout. When it looked at the issue, it was particularly considering how to cover the gaps, for example when there is engine failure, as has been alluded to, or when we did not have 24-hour cover. Of course, it also looked at the costs. It is obvious that we are responsible for spending taxpayers' money; we are sent here to monitor and be careful about how taxpayers' money is spent. The police forces looked at the issue and said, "There could be this model"; then they looked at it again and changed the model. I fully accept that there was a change of model, which is why there will be a review.

We must all sit back, and, as emotive and difficult as it is, say, "This is what will happen. Let's see how it works." This is what the police are comfortable with, in relation to the myriad different roles that the helicopters have. They do everything from rescues—even though other facilities can be called on in this part of the world and in other parts of the country—to tackling organised crime and, in particular, cannabis growing. Hon. Members may not yet have had an opportunity to see some of the videos available from heat-seeking cameras, which help us to know exactly who is doing what in properties where cannabis is being grown.

Helicopters are vital for these things, but we all know that they are very expensive, so we must ensure that we use them in the best way. If fixed-wing aircraft are suitable, they should be used. As I said, we must not underestimate the capabilities of fixed-wing aircraft. However, a helicopter moves at great speed. Many of the assumptions are based on the idea that the helicopter would not already be airborne, but it might be airborne; it could have been on an exercise, or be coming back from another operation. The speed at which it could get to different parts of the country would therefore be much quicker.

Clearly, we need to keep the matter under review, and NPAS has agreed to do that. I fully understand individuals' concerns, but if we want the police to do the job that we are asking them to do, we must listen to the police when they tell us what they need and then react to that. This has been an important debate. I am pleased that other hon. Members have had the opportunity to attend, if not participate. Half-hour debates are always difficult—so difficult that I have managed to gain myself an extra minute by congratulating those who have intervened.

The key is not boundaries; it is not individual constituencies or police authorities. Actually, the police authorities have gone; police and crime commissioners are in place; it was a slip of the tongue to refer to police authorities. It is a good thing that PCCs are in place. We await the elections next year, when I hope the turnout will be much better than it was before. They will coincide with local elections in many parts of the country. People will be able to see what the PCCs are doing for them in their communities. Hopefully, we can leave the politics out of that for a couple more years.

Question put and agreed to.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.

Vocational Qualifications Day

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered annual Vocational Qualifications Day.

It is a great pleasure to serve under—

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. It says here that I have to say something. The Question is that this House has considered annual Vocational Qualifications Day.

Neil Carmichael: We are operating a new system, so there is some confusion, not just on my part but obviously elsewhere.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. I got it wrong.

Neil Carmichael: It is great to have such a free and frank Chairman for this occasion. Thank you, Sir Roger. It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

Vocational Qualifications Day is critical, because it celebrates the success of young people. However, we need to do that not just annually but throughout the year, because it is that success that young people, our society and our economy need. It is worth emphasising that vocational qualifications are something that we should celebrate for everyone, at every level. That is one essential underpinning of the speech that I shall make and, I hope, the debate that we will have.

The second point, of course, is that we want to see equal value between vocational qualifications and academic qualifications. That is an essential part of the whole debate about our education system and the way in which our young people and everyone else, including those who go into new careers at the tail end of their working lives, want to experience it. This is the eighth year for Vocational Qualifications Day. That demonstrates continuity and success, and underlines our very strong feeling about the subject.

We have to promote several key messages. First, we need to raise the status of technical, practical and vocational learning. We have to ensure that people see that as a direction of travel for their careers, aspirations and hopes. Secondly, we need to demonstrate and celebrate the fact that everyone, of all ages, both genders and wherever they come from, can be part of the vocational qualifications world. Of course, we also want to ensure that there is a sense of parity between vocational studies and academic studies. Parity is important because that leads to esteem that is equal and benefits everyone.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman is right to say that parity is of the essence, but is not there a dark cloud over all of us in the vocational qualifications sphere, because there is no red line around further education spending? As well as the ambition and the high priority, we need the resources to invest in further education.

Neil Carmichael: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. Of course we need resources, but a good FE college is adaptable enough—flexible enough—to find those resources where appropriate. I shall go on to describe the experiences of my local college, Stroud College, which has now merged with Filton College to create an exciting range of opportunities for young people. That has lifted the reputation of FE in my community and provided fabulous opportunities for young people. The issue is not just ring-fencing, but freeing up colleges to benefit from the opportunities that they can find.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I am sorry that I cannot stay for the whole debate, but I am very pleased that the hon. Gentleman has raised this issue for discussion this afternoon. He is right to say that colleges, such as the excellent Trafford College in my constituency, can do imaginative things to draw in new resources and form new partnerships, but does not he agree that we should take this opportunity to press the Minister on the impact of the 24% funding cut suffered by further education?

Neil Carmichael: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. My hon. Friend the Minister will have heard it—indeed, he is writing a note about it. Obviously, all areas of education have an interest in fair funding and more funding, but there is a cake and we have to slice it up in a sensible way. We will be having that debate throughout this Parliament.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on initiating this very important debate, but let me press him further on funding. Although further education colleges are in the vanguard of providing vocational qualifications, they have had to suffer, in addition to the cut in February that my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) mentioned, an in-year cut of £450 million in post-16 funding and another £450 million cut in FE and higher education funding—in-year and retrospective—for which they have not planned, so however brilliant they are, these are challenging times for vocational education.

Neil Carmichael: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention and for appreciating my success in securing the debate. The key point is really the one that I made to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman). There are opportunities for FE colleges, working with business and working in their communities, to develop novel and interesting ideas about getting funding from sources other than the ones that hon. Members are talking about. That is what we should be thinking about, and I will articulate more thoughts about it as I progress through my speech.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I join in the expressions of support for the debate that my hon. Friend has secured. I hear what other hon. Members are saying with regard to funding in further education, but does my hon. Friend agree that the Government's commitment in this area is clear in the funding that has been put in for apprenticeships, and the success that the Government have had in increasing the numbers of people securing apprenticeships in our communities?

Neil Carmichael: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. She makes a very good point. We have already created 2.2 million apprenticeships in the last five years and we plan to create a further 3 million in the next five years, so that is 5.2 million. That is a fabulous contribution to the success of our economy, but above all are the achievements of the people who have those apprenticeships. That is absolutely right.

Mr Sheerman: Before the hon. Gentleman moves off apprenticeships, may I make this point? I will not intervene again, but it would be wrong if I did not say this. He and I and the rest of the usual suspects in this excellent debate all know one another and know the background, but may I just say this? Will the hon. Gentleman not let himself be sucked into what was the coalition Government's mantra? It was a fig leaf: "Look at what we're doing with apprenticeships." A lot of those apprenticeships were short term—for one year or less—and did not lead to a qualification. In contrast, FE delivers real skills and costs more money, but that is the real choice.

Neil Carmichael: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I am a firm proponent and supporter of the FE sector. I have been a governor of two or three colleges and have worked hard for the success of them all, so hon. Members can be sure that for anything that happens about the FE sector, I will be there, fighting its corner.

In short, what we are hoping to do and should be doing is celebrate achievement and promote aspiration through vocational qualifications. That is a good strapline for this debate. Our purpose is essentially to enable people to fulfil their lives. That is a very important thing in the structure of my political beliefs. I want people from all walks of life and all places to be able to fulfil their lives, and they will do that through satisfying and rewarding work, which in many ways comes from good vocational training and qualifications.

Our purpose is also to ensure that we can create an economy that is full of opportunity, responsive and modern, and I think that that is completely in line with vocational qualifications and the whole framework around them.

Thirdly, we must ensure that our economy has the skills that it needs—the appropriate pools of skills in all the big sectors. For instance, in engineering, we will still need 83,000 new engineers each year to keep the show on the road, and many of them will be individuals with vocational qualifications. However, this is not just about engineering; the world of construction is just as thirsty for these kinds of qualification. That is an essential part of this debate.

We need an education system that is adaptive, responsive and aware of the changing framework in the world of work and in society. Our working patterns have changed, our aspirations are greater and our attitude to work is different, because we expect to find more opportunities, to advance in our careers and to change careers from time to time. That difference is reflected in our society as well, because we want our families to be able to develop their careers.

Nic Dakin: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that careers advice is crucial, and that it is unfortunate that even today, 63% of young people, when asked,

can name A-levels but cannot name any vocational qualifications? That shows the distance that we need to travel to achieve the parity of esteem that we need if vocational qualifications are to deliver in the way in which he indicates, quite rightly, that we need them to.

Neil Carmichael: I will go on to address that issue, but I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has touched on it. As I will say in a few moments, we need to make it clear that it is not just A-levels that people need for future employment; there are a whole range of other possibilities.

We need to reinvigorate practical learning. We all know that that happened in the past and still happens now, but it must happen more. We need more specialist schools in the 14 to 18 sector to address the skills shortages—I have already alluded to some—that various sectors have identified. University technical colleges are part of that, but there are other ways of providing such schools, which have a relationship with the business world and the community, and which can run appropriate activities. We should be encouraging that.

I support a baccalaureate to recognise young people's achievements up to the age of 18. That is in line with what the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) has said. A baccalaureate is the right way to demonstrate that huge achievement has been notched up through vocational qualifications, and I want to put that firmly on the agenda.

We have to work hard at bringing together the world of education and the world of business, the professions and employment in general. That is important not only for education, but for employers and organisations that might extend some form of training. Unless the interface between those sectors and organisations is improved, opportunities will constantly be missed because schools produce one kind of output and businesses require another.

I have come across that problem in my constituency, and I tackled it by setting up the Festival of Manufacturing and Engineering. One in every four jobs in my constituency is connected to manufacturing and engineering, but when I first went around the schools, I did not get the sense that they understood that at all. I felt that they were quite unaware of the appetite for skills in electronics, in certain aspects of the automotive sector and in aviation, so I got schools and businesses to work together and we came up with the Festival of Manufacturing and Engineering. It is held every year, and it really brings young people into the world of work. It ensures that schools understand what kind of job opportunities are coming along, and it underlines the need for vocational qualifications. We should recognise the importance of bringing those sectors together.

We have talked a bit about further education, and I want to underline its importance. Right now, 3 million students are being equipped with valuable employment skills. That is a huge chunk of our young people, and it demonstrates the large footprint that the further education sector has in the matter. We need to recognise that the FE sector has a role to play. In my patch, as I have mentioned, a really good college has seen the strategic advantage of merging with another, and it is now able to produce a whole range of useful courses and training opportunities for young people and for adults who seek to change their direction of travel.

[Neil Carmichael]

In fact, the arrangement is now so successful that we are going to have a new training centre at a disused—but properly maintained—nuclear power station. It will be known as Berkeley Green, and it will provide training opportunities for people who are interested in renewable energy, nuclear energy, manufacturing and other activities. That huge investment has been made because the college understands that there is a huge requirement for such skills in my constituency. That has led to another investment in a university technical college to ensure that advanced manufacturing opportunities are being offered and places are being filled by people who are properly trained, as we would expect them to be, at a UTC.

Mr Sheerman: Which university?

Neil Carmichael: Gloucestershire. [Interruption.]

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. I know that the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) is a new Member, but he really ought to be aware of the procedure by now, if only for the benefit of the *Hansard* writer.

Neil Carmichael: The hon. Gentleman has made a lot of interventions, so I recognise—

Mr Sheerman: It was helpful, was it not?

Neil Carmichael: I think I will go on with my speech. The point that I am advancing is that we can really make sure that the FE sector plays its part. If it has strong leadership, which I hope is the case in all areas, that is exactly what will happen. We need to seek more of that.

One of the Government's key themes is increasing productivity, and we need to do so in this country because the productivity gap is too large. For example, the OECD suggests that the gap between us and Germany is 29%. That is huge, and we need to address it. There are two good reasons for doing so. First, it will alter the terms of trade and export. Secondly, it will enable our young people to get jobs that lead to higher salaries and more opportunity. That is the antidote to any cost of living crises that we might be concerned about. It seems to me fairly obvious that vocational qualifications can play a part in improving productivity, which is one reason why we must make sure that the opportunities are laid before us.

One other aspect of the productivity question is the role of local enterprise partnerships. It will be increasingly important for LEPs to have a clear understanding of their local labour market, where skills are needed and how they will be provided. LEPs should have an interface with FE colleges and providers of vocational qualifications to ensure that there is a better fit between requirement and provision. That would be of great benefit.

The hon. Member for Scunthorpe mentioned the difficulties caused by simply assuming that A-levels are the only things that matter, when there are lots of other options. I have already advanced the idea of a baccalaureate. Interestingly, nearly 46,000 students who have gone to universities in the past year have had a BTEC as part of their application. That further reinforces the point that vocational qualifications matter. Importantly, a large

number of those students have managed to persuade employers to pay a large part, if not all, of their student fees, either because they are doing a course that includes vocational training or qualifications, or because they have already done a course that was underpinned by vocational qualifications. The value to that student and to the potential employer is, therefore, all the greater. That underlines the importance of vocational qualifications.

Another organisation that wrote to me after I secured this debate was Sports Leaders UK, which highlighted the value of soft skills, especially in developing leadership capacity. In our modern economy, which is developing very nicely, leadership will be paramount for entrepreneurial activities and large numbers of growing small and medium-sized businesses. Leaders are needed within structures and organisations to implement changes or direct new operations. Such a vocational qualification route, supported by the sorts of soft skills that develop leadership capacity and other useful characteristics, adds to the value of the individual and their appreciation of the opportunities ahead and to that of the economy as a whole. That is yet another reason for celebrating vocational qualifications.

Vocational Qualifications Day is a good thing to celebrate. It is about empowering people to do the things that they want to do and making sure that they have aspirations that they can achieve. It is about ensuring that we have a mix across the spectrum of education and training that meets everyone's needs and all the opportunities that are available, and that reinforces the direction of travel, which must surely be towards the creation of a real economy that is modern, vibrant and able to support families, young people and older people who, ultimately, want work that is rewarding, satisfying and capable of giving them the capacity to fulfil their lives. Vocational study, training and qualifications can play a paramount role in delivering such an economy and society.

2.52 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak briefly in support of this debate. We should all seize the opportunity to celebrate vocational qualifications, and it is good that we are doing so today. Vocational qualifications play a huge part in the mix of qualifications that young people and older people gain throughout their lifelong learning and development. I was a co-ordinator for the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative back in the 1980s, and I know well that vocational education is a holy grail that politicians, academics, practitioners, the general public, parents, businesses and industry have been working towards for many years.

This is not a quick fix, but we must ensure that we take full advantage of this day that celebrates vocational qualifications. Further education colleges, along with other institutions, are the fulcrum of ensuring that things happen in that space. My local FE college, North Lindsey college, does an excellent job of bringing together the worlds of work and study, because it has a pivotal role in the local community. The college has lots of links with local companies and businesses, and students of all ages come to work and study at its various premises. Further education is a key partner, and it needs to be backed and supported. I illustrate that with a local example: the work that North Lindsey college is doing with Bradbury Security on Youth Engineering

Scunthorpe, a scheme that gives people who have been out of work for some time an opportunity to come back into it, doing work that would otherwise not exist. That work is not displacing jobs that would otherwise be taken by other people; these are new jobs. The scheme is onshoring jobs that Bradbury Security previously delivered from China. We need such work in order to reskill, develop capacity and secure and grow new business.

Mr Sheerman: My hon. Friend knows more about this sector than almost anyone else in the House of Commons, and I defer to his great knowledge and professional experience. This is not party political, but does he agree that, across successive Governments, further education has been the neglected area of UK education? Does he agree that FE has been neglected in terms of budget, focus and interest for many years?

Nic Dakin: My hon. Friend is right that further education has been a Cinderella area of education and training. One reason why I applaud vocational qualifications day is that it represents a real effort to rebalance what we are saying out there, and what is being said back to us. It is important that we seize that with both hands.

Careers advice is an area in which the Government need to up their game. We have a new careers and enterprise company in place, but it is not clear—the Minister might tell us that it is crystal clear—exactly what that company is doing, or how it will address the current deficit that means that whereas 63% of young people can name A-levels as a post-GCSE qualification, only 7% can name apprenticeships and only 26% are able to name national vocational qualifications as post-GCSE qualifications. Despite the plug that the hon. Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) gave for BTECs, only 19% of pupils were able to name them. When I was a college principal, I expanded the BTEC curriculum within my college because it acts as a very good bridge between the academic and the vocational. That applied learning is the sort of bridge we need in order for people to develop and move on to both vocational and academic pathways, as he described.

Kate Green: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the importance of careers advice in raising young people's awareness of alternative education and qualification routes, but will he say something about what can be done better to inform parents? Parents influence their children's choices, and many parents assume that a university education is the best and only suitable option for their children.

Nic Dakin: Absolutely. That is where there is a real danger in the fragmentation of schools, academies, UTCs and other provision. Sadly, the evidence is that in schools with their own sixth form, the quality of careers education, as regards raising awareness of the various pathways available, is lower than in schools that do not have their own sixth form. We must ensure that impartial advice is available to all young people, wherever they undertake their secondary education. That includes connecting better with parents and ensuring that they get information about the range of available pathways from the secondary school, which is the main vehicle through which they receive such information. Research commissioned by the Association of Colleges shows that

only 14% of 11 to 16-year-olds have heard of apprenticeships, which is just not good enough. That is evidence that, collectively, we all need to up our game.

The hon. Member for Stroud mentioned LEPs, which are well placed to maximise the value of careers education locally. They seem to be the other player in the mix, with a good connection with the worlds of work and education. LEPs are in an opportune place to bring those things together. Given that LEPs are becoming more mature as organisations, any opportunity to allow them to show more leadership with regards to careers information, advice and guidance would probably benefit young people in their area. I commend Humber local enterprise partnership for its work in promoting gold standard awards for quality in careers information, advice and guidance in the Humber area. It is an example of good practice.

The adult skills budget is disappointing. Vocational qualifications are not just for younger people; they are for older people, particularly because many people will lose one job and have to retrain for another. Given that people are living longer, that is likely to be a challenge for older as well as younger people. It is disappointing that the adult skills budget was cut by 24% in February 2015, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) said earlier. It is equally disappointing that just last week, further cuts were announced of £450 million to the non-schools budget and £450 million to the further and higher education part of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills budget.

Those cuts will cause challenges and pressures, particularly if there are retrospective funding cuts. As a former principal of a college, I know what it is like to set out my stall and put my plans in place. If schools are told halfway through the year that they need to save more money, it is difficult to do so, even for the best-run organisations. I have concerns about the impact on providing the better vocational education and better pathways that we all want for young people, as well as better understanding and support for older people retraining. We might accidentally achieve the opposite. I know that the Minister is passionately committed to ensuring that this works, and I am sure that he did not decide to decrease funding in certain areas to benefit the bit of the world that he champions. I am sure that he will take away from this debate the desire to bat even harder in private for the people whom we want to deliver well for us in public: that is, young people coming into the workplace, as well as older people needing retraining. For both those groups, vocational qualifications are a key underpinning of bridges and platforms into the future.

3.2 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, in this interesting debate. It is also a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin). He is absolutely right that awareness of further education qualifications is one of our key challenges, and I will discuss that in my contribution. However, the issue is not just about awareness; it is also about attitudes. They are part of the key to finding the solution.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) on securing this debate and for giving us all the opportunity to recognise the eighth annual

[Mrs Maria Miller]

national vocational qualification day, as well as the organisers of the day; it always takes a great deal of organisation to ensure that such days have longevity. My hon. Friend put his finger on it when he spoke about productivity. It is one of this Government's greatest challenges to ensure that Britain is fighting fit for an increasingly competitive global marketplace.

Today, in the main Chamber, right hon. and hon. Members might be discussing the future of the EU, but I am sure that many Members would agree with me that we should be looking beyond the EU to consider what trade deals we can do with other countries to secure the future of the United Kingdom. Productivity—ensuring that we are as competitive as any other country in the world—will certainly be one of our biggest challenges. Although the Government's investment in infrastructure such as high-street broadband, railways and roads are all important, the key to productivity is skills: ensuring that our workforce is as skilled as it can be and that every single citizen can contribute to the best of their ability, making us a successful nation. I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and I look forward to hearing other Members' contributions.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Lady is making a brilliant speech, but does she accept that this conundrum of the lack of productivity in our country, which we face across parties, is often related to management—a skill that we do not talk about enough? A recent report shows that there are a lot of highly skilled people in our nation, but they are poorly managed. Does she agree?

Mrs Miller: The hon. Gentleman makes his own point. I am not sure. If we look at the analysis of productivity, we see that among the most important factors are transport systems. As a result of woeful investment in recent decades, this Government are running to catch up with some of the problems that we have inherited. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman makes an important point, but we should not forget that productivity is not just about skills; it is about the ability to export and to move goods around a country. I congratulate the Government on how much support they are giving transport systems, some of which are woefully unable to relieve congestion. We should not forget that productivity is not simply a UK problem but a problem of all mature markets, so we should not beat ourselves up too much.

Before moving to my own comments, I want to respond to what my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud said about the festival of manufacturing and engineering in his constituency—an idea that I think all of us will want to emulate. What a great way to highlight to young people the job opportunities available in their community and the importance of vocational qualifications to securing such jobs! It is a fascinating idea that I am sure we will all want to consider in more detail.

My constituency understands further education, primarily as a result of incredibly strong leadership in FE at Basingstoke College of Technology. I have had the privilege of introducing Anthony Bravo, the principal of that college, to my hon. Friend the Minister, who was extremely generous with his time, in order to discuss some of our ideas for FE, particularly apprenticeships

in Basingstoke. Business responds well to such strong leadership. We have engaged businesses in Basingstoke in further education and in valuing its role, particularly apprenticeships, in a way that has impressed me. I also echo the point about the role of local enterprise partnerships in providing such leadership. We in my constituency are fortunate to have one of the best LEPs in the country: the M3 LEP, which has implemented a special management position to consider apprenticeships and how we can maximise them in our area, as they are critical to business growth.

I will make three short observations on the future of vocational education and how we can make it even more vibrant, and I will be interested to hear the Minister's response. The first was mentioned by the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) in her intervention earlier. It is important to support a positive attitude to vocational qualifications and ensure that schools and parents, as has been mentioned, understand what role such qualifications can play in their children's educational careers.

Both my grandfathers were tool room workers. There was no way to work one's way up the ladder 60 or 70 years ago without embracing the idea of apprenticeships. For my family, it was a huge way to move forward. We talk about social mobility; apprenticeships were critical to families such as mine in the black country all those years ago.

In the drive to increase university participation—I was incredibly fortunate to be part of it, as one of the first people in my family to go to university; the London School of Economics, a fabulous university, set me up for life—we have, in many ways, marginalised the further education that my grandfathers' generation so valued. I urge the Minister to share with us, perhaps today, how he anticipates the Government working with not only schools, but parents, to encourage them to understand how vocational qualifications can fit their children with the right skills for life and help in retraining us all, as we work for much longer and have one, two or three different careers.

My second point relates to the importance of building business into a vocational educational approach. The reason why we in Basingstoke have been so successful in driving forward apprenticeships is our links with local businesses. My local college has taken that to such a degree that it is developing a work-based university centre to deliver degree-level apprenticeships in digital engineering and the construction industries. It has an employer advisory board, which includes the likes of Sony and the Atomic Weapons Establishment—I am fortunate to represent one of the top 10 centres for employment in the south-east, and many such household names are local employers. I applaud the work that Anthony Bravo is doing on the degree-level apprenticeship, because such developments can help to build further education's credentials.

My third point picks up on some of the funding concerns that other Members have raised. If we want to encourage people to see further education as a viable option, they need the confidence that the funding is there. On a slightly different note, the Minister will remember the conversation he had with me and Anthony Bravo about the funding issues around apprenticeships, and I hope he has been able to make progress in removing some of the uncertainty, which, as we discussed, was creating delays in expanding the number of apprenticeships.

In conclusion, education is all about fulfilling the potential of every citizen in the country. It is the reason why I became a Member of Parliament, and why I am fascinated by the issues we are discussing today. Vocational qualifications have a huge part to play in getting young people on to a career ladder and in helping us all to stay in a lifelong programme of employment. The country faces a productivity gap, which we need to address head on, and although infrastructure investment and better ways of trading with other nations are important, skills are central. The Minister knows that and in him we have an effective champion in the Government. I look forward to hearing his thoughts.

3.13 pm

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, and to follow the excellent speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller).

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) on securing this important debate and on raising vocational education's profile in Parliament. I cannot claim to have been a college principal, but I can claim to have studied a BTEC ordinary national certificate in engineering, which is probably as rare as hen's teeth in this place.

Mr Sheerman: It may not be as rare as my vocational qualification. I failed my ONC at the City College in London, but I passed intermediate paint technology.

Chris White: I do not think there is any possible response to that.

As a result of my background, I am a passionate supporter of further education. Warwickshire College, whose headquarters are in my constituency, is one of the best such colleges in the country. It has six centres across Warwickshire and Worcestershire, with more than 15,500 students attending each year. It offers more than 1,000 courses across 20 different subject areas, including management. It has the highest enrolment among 16 to 18-year-old students and one of the highest success rates among larger FE colleges in the country.

To its credit, the college has developed strong links with employers. As result, it trains more than 1,750 apprentices every year in a variety of sectors, from agriculture and farriery to construction and digital media—an area that colleges are beginning to embrace with open arms. The college offers a broad range of courses and subject areas, and it is, importantly, addressing two national skill shortage areas.

Capital investments of more than £10 million mean that two important projects—in horticulture and engineering—will be completed by September, ready for students attending from the start of the academic year. As part of the college's expansion and development, a new engineering building is being constructed at Warwick's Trident College. The new complex will comprise specialist engineering workshops, 12 teaching labs, three computer labs and three specialist, tailored engineering technology labs. The aim is to create the capacity to meet demand for an additional 285 advanced and 253 higher apprenticeships in the manufacturing, mechanical, electrical, electronic, automotive and product-creation sectors, providing skills the country desperately needs.

There have been fantastic achievements in terms of the number of students who progress directly into higher education, although that is not the essential goal. To mention just a few examples, the number in agriculture is 95%; in construction, it is 94%; and in computing and IT, it is an astonishing 99%.

As parliamentarians, we must discourage the perception that further education is a second-tier choice—to be taken up only if one's first preference has not been achieved. In fact, FE is quite the reverse. Many students now see the benefits of a practical and vocational education that provides them with the skills and real-life work experience they need to get on.

Links with business are key for the FE sector. Businesses can recruit from colleges, but they can also help them financially and practically as they tailor courses to the needs of business and the wider workforce. For the last 18 months, for example, the college has been involved in the trailblazer apprenticeship scheme, which allows employers—in this case, Jaguar Land Rover—to partner with the college to reform apprenticeship frameworks and ensure that they are the best training for future employees. In engineering, the college also has links with more than 40 small and medium-sized enterprises, with the aim of increasing that to 65.

Nationally, support from the Government is essential. The Government have done a great deal over the last five years to invest in vocational education. Two million apprenticeships were started during the last Parliament, and I fully support the aim of delivering 3 million by 2020. Businesses can also support vocational education. As I mentioned, encouraging them to partner with colleges and other FE providers benefits all concerned.

We must work hard to ensure that vocational education's contribution to the economy is more widely acknowledged and that there is appropriate recognition for vocational education. We must commit to working towards parity of esteem between vocational and academic qualifications by continuing to raise the standards and promote the benefits of vocational education.

3.19 pm

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Roger, for a Westminster Hall debate early in the new Session. Like other hon. Members, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) on securing this interesting and important debate to celebrate national vocational qualifications day.

Romsey and Southampton North is quite unusual in that within the constituency there is no 16-to-18 state sector provision, which means that those in that age range are effectively exported out. That is sometimes seen as a negative, but I regard it as something of a benefit, because it gives me the opportunity to work with a range of college principals, albeit at the edge of my constituency.

For example, I am an advisory governor at the further education college in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies). For many years I have been invited annually to Eastleigh College to present the awards at its apprenticeship celebration event. That is exactly the sort of initiative that we want to happen everywhere, to celebrate the apprentices and their achievements, as well as the achievements of the employers who have taken the plunge and taken apprentices

[Caroline Nokes]

on. Many employers arrive annually having been nominated by their apprentices for the brilliant experience that they give young people in the Hampshire area.

We want more vocational qualifications and more high-quality apprenticeships. It is crucial that apprenticeships should provide the quality training that young people deserve. I have been pleased over the past nearly 12 months to have a business administration apprentice in my office. That has been a learning curve for us and for her. I hope that she has benefited from the experience. I guess we will know about that at the end of it, and I hope that she will get a good certificate, which she will be able to take to future employers, or potentially to university. We have a responsibility to practise what we preach, and that was one reason for my taking on an apprentice. I was struck by Eastleigh College's determination to promote its provision and to make things as easy as possible for the employer. That is crucial. Sometimes there are far too many barriers, although many are perceived rather than real.

Nic Dakin: The hon. Lady is right that taking on an apprentice—and I have taken on two so far in my current role—helps to educate us as employers about the challenges in taking on such a responsibility. It is hugely rewarding, and we should celebrate the employers' role.

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman is right. Taking on apprentices is great for us, for the employers, and for the economy and everyone else. I have long held that the first rung on the employment ladder is the hardest, and that is why vocational qualifications are so important. They provide a fantastic bridge from school to work. Whether they be tech-levels or technical awards, and at whatever age they are achieved, we need the suite of qualifications of which they are part to be attractive and available to students, and we need it to have parity of esteem, as various hon. Members have said.

Life is about more than a clutch of good GCSEs. It is about acquiring the life skills necessary to make the transition to the world of work. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud mentioned the soft skills that can be obtained from work experience and vocational qualifications—whether in retail, catering or the example that he used of sport. Such opportunities can also build confidence, which is important for young people who too often have just experienced the classroom, and who lack the interaction that they will need in later life to play a constructive role in the world of work.

Southampton has some great vocational qualification providers, such as City College in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Royston Smith) and the Southampton Engineering Training Association, which I enjoyed visiting last summer for its annual presentation and celebration evening. There are hundreds of courses for thousands of students, which all provide obvious and successful routes into work. City College makes much of the fact that its young people who undertake vocational qualifications often go on to be self-employed. They will be small business owners, employing other people. We need to encourage that, because if every small business employed one more person we would have zero unemployment.

At the SETA evening, 70 young men and one girl received engineering qualifications. We still have an enormous amount of work to do to encourage young women to take up engineering qualifications and follow that vocational route. We must make sure that, just as GCSE and A-level results are celebrated annually in local papers, when we see young people with brilliant achievements and fantastic certificates, there is also an opportunity to celebrate just as vehemently and vigorously those who get vocational qualifications. It is great to see exactly that happening on the website of the Edge Foundation, but I would love to see more of it in my local paper.

The hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) made a point about careers advice, which is crucial. In my constituency there are some great examples of best practice, with opportunities to expand on career options and choices. The Romsey School has done brilliant work, particularly with young girls, on vocational qualifications. They set up their own beauty studio in the school, to try to get across the message that science qualifications are needed to go on vocational courses in beauty and hairdressing. That was a practical way of conveying to girls the importance of continuing with science studies, when perhaps they were not finding them that interesting.

Just up the road is The Mountbatten School, which has done brilliant work linking up with local businesses. That is crucial; we must have such opportunities to bring companies into schools, so that young people can see the opportunities and the range of jobs out there. I take part annually in what The Mountbatten School refers to as its enrichment day. The poor year 10 children have to do a mock interview with me. They appeared slightly horrified the first year I did it, because they were used to doing it with their teachers, but the event has expanded every year, and the school now brings in the Rotary Club and eminent members of the local chamber of commerce. The children are confronted with real live employers and they go through a real interview, so they understand how tough it can be to make that important first impression. We must make sure that 14-year-olds make the right decisions about their future, based on what they want, enjoy and are interested in, and that they avoid the age-old problem of choosing to do exactly what their friends are doing.

I congratulate the Edge Foundation, which has done great work on establishing, celebrating and promoting VQ day. It plays a crucial part in reinforcing parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications. In the words of Lord Baker,

“By 2022, 90% of the most in-demand job areas will be accessible through technical, practical and vocational learning.”

That gives a very clear steer about the scale of the opportunity, and we must make sure that we grab it with both hands.

Today I have given some local examples of best practice throughout Hampshire, and there are others throughout the country. We need to celebrate and promote them, and make sure that they are rolled out across the country.

3.27 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I, too, want to start by congratulating the hon. Member

for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) on securing the debate. I was of course very disappointed at his re-election to the House, but I notice that he is back with an increased majority; that is a testament to the work that he has put in, in his constituency. He reminded us of some of the reasons for his re-election by making an excellent speech in an excellent debate.

I want to add a word of praise and congratulation to the organisers of vocational qualifications day. The wisdom of the hon. Member for Stroud in securing the debate has been much in evidence as we have listened to a wide range of excellent speeches. It can be seen, at the beginning of the present Parliament, that there is great interest in this field of policy, and a shared agenda across the House for strengthening it and moving it forward. We all know how important it is to our economic future.

I also congratulate the Minister. I am disappointed that he is doing the job and I am not; but there is no better member of his party to serve in that role. He has taken a huge interest in the subject and has bothered to spend a great deal of time in colleges, talking to students, teachers and principals. I hope that he will bring energy to the brief, and maintain and sustain it in the months and hopefully years ahead. What this field of policy needs above anything else is stability, and I very much hope that he will provide that. For my part, I will provide the Minister with all the support and scrutiny that he has enjoyed over the last year. When he does well, he will get hymns of praise, and when he does badly he will get a forensic verbal assault here and elsewhere. I hope that the hymns of praise greatly outnumber the words of verbal assault.

However, I will start where the hon. Member for Stroud started: I too welcome the fact that, rather belatedly, the Chancellor has woken up to the grave productivity crisis that our country confronts. The truth is that we have the worst productivity record in the G7. There is something like a 20% productivity gap between ourselves and our major competitors, and it is not getting better; it is getting worse. We have to ask ourselves what it is about this country today that means that despite our long history of genius and innovation on these islands, what the rest of the G7 finishes making on a Thursday afternoon takes us until the end of Friday to get done. If we want to break out of the cost-of-living challenges that many families still confront, we have to earn more as a country, and skills are absolutely at the core of that problem.

I look forward to the Chancellor putting his money where his mouth is in the Budget later in the parliamentary Session, because of course setting out a Budget that seeks to raise UK productivity is incompatible with further withdrawing money from skills and from the Minister's domain.

Mrs Miller: I know that the right hon. Gentleman is not implying that workers in this country do not work as hard as workers elsewhere. Perhaps he will agree that, when considering productivity, he cannot ignore either the figures on congestion on our roads or the need for us to trade more broadly as a nation.

Liam Byrne: That is absolutely right. The right hon. Lady helpfully points to the fact that global competition is intensifying, and if we are to improve our performance

in trade markets in which we have been losing market share during the last four or five years, we will have to raise our game. Skills are absolutely at the core of that, because there is a risk, given the pattern of economic development over that time, that our country is becoming a cheap labour economy. About 80% to 85% of the jobs that have been created have been low-paid jobs, which is a problem if we are to earn our way out of the cost of living crisis that we are trapped in. There are not necessarily the column inches devoted to this issue that there should be; *The Economist* has done a good job, as has Nigel Nelson of the *Sunday People*, in highlighting the risk associated with this change.

We have to look hard at the competition that we are up against. When the programme for international student assessment results in Shanghai are so much better than ours, when China is about to spend more on science than the whole of Europe put together and when four out of the top 10 global tech firms are Asian, we can see how the battle for good jobs will intensify over the next 10 years, and the risk is that we will lose it. We will not beat the global competition without a much bigger and bolder plan to improve the skills of our country in the years ahead.

Of course, that situation has particular consequences for not only families but young people. All of us now serve the younger generation, which is the first generation in a century that is worse off than the generation that came before it. Social mobility is, in effect, going into reverse; none of us can be proud of that, and all of us must want to alter it. Young people in particular desperately need breakthroughs in this policy area, and I know that the Minister is absolutely focused on it, like a laser.

I hope that the Minister will use this debate and this great day to begin telling us a bit about an ambitious vision for system reform—reform that is evolutionary, perhaps, but revolutionary in scale. The truth is that although we talk about a system of technical education in this country, we do not have a system worthy of the name. We have a piecemeal, ad hoc system of institutions, exams and funding entitlements that are yoked together, often in a very rudimentary way. That does not allow young people from the age of 14 a clear line of sight for a technical education career that goes up to the degree level of skill, which many hon. Members have talked about, celebrated and underlined as being critically important.

In his speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) forensically exposed the inadequacies of the current system. If I might be so bold, I will throw a few suggestions on to the pile that hon. Members, particularly the hon. Member for Stroud, have given us this afternoon. In our schools, there has to be a bigger and bolder effort to expose more 14-year-olds to technical education. That is why I support many of the reforms pioneered by Lord Baker. I hope that the Minister, with his colleagues at the Department for Education, can continue to lobby for practical and empirical subjects.

I hope that we make serious progress in building a stronger careers service during this Parliament. I think it was the CBI, of all organisations, that said before the election that the careers service in this country was “on life support”. That situation will not help us to compete with the global competition that we now confront. Although small amounts of money were offered before

[Liam Byrne]

the election, the Minister will know, and in his heart believe, that that was not a solution to the problem, given its scale. We need a radical increase in apprenticeships; I am glad that there is all-party consensus on that. The Minister will know that we intend to focus constantly on ensuring that quantity does not come at the expense of quality. Quite simply, there is no point in putting our people on to programmes that do not genuinely equip them with the skills to compete globally. I know that he, too, cares about that issue passionately.

However, the bigger and more complicated question is about the whole system of qualifications, entitlements and funding arrangements for our constituents who are aged between 18 and 24. At the moment, there is not a smooth pathway on a technical education track for our constituents in that age range. There are entitlements to maintenance, which stop at the age of 18 but restart at the age of 24, with the availability of advanced learning loans. The funding entitlements for colleges differ according to whether their students are under 18, between 18 and 24, or over 24. There is a quagmire of qualifications. There are too many qualifications; they are too disjointed; they are delivered at far more cost in England than in Scotland; and, frankly, the whole field of technical qualifications needs a good root-and-branch review. I know that there has already been some simplification of the system, but we have much further to go.

Crucially, there must be a revolution in the collaboration between further education and higher education. Hon. Members made some very good contributions this afternoon about the need to join those systems up. It is not good enough that just 2% or 3% of apprentices go on to degree-level skills; we will not compete globally if that situation continues. There have been some welcome advances, which I know the Minister helped to drive through before the election, but there must be a revolution in the number of apprentices going on to degree-level skills. Apprenticeships should be a route to the top in the same way that doing A-levels and going to university is. At the moment, I believe that many people are not taking the apprenticeship route because they know that the ladder only goes so far up the wall. We want an apprenticeship to be a fast track to the top, in the same way that a degree at a good university is.

I know that all of this work will be detailed and involved, and there are few better minds than that of the Minister to puzzle all of it through. However, his bigger challenge will of course be the funding settlement that he will have to contend with. As the last Government put up our national debt to £1.5 trillion, this Government will have to deliver some savings. I hope that they will also sensibly raise some taxes from those who can afford to pay just a little bit more. The Budget will tell us more.

If we are to close the productivity gap that our country confronts, we must support technical education in a radically new way. My hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe made an excellent point when he sounded the alarm about the 24% cut in adult skills delivered in-year.

During the many visits he made before the election, the Minister will have been lobbied about some colleges now being unviable. I know this because I visited many colleges after him. Some colleges are at risk of falling

over without urgent action this year. On top of that, a third of the cuts announced by the Chancellor last week are set to hit the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Education. Many colleges are already on the brink. The Minister will have to move fast with his colleagues at the Treasury to ensure that colleges do not fall over and become unviable, despite the Chancellor saying that we need to fix the productivity gap, and many in this House saying, "Look, technical education is key to this."

The Minister will also want to, or have to, consider other funding pressures, including the performance of advanced learning loans for those over 24, because they are vastly underperforming at the moment. There has to be a sevenfold increase in the number of people taking up these loans if the budget is to be consumed. I want to put on record my thanks and congratulations to the Association of Colleges and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education for their work in consistently highlighting this risk.

I hope that the Minister shows us a little bit of leg this afternoon as regards his plans for system reform. We famously designed a wonderful system of technical education for the new Germany after the war, but forgot to implement a similar blueprint for our own country. Perhaps it is time to move on and introduce system changes of our own. I hope that the Minister can tell us about those changes. I hope that he can say a bit more about his ambitious plans to devolve control over skills to local authorities, and particularly city regions. Many people throughout the country told me that they would not have had to contend with a 24% cut to the adult skills budget this year if they had just been given the budget they were entitled to and were allowed to make decisions about priorities much more locally.

I hope that the Minister tells about his conversations with the new Minister for Universities and Science, whose father was rather unfair in attacking his lack of exposure to science as a young man. I have always found that new Minister a thoughtful, clever and progressive individual. I hope that the Minister here today and the new Minister in BIS will make a good double act, because, heaven knows, there is an awful lot of work to do.

3.42 pm

The Minister for Skills (Nick Boles): Sir Roger, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship during my first outing in Westminster Hall since the election and my reappointment as Skills Minister.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) on securing this important debate. He congratulated the Edge Foundation on setting up this day of celebration of all that is good in technical and professional education, and all those people, young and not so young, who take advantage of those opportunities to secure qualifications that enrich their lives and promote their careers. This is an excellent debate with which to kick off the deliberations in this five-year Parliament. Technical and professional education has an important role to play in making our economy more productive and providing opportunities for all people in all parts of the country.

Before getting into the meat of my argument, I want to deal with a few issues raised by hon. Members. First, it is important to say that the 24% cut in the adult skills

budget—in the allocations offered to colleges and providers—is obviously an average figure and, more importantly, relates to the non-apprenticeship portion of the adult skills budget. It does not take a genius to work out that if the overall scale of a budget is reduced and the size of an important element in it is doubled, there will be larger reductions in what is left. Even I could work it out. That is what has happened to the non-apprenticeship portion of the adult skills budget. We have reduced the overall budget and doubled the spending on adult apprenticeships funded out of that budget. That has necessitated rather larger cuts in that particular area.

Nic Dakin: Does not the Minister agree that by doing that certain activities currently very much valued by employers will disappear from the offer that is available locally?

Nick Boles: I fear that cuts often require difficult choices to be made. Colleges are all trying to ensure that they make economies chiefly through efficiencies and in areas of lower value. Following on from that, I should like to correct something said by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), who is no longer in the Chamber, about the relative value of full-time FE courses and apprenticeships. I am not for a minute suggesting that full-time FE courses do not have a positive impact—they do—but their positive impact on people's earnings between five and seven years later is not nearly as high as the positive impact of apprenticeships. We have just done one of the biggest data studies undertaken by Government, matching people's education performance and their earnings as recorded by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. Almost 500,000 individuals were covered by this study, which found that a level 2 apprenticeship leads to approximately a 16% improvement in the individual's earnings five to seven years later, whereas the impact for a full-time level 2 is roughly 6%. At level 3 it is 16% for those on an apprenticeship, against 4% on a full-time course. There are positive impacts from full-time courses and some of those courses—not least the BTEC mentioned by my hon. Friend—may well have a higher value, but the averages suggest that it is sensible to do what the Government have been doing and shift resources out of full-time FE courses into apprenticeships, while continuing to invest in full-time FE.

My neighbour, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe, mentioned the in-year cuts to both the DFE and BIS budgets. Although I cannot go into detail, because it would be way above my pay grade to do so, he should not assume that the only way of cutting the unprotected part of the DFE budget is by cutting funding for 16 to 19 education, including funding for FE colleges. He should also not assume that the only way of cutting the part of the BIS budget that has been subject to in-year cuts is by cutting funding for FE colleges. No doubt everybody will have to make a contribution, but he should not assume that those cuts involving large figures will fall entirely on the sectors that he so admirably represents in the House and in this debate.

We are at the start of a five-year Parliament, so we have a bit of time to think and plan and be strategic, and to try to build something that addresses some of the problems that have afflicted us as a country for decades. There has been a huge amount of agreement

across the House about the nature of the productivity challenge that we face as a country. We have lower productivity—all that means is how much value people are producing for every hour that they work—in part, I am glad to say, because we manage to find jobs for people with very low skills who are less productive. Of course, a large number of the least productive workers in countries not too far from here are not employed, and by necessity that means that their average productivity per hour of employment is higher. I prefer to live on this side of the channel rather than on the other side, where that is so, but that does not in any sense diminish the challenge to us of ensuring that the productivity of everybody, whether relatively low-skilled or high-skilled, is improving so that they can command higher wages, pay higher taxes and have better lives for themselves and their families. That is, of course, a fundamental challenge for this Parliament.

The Opposition spokesman was right to say that Members of all parties have long bemoaned our inability to create a system of technical and professional education that commands the same level of understanding in the country, and in families and schools, and in this House—not to mention the level of respect—as the academic education system, which is admired around the world. He is absolutely right to challenge the Government in these early weeks to grapple with the problem systematically, rather than in a piecemeal way, and I hope and intend to rise to the challenge.

I will resist the temptation, long though my legs are, to show too much of them in my response to the debate. That is not because I am coy, because I am not naturally that coy, as you may have noticed, Sir Roger, but because it is a little premature for me as a Minister, although I was in this post for 10 months before the election, to start rushing to judgment. I would like to hear from others, and it has been tremendously useful to hear the contributions of my hon. and right hon. Friends and Opposition Members on the elements of the system that they see as needing to be reformed, changed or improved.

I also want to learn from other countries. The Opposition spokesman referred to the example that we always beat ourselves over the head about: the German system of technical education. He is right to say that we honourably and admirably had some part to play in creating that system, but it is also right to observe that it is the product of a deep economic, educational and social culture that is somewhat different from ours. We need to ensure that we are looking to learn from relevant examples that are, in a sense, transferable and applicable to our system. I am keen to look at—I encourage Members to come forward if they have better example—the Dutch example. The Dutch economy is more similar to our own in culture and approach than the German one. It is smaller, but it has what we would see as—I am not sure that the Dutch would accept this—Anglo-Saxon features. As the Opposition spokesman said, they seem to have a better system of clear routes through education to high, degree-level qualifications.

Liam Byrne: The Minister is absolutely right to sound a warning that it is impossible to import one system wholesale to one economy from another. The key thing we have to learn from the German system is that smooth pathway through. A couple of things have been mentioned

[Liam Byrne]

in the debate that are important to incorporate into some of the Minister's research, of which one of the most important is the growth in self-employment and enterprise. There are superb colleges up and down this country—not least Sheffield College and others in the Peter Jones network—that are doing a first-class job in encouraging an entrepreneurial revolution among our young people. They are a good example of how we cannot simply import a system from a country such as Germany that does a much less good job at fostering a culture of self-employment, the skills for self-employment and a yen for enterprise, too.

Nick Boles: I thank the shadow Minister for that; it was very interesting and I entirely agree with him. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud raised this, too, but when people are working for 50 or 60 years of their lives in a fast-changing economy, we have to consider the kind of qualifications that are relevant by being sufficiently flexible to cope with the different employment situations that a person is likely to want to go through, which may well include working for themselves, setting up their own business and acting in a whole range of different circumstances.

My new and fantastic Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris)—she is the Select Committee's loss, but my gain—is also operating as the PPS for my hon. Friend the Minister for Universities and Science. If any Member here would like to come through her with any suggestions or answers to the following questions to which I will be seeking sensible and systematic answers over the next few months, I will be incredibly grateful. The first question is: what do people think should start at 14 and what do people think should start at 16? That is an age-old debate that will not be settled in this parliamentary term, but we should have it again, not least when we look at the work of the university technical colleges and Lord Baker in introducing to the system some education that starts at 14. Should that become a common thing or remain an exception to the rule?

The second question is about the institutions. We have all talked with affection, admiration and praise about the further education colleges in our constituencies, and I am lucky enough to have two such institutions. Are those institutions in their current guise equipped for all the demands that we are going to place on them and the financial pressures that are inevitable, even if we can maintain funding broadly at the current level? Should they specialise more? Should some of them focus more on higher level skills and others more on training for people who have not received an adequate education at school? What institutions do we need, what institutions have we got and how can we get from one to the other? That naturally leads to the question of who should be making such decisions. Should it be the Minister in his Whitehall office with the help and guidance of the Skills Funding Agency, should it be local enterprise partnerships, or should it be combined authorities on the Greater Manchester northern powerhouse model? Who is properly placed with a sufficient understanding

of the local economy to decide what institutions are needed locally to meet the full range of young people's and employers' needs?

The final question, although it is only the final one because I will probably run out of time soon—there will be many other questions—is on qualifications. The shadow Minister raised it, as did several other Members who talked about the different qualifications and how badly known and badly recognised they are among parents and young people. Do we have the right set of qualifications? Have we been prescriptive enough? We have weeded out a whole lot of very weak qualifications, and I think we can all agree that that was a necessary and a good step, but do we need to be more prescriptive about the combinations of qualifications that denote a sensible route to a high-quality career and so should receive the benefit of taxpayer funding?

The questions about who should be involved in making the decisions about local institutions and qualifications will lie at the core of the long-term system plan that the shadow Minister has urged on me. While I know that he will be forensic and at times even a little brutal—I know, because I have witnessed it before—in his examination, I also know that he and all other Members will make a positive contribution, because ultimately we want the same thing: a country where everyone can get the skills they need, at whatever point in their life that they feel the need for them, so that they can prosper and have fulfilling lives.

3.58 pm

Neil Carmichael: Thank you, Sir Roger, for chairing this effective and excellent debate. I thank all the contributors, too, because the debate has been constructive and allowed us to set out the issues. I also thank the Edge Foundation for all it has done to make the Vocational Qualifications Day work, because, as we have all acknowledged, it is an important day. The track needs reform, more rigorous thought and more attention to detail. We should be doing more on productivity, and there is a lot more we could be doing to ensure that young people understand what vocational qualifications are and why they should be seeking them.

Above all, it is a question of ensuring that our education system is adaptable and responsive enough to the emerging modern economy that we are all part of. We cannot stop at our shores, because we are in a global economy, and that has a significant impact on how we should operate. The Minister's three questions will help to focus what we do in the next five years so that in five years' time we can say, "Britain is well placed in the provision of skills. We have matched our competitors in productivity and we have demonstrated that we are concerned that each and every one in our country can make the most of themselves and fulfil their lives in a way that reflects their aspirations and the emerging economy." We have the opportunity to make this a country that is founded on good working practices, strong ethics in education and the appreciation of society.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered annual Vocational Qualifications Day.

Libraries (Harrow)

4 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of libraries in Harrow.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for what I believe is the first time in this Chamber, Sir David.

I want to set out the case for the continuation of public libraries in the London borough of Harrow, part of which I am privileged to represent. Over the past 25 to 30 years, I have had great involvement in libraries in both Brent and Harrow. When I was first elected as a councillor in the London borough of Brent, the Labour administration in the borough at the time tried to close libraries. That attempt was overturned after a long campaign by the community.

When I became leader of Brent Council in 1991, we invested in public libraries and turned them into assets that were used to the ultimate. In fact, I was almost considered a revolutionary because I opened Willesden Green library on Sundays so that students could study. Sadly, in 2010, the Labour administration in Brent decided to close four libraries and create a new civic centre library. That resulted in a long community campaign that eventually led to a community library in the ward that I used to represent reopening as a community-run library. That demonstrates how much the public want libraries to continue.

In contrast, in the London borough of Harrow over the same period, only one library has closed: the Gayton Road library. I will return to that later, because it is important in the current context. Over the past five years, the library service has been put out to tender and various aspects have changed, resulting in the diminution of the services provided to library users. When the budget process started last year, the Labour administration in Harrow claimed that it needed to find £75 million in budget savings over four years. That would have been okay, but the next day it reinstated its chief executive position, with a salary of £160,000 per annum. It then went further by rehiring the same chief executive whose post had been deleted some six to nine months earlier. It could have saved £1 million over four years—quite enough to fund all the borough's libraries. The council has changed its view and now says that it needs to find savings of £83 million. We are not sure whether the figure is £75 million or £83 million.

As part of its saving drive, Harrow council proposed the closure of a swathe of public facilities, including Harrow's only arts centre and Harrow museum. Of course, there was a huge backlash. I joined forces with my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd) to prevent the closures, and I am pleased to say that the council has backed down on closing the arts centre—temporarily, at least—and alternative funding arrangements are being made. Nevertheless, the urgency of the situation is demonstrated by the fact that from 5 pm on 13 June, four of Harrow's 10 public libraries—the Bob Lawrence, Hatch End, North Harrow and Rayners Lane libraries—will be closing their doors, despite the local protests.

Harrow Council undertook a consultation on the current proposals between 24 November 2014 and 19 January this year, and found that 71.48% were against the closure

of the libraries. Of course, that has not stopped Harrow's Labour-run council from wanting to close them. In fact, the consultation was flawed, because it specifically suggested that, as alternatives, library users in Edgware could use Kingsbury library in Brent or Burnt Oak library in Barnet. I am not sure whether the council tax payers of Barnet or Brent would welcome Harrow's council tax payers using their libraries free of charge, but there is also another issue: Barnet council is currently consulting on the closure of Burnt Oak library. The consultation was therefore completely flawed. There is a strong feeling locally that the decision had been made before Harrow council's consultation started and that the process has just been one of rubber-stamping the council's decision.

All campaigns against the current situation are being ignored. There was an excellent campaign in Edgware to preserve Bob Lawrence library. Campaigners gathered a petition with more than 5,000 signatures from people who want to keep the library open. Both my hon. Friend the Minister and the former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), visited Bob Lawrence library to see how it is used and the good work done there. It is not only a centre for reading and lending books; it is a place where young people study. Students and young people at school who do not have facilities at home can go to the library to do homework and project work. Indeed, members of the public visit the library for various community events.

The local community put together an excellent business case for keeping the Bob Lawrence library open and fully funded, with a revenue stream, and identified a number of income streams, including social enterprise funding. They even proposed taking over the library as an organisation under the community right to bid. Sadly, the problem is that the council decides whether such a bid is allowed to proceed. Surprise, surprise, the council rejected the business case without giving any specific reason—it just said that the case did not pass muster.

Those currently running Harrow Council want to place the blame at the Government's door, but that is disingenuous. It is worth pointing out that, thanks to the work put in when Harrow council was run by an Independent Labour and minority Conservative administration, the council had a balanced budget for 2013-14 and 2014-15, and delivered savings of £22.8 million over those two years. That shows that it is possible to achieve savings without closing public facilities.

In March, the Prime Minister came to Harrow and this subject was raised with him directly. He made the point that, actually, Harrow council had spent less than its budget envisaged and its budget for 2014-5 was higher than it had been the previous year. The council has reserves—it has the capability to fund the libraries if it so chooses. There is no need for libraries to be closed on this scale.

The council has recently announced a new library for Harrow town centre, with

“state of the art facilities and self-service technologies”.

That proposal is currently being considered, but, on closer inspection, the site has not yet been redeveloped and no planning permission has been granted. The planning application is extremely controversial, because the proposed building would be very tall. There is a lot of local opposition to the consideration of the planning

[Bob Blackman]

application itself, let alone to the setting up of a new library. The site under consideration is that of the old Gayton Road library—the proposal is merely to replace the library that was closed with a new state-of-the-art library.

According to the council, as of April 2014 total library membership in Harrow was 146,661 people, about 40% of Harrow's population. That, I suggest, means that the people of Harrow greatly value their community libraries and do not want to see them close.

According to demographic information completed at the time of joining, in August 2014 46% of active borrowers were under 18 years old and 13% were aged over 60. Given that the Office for National Statistics states that 20% of people in Harrow are under 16 and 14% are over 65, those figures represent huge levels of use from both age groups. Libraries are vital resources that must be retained for schoolchildren, older people and all groups who want to use computers but do not have them at home.

Furthermore, Harrow Council's own data in 2013-14 show that there were 1,104,846 visits to Harrow libraries and that 1,147,630 items were loaned. Harrow is always ranked in the top quartile of outer London boroughs for book loans and it is ranked fourth out of 18 for that period. Local residents want to use their libraries for study purposes, recreation, computer access, social activities and, importantly, to access council information. It is vital that those facilities are provided and that that continues. One of my concerns is that if the Bob Lawrence library were to close, the nearest library to it, the Kenton library, is some two miles away, which would be a long journey on foot for elderly people and a challenge for younger people as well. There is also no direct bus or train service between the two.

It is quite clear that Harrow Council cannot blame the Government for its decisions on cuts and spending. The Government commissioned the independent library report, led by William Sieghart, to advise on the future of libraries and one of its central recommendations was to increase the number of libraries with internet and wi-fi. As a result, £7.4 million was allocated in the 2015 Budget to deliver that. The Arts Council, supported by Government funding, has also allocated £6 million to help libraries increase the range of facilities they provide to visitors. Some libraries have chosen to stage exhibitions of paintings by local artists to increase the number of visitors, which shows that entrepreneurial spirit can make a difference.

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, my Harrow neighbour, for giving way. He is making an interesting argument and, similarly, I hope that North Harrow library can be kept open. I think he went a tad too far in suggesting that the Government cannot be held to account at all, given that potentially Harrow Council will be hit with £83 million of cuts over a four-year period. That inevitably means that, on the tough decisions that it has to make, it is between a rock and a hard place.

Bob Blackman: I thank the hon. Gentleman, my neighbour, for that intervention. As I said at the beginning of my speech, Harrow Council seems to want it both ways: it cannot seem to make up its mind about whether

it faces £75 million or £83 million of reductions. If it cannot make its mind up about £8 million of savings, the council must have a really serious problem at its heart. If it offers, I will take up the challenge of reorganising its budget, but that is another matter.

As has been demonstrated, local authorities can make efficiencies without closing community facilities. The council received two community take-over proposals, which related to the Bob Lawrence library, which I mentioned before, and North Harrow library, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. I believe that the North Harrow library proposal is still being considered, but the Bob Lawrence library proposal has been dismissed out of all regard. I wonder whether there is a political reason for that, because while the proposal for the North Harrow library is being led by a former leader of the council who was also a notable Harrow Labour councillor, the Bob Lawrence library proposal is led by a former mayor of the borough who has fallen out with the Labour group on Harrow council.

Libraries provide a vital service, offering people the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills and opening up new possibilities in work, education and culture. Harrow is a rapidly growing area, so we will see greater pressure on school places, at primary school level in particular, and we need additional public knowledge facilities that our children and elderly people can access.

The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 says:

“It shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof”.

The Act imposes a duty on the Secretary of State to “superintend, and promote the improvement of, the public library service provided by local authorities in England and Wales, and to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred on them as library authorities by or under this Act.”

Given the large number of people using the services, the extreme dissatisfaction with the consultation phase and the apparent unwillingness to look at alternative strategies, there is a case for reviewing the decisions made by Harrow Council to ensure that those statutory requirements are being met.

I would be grateful for confirmation that the Secretary of State will pursue that. I have written to him today on that subject, inviting him to call the decision in and to ensure that the libraries do not close next Saturday. I look forward to the Minister's response to our reasoned arguments.

4.16 pm

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): It is a pleasure to appear under your chairmanship for the first time in this Parliament, Sir David. Indeed, this is the first debate in which I have taken part in this Parliament, although I did participate in oral questions last week.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) for his excellent speech, which set out the position in Harrow. Before I turn to that specifically, with your indulgence, Sir David, I will talk a bit about libraries in general. In the 21st century, no one should underestimate the importance of libraries. Last week, I spoke at a meeting of the Society of Chief Librarians, and I made the point that in a digital age libraries are arguably more important than ever.

Perhaps the threat to libraries is about nostalgia. Many commentators on libraries perhaps benefited from them greatly in their youth by going in and borrowing books, but they now offer a huge range of other, equally important, services. In essence, and without downplaying at all the importance of borrowing books, reading and literature, they are important community spaces and hubs.

Mr Gareth Thomas: I agree with what the Minister has said thus far. Given his comments about the future of libraries, does his Department have any sort of library modernisation fund that could be accessed by those who are trying to turn North Harrow library in my constituency, which the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) referred to, into a community library, to help move things forward?

Mr Vaizey: That is a useful point, which I will come to in a second. However, I want to make it plain first that under the 1964 Act, every library authority is required to provide a

“comprehensive and efficient library service”.

It is open to the Minister to call in any plans to alter that library service if they think, *prima facie*, that the duty is not being carried out. It is important to emphasise that that power has been exercised only once: in 2009 in respect of Wirral libraries. That was useful, because the Sue Charteris report that emerged from that was a good guide for local authorities who are undertaking reviews.

As far as libraries are concerned, the Government have not stood still. Libraries are provided and funded by local authorities, as has always been the case, but the Government can and should play a role. One of the first decisions I took as Minister was to merge the functions of the then Museums, Libraries and Archives Council with those of the Arts Council. That merger was long overdue; when the 1964 Act was being debated, the role of libraries in local culture was emphasised, so it was important to put the Arts Council and libraries together. There is a £6 million lottery fund; it is not for the modernisation or transformation of libraries *per se*, but allows libraries to host cultural events. Much of the money has been used, but some is still available.

We also commissioned William Sieghart to look at e-lending. In a digital age, more and more library users may want to borrow books digitally, but it is important to get the right balance between libraries and the needs and legitimate concerns of publishers running commercial businesses. From that process emerged a second report, as we commissioned from him a wider report on the future of libraries, which made a number of recommendations. One was to set up a task and finish group; it is chaired by the Local Government Association and has a chief executive, Kathy Settle, who is on secondment from the Government Digital Service. That group is looking at real practical measures to help libraries. It called “task and finish” because it is time-limited and focused—it is funded for the next two years—so as to make a real impact.

William Sieghart also called for all libraries to have wi-fi. In the last Budget before the election, the Chancellor awarded £7.4 million to libraries to help them put wi-fi in. That answers the point raised by the hon. Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas) to a certain extent, although I appreciate that the fund that he is looking for would perhaps be wider.

Mr Gareth Thomas: Were North Harrow community library—supported, I am sure, by Harrow Council—to put in a bid to the lottery fund for some of the £6 million pot that the Minister alluded to, and to write to him with the details, would he be willing to consider writing in support of that request for finance?

Mr Vaizey: It is important that such decisions are taken independently. The fund will be managed by the Arts Council and the criteria for applying to it—whether applicants should be local-authority-provided libraries or could be community libraries—will be established by the council in the coming weeks. The fund will go live in July. It is important to emphasise that the Department for Communities and Local Government has issued guidance for community-managed libraries. It is also incumbent on me as a Minister to make sure that community libraries are aware of potential funds from tangential sources—the kind of community funds that the DCLG oversees.

Much of my time as Minister with responsibility for libraries has been taken up with concerns about library closures. I should emphasise that despite the mood music provided by some library campaigners the scale of closures is not what people would have us believe. Fewer than 100 static libraries—effectively, library buildings—have closed. It is a sad reflection on them that five times as many libraries have been closed by Labour authorities as by Conservative ones. At the same time, there is good news. Lots of libraries have been refurbished and many have reopened. Indeed, some Labour authorities—Liverpool and Manchester—have refurbished their central libraries, and Birmingham has built the largest library in Europe, although that was started under a Conservative council.

The specific situation in Harrow, as outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East, is somewhat depressing. I forgot to mention that I was privileged to spend some time with him in his constituency earlier in the year. It was a pleasure to spend time with such a hard-working local MP, and although it may have surprised some people, it did not surprise me at all to see his majority increase at the last election; that was well deserved. I was privileged to visit the Bob Lawrence library with him and meet the people working there, as well as some of the library users.

When one looks at what Harrow is proposing, a number of questions arise. As I said earlier, although books are important, libraries are about more than just books; they are community hubs. What has the council done to look at other services that it could provide through libraries? What has it done about providing, for example, homework clubs for children, or adult education opportunities, or perhaps the opportunity for community nurses to talk to people about their concerns and give advice? Is it planning to apply for the wi-fi fund? Indeed, do all its libraries have wi-fi—libraries that do attract many more users?

Are the council’s libraries fully integrated into all its services? Has it looked, for example, at how its libraries could work with jobcentres to help people who need to use a computer to apply for benefits online or to brush up their CVs? As my hon. Friend said, is the council providing opportunities for young people to study? Has it worked hard enough with the community to allow the community to take over a library? I was concerned by,

[Mr Vaizey]

and will look in more detail at, what my hon. Friend said about the bids to take over a library under the community right to bid. Community libraries are an important aspect of library services, and where the community is prepared to step forward it is incumbent on councils not to shut the door but to open it and welcome the community in.

Has the council looked at different models for how it could run its library services? In Suffolk, an industrial and provident society took over the libraries, kept them open and extended the opening hours. Has Harrow Council looked at mergers with other library authorities? Westminster, Hammersmith and Fulham, and Kensington and Chelsea merged their library services a few years ago, saving £1 million and keeping all the libraries open; in fact, I think I am right in saying that one of the authorities opened another library. There are a whole range of options and features that it is now incumbent on library authorities to look at. Important though it was, the Charteris review took place some five or six years ago, and we have moved further forward in the past few years in terms of the ways in which libraries are seen, and the huge opportunities that they now have to play a role in a fast-moving society in which more and more people rely on becoming more digitally literate and engaged.

As I mentioned, library closures have not been on so great a scale as some library campaigners would have us believe. However, importantly, every single proposal by a library authority to change its library service is looked at by Ministers, and we get independent advice on whether it is appropriate to call a proposal in. Up until this point I have not done so, because a lot of library authorities have undertaken careful reviews, but it is important to put on the record—I have always said this—that I have never taken the position that I will never call in any proposal. I will always look closely at any and every proposal for significant change to a library service.

Coming back after the election, I have engaged once more with the Society of Chief Librarians, an excellent organisation, and talked to library services that are enthusiastic and ambitious. Perhaps my vigour has been further renewed—spurred on by the excellent task and finish group that William Sieghart prompted us to establish, led by chief executive Kathy Settle—for banging the drum again about the importance of libraries, and for encouraging local authorities to see libraries for what they actually are. They are neither a burden nor something at the front of the queue for cutting, but an enormous asset for councils, through which they can engage with communities and provide citizens with a huge range of opportunities.

My hon. Friend is a hard-working MP who represents an extraordinarily diverse constituency. In a diverse community, there can be no more important place than a library; when people come into a community and want to put down roots, there can be no better thing for them to do than walk through the doors of a library to find a warm welcome and a map to navigate their new life. I will certainly look at Harrow's proposals, and we will come to a decision as soon as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

City Regions and Metro Mayors

4.29 pm

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered city regions and Metro Mayors.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I welcome the Minister to his post; I am sure that one of the joys he is looking forward to is responding to endless Adjournment debates.

This debate has excited a certain amount of interest; it is somewhat topical. We have a new Government with a newish agenda, two key themes of which I am personally keen on. One is devolution and the other is the northern powerhouse, both of which I support in principle. For England, we are largely talking about devolution to city regions, but it is wholly unclear, as many hon. Members have already said in the Commons Chamber, what will happen to areas outside city regions.

I understand city regions, because they are essentially the rediscovery of what we used to call metropolitan counties, which were abolished as collateral damage when Mrs Thatcher got rid of the Greater London Council. She was so antagonised by signs across the road from County Hall that she decided it had to go, and to make it not seem personal and vindictive she got rid of the metropolitan counties as well, just to prove the point. There has always been a necessity for sub-regional bodies of one kind or another, which was proved by the need to recreate the GLC as the Greater London Authority, with an associated Mayor's office. It was also proved by the fact that the met counties more or less persisted in one form or another. They persisted in most areas as four joint boards or authorities dealing with police, fire, transport and waste.

That is what Mrs Thatcher did. What we are seeing now is almost a reversal of Thatcherism—the Minister may not be comfortable with that, but that is what is happening. Police authorities, which Mrs Thatcher and the Conservatives who followed her tried insistently to depoliticise by adding to them cohorts of magistrates, independents and so on, have now become politically accountable police and crime commissioners—I am not particularly fond of that proposal, but nonetheless it is a politicisation. There is a promise of a devolution of power from Whitehall to what we have learned to call our combined authorities, which have essentially replaced the joint boards and the met counties before them. The only real difference is that they are indirectly nominated rather than directly elected.

Governments are often trapped into having to reinvent the wheel. There is always a need for a sub-regional structure to make the big economic and transport decisions that are beyond the individual competence of even a sizeable council. Governments have also learned that those kinds of decisions cannot be made well or to local satisfaction by Whitehall.

What is odd about the Government's proposals is their insistence that this sort of devolution requires something called a Metro Mayor—a Mr Big or a kind of civic Mussolini—which is different from having an effective council leader or a figurehead, for which many people see the need in certain areas or for certain purposes. It is essentially the appropriation of executive power to one individual.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): There is a great deal of confusion about the real shape of the metropolitan areas and the Metro Mayors. Has the hon. Gentleman seen the research that suggests that the emphasis on big cities such as Leeds or Manchester will squeeze and have a deleterious effect on smaller towns and cities, such as my town of Huddersfield?

John Pugh: I will come to that point later, but the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

The interesting thing is that this is the sort of devolution that people have requested and want. There is clamour up and down the northern cities and conurbations—people are saying, “Let’s have a Metro Mayor.” But it is a Government-knows-best, procrustean model. The Chancellor has been explicit that proper, full devolution—devolution that is worth anything—will be on that model. If I were being unkind, I could accuse the Government of dogmatism, ideological stupidity, blind prejudice or even a predilection for civic Mussolinis, but I am genuinely struggling to follow their argument. There is no evidence from anywhere in the world that conurbations with all-powerful mayors thrive any better or any worse than those that do not. Some clearly do, but a lot do not; governance is not always a decisive factor. There is no evidence that one man alone always makes a better decision than a leader surrounded by his peers or a group of adequately informed, able people.

There is an appreciable body of evidence that shows that systems that invest power in a single decision-maker are vulnerable to a number of things. They are vulnerable to cronyism—that kind of accusation has been made against the Mayor of London. They are vulnerable, in the long term, to an element of corruption, as decisions become less transparent, and to political obtuseness and people flying a kite—I am thinking of things such as Boris’s island airport. Collective decisions, rather than individual decisions, are always more transparent and more open to challenge, because they have to be argued for. They are not always quicker, which may be why the Government are infatuated with the Metro Mayor idea, but if corporate bodies are required to make quick decisions, most can think of an intelligent scheme of delegation that enables them to deal with the particular problem. Few people would argue that a President of the United States, surrounded by advisers, perforce and naturally makes better decisions than a Prime Minister of England, who has a Cabinet and has to get things through Parliament.

In Merseyside, we have a particular problem. From our point of view, it is essential that decisions that affect the whole region have proper input from all parts of the region. All voices—those of Southport, Sefton, the Wirral and St Helens—should be heard. It is not simply all about Liverpool. One person, however good, qualified and sensitive they are, is unlikely to be equally alert and caring or equally bothered about all areas.

In my area—right on the margins of the Liverpool city region—we worry about marginalisation. We are already in a borough that is controlled by no one elected by Southport or who belongs to a party that has been elected in Southport. There is genuine unhappiness about being in the council we are in, and we will make representations later in the Parliament about boundary changes. But how much worse will it be for my constituency

when not even a Sefton voice is involved in the decisions that directly affect us? We will become a marginalised community.

Our tourism, for example, could be overlooked in Liverpool’s drive to boost its own tourist economy. There does not seem to be an adequate restraint on that. Following on from the intervention of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), what we want is a better engagement with the areas immediately outside the city region. It is important to us to find out what is going to happen in our neighbouring authority, west Lancashire—a district highly dependent on the city region economy, but exiled from it, no part of it and not able to join it. We need to talk about transport links with west Lancashire, and it is not obvious that having a Metro Mayor would be of any assistance to us.

The situation genuinely would not be so bad if, as in the ResPublica pamphlet, which backed the proposal of “Devo Manc”, the prospect of a Metro Mayor was presented as an option—as something in the toolkit. But it is not; it is a precondition, regardless of local opinion. It is not devolution by demand, but almost devolution as the Chancellor demands. To that extent, it has to be questioned.

I do not think these problems are unique to the area of Merseyside, or even just to Merseyside, Manchester and the north-west. The same issues can be found in Tyneside, the Sheffield area and Birmingham. The fact that Manchester has been such a success recently in terms of its devolution—it was picked as an early candidate for devolution without a Metro Mayor—proves how tangential the presence of a Metro Mayor is to genuine devolution.

Let me conclude by summarising the problem. We want devolution, just like the Scots—it would be nice, of course, to have the same level of per capita funding—but the Government’s offer, as it is at the moment, is simply piecemeal. We are leaving many areas completely orphaned. We are patronising other areas by suggesting that they can only have one particular form of governance, regardless of what the electorate actually wants, otherwise they will not get the funding that devolved areas will have. We are marginalising communities, such as mine of Southport, within the city region, and we are confronted with a wholly unproven, unevidenced strategy.

The worst thing is that there is absolutely no opportunity for the people who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of this devolution to have or express a view on the template that the Government offer them. That is not devolution; it is imposition.

Sir David Amess (in the Chair): To help the Chamber, I should say that the new arrangements for sittings in Westminster Hall are as follows: this debate finishes at 5.30 pm, and the SNP, Labour and Government Front Benchers each get seven minutes at the end of the debate. As colleagues can see, there is very little time to be shared between 13 people. I am very happy to call everyone, but they will have only three or four minutes to speak, so I ask colleagues to bear that in mind. Whether they want only to make interventions is entirely a matter for the Chamber.

4.42 pm

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship today, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh)

[*Julian Sturdy*]

on securing this important debate, which is not only about city regions and Metro Mayors, but, as he ably put it in his speech, about where devolution is ultimately leading us.

Devolving the decision-making process closer to communities and tackling our nation's historic north-south divide head on make perfect sense as principles. Empowering the north to achieve its true potential will ensure that we do not surrender to the unyielding rise of London. I say that because rather than dragging our capital down, we should instead empower the rest of the country to rise to the challenge.

Britain is at its best when all our cities and regions have the freedom to champion their unique strengths in order to generate more highly skilled jobs and greater prosperity. Clearly, it would be a mistake to restrict the offer of greater powers to a small, elite club of metropolitan centres. Every region of the country must be free to seize the opportunity of controlling its own destiny. That is the only way in which devolution can be truly successful.

I am therefore delighted that the proposals for devolution, as we see them at the moment, will now be considered much more widely, regardless of where they come from. For me, the essence of Conservative philosophy is that it is not where someone comes from that matters, but where they are going and what they can achieve in life. That is ultimately where the devolution argument has to lie.

After the excellent contribution by the hon. Member for Southport, I would like to take this discussion across the Pennines and focus attention on the impact of the devolution debate on the great county of Yorkshire and my city of York. As the historic heart of Yorkshire, the city of York is uniquely placed to benefit from the Government's offer of devolution. We are fortunate enough to benefit from the membership of two local enterprise partnerships, and we are strategically linked not only with the economies of west Yorkshire, but with the more rural hinterland of North Yorkshire and the East Riding.

Although it is true that parts of our economy are intertwined with west Yorkshire, our connections with the rest of North Yorkshire run far deeper. We share many of the essential services with North Yorkshire, and our proud heritage as the northern capital of both the Romans and the Vikings—as the city of York—provides us with a more intangible connection with the rest of the country.

I remember when the proposals for combined authorities were first mooted and first debated in the House. I, along with many other colleagues, voiced my concern about the lack of alternatives for places such as York to take a different path from the one proposed for major cities. I am delighted that the Government look set to deliver on this key commitment and I sincerely hope that York will be able to achieve its ambition of working closely with its long-established partners, such as North Yorkshire and the East Riding, to deliver greater benefits for our local communities.

The importance of York, North Yorkshire and the East Riding as a valuable counterweight to the competing interests of Leeds, Sheffield and Hull must not be overlooked. The new Conservative-led City of York

Council, which has a Conservative leader for the first time since the authority was created over 20 years ago, has a great opportunity to make devolution work for our society and truly unlock York's potential.

It has been made abundantly clear that the only way in which we can achieve a Yorkshire powerhouse and make sure that devolution percolates right the way through our great county is to dissolve the responsibilities for investment in our transport infrastructure. On transport infrastructure and the need for investment, we can look no further than the northern ring road in my constituency. It provides the main access to key retail and employment and leisure sites. However, as the numbers of vehicles using that particular road have increased by more than half over the past decade, large stretches of the route are now at full capacity. Without further investment, journeys that take 20 minutes today will take over an hour in 2020, so devolving transport funds to York would provide the ancient city with the tools that it needs for a modern transport infrastructure that fits the demands of the 21st century.

I will just touch on this next point, because I know that other people want to come in. If we are really going to put wings under our devolution project, we must also devolve funding for our local airports. As many Yorkshire colleagues will agree, it is essential that access to Leeds Bradford airport—one of the fastest growing airports in the country—is greatly improved. We have to get rail links in there and not just road links, as we have at the moment. Again, devolution can really put the wings under that airport and move it forward, so to speak. As such, we need that long-term approach to funding, with a dedicated rail link into the airport.

Clearly, the possibilities offered by devolution really have the potential to be transformative, not only for many of our cities, but for our rural communities. However, we must make sure that it percolates right the way through, across our great country, empowering rural communities and cities such as York, leaving nowhere behind. It must not just be about the metropolitan centres.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): My hon. Friend is talking about devolution to cities, but does he agree that it is extremely important to remember the counties that are further away from the cities, such as Cumbria?

Julian Sturdy: I entirely agree. As I was saying, if devolution is to work, we must ensure that it percolates right the way through, leaving no area or community unaffected. We must ensure that it gets right across the country, into our rural communities, and is not something just for the metropolitan elite, as we see it at the moment.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): My hon. Friend is talking about devolution and has mentioned rural communities. I agree about that; I come from a rural community. But how does that link to the Metro Mayors concept? Is the Metro Mayors concept as appropriate to somewhere such as Oxfordshire as it is to somewhere such as York?

Julian Sturdy: As I have said, if devolution is to work across the country and we are not to end up leaving communities behind and widening the divide between metropolitan centres and our rural communities, we must ensure that that link does work. I look forward to

what my hon. Friend the Minister will say on that. I am sure that he will come up with many arguments as to why rural communities should be reconnected. I know that that will affect his constituency and the north as much as it affects mine and the great county of Yorkshire.

While we are talking about Yorkshire and the city of York, I should say that if the rural communities that surround York are to play that leading role in devolution, we must ensure that it gets right to the heart of them. If we can achieve that, we can ensure that all communities play a leading role in what I would argue delivers for my area a Yorkshire powerhouse to rival that of Manchester and London.

4.51 pm

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you back in your place after the election, Sir David. I thank the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) for securing this important debate. I also welcome the Minister, a constituency neighbour, to his place on the Front Bench. I hope that he will be working in the interests of Teesside and the wider north-east. This debate is a good opportunity to start probing the Minister on what he will do for our area.

In the short time available, I want to make four points. First and foremost, and as the hon. Member for Southport established in the course of his excellent opening to the debate, the Government are trying to show their enthusiasm for devolution and letting go of power to local areas by insisting on a one-size-fits-all approach to governance. Areas can have further devolution, but only if they adopt the Government's way. That seems a pretty odd way of devolving power to local areas in order to ensure that local wishes and circumstances prevail. If devolution is properly chosen by the Government, how on earth can the Minister justify that?

Following on from that, my second point is that the Government, in adopting this approach, are disregarding in a very significant way the wishes of local people. It seems a fundamental principle of British politics that if there is a significant change in the model by which people are governed, the people affected should be allowed a say. Indeed, the House is at this very moment debating the Second Reading of the European Union Referendum Bill.

The principle has been true at national level, with the referendum in 2011 to change the parliamentary electoral system. It has been true at regional level, such as with the referendum in 2004 in my own region of the north-east to determine whether we would have a regional assembly. Significantly, it has also been true at local level in my own constituency. In 2001, the electorate of Hartlepool decided in a referendum that they wanted a mayoral system of governance at local level—and they elected a monkey. In 2012, after a decade of a directly elected mayor, the good people of Hartlepool decided in another referendum that they had had enough of that and rejected the model. Given that my constituents, in recent years, have had their say on which local models of governance they prefer, and given in particular their rejection of a mayoral model, why are their views so obviously ignored by the Government?

My third point is about something that was raised eloquently by the hon. Member for Southport. Much of the economic drive in future decades will be fuelled by cities, but by no means all of it. In my own area of the

north-east, Newcastle is a superb city. I used to work there and my eldest son is at university there. I want to see Newcastle thrive and it is in the region's interests for it to thrive. But I can see my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson) at the debate. What about Sunderland and Nissan? What about somewhere closer to home—the Teesside area and the great manufacturing firms there? City regions will not be the sole drivers. What will the Minister do to ensure that smaller towns and cities, such as Hartlepool and Stockton, are able to benefit? That is incredibly important.

Can the Minister confirm that the combined authority for Teesside is working well? Those local authorities are working adequately together and can work together; there is no need for a change in governance, so can he discount here and now a Metro Mayor for Tees Valley?

My fourth and final point relates to the matters that could be devolved. I would wish to see economic development, regeneration, skills and transport devolved, but I would also hope to see health matters devolved properly. My constituents and I want to see hospital services return to Hartlepool—the Minister will know about this issue all too well—but my constituents feel powerless to ensure that that happens. Surely real devolution allows local people to feel empowered.

Of course clinical safety has to be paramount and medical advice has to be prioritised, but decisions on hospital services are made by the NHS foundation trusts that do not have the support of the local population. Hartlepool Borough Council, regardless of political affiliation, are against the changes. I want to see hospital services return to Hartlepool, but there is a lack of real devolution, power and accountability at local level. The people of Hartlepool do not feel that they are being listened to. If we are to have real devolution and accountability, that should always include public services vital to the people of an area, and there is no bigger such public service than the NHS, so will the Minister say something about how local people can have a real say about this?

John Howell: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the big prize is not just in transferring the NHS services, but in linking up the NHS with social care, so that they are all under one roof and decisions can be made about both at the same time?

Mr Wright: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. That integration—ensuring that local authorities are working in conjunction with different parts of the NHS, which are often very silo-like in approach—is the key to ensuring that my constituency, as well as his own, gets the best possible health and social care.

I shall summarise by saying that the people in my area would like more power over their future and their destiny, but the model proposed by the Government is rigid and fixed according to their own agenda rather than that of local areas. The Minister knows our part of the world incredibly well. I hope that he will show some flexibility in allowing proper devolution.

4.57 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) for securing the debate. I will try to be brief, because

[*Andrew Percy*]

I agree with an awful lot of what my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) said, particularly his references to the great county of Yorkshire, but I do want to talk about devolution in the Humber and our concerns about how that may go.

I start by expressing my support for the Government's agenda to devolve more powers. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is shocked that I am supporting the Government line, but this is a new Parliament and we are all ambitious! I spent 10 years as a local councillor in the Humber, on Hull City Council. My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), who was sitting next to me until a moment ago, spent 26 years on the council in north-east Lincolnshire, or the precursor to that council. Our experiences as local councillors during that period were, under any Government, of centralisation of power to Westminster and a lack of trust between central Government and local government. If something did come out to local government—an extra power or funding—it always came with strings attached; we were told how to spend the money.

Inevitably, the money ran out at some point, but we still had to continue doing whatever it was, so I pay tribute to this Government for being the first in a long time at least to talk about devolving powers and taking them away from Westminster. For me, a proud Englishman as well as a Yorkshireman, the current structures will never work. As someone who believes in a federal Britain, I do not believe that we can ever right the constitutional settlement that we have, given the powers that the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and Northern Ireland Assembly have.

I echo the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer about regional airports. Although the Scotland Bill is going through the House and we will be voting on that—the Committee stage is on Monday—it is a concern that air passenger duty, for example, will be devolved to Scotland. For airports in the north of England, there is a real risk there. Although devolution to local government along the proposed structures is to be welcomed, it will not, in my view, right the constitutional settlement that the Scotland Bill will make a lot worse for constituents in England. That is a debate for elsewhere, however.

I agree with the comments made about not trying to be too prescriptive. I noted the surprise expressed by the hon. Member for Southport and my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer about the idea that central Government might demand something fixed and rigid. That should not be a shock to anybody who has been here or in local government; it is generally the way of things.

I concur with what has been said, however. We do not want a solution to be imposed on the Humber. I represent an area served by three local enterprise partnerships, which are all doing different jobs but doing them very well. We do not want the return of Humberside, and we do not want a Metro Mayor for the great city of Hull. Hull is a fantastic city, which is going to be UK city of culture in 2017 and which is really important to our region, but my constituents in the East Riding of Yorkshire, in Goole and on the south bank of the Humber in north Lincolnshire do not want to be part of a governance structure with Humberside. I believe that the Government's

position is that nothing will be imposed against the will of the people. That will be reassuring to my constituents, who are very concerned about the idea that anybody might try to recreate Humberside.

Finally—I am trying to keep within three or four minutes—if local authorities come forward with radical and innovative solutions, I would like two assurances from the Minister. First, I would like an assurance that regional boundaries would not be a barrier to such solutions. I represent north Lincolnshire, which is in the Yorkshire and the Humber region, but which sees itself as part of Lincolnshire because it is, of course, part of that great county. If north Lincolnshire wishes to pair with any of the district authorities to the south, which are in a different region—they are technically in the east midlands, although in north Lincolnshire we have far more in common with Lincolnshire than we do with west Yorkshire or even York—regional barriers must not be a barrier to its doing so.

Secondly, if unitary authorities want to work with district councils in places where there are also county councils, which is the situation in Lincolnshire—in north Lincolnshire we are a unitary authority, but Lincolnshire proper still has a district and county model—there may be a problem if district councils agree to the structures but county councils do not. Although I understand the desire for us to proceed on the basis of agreement, district and county councils have a history of disagreeing with each other on pretty much everything. I hope that the Minister will tell me that if a district council wishes to partner with a unitary authority, the county council will not have an absolute veto on that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir David Amess (in the Chair): Order. We have 12 minutes to share between three colleagues before the wind-ups.

5.2 pm

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (John Pugh) for securing the debate. I am wholly in favour of devolution, but I would like to quote Charles Kennedy, who got it exactly right when he said:

“I want to see far more decisions taken far closer to the patients, the passengers and the pupils. Far more power for locally and regionally elected politicians who understand best the needs of their areas.”

I could not have put it better myself. He was a very wise gentleman who will certainly be missed.

One of the key issues about devolution is funding. During the past five years under the previous Government, finance to local government was reduced by some 37%. If that is the way that this Government will go, passing powers down through Bills but cutting the funding, that is wholly unacceptable. We have to give localities the power to collect the money that they require.

Having said that, I support and welcome the extra powers in the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill, and I welcome what the legislation could provide to Greater Manchester. I add a note of caution—this has been touched on already—about the focus being too much on cities rather than smaller towns. Rochdale, for example, is on the periphery of Manchester, and

there are some disadvantages attached to that, although the city of Manchester serves Rochdale well. The Bill must ensure that the powers that are passed down give equal weight to the peripheral towns, not only in Greater Manchester but in south Lancashire and east Lancashire. That is worth bearing in mind, because there are inequalities not only between regions—those are fairly obvious—but between sub-regions within the regions. Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Southport, I am in favour of directly elected Metro Mayors. I believe that they provide greater accountability, more decisive action and a visible local champion whom the people can get behind and support.

Finally, a number of good people are coming forward in Greater Manchester hoping to be the Metro Mayor for the city region. I advise hon. Members who would like a flutter that I am 20:1 and my good wife Karen is 33:1. I will not comment on who is the better bet.

5.5 pm

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): First, I want to recognise and welcome what the Government are doing. I believe that the proposal is a recognition of the failure of more than 70 years of centralisation. It may not be completely perfect—there may be warts on it and difficulties with it—but it is the first real reversal in England of centralisation since the second world war, and as such, it is to be welcomed.

Secondly, regarding some of the comments made by the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) and others, it is very easy to find the faults in the proposal. It is easy to argue about boundaries or about consistency between different areas, and to say that the shires will not do as well as the cities. One problem that has bedevilled those of us who have argued for decentralisation—in my case, over the past third of a century—is the fact that nobody can agree on boundaries or on a consistent view. Cornwall is very different from Kent, which is very different from Manchester, which is very different from Birmingham. Each area has to argue the case for what is appropriate for Cheshire or for Kent, rather than looking to central Government to impose a uniform system across the whole country. That is what devolution should mean. If we try, as in the early '70s, to find a completely homogeneous system, we will end up with no change whatsoever.

Thirdly, I want to make a point about the municipal Mussolinis that the hon. Member for Southport mentioned. His argument was deficient, quite frankly. He said that there was no empirical basis for the proposal. The difference between this country and the democracies in Europe and north America is that all those democracies, in essence, have elected mayors under the strong mayor model, the weak mayor model or variations of those models. We may be talking about mayors of tiny villages that nobody has ever heard of in the middle of France, but the mayoral model is well understood and there is a huge empirical basis for it. Those who argue against the mayoral model must respond to this point: I do not think that there is any empirical basis for saying that the system of local government that has grown up in this country, which was originally based on committees and elected leaders and which now has scrutiny committees and executive members, is better than elected mayors.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) that a mayoral system has the fundamental democratic advantages of transparency and accountability. In London, for example, people

know who is responsible for transport in the city—it is the Mayor—but they often do not know who is their local councillor or the local leader of the council, who is elected under secondary legislation. If democracy means anything, it means that people understand who takes decisions on their behalf because that individual is elected, and that people can throw that individual out if they do not like them. If that is the case, I think that the mayoral model works well.

There is a huge amount to be said about the matter. As a Greater Manchester Member of Parliament, I welcome the proposals for Greater Manchester. Having looked at the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill, I believe that there are still areas of it that need improvement and clarification. I do not see why the Deputy Mayor should have to be the leader of a council, and why they cannot come from a different sector altogether, as they do in London. That restriction is unnecessary. Why is it necessary to have a separate Bill to transfer transport powers so that we can re-regulate the buses in Greater Manchester? I worry about that, and I want to see what will be in that Bill to ensure that we get a good deal. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) that the bonus of devolution is that we could integrate healthcare and social care so that we can take decisions on hospitals and the rest of healthcare locally, preferably by this method. Overall, the Government are on the right track, but there is some detail to get right. The proposal is welcome.

5.10 pm

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): Time is short, so I will try to get through my remarks as quickly as possible. There is huge potential in the north-east for economic growth, but if the past five years have taught us anything, it is that our region is experiencing disproportionate funding cuts. We need a fairer deal from the Government this time around. Any talk of regional devolution has to go hand in hand with action to address that unfair funding imbalance.

Although I welcome the Chancellor's belated recognition that the north does not end at Manchester or Leeds by incorporating the north-east in his plans, his proposed settlement on devolution for our region is deeply flawed. Devolution should mean empowering local regions to decide how best to spend their resources in order to nurture economic growth. Indeed, he has promised to give local authorities the levers they need to grow their local economy and ensure that local people keep the rewards, but under his current proposals only areas with a directly elected mayor will be given such levers. Devolution by diktat seems a strange form of empowerment to me.

The Government may believe that directly elected mayors represent the best means of ensuring accountability on devolved decision making, but Ministers have yet fully to make the case for why they believe that to be true. I am sceptical about whether local voters will agree with them. People in the north-east should be given the opportunity to make that decision for themselves. Forcing them to accept devolution on the Government's terms is not devolution at all.

Sunderland and Newcastle have previously rejected directly elected Mayors in referendums. The 2004 regional assembly referendum was very clear. If that opposition remains, why should the north-east and the communities

[*Bridget Phillipson*]

I represent be denied the benefits that devolution will bring, especially as the North East combined authority has made significant progress in a short space of time, not least on local transport matters? Plans to re-regulate local buses are under way through the quality contract scheme, a change for which I have long campaigned and that I have long supported.

I welcome the hon. Member for Stockton South (James Wharton) to his new role, and I am pleased that he, at least, has recognised that a one-size-fits-all approach to the devolution of regional powers is flawed. But if, as he says, the so-called northern powerhouse is not a proposal to force a uniform model on everyone, why has the Chancellor gone on the record as saying that he will settle for nothing less than elected mayors? Which is it? If the Government are serious about creating an economic powerhouse that encapsulates all of the north, local people must be given freedom to determine their own destiny, free from prescription or interference from Whitehall. The Government's proposals, in their current form, will deny the people of the north-east that opportunity.

5.13 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I have listened to this debate with great interest more as an observer than as someone who seeks to impose their views. As a Scottish National party Member, and as a former local councillor, I think it is important that local areas take decisions for themselves because they understand what best suits their needs. The debate on city deals for England is interesting because we have a city deal in Scotland. The area I represent has a partnership of eight local authorities covering Glasgow and the surrounding areas, but a mayor has not been imposed because it is not part of the Scottish local government tradition to have an elected mayor. Indeed, in Glasgow we have a political head, the leader of the council, and a civic head, the Lord Provost. Those two roles are separate and understood. I can see the point of conflict between urban areas, which may suit a mayor, and rural areas that, for different reasons, may not.

It will be interesting to see what comes out of this debate because we have diverse areas in Scotland, too. Our 32 local authorities include the city of Glasgow with a population of some 600,000 and Clackmannanshire with a population of only around 50,000, but both local authorities are set up in broadly the same way. Devolution is working well in Scotland. The Scottish Parliament's powers have been used to address local demands and to set a separate course for Scotland where we think things can be done in a particularly Scottish way for the benefit of our people. I will watch this debate with great interest. Much detail is still to appear, but we agree that, if the Government are giving powers to local areas, finance ought to be provided, too.

5.15 pm

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) on securing this important debate.

I make it clear that Labour supports devolution to cities, counties and communities in every part of the United Kingdom for a simple reason: decisions are

better if they are taken closer to the people they affect. In the past, Governments of every political colour have been too centralising, which is one reason why people have lost trust in politics. Power feels too remote, too unaccountable and too disconnected from people's everyday lives and everyday concerns. The time has come to get power out of Whitehall and into the hands of people across the country.

The previous coalition Government claimed to be localist, but the evidence tells a different story, and I speak as someone who led a reasonably high-profile council until I was elected to this place in December 2012. Education was centralised in Whitehall, with civil servants and national Ministers taking decisions about where schools would be built and who would run them. There was little, if any, engagement with parents, local communities or local government and, as a result, mistakes were made. The Government told councils how and when they should empty bins, how they could communicate with local residents and how much council tax they could charge. They told councils what level of financial reserves they should hold to cover known risks, and then they denounced those councils for not spending the same money on the day-to-day services that they had to operate. I even received a letter from a Minister telling me how and where the council should organise street parties.

Now we have a new Government also claiming that they will devolve and decentralise. That sounds good, but the omens are less good. We have just had our first sight of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill, which does not include any proposals for devolving specific powers. Devolution must be on offer to every part of the country and should benefit every city region, not just Greater Manchester. Devolution should benefit towns and county regions, too, not just our major urban areas. And devolution should not stop at the town hall. Tenants need more control over the homes they rent. Patients need more control over the health and care services they use. Parents need more control over the schools their children attend. Unemployed people need more control over the support on offer to help them get back to work. Devolution should be about handing power to the people.

Fundamentally, devolution cannot work without a fair funding settlement or longer-term funding deals. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) said, the areas that are being identified for devolution are those that have suffered the greatest cuts. Areas are being set up to fail, which feeds my concern, shared by many others, that the primary thing the Government want to localise is the blame for cuts they have made in Whitehall. Perhaps the starkest contradiction of all is that devolution is on offer only if it comes with an elected mayor. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has said:

"I will not impose this model on anyone. But nor will I settle for less."

Surely localism means trusting local people to take decisions for themselves, rather than having to rely on the occupant of No. 11 Downing Street.

Why do the Government feel that devolution needs to be accompanied by a mayor? Does the Minister not think that combined authorities are capable of finding a model of governance that is acceptable to the people they represent? Why are the Government choosing to propose only one model with a "take it or leave it" offer

designed in Whitehall? There is nothing localist about doing it that way. Labour wants much more devolution and decentralisation, and Labour-run cities are at the forefront of the devolution agenda. Combined authorities need a wide range of powers to create jobs, build homes, keep communities healthy and provide support to those who need it most, but there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. That does not work, and the Government should not be putting barriers in the way of parts of the country that want more devolution.

Why do the Government not give local people a choice? They cannot end the culture of “Whitehall knows best” by letting Whitehall override the preferences of areas that want more devolution but also want to choose how they are governed. Why are the Government denying local areas that choice? I hope that the Minister will tell us that he is ready to think again.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that local people should be involved in devolution and the right to take powers. At present, if they want to have a referendum and elect a mayor locally, 5% of the population must sign a petition. Would he be agreeable to reducing that to 1% or 2%, given that he wants local people to make decisions?

Mr Reed: My view of localism is that we must allow more such decisions to be taken by local authorities or local combined authorities in the areas that they seek to represent. The key point is that the Minister should not determine such things on behalf of those people. He cannot claim to be localist while imposing decisions on local communities.

5.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) on securing a debate that is clearly of such interest to colleagues of all parties. Members have raised a range of issues, many of which are fundamental to how the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill will work and many of which feed directly into hon. Members’ understandable concerns in the early stages of this debate. I hope that I can address most of those concerns in my comments.

The hon. Member for Southport accused me of the reversal of Thatcherism and the re-creation of metropolitan counties. I am not often accused of such things, nor did I expect to be accused of them on my first appearance as a Minister in a Conservative majority Government; I am sure that he will not be surprised to hear that I do not agree. We are not re-creating the metropolitan counties. They were large, cumbersome organisations with layers of bureaucracy that often conflicted with themselves. Instead, we are seeking to do what we can to transfer powers down to people sensibly and efficiently, and to build on combined authorities by empowering them to make decisions more locally and quickly and tailor those decisions to the needs of the communities that they serve. We have been accused of wanting to create Metro Mussolinis. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The hon. Member for Southport mentioned uniformity of approach—the Procrustean approach to devolving powers. Again, that is not the Government’s intention, nor is it contained in the legislation that we hope to introduce. We are seeking bespoke deals. We are saying

to local areas, “Tell us what works for you. Tell us what geographic area works for you and what powers work for you. Come to the Government and make a deal with us that will help you grow your local economy, deliver better services for local people and, fundamentally, play a part in the northern powerhouse project that this Government are introducing to rebalance our economy so that the north of England can grow at the rate it should be able to expect, and so that the success enjoyed by London and the south over many years can be replicated across the country as a whole.”

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Will the Minister comment on the feeling in the midlands that we are somewhat left out by the talk of a northern powerhouse? We are home to 10 million people, and we are the beating heart of manufacturing. Does he understand that there is some concern that we do not appear to be maximising ministerial favour and interest, given all this talk of the north versus the south?

James Wharton: The talk is not of the north versus the south; it is about how the rest of the country can catch up with some of the successes realised in the south not just recently but over many years. The midlands have just as important a role to play in that process. The Chancellor was in the midlands not long ago, talking about the midlands engine and what we can deliver there. Devolution can work for the midlands just as it can for the north. The majority of comments in this debate have been from Members for northern constituencies, but by no means does that mean that the Bill will apply only to those areas; it will provide opportunities to the country as a whole.

I want to address the accusation of uniformity of approach and prescription. That is not what the Bill will do; it is not what the Government are proposing. We propose to go to each area and find out what will work for that area. The legislation that we want to introduce is enabling legislation: it will allow different, tailored approaches to be delivered where they are needed, and in ways that have local agreement.

Members have raised concerns about the Metro Mayor model. It has been asked why the Government have been clear that we want to require the Metro Mayor as part of the devolution package for some city areas. If areas want the big devolution deal that places such as Manchester are getting, it is absolutely true that a Metro Mayor is a Government requirement as part of that package. The legislation enables but does not require that to happen. That is because we are talking about a wholesale transfer of powers, right down to a much more local level, in a way that has not been done by Government in this country for generations. We have seen power move away from local communities under successive Governments of different party political colours, and we want to reverse that trend. We want to say, “What can you do better locally, what do you need and what can we deliver for you?” With that, however, there must be accountability and responsibility. The mayoral model has been shown to work all over the world, and a directly elected and accountable individual is an important part of that model.

Bridget Phillipson: Can the Minister clarify something? Regarding the north-east, where we already have a combined authority, will devolution of further powers

[*Bridget Phillipson*]

be conditional on a Metro Mayor? I am a bit unclear. On the one hand, he says that it is not a one-size-fits-all approach; on the other hand, he says, “It is, because you must have a Metro Mayor.”

James Wharton: I am happy to clarify matters to the hon. Lady to the extent that I can, because it depends on what the areas that want to take part in the devolution process want to get from it. If they want the Manchester model—the exciting package of powers that we are already delivering to the Greater Manchester area—a mayor will be a requirement of it. We in the Government believe that that needs to happen, and we will insist on it. If they want something less, then we can have a discussion about what that might look like. But yes, fundamentally, if areas want to push ahead with the sort of devolution package that areas such as Greater Manchester are already in line to get, a mayor will be a requirement of that process or will be part of that deal.

John Pugh: The Minister has repeated some of the mantras that I think we have heard before on this subject. However, what I genuinely want to know is this: why is that impossible in the Government’s mind? It must be impossible for there to be a prescription; if the Government are insisting on a Metro Mayor, that means they do not think that other things will work. Why is it impossible to give a level of devolution to a combined authority similar to that on offer in Manchester? What capacity does a combined authority lack that a Metro Mayor has?

James Wharton: I am sure the hon. Gentleman recognises that combined authorities are made up of individuals who, while they are elected in their own respective local authority area, are not directly elected by the totality of the people they are there to serve. It is that democratic accountability that we are trying to deliver with this model and prescribing.

John Pugh *rose*—

James Wharton: I will give way one final time, because I must make progress.

John Pugh: The answer to that argument is that if the reason for having one accountable person is that it will make things more accountable to the public and serve them better, why will the Government not give the public a chance to decide whether they want that template in the first place?

James Wharton: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that local authorities already have the power to put mayors in place, and local authority mayors are different

from what is being proposed under the Metro Mayor model. Local authorities already have that power, without referendums. We as a Government are trying to give combined authorities the same power to deliver that accountability for those larger areas, and the directly accountable individual that local people can hold to account.

I will touch on a number of other issues that hon. Members raised, including the question of whether this project is just for cities. Several hon. Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for York Outer (Julian Sturdy), for Carlisle (John Stevenson), and for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), and the hon. Members for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) and for Hartlepool (Mr Wright), asked whether counties count too. The answer is that of course they do. The Bill we are considering is an enabling one that will allow us to tailor packages for different areas right across the country. We want to see cities succeed—they can be drivers of growth—but counties contribute a huge amount to our economy as well, and we want all those areas to come forward, make deals and find devolution settlements that work for them, so the Government are making an absolute commitment to pursue devolution not only for cities but for counties.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole also asked about boundaries. This is a bottom-up process, and I say to him that if proposals come forward from local areas both for the powers they want and the areas they want them to apply to, we are open to listening to those proposals and making a deal with those areas. We want local areas to come forward with that approach.

The health budget was raised in the context of powers that might be devolved. My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) made an important contribution on that issue, recognising the opportunity that arises when health and social care budgets can be brought together, and the work that can be done locally to drive better provision of those sorts of services. That approach is already being pursued in the Greater Manchester model.

This Bill is an opportunity that the Government are introducing to rebalance our economy, to drive the northern powerhouse while driving economic growth across the country as a whole and to transfer powers away from Whitehall in a way that will not only provide accountability at a local level but allow local areas to make decisions more quickly and effectively, tailoring them to their needs, so they can grow their economies for the benefit of us all.

5.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No.10(14)).

Written Statements

Tuesday 9 June 2015

HOME DEPARTMENT

Justice and Home Affairs Pre-Council Statement

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): The Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council is due to be held on 15 and 16 June in Luxembourg. My hon. Friend, Lord Faulks QC, Minister for Civil Justice and I will attend on behalf of the United Kingdom. As the provisional agenda stands, the following items will be discussed.

Justice day on 15 June will begin with the Latvian presidency seeking a general approach on the proposed data protection regulation. The file is subject to qualified majority voting.

This will be followed by the presidency seeking a general approach on the draft regulation on promoting the free movement of citizens and businesses by simplifying the acceptance of certain public documents in the EU. The aim of the proposal is to reduce the problems associated with language barriers when people present documents such as birth and marriage certificates in different member states.

The Latvian presidency is aiming for a consensus on the first 16 articles of the draft European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) regulation, covering certain aspects of its internal workings. The UK did not opt in to this proposal.

During lunch there will be a discussion on the judicial dimension of the new digital single market strategy. Under AOB, the presidency will provide information on other current legislative proposals and on the EU-US justice and home affairs ministerial meeting, which was held in Riga on 2 and 3 June.

Finally, the Luxembourg delegation will present the programme for its forthcoming presidency—July-December 2015.

The interior session on 16 June will begin in mixed committee with Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland—non-EU Schengen states. The Council will debate the Commission's communication "A European Agenda on Migration", and receive an update on the outcome of the special meeting of the European Council on 23 April, which agreed a series of immediate actions to respond to the situation in the Mediterranean.

During the main interior meeting member states will be asked to agree Council conclusions establishing the EU internal security strategy (ISS) for the next five years. This is in line with the commitment in the new strategic guidelines agreed at the European Council in June 2014 to review the ISS (2010-2014.) The renewed ISS will set strategic objectives for EU co-operation on internal security matters.

Ministers will then discuss progress in delivering European counter-terrorism priorities since the 12 February statement of the member states of the European Council. These priorities are divided into three objectives: ensuring

the security of citizens, preventing radicalisation and safeguarding values, and co-operating with international partners. National security remains a member state competence.

Under AOB, the presidency will provide information on current legislative proposals and on the EU-US Justice and Home Affairs ministerial meeting—held in Riga from 2 to 3 June 2015.

The Austrian delegation will then provide information on the Salzburg forum ministerial conference, held in St Pölten (Austria) from 4 to 5 May and on the international ministerial conference on "Tackling Jihadism Together", held in Vienna on 20 March.

Finally, the incoming Luxembourg presidency will present its programme and Slovenia will present on the justice and home affairs ministerial conference of the Brdo process and south-east European co-operation process held in Budva (Montenegro) from 16 to 17 April 2015.

[HCWS20]

TRANSPORT

EU Transport Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): I will attend the final Transport Council under the Latvian presidency (the presidency), taking place in Luxembourg, on Thursday 11 June.

The presidency is aiming for a general approach on a proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down technical requirements for inland waterway vessels and repealing directive 2006/87/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council. The proposed directive seeks to replace the detailed technical annex of directive 2006/87/EC with simpler standards to be developed by a new international body (to be known as CESNI). The UK intends to support the proposed directive as it streamlines existing processes; we have safeguarded crucial existing derogations for the UK inland waterway sector; and secured explicit links to the output of CESNI, which the UK considers to be the appropriate body to develop technical standards for inland waterway vessels.

There will be two progress reports, the first on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending regulation (EC) No 261/2004 establishing common rules on compensation and assistance to passengers in the event of denied boarding and of the cancellation or long delay of flights and regulation (EC) No 2027/97 on air carrier liability in respect of the carriage of passengers and their baggage by air (air passenger rights). The presidency has held a number of working level meetings over the last few months to try to resolve four main issues: the trigger points for when delay compensation is due; compensation for connecting flights; extraordinary circumstances; and cabin baggage. Limited progress has been made during the working groups, with most member states still having significant concerns about at least one of these issues. On trigger points, the UK has supported fixed compensation amounts for delays of at least five, nine or 12 hours depending upon the length of the flight in question. Our analysis

shows that such a regime would strike the right balance between adequately compensating passengers for time lost, while ensuring that burdens on industry are proportionate. The UK also considers that to include compensation for missed connections would place a significant burden on the operators of short-haul feeder flights, damaging connectivity.

On the issue of extraordinary circumstances in which compensation is not due to the passenger, we have supported the inclusion of a binding and non-exhaustive list in the text of the regulation. This would increase clarity while retaining flexibility regarding what can be considered as extraordinary. We also oppose limiting the use of extraordinary circumstances to the current flight and the previous flight to help to minimise burdens on industry. On the number and type of cabin baggage items allowed, I am of the view that this issue should not be regulated and should be a commercial decision for the carrier.

Although this dossier is currently down for a progress report, there may be a wide ranging debate at Council, including a discussion on Gibraltar airport. Regulation (EC) No. 261/2004 was adopted prior to the 2006 Cordoba agreement and therefore contains a clause suspending its application to Gibraltar airport, as was normal practice at that time. The Commission's proposal does not contain an amendment to remove the Gibraltar airport suspension clause from the original regulation. The UK will continue to press for the extension of the regulation to Gibraltar airport in line with the EU treaties. I will work with the Minister for Europe on this and other aviation dossiers to ensure that any language on Gibraltar is acceptable.

The second progress report concerns the proposal for a directive of European Parliament and of the Council amending directive 2012/34 establishing a single European railway area, as regards the opening of the market for domestic passenger transport services by rail and the governance of the railway infrastructure and a proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending regulation (EC) No 1370/2007 concerning the opening of the market for domestic passenger transport services by rail ("market pillar" of the 4th railway package). Negotiations of the market pillar by the Council began under the Italian presidency in June 2014 and have progressed further under the Latvian presidency. The presidency has produced a set of draft amendments to the package. These have improved the text in a number of areas which could otherwise have resulted in additional burdens in the UK, for example the amendments no longer increase regulation of the transport planning process and have reduced the proposed new restrictions on outsourcing and co-operation by different businesses in the railway industry. The key outstanding sticking point is the question of when a public authority should be able to decide not to hold a competition for a rail contract and instead make a

direct award to their chosen train operator. I plan to support the progress made by the presidency in reducing the regulatory burden the package would impose, while noting that there is still scope for further improvement. I intend to underline the success of liberalisation and competition in revitalising the UK railway market over the past 20 years and to argue that competition is vital for a competitive and sustainable railway sector. In particular I propose to state the use of direct awards should be restricted in order to promote competition. Any exemptions to competitive tendering of rail contracts therefore need to be based on objective criteria, where it can be demonstrated that a direct award is justified.

Under any other business, the Commission will provide information on its review of the road safety strategy 2015-2020 and will provide an update on the Christophersen-Bodewig-Secchi report on TEN-T and CEF ahead of the TEN-T days taking place in Riga from 22-23 June. The Commission will also provide an update on the shift to rail proposal. The presidency will report on the outcome of the 3rd ASEM Transport Ministers' meeting held in Riga on 29-30 April at which the UK was represented at official level. Luxembourg, the incoming presidency of the EU will present its work programme.

[HCWS19]

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Government Chemist

The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson): The 18th annual review of the Government Chemist has been received. The review will be placed in the Libraries of the House plus those of the devolved administrations in Wales and Northern Ireland. The review will also be laid before the Scottish Parliament.

The Government Chemist is the referee analyst named in Acts of Parliament. The Government Chemist's team carry out analysis in high-profile cases, for example, the measurement of horsemeat in products suspected to have been mislabelled.

The Government Chemist's work often has a critical health dimension as it used to decide whether food additives or contaminants are within permitted levels.

The Government Chemist employs a range of classical and modern techniques, including DNA analysis, as part of his activities in producing certificates of analysis. The Government Chemist also gives advice to Government Departments, Trading Standards Departments and Public Analysts.

[HCWS18]

Petition

Tuesday 9 June 2015

OBSERVATIONS

WORK AND PENSIONS

Progress of the Affordable Homes Bill

The Petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that the Petitioners support the Affordable Homes Bill sponsored by Andrew George, further that the Petitioners believe that the bill should be allowed to progress and further that a petition in the St Ives constituency calling for the bill to be allowed to progress was signed by 1072 individuals.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to bring forward a money resolution to allow the Affordable Homes Bill to make progress.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Andrew George, Official Report, 24 March 2015; Vol. 594, c. 1393.]

[P001466]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions:

It is worthwhile setting out the policy rationale behind extending the private rented sector size criteria conditions that have been in place for some time, to working age housing benefit recipients living in the social rented sector.

The Government firmly believe it is only fair that all working age housing benefit recipients should be treated the same. They should all face the same choices about affordability and where to live, no matter which rented sector they live in. That is why we removed what is often referred to as “the spare room subsidy” for social sector tenants. In effect this means the amount of housing benefit paid is restricted for those living in a property that is assessed as too large for their needs. This is not a tax on individuals, but a reduction in the level of state support for housing costs for those who under occupy.

Left unreformed the housing benefit Bill would have spiralled out of control. It had increased by around 50% in real terms over a decade and in 2011-12 expenditure stood at £23 billion. The Government cannot expect taxpayers to continue to underwrite people’s housing costs regardless of the size of their accommodation. People receiving housing benefit who wish to remain in accommodation that is larger than their household requires, need to fund part of the cost themselves. This particular measure is helping to reduce that expenditure with savings of around £500 million a year during 2013-14 and 2014-15.

At the time of introduction there were around 820,000 spare rooms being paid for by the taxpayer at a time when almost a quarter of a million people were living in overcrowded accommodation with around 1.7 million on social housing waiting lists in England alone, now down to 1.4 million.

The Government believe the removal of the spare room subsidy is encouraging more effective use of social housing stock and a more strategic approach in both the allocation of property and, in the longer term, building programmes, ensuring more appropriately sized accommodation for the demand. It is in the interests of both social landlords and tenants to achieve a better match between housing need and the size of accommodation provided.

Had the Affordable Homes Bill become law, we calculated that the cost would have exceeded £1 billion. This figure was an estimate based on the abolition of the removal of spare room subsidy, which would have cost the tax-payer £500 million per year. However, as a result of the wording of the Bill, there would also have been the added cost of paying for ineligible service charges, paying full rent where there is a non-dependant who could contribute to housing costs, and extending these changes to housing benefit to those not impacted by the policy; namely, pensioners.

There would also have been cost implications for local authorities where they are required to assess an individual’s ability to share a bedroom, or where there is dispute regarding what constitutes a ‘reasonable offer’ of more suitable accommodation from either the local authority or social landlord.

In addition there would have been a requirement to find more than £1 billion of alternative saving measures from within the welfare budget, in order to ensure that these changes did not breach the welfare cap.

The Government are still committed to supporting those who face the greatest challenges in adjusting to welfare reform, which is why, in the previous Parliament; we significantly increased funding for discretionary housing payments to £345 million for the two years to April 2015. That included £115 million allocated specifically to support people affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy.

We maintain that use of discretionary housing payments offers a more flexible and cost effective approach than rigid and prescriptive legislation. They enable local authorities to provide additional support such as allowing extra time for those affected to find suitable alternative accommodation as well as providing longer term support for vulnerable claimants, such as those living in significantly adapted accommodation.

To date, the courts have consistently upheld the Government position on this policy, finding that we had fulfilled our public sector equality duties, the effects of the policy had been properly considered and that DHPs are an appropriate mitigation.

Had the Affordable Homes Bill been passed it would have increased the burden on the taxpayer, and reversed the efforts that the Government have taken to ensure fairness in the housing benefit system.

ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 9 June 2015

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE	1023	FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE—	
Burundi.....	1033	<i>continued</i>	
Economic Migrants: North Africa.....	1029	Israeli Settlements.....	1037
EU Referendum.....	1030	Middle East Peace Process.....	1036
EU Reform.....	1025	MV Seaman Guard Ohio.....	1034
EU Sanctions (Russia).....	1023	Persecution of Christians.....	1037
ISIL: Iraq and Syria.....	1028	Topical Questions.....	1038
ISIL: Militia Groups.....	1035		

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Tuesday 9 June 2015

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS	30WS	TRANSPORT	28WS
Government Chemist.....	30WS	EU Transport Council.....	28WS
HOME DEPARTMENT	27WS		
Justice and Home Affairs Pre-Council Statement..	27WS		

PETITION

Tuesday 9 June 2015

	<i>Col. No.</i>
WORK AND PENSIONS	13P
Progress of the Affordable Homes Bill.....	13P

Members who wish to have the Daily Report of the Debates forwarded to them should give notice at the Vote Office.

No proofs of the Daily Reports can be supplied. Corrections which Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked in the Daily Report, but not telephoned, and *the copy containing the Corrections must be received at the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Tuesday 16 June 2015**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF THE VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their Speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), on application to the Stationery Office, c/o the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons, from whom the terms and conditions of reprinting may be ascertained. Application forms are available at the Vote Office.

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

DAILY PARTS

Single copies:

Commons, £5; Lords, £4.

Annual subscriptions:

Commons, £865; Lords, £600.

LORDS VOLUME INDEX obtainable on standing order only. Details available on request.

BOUND VOLUMES OF DEBATES are issued periodically during the session.

Single copies:

Commons, £105; Lords, £60 (£100 for a two-volume edition).

Standing orders will be accepted.

THE INDEX to each Bound Volume of House of Commons Debates is published separately at £9.00 and can be supplied to standing order.

All prices are inclusive of postage

CONTENTS

Tuesday 9 June 2015

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1023] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

European Union Referendum Bill [Col. 1047]

Motion for Second Reading—(Mr Philip Hammond)
Amendment—(Alex Salmond)—on a Division, negatived
Second Reading—on a Division—agreed to

Black Country University Technical College [Col. 1162]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Air Pollution (London) [Col. 1WH]
Dyfed Powys Police Helicopter [Col. 26WH]
Vocational Qualifications Day [Col. 35WH]
Libraries (Harrow) [Col. 57WH]
City Regions and Metro Mayors [Col. 64WH]
General Debates

Written Statements [Col. 27WS]

Petition [Col. 13P]

Observations

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
