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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 18 June 2015

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Farm Animals: Disease

1. **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): What steps she is taking to reduce the routine use of antibiotics to prevent disease in farm animals. [900405]

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): We have made it very clear that we do not support the routine preventive use of antibiotics or the use of antibiotics to compensate for poor animal husbandry. That is reflected in the revised guidelines on the responsible use of animal medicines on the farm, published by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate last December. We continue to work with a number of industry bodies to encourage the development of prescribing guidelines, to challenge and optimise prescribing practices and behaviour.

Kerry McCarthy: Today, we hear that MRSA of a livestock origin is not only likely to be well established within the UK pig herd but has for the first time been found in British retail pork, from which it could be passed on to humans. In the light of this new and extremely troubling evidence, will the Department now finally set clear targets for phasing out routine preventive use of antibiotics in farm animals where no disease has been diagnosed, or is the Minister happy to take the risk of a post-antibiotic future?

George Eustice: It is important to recognise that livestock-associated MRSA is a different strain from that which affects our hospitals and does not cross to the human population. This country has always had slightly lower levels of antibiotic usage than countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands, which have had more serious problems. They have to be prescribed and clinical decisions have to be made, but the guidelines we have issued mean we have managed to suppress the use of antibiotics and ensure they are used sparingly.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that microbial antibiotic resistance is by no means exclusively a concern for veterinary

medicine, and will he join me in welcoming the publication back in 2013 of a Government strategy to deal with the issue across Departments?

George Eustice: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This issue also affects the Department for Health, and the chief medical officer is leading our work in this area. As my hon. Friend says, we have published an antimicrobial strategy setting out our approach for the next five years. It is also true that, although the use of antibiotics in farming has been relatively static over the past decade or so, we have seen an increase in the use of antibiotics in medicine, which is of great concern.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): McDonald's is phasing out beef products that contain antibiotics, but it has indicated that beef products containing ionophore drugs will be acceptable, as they harm neither animals nor humans. What discussions has the Minister had with the catering industry about that?

George Eustice: I have not had any specific discussions on that point. As I have said, all antibiotics have to be prescribed. It is important to distinguish between routine use and preventive use. Sometimes it is right to use them preventively if there is a particular problem in a herd or a flock, but they have to be prescribed by vets—and only sparingly.

Air Quality (Glasgow)

2. **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): What discussions her Department has had with Glasgow City Council on projections for Glasgow's air quality and compliance with EU air quality regulations. [900407]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): As the hon. Lady is aware, air quality in Scotland is a devolved issue, so I have not had direct conversations with Glasgow City Council, but I saw the Scottish Environment Minister on Monday. Officials are in regular contact with Scottish Government officials about the revision of UK nitrogen oxide air quality plans, including those for the Glasgow urban area.

Alison Thewliss: I thank the Minister for that response. Given the recent European Commission ruling relating to Client Earth, does the Minister consider it wise, with ongoing issues on Hope Street in Glasgow, that Glasgow City Council expedites its action on this issue in its air quality action plan?

Rory Stewart: I reconfirm that this is very much a devolved issue and one on which officials from Glasgow City Council can work closely with our departmental officials to resolve, but I do not wish to stand at this Dispatch Box and dictate to Glasgow.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: The question relates to Glasgow or, at its widest interpretation, Scotland, but not Meriden or elsewhere.

Mrs Spelman: Scotland, in common with 27 member states of the European Union, is non-compliant with the EC arrangements. Does the Minister agree that low emission zones can help improve air quality in cities such as Glasgow and that, in proposing a low emission zone for London, the Mayor of London has offered a good way to improve air quality?

Mr Speaker: With reference to Glasgow.

Rory Stewart: I pay tribute to the Mayor of London for his work on air quality. I am unable, however, to connect directly the work of the Mayor of London to the question about Glasgow.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab) *rose*—

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The question is certainly not about Poplar and Canning Town or Denton and Reddish, but about Glasgow.

Jim Fitzpatrick: I am glad that you recognise my Glasgow credentials, Mr Speaker, because sometimes my classic cockney accent confuses people.

I welcome the Minister to his place. In any such discussions with Glasgow, I ask that he takes into account river traffic. The Thames is busier than the Clyde, but vessels on the Clyde do contribute to emissions. Will he ensure that he remembers that addition?

Rory Stewart: Among the different sources of nitrogen dioxide emissions, river traffic is indeed a substantial emitter. Glasgow City Council and officials from the Department will take that into account.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I, too, welcome the Minister to his place. Last year, the Government wrote a letter to all local authorities, trying to blame them for the 29,000 deaths that air pollution is causing every year in the UK and saying that any fines imposed by the EU for failure to comply with the air quality directive would have to be paid by them. Now that the Supreme Court has ruled that it is the Government who are solely responsible for compliance and any fines arising, will the Secretary of State write again to all local authorities to accept her responsibility and overturn her previous threatening letter?

Rory Stewart: I am very happy to discuss that matter in detail, but as the shadow Minister said—*[Interruption.]* “Say yes”, it is suggested from the Opposition Front Bench. As the shadow Minister has acknowledged, we need to tackle this issue in partnership with local authorities. The prime responsibility needs to reside there because the sources of the emissions are quite different from one local authority to another, and therefore the solutions will be different from one local authority to another.

Flood Defence Schemes

3. **Karl McCartney** (Lincoln) (Con): How many flood defence schemes are planned to begin construction under the Government’s six-year flood defence programme in 2015. [900408]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): One hundred and sixty-one schemes are due to start this financial year, as part of our £2.3 billion, six-year programme, which will protect an additional 300,000 properties by 2021. That represents a real-terms increase in flood investment.

Karl McCartney: Will the Secretary of State join me in welcoming the work of the three internal drainage boards that affect my constituency, Witham first district IDB, Witham third district IDB and Upper Witham IDB? What steps will the Government take to ensure that the Environment Agency, which is lackadaisical in my local area, and other parties work together more effectively for the benefit of my constituents in Lincoln and the people of Lincolnshire?

Elizabeth Truss: Like my hon. Friend, I am a huge fan of internal drainage boards. We have some fantastic drainage boards in Norfolk and I have visited the internal drainage boards in Boston. I want internal drainage boards to work closely with the Environment Agency to continue to protect homes and farmland. I would like this model to be rolled out across the country.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The coalition Government announced £80 million to protect the Humber estuary over six years. That is only 9% of what the Environment Agency said was required. Does the Secretary of State agree that investment in flood defences can be seen as an economic opportunity, rather than as a burden that has to be borne?

Elizabeth Truss: I completely agree with the hon. Lady that investment in flood defences is an economic opportunity. Our six-year programme will result in the generation of £30 billion of economic value. We are committed to looking at the Humber plans and are due to report back on them in July.

Hunting Act 2004

4. **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Whether she plans to bring forward legislative proposals to repeal the Hunting Act 2004; and if she will make a statement.

[900409]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): As we said in our manifesto, we will give Parliament the opportunity to repeal the Hunting Act 2004 on a free vote on a Government Bill in Government time.

Paul Blomfield: The Secretary of State will understand that my constituents and, indeed, the whole country are overwhelmingly opposed to the repeal of the foxhunting ban. As she said, the Government have made a clear commitment to a vote on repeal, but she has not made clear the nature of that vote. Will she confirm that the vote will be on a parliamentary Bill that is considered in this House and the other place in the normal way?

Elizabeth Truss: I confirm that that is what we are committed to. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that that pledge was part of our manifesto, which people voted on at the general election, and we are committed to fulfilling it.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): We on this side of the House are confident that we would win a vote to prevent the repeal of the Hunting Act, but it is clear from the Minister's answer that no plan is in place for a vote. On that basis, and given that 80% of voters support the ban on hunting, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) pointed out, why does not the Secretary of State just drop the idea and get on with the job of making sure the legislation is enforced?

Elizabeth Truss: I am a bit surprised to hear the hon. Lady talk about her side of the House, given that this has always been a free vote matter that is up to the conscience of individual Members. I have made it very clear that I support repeal of the Hunting Act and would vote on that basis, but I recognise that Members need to make their own decisions on the issue, so I am surprised to hear that the vote would be whipped by the Labour party.

Flood Defences

5. **Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): What steps she is taking to invest in flood defences. [900410]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): Flood defences are an absolute priority for this Government. We are spending £2.3 billion on more than 1,500 schemes over the next six years, which will help us reduce flood risk to our country by 5%.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I thank the Secretary of State for her response, but the reality is that in the last Parliament the Government promised £3.1 million of investment to reduce flood risk in my constituency, but figures published by the Environment Agency show that only £1 million of funding has been granted. Can the Secretary of State confirm which schemes will not go ahead and why the Government are failing to deliver on their commitment to manage flood risk?

Elizabeth Truss: Seven schemes in the hon. Lady's constituency have now been identified within the six-year programme between now and 2020-21, with a total investment value of £4.3 million. We are also raising money from partnership funding and the private sector, which enables us to protect more homes and more communities.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): In 2007, the community of Thatcham suffered the surface water flooding of more than 1,100 homes. Since then a huge community effort, working with the Environment Agency and unlocking a lot of local funding as part of the partnership funding scheme, has seen a lot of measures reintroduced. The last piece of that work needs preliminary design funding for this year. Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the new Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), whom I welcome to the best job in Government, look closely at this case, so that Thatcham is protected for the future?

Elizabeth Truss: I am sure that we will look very closely at the case that my hon. Friend has made. We are enabling local communities to bundle up projects so that we can have more small-scale projects, and we have put through our plans on sustainable urban drainage better to protect housing from flooding.

Food and Farming Sector

6. **Julian Sturdy** (York Outer) (Con): What plans she has to increase the productivity, competitiveness and resilience of the UK food and farming sector. [900411]

7. **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): What plans she has to increase the productivity, competitiveness and resilience of the UK food and farming sector. [900412]

8. **Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): What plans she has to increase the productivity, competitiveness and resilience of the UK food and farming sector. [900413]

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): British food and farming is worth more than £100 billion a year to our economy and employs one in eight workers in Great Britain. That is why the Government are committed to working with industry to develop a long-term plan to buy more, sell more and grow more British food. The plan will set out how British food and farming can become a world leader that is innovative, competitive, profitable and resilient, and we will work on that in the months ahead.

Julian Sturdy: I draw Members' attention to my declaration of interest.

Population growth predictions estimate that we will need to produce 60% more food by 2050, but British crop yields have plateaued over recent years and the agrichemical toolbox available to farmers has been ever reducing. Will the Minister look seriously at offering more support for research and innovation that is focused on increasing yields and on the production challenges that farmers face today?

George Eustice: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Following large growth immediately after the war, yields have plateaued in recent decades. DEFRA is spending about £1.75 million a year on research into crops, and our research councils, through the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, have a number of programmes in this area. In particular, Rothamsted has a major programme called "20:20 Wheat", which aims to get yields of wheat to 20 tonnes per hectare in the next 20 years.

Kevin Hollinrake: This week a dairy farm in my constituency closed its gates for the last time. That follows a 55% reduction in the number of dairy farms in the UK since 1998. What can the Minister say to support British dairy farming?

George Eustice: My hon. Friend highlights a real problem with dairy at the moment. We have had a very difficult year, following a very good year last year. The long-term prospects for the industry are good: demand is growing by about 2% a year, and the Government are

making it easier for farmers to average their tax, working with the National Farmers Union to develop futures markets to help farmers manage volatility, and making available investment—through the rural development programme—to help farmers improve their competitiveness.

Derek Thomas: The number of young people entering the UK food and farming sector is encouraging. What assurances can the Minister give that young people can access the skills they need to ensure that the sector has a secure future in areas such as west Cornwall and my hon. Friend's constituency?

George Eustice: As my hon. Friend knows, we have Duchy College in my constituency, and many of his constituents attend it. He makes an important point: we want to treble the number of apprenticeships in food and farming and to encourage more young people to choose farming as a career. We are working with organisations such as Bright Crop to get ambassadors to go into schools to help teenagers to choose the right subjects so that they can take up careers in farming. That area will be a major part of our food and farming strategy.

18. [900424] **Mr Nicholas Brown** (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab): Does the Department have a contingency plan to support British agriculture and protect the British food industry's market access in the event of our leaving the European Union and the common agricultural policy? If so, will the Minister publish it?

George Eustice: No, the right hon. Gentleman will know that the Government want to renegotiate our relationship with the European Union, and then we intend to campaign to stay in. The CAP is not perfect, and during the course of this Parliament we will push for a mid-term review. We will also argue for longer term reform so that the CAP serves farmers and consumers more effectively.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Farmers in my constituency, a mere 10 miles from Manchester city centre, are still seeing the productivity and competitiveness of their businesses inhibited by the lack of superfast broadband. What discussions is the Minister having with ministerial colleagues in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to expedite the roll-out of superfast broadband in rural areas?

George Eustice: The Secretary of State had a meeting yesterday on that very issue. Broadband Delivery UK has made available some £750 million to roll out superfast broadband in our most rural areas, as well as funds to pilot new technologies in the hardest to reach areas. We recognise that this is an important issue, and the Government will focus much of their energies on it.

Calum Kerr (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (SNP): The Government have withheld from Scotland the vast majority of a €230 million pillar one allocation of EU uplift money. The UK qualified for that money only because of Scotland's low payments. Can the Minister explain why, against the clearly expressed will of the Scottish Government and all political parties in the Scottish Parliament, the Government intend to deprive Scottish farming communities of most of that money?

George Eustice: The allocations that we have made are based on land types, and historically Scotland has tended to have less per hectare because its land was less intensively farmed, but it actually receives more per farm holding than any other part of the UK. We have made it clear that we will have a mid-term review of that issue, which will include comparisons of land types in every part of the UK.

Climate Change Adaptation Plan

9. **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): What steps her Department is taking to prioritise flood prevention and introduce a climate change adaptation plan. [900414]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): Our £2.3 billion capital investment programme will better protect 300,000 homes through a range of flood risk management measures. York will benefit from the programme to the tune of £5 million. We already have a climate change adaptation plan—the national adaptation programme—and it is currently being assessed by the adaptation sub-committee: we expect to learn from its report.

Rachael Maskell: In my constituency, 2,053 homes experience a medium to very high risk of flooding, as does York city centre. Where are the Government in implementing a flood reinsurance scheme to give my constituents some assurances?

Rory Stewart: As I mentioned, £5 million has been committed specifically to flood defences in York. The flood re scheme is currently on track. It is an extremely impressive but complex scheme that will provide insurance to the most vulnerable and at-risk people within your constituency.

Mr Speaker: Not mine.

Cost of Living (Rural Britain)

10. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): What steps she is taking to reduce the cost of living in rural Britain. [900415]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): Reducing the cost of living in rural areas depends primarily on overcoming the challenges of distance and sparsity. That means boosting productivity and investing in a strong economy and infrastructure, such as road, rail and high-speed broadband. The rural fuel rebate means that some of the most rural areas now benefit from a 5p per litre fuel discount.

Alex Cunningham: People in villages such as Stillington, Carlton, Thorpe Thewles and Redmarshall in my constituency have seen their buses reduced to the odd one here and there, or they have gone altogether, as private companies have pulled out because local authorities no longer have the money to subsidise them. I am sure the Minister agrees that affordable transport links are essential for rural areas, so what can I tell my constituents that the Government will do to connect them to the rest of the area?

Rory Stewart: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman that connections of any sort, whether digital or bus connections, are vital for rural areas that are isolated. Some councils have found solutions to that and there is a community bus fund, championed by the Department for Transport. I look forward to talking in detail to the hon. Gentleman, if he is interested, about the problems in his constituency.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): The Minister mentions the rural economy in the context of broadband. I quite agree that we need to boost broadband, but does he agree that we really need to send a signal to BT to enhance its efforts to ensure that we are properly connected in rural areas?

Rory Stewart: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. Working with BT involves the work of every single constituency MP to ensure that we get the information on which areas will be connected and we hold British Telecom to account for the more than £700 million of public money that the Government are investing in a highly impressive programme in rural broadband roll-out.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Minister, like me, a compulsive listener to “Farming Today”? Is he aware that many experts are saying on “Farming Today” that the cost of living in rural communities will be affected in the long term by climate change and how it impacts on the crops we can grow successfully in the rural economy? Is he worried about that? Is he talking about it, or have this Government given up on climate change worries?

Rory Stewart: Climate change is baked into every aspect of this Department’s work. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the risk assessment conducted in 2012 on climate change adaptation focused specifically on flood risk, but he is correct that there are other issues we need to look at—and look at relentlessly—which is why we look forward to providing a full response to the assessment provided by the climate change adaptation sub-committee.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): There can be no question about it: it does cost more to live in rural areas compared with urban areas, so I very much welcome the reduction in fuel duty, the cap on petrol prices and equalising the council tax. All these things are extremely helpful, but transport must be central to this. Twenty-five per cent. of people in my constituency do not have cars. Will the Minister take steps to look into community bus services, such as Bradies taxis, which I launched last week in my constituency? They are at the end of a telephone and will go and pick people up from their rural locations.

Rory Stewart: My hon. Friend is a great champion of the issues of rural areas. The Department for Transport launched an interesting scheme towards the end of the last Parliament to provide support for community transport schemes. If he wishes to discuss it in more detail, I would encourage the council to apply to the Department for Transport for that fund.

Public Sector Food Procurement

11. **Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con):** What discussions she has had with her ministerial colleagues on promoting the purchase of more local and seasonal food in the public sector. [900416]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): We launched the Bonfield plan in July last year to help the public sector to buy more local, seasonal food. It means that £400 million of business is available to our farmers and food producers. We are making good progress on that, and only this week I discussed with the Justice Secretary how it could be implemented in his Department.

Wendy Morton: The Secretary of State mentioned the efforts she is making in central Government, but what progress does she think is being made at a local level to support our first-class farmers and food producers, not least those in the west midlands?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. We have fantastic produce in the west midlands, from Burton’s Marmite to Worcestershire pears. I am pleased to see that Birmingham City Council is working to make sure all its schools meet the Bonfield standards, and I would like other cities, towns and villages across Britain to do so too.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Will the Secretary of State outline what discussions have been held with the devolved regions about the use and promotion of local food right across the UK public sector?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I recently met the Scottish Agriculture Minister to talk about how to promote British food. I look forward to meeting my Northern Ireland counterparts very soon to discuss that issue, too.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. Ever since I have been a Member of Parliament, the amount of home-grown food as a proportion of the total has dropped and dropped. If we could increase it, it would be good for our balance of payments and good for jobs. What does my right hon. Friend propose to do to increase it?

Elizabeth Truss: I completely agree with my hon. Friend that we need to grow more, buy more and sell more British food. We produce fantastic food in this country. At the moment, for example, we are importing two third of our cheese. There is more we can do to encourage investment in the dairy industry and we have a massive opportunity with exports. By 2018, China will be the world’s biggest food importer, and we have just put in place a food and agriculture counsellor in China to promote that fantastic British produce.

Air Pollution

12. **Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab):** What steps he is taking to reduce levels of air pollution in towns and cities. [900417]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): The Government are taking a series of steps to reduce air pollution. We are tackling pollution particularly from transport on a number of fronts. For example, we are transforming public transport and private vehicles by supporting the uptake of ultra-low emission vehicles and encouraging sustainable transport by investing in cycling. We are also tackling pollution from industry.

Alison McGovern: I thank the Minister for his reply. The common good matters nowhere more than in respect of the air we breathe. Will he commit today to drop all objections to European standards on air pollution—unless they are on the basis that the standards are too lenient?

Rory Stewart: I look forward to discussing in more detail with the hon. Lady exactly which European standards she is talking about—concentration levels or total emission levels, for example. If she is talking specifically about nitrogen dioxide, this Government are absolutely committed to meeting the EU targets as soon as possible.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to Johnson Matthey, the world's leading manufacturer of autocatalysts, which is internationally recognised for its diesel trap technology. Will he do all he can to ensure that the tax regime in this country and emissions regulations that apply here allow for the deployment of the latest technology in this field?

Rory Stewart: My hon. and learned Friend will not expect me to comment on a Treasury issue in relation to taxation, but I would like to pay tribute to the work of Johnson Matthey. My hon. and learned Friend has suggested that we meet, and I look forward to meeting this company with its innovative technology as soon as possible.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Fifty-nine years ago, the former Denton urban district council was one of the first local authorities in the land to sign up to the Clean Air Act 1956. Back then, we had thick pea souper smogs that could be seen; today, air pollution is an invisible killer. Is it not time that this Government adopted a new Clean Air Act fit for the 21st century?

Rory Stewart: I am glad the hon. Gentleman has acknowledged the work done over the last 60 years by parties on both sides of the House to address air pollution. It is very striking that sulphur dioxide is down by 88%, while we have halved emissions in particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide. More is to be done, particularly on nitrogen dioxide, and I look forward to working very closely with the hon. Gentleman on that subject.

National Pollinator Strategy

13. **Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con):** What support her Department plans to provide for bees and pollinators through the national pollinator strategy. [900418]

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): Bees and other pollinators play an absolutely crucial role in our environment

and are estimated to contribute around £400 million a year to our economy. Last year, DEFRA published the national pollinator strategy—a 10-year plan to bring about the best possible conditions for pollinators to flourish. The Government are committed to taking action to support pollinators across all types of land, enhancing the response to pest and disease risks and improving our evidence base.

Iain Stewart: I share the concerns of many constituents who have contacted me about the threat to the bee population from the proposed use of pesticides. We tamper with bees' wellbeing at our peril; the evidence on this issue is incomplete. Will my hon. Friend give me an assurance that the restrictions on neonicotinoids will not be lifted until the evidence is complete?

George Eustice: I can tell my hon. Friend that the United Kingdom has implemented the restrictions in full, and that the European Food Safety Authority is about to conduct a review. It has made a call for evidence, to which the United Kingdom will contribute. We have commissioned work from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, and that will be taken into account when the authority has completed its review.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I recommend to the Minister Hoxton Manor honey, which is made by the many urban beekeepers who are now based in my constituency. Production there has mushroomed in the last decade; indeed, my first piece of casework involved a beekeeper. Does the Minister agree that we need to encourage more urban beekeeping to ensure that we have a good ecosystem in our inner cities as well as elsewhere?

George Eustice: I entirely agree, and the national pollinator strategy refers to the importance of providing better habitats for bees in urban areas. I can inform the House that there is even a beehive on the roof of the DEFRA building.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I welcome the pollinator strategy, but yesterday I was contacted by a large number of people who were effectively lobbying. Will the Minister assure us that he will look at all the evidence, in order to ensure not just that the wonderful bees are protected, but that our farmers can farm economically and produce healthy food?

George Eustice: Many of my hon. Friend's constituents have contacted me as well, and I know that there is a great deal of concern about the issue. There is a gap here: we do need more field trials. The United Kingdom has commissioned some work of that kind, as have other European Union member states including Sweden.

Robert Flello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I should probably declare an interest, Mr Speaker, as I am an urban hobby beekeeper myself.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): How much is your honey?

Robert Flello: I am going to lose all my honey now. [HON. MEMBERS: "How much?"] I shall ignore the heckling from my own side. It usually comes from the other side.

I was very concerned to learn that farmers who use polytunnels are buying hives in order to pollinate them and, as a condition of their contracts, must then destroy the hives with the live bees inside. I should be grateful if the Minister could confirm or deny that, in the context of his review, or at least look into it if he is not sure of the answer.

George Eustice: I was not aware of that particular problem. We have tightened the regulations on imported bumblebees that are used in glasshouses in order to ensure that the native breed, *audax*, is the main one used, but if there is a specific issue involving honeybees, I shall be happy to engage in correspondence and then deal with it.

Topical Questions

T1. [900385] **Glyn Davies** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): DEFRA's priorities are a cleaner, healthier environment, a world-leading food and farm industry, a thriving rural economy, and a nation that is well defended against natural threats and hazards. As a one-nation Government, we will ensure that people in rural areas have access to the same opportunities and technologies as those in towns and cities. We want to unleash the potential of our fantastic countryside.

Glyn Davies: All sectors of the livestock industry, which is hugely important in Montgomeryshire, are struggling with low prices, and that includes milk producers. The Minister said earlier that he saw a positive long-term outlook, but many dairy farmers will not survive in the long term. What steps are the Government taking to help to ensure that all livestock farmers can compete internationally on a level playing field?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend has made an important point. The dairy industry is vital to the future of food and farming. I was delighted when the Chancellor announced in the Budget that farmers would be able to "tax average" over five years, which will help to manage the current volatility. We are also seeing exciting developments in the dairy sector: for example, the producer organisation launched by Dairy Crest will improve farmers' bargaining powers when they are selling their products.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): In a message to all the people of the world, Pope Francis will say that climate change is mainly caused by human activity, and threatens unprecedented destruction of the ecosystem. Does the Secretary of State agree with the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), her predecessor as Environment Secretary and a well-known climate change denier, or does she agree with the Pope?

Elizabeth Truss: I agree with the Pope. The Government are absolutely committed to tackling climate change. The Paris summit is coming up, and we have taken the lead in securing a deal to limit temperature rises to 2°, which is an important priority. Our Department is clearly responsible for adaptation to climate change,

and we take that into account in everything that we do, whether it relates to agriculture, flood defences or protecting nature.

Maria Eagle: I am glad to hear it. The right hon. Lady has accepted the second-largest percentage cut of any Department—an £83 million decrease—in this year's budgets demanded by the Chancellor. Can she assure the House that she will not repeat the mistakes of her predecessor in 2010, who is in her place, and who cut £100 million a year from the flood protection budget, only for the Department to have to put some of it back after the winter floods caused devastation in 2013?

Elizabeth Truss: Over the previous Parliament, we succeeded as a Department in reducing our budget at the same time as protecting frontline flood defences; we actually saw a real-terms increase in flood defence spending over that of the previous Government. At the same time we also protected our animal-disease response capability, so that we had the same number of vets working in our Department in 2010 as we did in 2015, and I will—

Mr Speaker: I call Maria Caulfield.

Elizabeth Truss: And I will continue—

Mr Speaker: Order. These exchanges are too long. Ministers and shadow Ministers are going to have to get used to the fact that I want to hear Back Benchers. That is the way it is going to be.

T2. [900386] **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): Bovine TB is an incredibly serious disease, with over 26,000 cattle slaughtered last year alone. My constituency of Lewes falls in a high-risk area. What steps are being taken to roll out pilot vaccination programmes and other measures to help support farmers in the south-east?

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): It is part of our 25-year strategy to roll out additional cull areas in high-risk areas and to roll out vaccinations in edge areas. The hon. Lady's constituency, in East Sussex, is part of a high-risk area and has an edge area, and we would be happy to consider any application that came forward.

T3. [900387] **George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): With a Greek exit from the eurozone a looming possibility this week, and given the inevitable downward pressure that will put on the exchange rate between sterling and the euro, has the Minister made any contingency plans to deal with the disastrous impact that that exchange rate change will have on the real value of farm support payments in the UK?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that we do face risks and difficult economic times. What we are committed to doing is helping British producers sell their products—we have seen exports rise to £19 billion. Also, when we had the issue with the Russian trade embargo last year, we were able to find new markets for products—for example, we found a new market for mackerel in Nigeria—and we will continue with that work.

T4. [900388] **Craig Williams** (Cardiff North) (Con): Wales is home to some of our country's finest food and drinks: Welsh lamb, Brains beer and Penderyn whisky, to name a few. What role does the Secretary of State think protected food names have to play in adding value to and boosting Welsh exports?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I enjoyed some of those fantastic products at the Royal Welsh show last year. There are great protected food names, like Welsh lamb. We have 63 protected food names in this country, and they command a market premium at home and overseas. I want to see us get up to the level of the French, who have over 200, and I encourage companies across our country to apply.

T6. [900390] **Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): In the Minister's written answer to me yesterday, he refused to publish the National Farmers Union application for an exemption on the ban on using neonicotinoid pesticides. Does he agree that on this vital subject and this major threat to bees and pollinators the public should know what is going on behind closed doors? If so, will he publish that information, even if he redacts the names of the farmers?

George Eustice: The hon. Lady knows that that information is commercially sensitive, but what I can say is that two applications are being considered by the Health and Safety Executive, and before any decision is taken we would take the advice of our expert committee on pesticides.

T5. [900389] **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): The black country's canal network is an important part of our industrial heritage, supports a variety of wildlife and hosts many leisure facilities. Will the Minister update the House on what is being done to clean up our inland waterways?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): I could not agree more strongly with my hon. Friend on the importance of waterways. Nearly 10,000 miles of rivers and internal waterways have been cleaned up; phosphate pollution is down by one fifth and ammonia down by one sixth; and water companies will be investing £3.5 billion over the next five years in improving our water quality.

T7. [900391] **Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Up to 4,000 properties are at risk of flooding in my constituency, so the Government's announcement of an extra £7.5 million for flood defences in Great Grimsby was welcome. However, that figure includes a £5 million black hole of unallocated funding and my constituents are worried that their homes may be flooded again this year. Will the Secretary of State meet me so that we can get this funding shortfall sorted out and start protecting people from the risk of flooding?

Elizabeth Truss: I am delighted that the hon. Lady is pleased about the investment in flood defences in her constituency. During the last Parliament, we raised £140 million in additional funding, which is 10 times that raised by the previous Government. We are already

up to £250 million—more than 40% of our target—within two months of our six-year programme, and we are going to help deliver that.

T8. [900392] **Mr Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): Page 73 of the Conservative party manifesto said:

“We will press for...further reform of the Common Agricultural Policy”.

What specific reforms does my right hon. Friend expect to be agreed prior to the referendum?

Elizabeth Truss: We are working on this all the time. One of the most complicated common agricultural policies in history has just been introduced, and we are already in discussions with Commissioner Hogan about simplifying that and making it easier for farmers to apply it. The next round of CAP negotiations are coming up and we want a much simpler policy.

T10. [900394] **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): Many of my constituents in rural areas desperately need faster broadband speeds to run their businesses and create jobs in an area where unemployment is 50% higher than the average. The Under-Secretary referred earlier to planned investment, but rather than have my constituents wait years under current plans will he meet the providers again and tell them to get a move on?

Rory Stewart: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the progress on superfast broadband has been pretty remarkable; we have gone from 40% to 80%, and we will be at 95% by 2017. If there are specific issues related to his constituency, I would, again, be very happy to sit down to discuss them in detail.

T9. [900393] **Andrew Griffiths** (Burton) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. British beer is the best in the world, and our beer sales at home and abroad are booming. That is good for British brewers and for British farmers, connecting grain to glass to the lips of beer lovers across the world. What can we do to encourage more beer exports?

Elizabeth Truss: I completely agree with my hon. Friend; we are now exporting 1 billion pints of beer around the world. I have had the opportunity to visit the Ilkley brewery and taste its fantastic produce, as well as Fuller's in London. I have not yet visited Burton—I am still waiting for the invitation. Perhaps it is in the post, so that I will be able to promote it, too.

Stewart McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): When does the Secretary of State expect that her Department will become a living wage employer?

Elizabeth Truss: I am committed to making my Department a living wage employer.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Demand exceeding supply, we must move on.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Church Buildings

1. **Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): What plans the Church Commissioners have to improve the sustainability of church buildings. [900395]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mrs Caroline Spelman) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: I welcome the right hon. Lady to her new responsibilities.

Mrs Spelman: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Of course we must briefly pay tribute to my predecessor, who fulfilled this role with great aplomb and will be for ever remembered as enabling the legislation on women bishops.

The Church faces a great challenge in terms of its sustainability, particularly in rural areas. The Church Commissioners will be helping to support those churches that want to come back to the heart of the community by opening their doors to a wide range of uses that serve the community.

Andrew Stephenson: May I join you in paying tribute to my right hon. Friend and welcoming her to her new role, Mr Speaker? Brierfield Methodist church recently secured much-needed Heritage Lottery funding support for roof and masonry renovations, but Nelson United Reformed church is having to close next month, after 150 years of worship. Will my right hon. Friend set out how she will work with the Heritage Lottery Fund and other bodies to help preserve the church buildings, for which the Church Commissioners are responsible?

Mrs Spelman: My hon. Friend has just mentioned the Methodist Church and I am sure you would agree that it is right that we should all record our sympathy to the Methodist Church in South Carolina, which has suffered a terrible shooting tragedy.

I intend to work very actively with the Heritage Lottery Fund, which dedicates about £25 million a year to essential repairs for all listed places of worship. Given the urgency of my hon. Friend's specific case, I suggest we work on it together immediately.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Last winter, the church of St Mary's in Lytchett Matravers was shut due to a lack of heating, and parish churches across Dorset struggle to meet both their parish share and to ensure that their buildings remain open. What plans does the Church Commissioner have to provide support for churches such as St Mary's in Lytchett Matravers to ensure that they remain open, and will she meet me to discuss the matter?

Mrs Spelman: A total of 250 churches have managed to install renewable energy facilities. The Church offers a church care support system to help parishes make changes and modifications to their heating systems to

bring down the costs of heating. I suggest that we work closely together with this specific example and see what can be done.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission was asked—

Referendum Questions

2. **Mr Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): What assessment the Electoral Commission has made of the effect of whether the question is posed in the affirmative or negative on the outcome of a referendum. [900396]

6. **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): What assessment the Electoral Commission has made of the neutrality of the proposed EU referendum question. [900400]

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon): The Electoral Commission has begun its assessment of the referendum question proposed in the European Union Referendum Bill and will publish its assessment before Parliament returns from recess in September. The Commission has previously reported on the neutrality of the proposed question as part of the assessment of the question contained in a private Member's Bill in 2013. That report found that a number of voters perceived a bias if the phrase, "Remain a member of the European Union" is used in isolation. The Commission therefore recommended an alternative question, which it found to be more neutral but which did not use yes and no as response options.

Mr Turner: The Electoral Commission has given its advice on the wording of the question in the referendum, and the Government have accepted their advice. Will my hon. Friend confirm that a similar approach will be taken to changes to the purdah rules?

Mr Streeter: It is certainly the case that the Electoral Commission has given advice on the purdah rules, which I will discuss when we reach question 5. Happily, I am not responsible for the Government accepting that advice.

Philip Davies: The Electoral Commission has said that the most neutral question for the EU referendum would be: should the UK leave the EU, or should it remain within the EU? Does my hon. Friend not believe that the Government should accept the independent advice of the Electoral Commission as to what is the most neutral question and put that in the referendum Bill?

Mr Streeter: My hon. Friend slightly anticipates the situation. The Electoral Commission is currently assessing and consulting on two questions: the question in the Bill and the question, "Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union, or leave the European Union." It will provide its findings and recommendations to the House in September.

EU Membership (Costs and Benefits)

3. **Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): If the Electoral Commission will commission a lay-person's guide to the costs and benefits of UK membership of the EU before the EU referendum. [900397]

Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission is currently considering what public information it will provide to voters on how to register and cast their vote at an EU referendum. However, given that it is also responsible for designating lead campaigners as well as registering and regulating other campaigners, the Commission does not believe that it would be appropriate for it also to produce a guide providing information about the costs and benefits of EU membership first hand as campaigners would want to make such a case themselves.

Derek Thomas: Does my hon. Friend agree that the British public have a right to a completely objective guide to our membership in order to take an informed decision in the in/out EU referendum?

Mr Streeter: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend, and that is what many of our constituents want. The issue is: who is best placed to provide that impartial guide? Given the complexity of the question—there are so many unknowns—and the importance of ensuring that the Electoral Commission does not in any way undermine its neutrality and independence, it may not be the right organisation to carry out that task.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): If they are not the people to do it, I am quite happy to take on that task. It would be pointless having such a document because it will have pages and pages and pages of costs; I doubt that we would find a page on the benefits.

Mr Streeter: I will certainly put that offer back to the Electoral Commission. I am sure that it will be as enthusiastic as I am.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Persecution of Christians (Iran)

4. **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What representations the Church of England has made on the protection of Christians from persecution in Iran. [900398]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mrs Caroline Spelman): The Church of England is aware of the plight of the Christian community in Iran and works closely with the Bishop of Cyprus and the Gulf, the right Reverend Michael Lewis, and the Bishop of Iran, the right Reverend Azad Marshall, to give support where it can.

Fiona Bruce: The recent report on the persecution of Christians in Iran by Christians in Parliament with the all-party group on religious freedom and belief recounts serious neglect of human rights of Christians in Iran. Surveillance, arbitrary arrests, lashings, torture and severe prison sentences are common. What steps is the Church

taking to encourage respect and tolerance for Christians and for those of other minority faiths in Iran and elsewhere in the middle east?

Mrs Spelman: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the report produced by the APPG. I attended the meeting at which some of those recommendations were put to a Foreign Office Minister yesterday. The Archbishop of Canterbury invited the Grand Imam of al-Azhar to both Houses of Parliament to express encouragement to religious and political leaders to speak out in support of moderate voices in the region.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): May I echo the remarks made by the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce)? It seems to me that one's right to faith and freedom of religion are fundamental human rights and I am concerned that within the Christian faith, Christian leaders need to do more to educate those who come to worship on a Sunday and do not know that others are denied that right.

Mrs Spelman: The hon. Lady makes an important point. It is important for people of all faiths to encourage one another in a spirit of tolerance. The Grand Imam made the point that the message of Islam and Christianity is enough to build the bridge of continuous understanding. That is what he said in this place.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In 2014, 75 Christians were arrested for their faith, physically and mentally abused, and threatened with execution. What representation has the Church made on behalf of those 75 Christians?

Mrs Spelman: The Church works closely in tandem with the Foreign Office to put diplomatic pressure on countries in which there is abuse of religious freedom. I know that the hon. Gentleman was present at the APPG yesterday and he will have heard the Foreign Office Minister give us encouragement to work together on this.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission was asked—

EU Referendum Bill

5. **Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): What assessment the Electoral Commission has made of the proposals in the European Union Referendum Bill relating to disapplication of purdah. [900399]

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon): The Electoral Commission has set out in its briefings on the European Union Referendum Bill why it does not agree with the disapplication of section 125 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, as proposed in the legislation being considered by this House. The commission's briefing papers on the legislation are circulated to hon. Members and published on its website.

Mr Burrowes: Does my hon. Friend expect the Government formally to respond to the helpfully clear advice that

“there is a risk that the use of significant amounts of public money for promotional activity could give an unfair advantage to one side of the argument”?

If so, can it be published?

Mr Streeter: I am not aware of any legal duty for the Government to respond to any recommendations made by the Electoral Commission, but I was pleased to hear earlier this week that the Government appear to be moving in the direction of the advice given by the commission. I am sure that my hon. Friend, who is a tenacious warrior on this issue, will welcome that.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): As the hon. Gentleman just said, the Electoral Commission clearly disagreed with the Government’s position. Why does he think that the Government disagreed, other than in a wish to rig the referendum?

Mr Streeter: Happily, that is not a matter for me. I am sure that will be a question the hon. Gentleman will ask Ministers on the Front Bench, if he has not already done so.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Wellbeing of the Clergy

7. **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): What steps the Church Commissioners are taking to assess and support the wellbeing of clergy. [900401]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mrs Caroline Spelman): The Church of England seeks to support its clergy and their families and dependants through their challenging roles ministering to parishes. This support includes, but is not limited to, housing, pensions and continual training.

Rachael Maskell: The demanding responsibilities of clergy in the Church and across civic society is having a serious impact on their physical and mental health. In the light of their office holder employment status, what commitments can the Church Commissioners give to improving their duty of care to clergy?

Mrs Spelman: Those of us in public life are all aware of the pressures on mental and physical wellbeing, but I acknowledge that is particularly the case for clergy. The hon. Lady worked closely with an important test case on the status of clergy and it is right to take forward the question of their wellbeing. Programmes such as the Arrow programme, provided by the Church Pastoral Aid Society, can assist clergy in making themselves more resilient in these challenging roles.

General Synod

8. **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): What discussions she has had with the Church of England on broadening the diversity of the General Synod. [900402]

Mrs Spelman: The elections for the General Synod of the Church of England will be taking place during late September to mid October. Any communicant lay person who is on the electoral roll is eligible, so I suggest that we all encourage those who we know who could increase the diversity of Synod to apply.

Mr Sheerman: I am encouraged to hear that. I am a lay canon at Wakefield cathedral, and when I go to church most of the people in the church are women, but 65% of the membership of the Synod are men—mainly middle-aged men like me. When are we going to get some leadership to get more women in the Synod?

Mrs Spelman: As I just said, one thing we can all do is encourage more women to apply for the elections this year. As an ex officio member of Synod and the first female Second Church Estates Commissioner, I will be doing my bit to diversify the Synod.

Electoral Commission Committee

The hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Names on Ballot Papers (Guidance)

9. **Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): What steps the Electoral Commission is taking to make guidance clearer on the use of commonly used names on ballot papers. [900403]

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon): The commission first clarified its guidance on the law on commonly used names in 2011, then restated that guidance in March 2015 when it became clear that there was some confusion surrounding the rules. The Electoral Commission keeps its guidance under regular review.

Caroline Nokes: Advice from the Electoral Commission at the recent local elections suggested that middle names were not acceptable as commonly used names, leaving the wonderful councillor John Nigel Steward Anderdon on the ballot paper simply as “Nige”. What assurances can my hon. Friend give me that guidance will be clearer in the future?

Mr Streeter: The law that we in this House passed in 2006 states that a candidate may state a commonly used forename if it is different from any other forename that he or she has; therefore the use of a second or third Christian name—for example, Nigel or Boris—does not qualify under the 2006 legislation. The Electoral Commission is reviewing the matter, and if people have representations they would like to make, the commission would be grateful to receive them.

Public Accounts Commission

The hon. Member for Gainsborough, representing the Public Accounts Commission, was asked—

Palace of Westminster Restoration and Renewal Project

10. **Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): What steps the National Audit Office plans to take to monitor and scrutinise spending on the Palace of Westminster restoration and renewal project. [900404]

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The current arrangements for the audit of the House of Commons by the Comptroller and Auditor General differ from those for the public bodies which allow him the right to examine the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of public expenditures under the National Audit Act 1983. As a consequence, any examination of the restoration

and renewal programme would require the House to request him formally—he must be requested; he has no right—to review and report on these expenditures. Those arrangements secure the absolute independence of the House.

Neil Gray: My constituents in Airdrie and Shotts and people from across these isles will demand value for money in this project. How will they be able to feed into and scrutinise the process?

Sir Edward Leigh: Of course we must have value for money on this project. The National Audit Office is already involved: it is working with the project managers and will be looking at the finances on a continual basis. The House must report its finances. If the hon. Gentleman can restrain his impatience, the independent options appraisal will be published this afternoon, and for my part, I hope we can be allowed to stay here.

Speaker's Statement

10.32 am

Mr Speaker: I am pleased to be able now to announce the results of the elections for Chairs of Select Committees. No ballot was necessary for 12 Committees for which a single nomination had been received. They are as follows:

<i>Committee</i>	<i>Elected</i>
Communities and Local Government	Mr Clive Betts
Energy and Climate Change	Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Neil Parish
Northern Ireland Affairs	Mr Laurence Robertson
Procedure	Mr Charles Walker
Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs	Mr Bernard Jenkin
Scottish Affairs	Pete Wishart
Standards	Kevin Barron
Transport	Mrs Louise Ellman
Treasury	Mr Andrew Tyrie
Welsh Affairs	David T.C. Davies
Women and Equalities	Mrs Maria Miller

In the contested elections, a total of 621 ballot papers were submitted, the ballots being counted under the alternative vote system. The following candidates were elected:

<i>Committee</i>	<i>Elected</i>
Backbench Business	Ian Mearns
Business, Innovation and Skills	Mr Iain Wright
Culture, Media and Sport	Jesse Norman
Defence	Dr Julian Lewis
Education	Neil Carmichael
Environmental Audit	Huw Irranca-Davies
Foreign Affairs	Crispin Blunt
Health	Dr Sarah Wollaston
Home Affairs	Keith Vaz
International Development	Stephen Twigg
Justice	Robert Neill
Petitions	Helen Jones
Public Accounts	Meg Hillier
Science and Technology	Nicola Blackwood
Work and Pensions	Frank Field

I warmly congratulate all those elected. I should like—I hope on behalf of the whole House—to thank all those who put themselves forward for election.

Business of the House

10.35 am

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

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): Before I do so, may I echo Mr Speaker's words of congratulations to all those elected as Select Committee Chairs, offer my commiserations to those who were unsuccessful, and echo Mr Speaker's words of thanks to all those, particularly the Officers of the House, who were involved in conducting the election process?

The business for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 22 JUNE—Second Reading of the Education and Adoption Bill.

TUESDAY 23 JUNE—Consideration in Committee and remaining stages of the European Union (Finance) Bill, followed by a motion relating to the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 24 JUNE—Opposition day (3rd allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 25 JUNE—General debate on reports into investigatory powers.

FRIDAY 26 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 29 June will include:

MONDAY 29 JUNE—Consideration in Committee of the Scotland Bill (day 2).

TUESDAY 30 JUNE—Consideration in Committee of the Scotland Bill (day 3).

WEDNESDAY 1 JULY—Opposition day (4th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 2 JULY—General debate: subject to be announced.

FRIDAY 3 JULY—The House will not be sitting.

Ms Eagle: I thank the Leader of the House for announcing next week's business, which includes, in particular, the Adjournment debate we will have next Monday on stone theft. After the events of the past few months, we on the Labour Benches have been wondering where our election stone has got to.

I, too, offer my congratulations to all those colleagues who have just been elected to chair Select Committees. They do an extremely important job in this House. I add my commiserations to those who were unsuccessful. Given that my own nomination process is over now as well, I can safely say that MPs are now free to roam the Corridors completely undisturbed.

Later today the report on options for the restoration and renewal of Parliament will be published, and I understand that the recommendations will all have significant and expensive implications. Will the Leader of the House tell us how he will ensure that the whole House has a chance to discuss and debate the way forward?

I note that once again there is no reference to English votes for English laws in the future business, but rumours continue to abound that we will be discussing Government

[Ms Angela Eagle]

plans as early as next week, so can the Leader of the House assure me that we will have adequate time to discuss and debate these important proposals, and will he tell us when that is likely to be?

The Greek debt crisis poses a serious threat to Europe's economy, including that of the UK. With the Greek central bank now warning of a "painful" road ahead and no sign of a solution, what contingency plans exist to protect the UK economy from the effects of a Greek exit from the eurozone? Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Chancellor to come to the House and report on the outcome of the meeting of EU Finance Ministers in Luxembourg today?

After last week's breathtaking U-turn in the Bavarian Alps, the Prime Minister is now in full retreat on the European Union Referendum Bill. We have had complete confusion over the referendum date. First, the Prime Minister said it could coincide with next year's elections, but this week he was forced to back down at the last minute because he knew he had lost his majority. We still do not know whether Eurosceptic Cabinet Ministers will be able to campaign for an out vote—something I believe the Leader of the House will want an answer to, at least some time soon.

Finally, on Tuesday, after frantic whipping and a desperate letter from the Minister for Europe begging them not to rebel, no fewer than 27 Back Benchers, including five former Cabinet Ministers, voted against the Government. After that sorry spectacle, will the Leader of the House tell us whether the Government have already conceded our amendments on today's amendment paper? May we have a debate on the complete chaos that has characterised the Government's flagship Bill? I was thinking about watching the new film "Jurassic World", but if I want to see a bunch of dinosaurs tear each other apart I might as well stay and watch his Back Benchers.

This week we marked 800 years since the signing of Magna Carta and the origin of the rights we enjoy today. Although some of its clauses, such as those on the return of Welsh hostages and the removal of fishing weirs from England, have been somewhat overtaken by events, this country's commitment to basic rights and freedoms remains a proud part of our heritage and crucial to our future. As the nation celebrated at Runnymede, will the Leader of the House tell us why the Prime Minister chose to mark the anniversary by reaffirming his intention to scrap the Human Rights Act? Will he tell us why the Prime Minister has rejected the advice of his previous Attorney General, the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who said that scrapping the Act will undermine human rights across Europe?

I know that the Prime Minister could not tell us what Magna Carta actually meant when he appeared on "Letterman" three years ago, but he would be wise to pay attention to the lessons of history now. Magna Carta came about because the King fell foul of pushy, rebellious barons who would not accept his authority. After it was signed, the King ignored it and kept going back on his word. It took his death from a surfeit of peaches and the accession of a new young King to finally quieten the rebels. After the Chancellor's impressive

debut at Prime Minister's questions yesterday, if I was the Prime Minister I would be worried, and I would certainly stay well away from any peaches.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady mentioned stone theft. It is a matter of great concern to all of us when parts of our national heritage are endangered, and I was particularly concerned by the idea that the Labour party might take an object of great symbolic importance, break it into tiny pieces and sell them, as happened to the Berlin wall. Perhaps she can give us an assurance that that will not happen.

I thank the hon. Lady for her comments on the Select Committee Chairs. Of course, she is wrong to say that the election process is over, because we will now have Members campaigning to join the Committees. It has certainly been a great exercise in democracy across the House. The Tea Room will probably be much quieter for at least the next 48 hours.

On the restoration of the Palace of Westminster, hon. Members will be aware that today we will see the independently commissioned report on the nature of this building and the challenges that await us in ensuring that it has a strong future. Officials will brief Members of Parliament later today. We will then approach the issue immensely carefully. We will set up a Joint Committee of both Houses to consider the report and the options it lays out. We will then decide on the best approach, but that provisional decision will be subject to extensive discussions over the months ahead and to a vote in both Houses. My clear view, as I said last week, is that this building is an important part of our national heritage and our democracy and must remain as such. I am not warm to the idea that we should look to move elsewhere. None the less, we have to face the challenges of ensuring that the building is fit for the 21st century, and that discussion will involve all Members of the House.

The hon. Lady asked about English votes for English laws. I know that she is eager to see our proposals, but she will have to wait a few days longer. I have given a commitment that the proposals will shortly be laid before this House, discussed and then voted upon.

The hon. Lady asked about the situation in Greece. It is an immensely important matter, and the Government are thinking very carefully about how we would respond if the situation deteriorates. If there are developments, clearly the Chancellor will feel a duty to inform the House. Let us hope that the situation can be resolved without the kind of economic turmoil that it could lead to in Greece and elsewhere in Europe.

The hon. Lady mentioned party unity. I have been impressed this week by the breakout of unity on the Labour Benches as Members from all sides of their party united behind the great hope for the future of their leadership—the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). As I looked at the hon. Lady's background and the nature of the people who have been supporting her campaign—I congratulate her on having made the next round of the contest—I wondered whether she and the hon. Gentleman might make a dream ticket together.

The hon. Lady mentioned anniversaries occurring this week. I am sure, Mr Speaker, that you are aware that this week also marks the 200th anniversary of the battle of Waterloo, with the re-enactment of that great battle taking place today. What you might not have

known is that Napoleon's armies marched to Waterloo under the banner of an eagle. The eagle was defeated, it was captured, and it is now in the hands of the Scots.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): After yet another very serious car crash near Galleys corner on the A120 in my constituency, will my right hon. Friend make Government time for a debate on traffic flow and safety improvements on this very important road in my constituency?

Chris Grayling: I welcome my hon. Friend to his place in this House. He has already made a great start in representing the interests of his constituency on an immensely serious issue that we as a Government take very seriously. He will be aware that the Department for Transport is already funding a study on how it can improve safety on that stretch of road. It will look very carefully at the conclusions of that study and will, I hope, make necessary improvements.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I too thank the Leader of the House for the business for next week. I add my congratulations to the winners of the Select Committee Chairs—not because I have a personal interest—and give my commiserations to the losers. I felt that it was like a bad Oscars or “Britain's Got Some Sort Of Talent” when the announcements were being made, but congratulations to everybody involved.

I am sure that the Leader of the House has heard this morning the absolute fury from Scotland about the early ending of the renewables obligation for onshore wind and the very real threat from the Scottish Government to have this judicially reviewed, such is the threat to the 70% of the industry that is based in Scotland. Some 100 applications will now be under threat because of this Conservative Government's almost ideological contempt for onshore wind and other renewables.

This seems to fit into a pattern. We have the return of the Scotland Bill in a couple of weeks, but this week not one amendment was accepted by a Government who said they would listen to the Scottish Government on the Bill. Amendments that were agreed cross-party even by the Conservative party in the Scottish Parliament have been rejected by the Government. It is almost as if they want us to go, given the way they are dealing with Scottish issues in the House of Commons.

I want to talk about English votes for English laws as well. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) asked some very basic and reasonable questions about the Leader of the House's proposals and plans for English votes for English laws, and what did we get? “I intend to bring the proposals to the House.” We know that is what he intends to do, but as well as having no debate, no scrutiny and no consultation, we are not even supposed to ask him basic questions about English votes for English laws. When are we going to see these proposals and have them brought before the House?

I thought I was going to take part in business questions today after the first Government defeat. What a gift was given to the Labour party this week with the Tory rebellion—an open goal, only for it to put the ball in its own net. The Leader of the House likes to go on about seating arrangements in this House. I suggest that what we might want to do is to have us on the Labour

Benches as the real Opposition to this Government, because that compliant lot, sitting on their hands again and again, are letting the Tories off the hook. They will not be let off the hook by the Scottish National party—that's for sure.

Chris Grayling: May I start by congratulating the hon. Gentleman on his elevation to the Chair of the Scottish Affairs Committee? He is going to be busy, because he wears another hat when participating in business questions.

On onshore wind, this Government are committed to renewable energy, but I am afraid that my idea of renewable energy does not involve covering some of the most beautiful parts of the United Kingdom and the highlands of Scotland with wind farms. I support offshore wind, but I also support the beautiful countryside of the United Kingdom and I want to preserve it. I am proud to be part of a Government who believe that is important.

The Scotland Bill implements the recommendations of the Smith commission—a commitment that was made by the previous Government and which has been continued by this Government—in the wake of the decision by the Scottish people to remain a part of the United Kingdom.

On the issue of English votes, as I have said, I will, when we are ready, inform the whole House. I say to the Scottish nationalists, with apologies, that I do not intend to inform them of our plans before I tell the whole House.

Finally, on the seating question, I gather that the morning race continues and it looks like the SNP won this morning. Opposition seating arrangements are a matter for the two parties involved to sort out and for us to watch with amusement.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I have recently been contacted by the directors of the last remaining traditional Nottingham lace makers, Cluny Lace, which operates in my constituency. It has recently been informed by Historic England that both its business and its business premises are about to be listed. That would seriously impact on the way in which this historic company operates and may put it in jeopardy. Will my right hon. Friend consider a debate on the way in which Historic England operates its listing process, given the fact that Cluny Lace is a going concern, not a museum?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Regulation to protect our heritage should not destroy it. She is absolutely right to draw the matter to the attention of the House. I encourage her to draw it to the attention of the Department concerned through both a written question and, possibly, an Adjournment debate. She has made an important point and I am sure Ministers will have noted it.

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Has the right hon. Gentleman seen early-day motion 143 on CareerMakers Recruitment, standing in my name?

[That this House condemns in the most severe terms the employment practices of CareerMakers Recruitment, 86 Cheetham Hill Road, Manchester, M4 4EX, and in particular their maltreatment of a constituent of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to overlong working-hours and failure to observe health and safety legislation; calls on the Secretary of State for

[Sir Gerald Kaufman]

Work and Pensions to investigate their activities and, if he regards it as appropriate, to refer their violation of employment laws to the police; and warns all potential contacts to have nothing to do with these swindlers.]

Will the right hon. Gentleman turn his attention to it, in order to get the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and, if need be, the police to deal with these rogue people who exploit employees and harm and damage their lives? This is an essential matter and I look to the right hon. Gentleman to follow it up.

Chris Grayling: May I commend the Father of the House for his continuing diligence on behalf of people in Manchester who have to deal—not often, but from time to time—with unacceptable employment practices of the kind that this House would always condemn? I cannot comment specifically on the case he has raised, but I will make the Department for Work and Pensions aware of his concerns and I hope he will take the opportunity to raise them directly with the Secretary of State as well.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): First, may I say that my Adjournment debate on stone theft is on Monday evening?

My local Kirklees Council does not have a local plan in place, resulting in a developers' free-for-all, and I am encouraging local residents to submit their objections to the Grimescar Valley development. Could we have an urgent debate on such situations and on planning as a whole?

Chris Grayling: I wish my hon. Friend well with his debate on stone theft. We wait with interest to see whether the precedent set in the general election campaign will be followed by any of the Labour leadership candidates producing their own stone commitments.

The serious issue of planning affects many constituencies. The changes this Government have put in place are specifically designed to give greater power and authority to the local plan. I urge every council to move ahead as quickly as possible with the planning process, and I urge my hon. Friend to bring the matter to the attention of Ministers during Communities and Local Government questions in 10 days' time.

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab): Is it still the Government's intention to hold a debate in Government time on the renewal of the Trident platform, and is the right hon. Gentleman able to say something about the timing of such a debate?

Chris Grayling: I cannot give an indication yet about the timing of such a debate, but there will be, at an appropriate moment, a chance for this House to decide on the future of Trident. That is only right and proper, and this party and this Government are absolutely committed to it. I know there are some divisions of opinion in this House, but I hope that, on the two Front Benches at least, there is an absolute commitment to preserving our nuclear deterrent.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): May I return the Leader of the House to the independent options appraisal on the future of this building? I know that there will be a vote next year, that a Committee will be

appointed and all the rest of it. However, the report has been widely trailed and we are told that it will be incredibly expensive for us to stay here. It would be useful to have an early debate, so that the views of Members can be discussed. There is no point in saying that this is an iconic building; what is important is what goes on inside this building.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Of course we have to ensure that this building is fit for the work that is done in it today to continue for generations to come. There will be a briefing on the report in the Boothroyd Room at 12 o'clock. I will work as hard as I can to ensure that all Members have an opportunity to contribute their views, not only in this Chamber but in discussions with those who are involved in the project.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I am extremely worried for my constituents in Ashton-under-Lyne, Droylsden and Failsworth, and for people across the country. This week, a report was published in the media regarding the crisis that is unfolding in home care services. We all have a vested interest in this matter as we are all getting older. I would like an urgent debate about how we can ensure that older people are treated with dignity and respect, and how we can deal with the unfolding crisis.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady has taken advantage of the Adjournment debates system to bring that and related issues to the House next week, when I am sure she will make her representations to Ministers. Of course we are all concerned to ensure that proper care is provided to the elderly. That is why the last Government established the better care fund, which will integrate social care and health care funding in a way that will improve the quality of care for the elderly, which is very necessary.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Sir John Chilcot's failure to publish his report in a timely fashion is a betrayal of the military covenant, a betrayal of those who served in Iraq and, in particular, a betrayal of those who have suffered as a result of the Iraq war. May we have an urgent debate in Government time on why Sir John has failed to bring forward his report?

Chris Grayling: You will be aware, Mr Speaker, that there is increasing concern across the House about the amount of time it is taking for Sir John's report to be published. The Prime Minister himself has expressed concern about this matter. It is, of course, an independent study, but I very much hope that those who are involved in putting the report together are listening carefully to the strength of the views being expressed in this House. The current delay is not what anyone envisaged, nor is it the right way to treat an issue of this importance.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Is the Leader of the House as alarmed as I am at the collapse of a number of trials of notable republicans in Northern Ireland, including Padraic Wilson, Rosa McLaughlin and a host of others, and at other cases where people have been arrested, such as Gerry Adams, with no trial pertaining thereto, and at the fact that these trials have

all collapsed because of serious sex cases that the people have allegedly been involved in? The fact that none of those historic trials can be brought to a proper, full and complete hearing is damaging public confidence. Does the Leader of the House feel that there is an opportunity for a proper inquiry into those matters?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman makes a series of important points. In my previous role, I had regular contact with the judiciary in Northern Ireland. I regard them to be of very high quality and to be very committed citizens of Northern Ireland. I do not wish to say anything that in any way denigrates the work that they do. I am sure that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will take note of the questions that he has raised in the House today. They are matters that need to be dealt with sensitively, given the independence of the judicial process. I will make sure that she is aware of his concerns.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): With the resurfacing of the M6 diverting much of the night-time traffic through Penkridge, Gailey and Dunston in my constituency for up to 70 nights over the coming months, may we have a debate on how Highways England can operate resurfacing and other major works more efficiently and effectively, so that they do not cause such disturbance to residents?

Chris Grayling: Having had to divert off the M6 a couple of times recently myself because of the roadworks, I share my hon. Friend's concern about the impact on the surrounding communities. That is not always avoidable, given the need for improvements. As the improvements take root and the road is reopened, there will probably be a positive impact on the communities that he represents. I will ensure that his comments are drawn to the attention of the Department for Transport, and he should use all the channels available to him to ensure that Ministers are aware of the need to speed things up as much as is humanly possible.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): While we are waiting for the briefing on the parliamentary building, is it not clear that previous reports have shown the crumbling state of the building and how costly it would be if the essential work to be undertaken were done with Members, staff and everyone else in place? I heard what the Leader of the House said about the Committee and the rest of it, but is it not important that a decision is reached, so that the necessary work can begin in 2020? The longer we delay it, the more costly it will be.

Chris Grayling: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman. We need to get on with this, because there is no benefit in inappropriate delays. Of course, there is other work to be done on the parliamentary estate before that work can happen, but I am clear that we need to move ahead with it expeditiously.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): May we have a debate on vehicle excise duty, which most people call car tax or road tax? That would give Members the opportunity to consider the rules governing that tax, particularly the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's practice of collecting tax twice for the same month when a vehicle changes hands from one owner to another.

Chris Grayling: I hear my hon. Friend's point. Of course, the DVLA is working hard to improve the vehicle tax system. The removal of the tax disc, for example, has both saved money and created a system that we hope and believe will be more efficient. I am sure that Ministers will have noted his comments.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Will the Leader of the House inform us how many drafts of the Chilcot report the Government have received for comment?

Chris Grayling: We will wait to receive the report along with everybody else. It is an independent report, and independent reports are submitted to Government when they are submitted to Government. As soon as we are able to give further information about it we will, but we are waiting in the same way that the hon. Gentleman is.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): Further to the answer that my right hon. Friend gave last week to the question by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) about legislation on caste discrimination, does my right hon. Friend agree that the issue is not so much whether discrimination legislation is unwanted as whether it is necessary? If we are to have a statement by the Minister for Women and Equalities, will she acknowledge in it the meetings that she has had with those affected by caste discrimination in this country and the representations that she has had from them?

Chris Grayling: These are of course sensitive issues. We are a society in which every individual should be treated equally and fairly, and the law should apply to all parts of our society in the same way. There will of course be opportunities to address Ministers the week after next, when we will have Women and Equalities questions and Communities and Local Government questions. Both colleagues who have raised the issue in the past week and a half should feel free to raise it with Ministers again on those occasions.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Why is everybody assuming that if we have to move out of Parliament while it is repaired, we will automatically move somewhere else in London? Why cannot we move to the midlands—preferably the black country? It would be much easier for most Members to get to, and it would enable Ministers and the metropolitan elite running the civil service to find out what life is like for the rest of us. As you will know from your celebrated visit to Dudley just a few years ago, Mr Speaker, and as the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood), who is in his place, will know, the Edwardian masterpiece that is Dudley town hall is at least twice the size of this Chamber and would provide adequate accommodation for every Member.

Chris Grayling: I commend the hon. Gentleman for his diligence in promoting the great town of Dudley and the black country, which is a fine part of this country with a great heritage, some great businesses and some great communities. However, I suspect that if we ended up having a debate about alternative venues for the House, we would probably find 650 different arguments being made.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): Southampton airport is in my constituency. Aircrew on planes from all airports are rightly suitably trained for any emergency, but recently

[Mims Davies]

a 47-year-old woman died on a plane heading to Europe. Will my right hon. Friend allow time for a debate on the availability of suitable equipment on aeroplanes, particularly defibrillators, for use in times of need and to prevent diversions?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I pay tribute to Southampton airport. Many years ago, long before I was a Member of this place, I was involved in organising the launch event for the terminal building, so I know it well and it is a fine asset to the area around her constituency. I am sure that Transport Ministers will have noted what she said, but it is important that she uses the platform that she has as a Member of Parliament to make the point to the airlines. Influencing outside organisations to change the way they operate is one of the things that MPs can do.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): For seven years, public sector workers have borne the brunt of the austerity agenda imposed on them by the Conservatives—800,000 people have lost their jobs, and others have had cuts in pay and pensions and attacks on terms and conditions. May we have a debate in Government time on when we will start respecting and rewarding our public sector workers, and in particular how we will recruit nurses, firefighters and care workers in the future? If we keep treating them with disrespect, no one will want to do the job.

Chris Grayling: We have some magnificent people in our public sector who do a fine job for this country, but that fact does not remove the need for us to balance the budget or the need for this country to live within its means. That was the big division and argument between us at the general election, and the reality is that we won.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): After Chad, the UK charges the most passenger duty of anywhere in the world. Indeed, many of our European competitors do not charge any such tax. A recent PwC report highlighted the fact that if the tax were abolished, the economy would benefit by up to £2 billion. May we have a debate on the future of air passenger duty?

Chris Grayling: Air passenger duty is one of the taxes that was introduced by the Labour Government and that I wish was lower. I am pleased that in government we have been able to freeze it and remove it for children. I know that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will continue to keep it under review and, after the Budget in early July, we will have extensive chances to debate air passenger duty and other taxes. I hope that my hon. Friend will take advantage of the opportunity.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): The Leader of the House may be aware that following the recent takeover of Friends Life, Aviva plans to slash £225 million from its annual budget. As part of the proposals, it intends to close its offices in Salford, Stretford and Salisbury, creating devastating job uncertainty for more than 780 employees. It has further proposals to close offices in Dorking, Exeter and central Manchester. Given the national scale of this terrible issue, is the Leader of the House amenable to diarising an urgent debate in this Chamber?

Chris Grayling: It is always difficult when major corporations reorganise—they cut jobs in one part of the country and create jobs in another to rationalise their operations. I commend the hon. Lady for what she is doing to raise the issues and challenges faced by her constituents. I suggest that she uses the opportunities that exist in this Chamber and Westminster Hall to bring a Minister along, so that she can raise her concerns directly. I give her an assurance that if her constituents end up losing out, the facilities available through the Department for Work and Pensions to help those who have lost their jobs will be deployed as effectively and as quickly as possible.

Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con): Can the Leader of House give us an early statement on the future of onshore wind farms, following the welcome announcement today of an ending of the subsidy and the change to planning law? Perhaps in that debate we could remind the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) that more than double the current number of SNP MPs wrote to the Prime Minister demanding that change four years ago, and nearly six times as many MPs had it in their manifesto this time.

Chris Grayling: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work he has done in that area. To those colleagues who are new to the House, I say that one of the things that they can all do is to change the way this country works by making a consistent and effective argument. My hon. Friend did that on wind farms and, in my view, has made a big difference to the way in which the Government operate.

I agree with my hon. Friend and I am still befuddled by the way in which the SNP appears to want more wind farms in some of the most beautiful parts of the United Kingdom, which I want to cherish and protect for future generations.

Michelle Thomson (Edinburgh West) (SNP): If the Leader of the House is unwilling or unable to confirm how many versions of the Chilcot report he has seen, can he definitively confirm that the Government have seen some? A simple yes or no would suffice.

Chris Grayling: I have seen no versions of the Chilcot report.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): May we have a debate on the continued crossings of illegal immigrants across the Mediterranean? While it is perfectly understandable that people want to see people who are at risk of dying rescued, many of my constituents are concerned that the Royal Navy is picking these people up and continuing their journey into the EU, rather than picking them up, turning them round and taking them back to where they came from. Is it now the Government's policy to give safe passage to any illegal immigrant seeking to enter the EU or the UK, provided they can prove that their journey is dangerous and life-threatening?

Mr Speaker: Order. Before the Leader of the House replies, can I very gently remind the House—this is not with specific reference to what we have just heard, but more generally—that questions should relate to next week's business and include a request for a statement or a debate?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We have a twin duty. One part is to ensure that the right humanitarian support is in place to prevent people from drowning in the Mediterranean—I commend the work being done by members of our armed forces to ensure that that does not happen—but alongside that we need a long-term solution to the problem. We are not opted in to the arrangements that could lead to some of those arriving in Italy being moved to this country. It is our view that we need to put in place arrangements that will deter more people from setting off across the Mediterranean. The Home Secretary has been in discussions about that this week in Brussels. The Government will continue to seek to encourage EU partners to find a solution to the problem, but I am absolutely of the view that the solution is not about a large number of additional people coming to the UK.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House will be aware of the serious cases in the press this week involving the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff), as well as the historic cases involving my constituency, of individuals travelling to Syria, Iraq and elsewhere to fight. Can he find time for an urgent statement from the Home Secretary on the progress being made on tightening up exit checks and engaging with airlines, border posts and transit countries, so that we are doing everything we can to prevent young people from travelling to fight in these horrendous conflicts?

Chris Grayling: First, let me be clear that I am as disturbed as I suspect every Member of this House is by the events of the last few days. My heart goes out to the two fathers whose families have apparently travelled to Syria; none of us can truly understand why they would have taken that decision. We have already put in place much more stringent exit checks, and the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the two families appear to have been previously stopped upon attempted exit from the country. I know that the Home Secretary will be looking carefully at what has happened and whether additional measures can or should be taken, and will update the House accordingly.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I am sure the whole House will share my concern that Torquay United's youth academy may close. May we have a debate on the future of youth development in our national game?

Chris Grayling: I absolutely share my hon. Friend's concern. A youth football structure in this country is vital. We cannot simply buy all the players we need in this country from overseas. We need a strong youth development structure. We need to bring forward the stars of tomorrow at all levels. What I would say is that the one thing that football as a whole is not short of is money. I would like to see the different football authorities doing the right things to ensure that youth development in this country is done properly, and I know that my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport, the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), shares that view.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I remind the Leader of the House that we need an urgent debate on the cost to individuals, families and

our country of autism? Is he aware that, up and down the country, if we do not diagnose autism early and give the recommended treatment and support, that cost to individuals, families and the country becomes greater and greater? May we have that urgent debate?

Chris Grayling: I absolutely understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. There are some fantastic people working in the field of autism who are making a real difference to young people's lives. I pay tribute to Linden Bridge school in my constituency, which I have seen turn the lives of young people around, helping them to deal with autism. He makes an important point; I know he will continue to use the opportunities in this House to make that point. This is an issue that very many of us share his concerns about, and I know that the Secretary of State for Health does too.

Mr Speaker: And, of course, the excellent Dr Gillian Baird, who is a specialist in this subject, is also one of the right hon. Gentleman's constituents—something I think he knows very well.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): *The Sunday Times* suggested that during the renovation of this wonderful Palace, we should all decamp to Dunsop Bridge in my constituency. Welcome as that might be, it could add a few billion pounds to the costs—costs varying between £1 billion and £6 billion. I know we are in uncharted territory when we start renovating this wonderful iconic building, but can the Leader of the House assure us that during all the processes that are followed and the clinical monitoring that will be necessary, he can ensure a tight grip on the costs? We want it done right, but my goodness, can we make certain that the taxpayers are not fleeced?

Chris Grayling: As I said a moment ago, 650 different arguments might be made, including one for the Duchess's stand at Epsom Downs racecourse. In reality, I am very committed to the future of this building. We have got to do this right. It has got to be done carefully and in consultation with Members in both Houses of Parliament, as it affects both Houses. My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the financial side, and I do not think there is any danger of the Treasury leaving that untouched. The important thing is to do the right job for future generations. We are custodians of a great part of our national life in this building—of what takes place within it and of the building within which it takes place: we should protect them both.

Stewart McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): The case of the Saudi blogger, Raif Badawi, is well known in this House. I have had a look back at some statements made by Government Ministers since 2010, and in response to the questions and statements, no Minister of this Government or the previous one has ever said without equivocation that Mr Badawi should be set free. We should be joining Sweden in calling for just that. May we have a statement from the Government on this urgent issue?

Chris Grayling: As a Government, we have deplored the sentence passed in Saudi Arabia on Raif Badawi. I will make sure that the Foreign Secretary is aware of the concerns that the hon. Gentleman has raised. I do not

[Chris Grayling]

see any justification for that sentence, and floggings in public should, I think, belong to the past, not the present or the future. I will make sure that the Foreign Secretary is aware of what the hon. Gentleman said.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Potholes in my constituency continue to be expensive for drivers and dangerous for cyclists. The last Government increased local highways maintenance funding by around £1 billion compared with the previous five years, but it is right to say that the results are not always feeding through into improvements on the ground. Will the Government hold a debate on how we can help councils make taxpayers' money go further?

Chris Grayling: If my hon. Friend has this problem in his area, I would advise him of my experience in my constituency and the county of Surrey, which is that the patch-and-mend approach that many councils adopt does not work. When it comes to repairs like this, it is better to replace sections of road rather than simply put some material in the hole. I encourage my hon. Friend to talk to his local authority and ask it to look at where it has been done better elsewhere. The money there at the moment can be made to work better.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): The Leader of the House will be aware of deep concern that the recent Independent Police Complaints Commission report into events at Orgreave recommended no further action, despite finding evidence of serious criminality during and after those demonstrations. Can he ensure that the Home Secretary comes to the House to make a statement, because these events have ensured a denial of justice to those people involved at Orgreave while also calling into question whether the IPCC is fit for purpose?

Chris Grayling: This, of course, has been the week in which the Philae lander came back to life again after many months of silence. It has also been the week when the Labour party of the 1980s came back to life again. The IPCC has looked at these issues, reached its conclusions—and there, I am afraid, I believe the matter should rest.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): The Department for Education entered into a funding agreement to establish Watling Park free school in my constituency. The school has already offered 40 places to children in an area of high demand, and they were due to start in a temporary class this September. Barnet council played its part when its assets regeneration and growth committee agreed, through a majority decision, to sell the school a parcel of land. Unfortunately, a minority of members of the Labour group decided to refer the decision back to the full council, thus putting the 40 places in jeopardy. As I was unfortunately not called during Education questions—

Mr Speaker: Order. This is very long. A single short sentence will suffice.

Dr Offord: Very important as well, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I am not disputing its importance. In a kindly way, I am telling the hon. Gentleman—I am not debating the issue with him; I am telling him—that the question was too long. A short sentence, and that will deal with the matter.

Dr Offord: Will a Minister come to the Dispatch Box to explain how we can stop important agreements being undermined by individuals who have an ideological axe to grind?

Chris Grayling: This is another example of the Labour party's inability to move away from the ideologies of the past. The fact is that free schools are making a real difference to the education of young people—they are helping to raise standards in a way that is necessary for the future of those children, and for the future of everyone in the country—but the Labour party is blocking that process at a local level.

I am sure that my colleagues in the Department for Education will have noted my hon. Friend's remarks. I just hope that the Labour party will take account of the need for change, and the need to allow improvements to happen.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): Reference has rightly been made to the Greek crisis, which is indeed reaching a climax. It is possible that the Greeks will have re-established their own national currency within a few days. As well as engaging in a full debate on all the implications of that event for Britain, Europe and the world, may we hear some suggestions from the Government of ways in which we might extend the hand of friendship to the Greeks, who have suffered so terribly as members of the eurozone?

Chris Grayling: I can give the hon. Gentleman two assurances. First, if matters develop in a way that leads to the problems in Greece becoming more pronounced, Ministers will certainly want to address those matters in the House. Secondly, we regard the Greeks as friends—as long-standing allies—and we certainly wish to do all that we can to help them in difficult times.

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): May I pursue the question asked earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris)? This morning's written statement from the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change on subsidies for new wind farms is very welcome. It will certainly be welcomed in Lincolnshire, where we have seen far too many attempts to carpet our beautiful countryside in wind farms. [Interruption.] Will my right hon. Friend try to persuade the Secretary of State to come to the House so that we can ask whether individual applications which are still in the pipeline will or will not be permitted, and can that happen next week?

Chris Grayling: Fortunately, I can assure my hon. and learned Friend that the Secretary of State will be in the House for Question Time next week, and I urge him to take advantage of that opportunity to raise the points that he wishes to raise with her. He is, of course, one of the Members who have made a real impact on the Government's policy, and he has rightly sought to protect the character of Lincolnshire.

It amazes me that we still hear sedentary complaints from SNP Members about this decision, which will actually will help to protect the character and beauty of Scotland.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I believe that, as we speak, the Vatican is publishing a new encyclical letter from Pope Francis, which will contain a radical message about social justice and protection of the environment. When might the Government respond to that, and will the House have an opportunity to consider what the Holy Father has to say?

Chris Grayling: We would not normally make a direct governmental response to a statement from the Vatican, but in the next few days Members will have opportunities to raise those matters with both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. Of course, the Pope is making important points. I remind the House that only this week the Secretary of State gave consent to an important new project in Swansea bay that will generate renewable electricity. A smart approach to renewables is the right approach, and it is what this Government stand for.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is well aware of the long-running scandal surrounding the way in which the Post Office has dealt with issues involving its Horizon software system. A large number of postmasters and postmistresses may have been wrongly prosecuted. May we have an urgent debate about that system, and about the potential injustices, both past and current?

Chris Grayling: I congratulate my hon. Friend on being such a persistent advocate of those who have been affected by that issue. It is of course a commercial matter between the sub-postmasters and the Post Office; they are independent contractors to it. None the less, he has played an important role in ensuring that the issue is firmly on the Post Office's agenda, and I know he is doing so again next week. The issue was addressed by the Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills in the previous Parliament, and it will only be through the persistence of Members such as he that any wrongs end up being righted.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): When we consider what we do about the refurbishment of this place, will we have an opportunity to discuss what happened between June 1941 and October 1950, when the House of Commons met in the House of Lords Chamber, a period when we won the war and also had the greatest Government ever—the 1945 Labour Government? Would that be one option we could consider?

Chris Grayling: I remind the hon. Gentleman that those decisions need to be taken by both Houses of Parliament, with great sensitivity and after extensive discussion. Trying to identify individual solutions now might be slightly premature.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): In Colchester we have seen an unfortunate number of high-profile cases involving knives over the past few years. Will my right hon. Friend allow time for a debate about the importance that education institutions and charities can play in tackling the scourge of knife crime?

Chris Grayling: I start by paying tribute to my hon. Friend. Members may not be aware that notwithstanding his fantastic victory in Colchester at the election, the coalition is still alive and kicking there, because last week he and a Liberal Democrat councillor made a citizen's arrest on a burglar. I congratulate my hon. Friend on doing that; he brings a new dimension to justice enforcement in this House. Knife crime is an issue that the Government take very seriously, and I encourage him to bring forward questions or an Adjournment debate to make his points about Colchester.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Before we embark on the essential inquiry into the terrible mistake of sending troops into Helmand in 2006 in the vain hope that not a shot would be fired, could we debate the need to replace the cumbersome Chilcot arrangement with the form of parliamentary inquiry commended by a Select Committee in 2009, which would ensure that truth was speedily delivered, not endlessly delayed?

Chris Grayling: When the Chilcot process is finally completed, there will be some serious lessons to be learned from it. I personally believe that we should make greater use of the skills that exist in this House. I cannot prejudice any post-mortem of the process, except to say that I have no doubt at all that it will take place.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): Over the past few weeks we have seen Caffè Nero blackmailed by a bunch of people—only 200 of them—into not taking milk from my constituents. Could we please find time to debate in the House the point that these organisations feel that they can get away with it and do what they want, and that there is no recourse to law or any other way of stopping it?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend has made and put on the record an important point. It is not acceptable, in my mind, for companies to give in to pressure from a very small number of activists in a way that can damage the livelihood of people who may in reality have no connection at all to the issues being raised. What took place was utterly unacceptable, and I am glad that Caffè Nero has changed its mind, but I wish it had not taken that decision in the first place.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The NSPCC's very disturbing report this week showed that there were an additional 8,500 recorded sexual offences against children to April 2014, yet prosecutions are actually falling. Following that, may we please have a debate in Government time to find out what is happening in this very important area?

Chris Grayling: This is an enormously important issue. I suspect that a significant part of the increase is because—in an entirely welcome way—more victims feel able to come forward to report crimes that would otherwise go unnoticed and unreported. That is good. It is of course of enormous importance that all authorities involved do everything they can to bring to justice the perpetrators of those crimes. Justice questions is on Tuesday next week, and I hope that the hon. Lady will raise the matter directly with my colleague the Secretary of State.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Yesterday, Prime Minister's questions were a revelation. I thought that the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), who stood in as Leader of the Opposition, did an extremely good job, but I am sure that all parts of the House will have been wowed by how the Chancellor of the Exchequer handled himself at the Dispatch Box as acting Prime Minister. He has been made First Secretary of State, but in next week's business could the Leader of the House arrange for a short written statement confirming that if the Prime Minister were incapacitated the Chancellor would take over?

Chris Grayling: I will make sure the Prime Minister is aware of my hon. Friend's question.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) is well known for his preoccupation with the health of others.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): The Leader of the House may well be aware of the series of crises that have afflicted Barts Health NHS Trust in east London. It is the biggest trust in the country, serving 2.5 million people, and has been the subject of a series of damning Care Quality Commission reports. The situation is not sustainable—it simply cannot go on. May we have a statement on the Floor of the House from the Secretary of State for Health, or perhaps a debate, on that issue?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. A number of trusts have faced pressures and a number are doing an excellent job. Of course the Secretary of State and those who lead NHS England will always take careful cognisance of where problems and issues arise. I will make sure the hon. Gentleman's concerns are drawn to the Secretary of State's attention, and I will invite my right hon. Friend to respond to him accordingly.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): May we have a debate about looked-after children going missing from care? A concerning report from the London Assembly this week highlighted the fact that in Enfield 199 children have gone missing from care in the past five years, 109 of them for more than 24 hours. That puts those vulnerable children at risk of abuse, exploitation and radicalisation.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point, which links very much to the one made a moment ago by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson). The disappearance of children from care can lead to all kinds of adverse consequences. I have talked to some of the victims of the sex abuse gangs, and one of the most striking things was the way in which in many parts of this country young people were able to walk into and out of care easily, without proper monitoring and without supervision. That simply should not happen, and every local authority has a duty of care to young people to ensure that they are not wandering the streets at night and cannot be preyed upon by gangs.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: As colleagues will know, I am almost invariably keen to get everyone in at business questions, but we do now need to speed up a bit. If account of that could be taken, it would be helpful.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): I shall be incredibly brief, Mr Speaker. We have touched on the ending of the subsidy for renewable onshore wind. With a stroke of the pen, a written statement and a press release, £3 billion-worth of investment in Scotland is at risk. When will the Secretary of State come to this House to explain that disastrous decision?

Chris Grayling: The Secretary of State will be here next week, but we will continue to have a substantial wind sector in this country and we continue to support offshore wind. I do think there are limits to the amount our countryside can be covered by wind farms. That may be a point of difference between me and the hon. Gentleman, but I am happy to have that argument with the residents of Scotland, as well as the residents of England.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): The Davies commission on the future of airport expansion is due to report at the end of this month. Clearly, the Government will want to reflect on its recommendations. Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a statement to be made on the day the report is issued, followed by a full day's debate, so that Members from across the Chamber can give their views and inform the thinking of the Government?

Chris Grayling: First, I can assure the House that the Secretary of State will, of course, be addressing these issues in this Chamber. I will take note of my hon. Friend's request for a debate. This report will affect a number of colleagues. It will need to be considered carefully by Government and by this House, and I will do everything I can to make sure that happens.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): One week after the events at Harwich, in an unreported and undocumented incident, 55 people, mainly Albanian nationals, were trafficked into Killingholme docks in Lincolnshire. That received no coverage and was hushed up. Border Force is losing staff on the Humber and in Lincolnshire, and the entire enforcement office at Hull. Teesport officers were sent down to deal with the situation but have now found themselves with 90 days' notice of redundancy. What exactly is the Government's policy on border controls on the east coast of England?

Mr Speaker: And may we have a statement or debate on the matter?

Tom Blenkinsop *indicated assent.*

Chris Grayling: Our policy is to do everything we can to make sure our borders are tight and secure. We face a constant battle to do that, but I will draw my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's attention to the concerns the hon. Gentleman has raised and ask her to respond to him.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The Leader of the House will be aware that, earlier this week, many RBS customers failed to receive funds into their accounts as a result of a computer failure. I was surprised to hear

an RBS spokesman say on Radio 4 yesterday that it was inappropriate for customers to receive compensation. Banks are compensated in reverse by charging their customers. Will he find time very soon for a debate on that issue?

Chris Grayling: If a bank has a failure of that kind and it ends up costing its customers money, it has a duty to its customers; it is as simple as that. Those customers are buying a service from the bank. If the bank ceases to be able to deliver it for a period of time and customers suffer financially as a result, the bank should respond accordingly, and I very much hope that it does.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Although my friends in the Scottish National party may wish for hard-pressed electricity consumers to continue to pour money into the wind energy gravy train, communities across the United Kingdom will welcome the Government's announcement today. However, given the consequences of the high cost of electricity, may we have a debate on why the Government still insist on electricity consumers subsidising expensive offshore wind energy when there are cheaper alternatives from oil and gas generation?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman will have a chance to raise that point with the Secretary of State next week. I am glad that he welcomes today's decision. There are a great many beautiful parts of Northern Ireland, which are sometimes well served by wind, but which I would not wish to see covered in wind farms.

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Two weeks ago, a fire took place in Clowance Street in my constituency. Members will be relieved to know that there were no fatalities. However, it was the second serious fire in my constituency in the past six months. May we have a debate on how we improve safety, and on what measures we can take to avoid house fires?

Chris Grayling: I am pleased that there were no fatalities, but house fires are always alarming when they happen, jeopardising life. It would be beneficial for fire safety generally if we in this House did what we could to raise awareness of the issue. May I suggest that my hon. Friend takes advantage of one of the 90-minute slots in Westminster Hall to requisition such a debate? That would help build awareness of the challenge to which he rightly draws attention.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): During the general election campaign, the Prime Minister told my constituents that the A&E in Halifax would not close. Last week, the clinical commissioning group said that the Prime Minister's pledge should be taken up with the Prime Minister and not with it. May I ask for a statement from the Prime Minister, or, alternatively, a meeting with him to clarify just how and when he intends to keep his promise to my constituents to keep the A&E open?

Chris Grayling: I congratulate the hon. Lady on her election. The whole point of the reforms that we put in place in the previous Parliament is that, ultimately, the decisions rest with GPs. In my own constituency, where there was a similar situation, I consulted all the local

GPs. It became clear that they did not want change, so change did not happen. I suggest that she does the same.

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): This morning, the Government issued two written statements about the future of onshore wind. They are important policy changes, especially when linked with the Prime Minister's clear assurance two weeks ago that any wind farm without planning permission currently will not receive any subsidy whatsoever. May I add my request for a written statement so that we can explore the implications of those changes, particularly on my constituency of Montgomeryshire, which is threatened with desecration?

Chris Grayling: I very much hope that the changes we have announced today will prevent any such desecration. My comments about beautiful areas apply equally to the beautiful areas of his constituency. It is one of the loveliest parts of Wales, and I hope that the changes will protect his constituency for the future. I also hope that he will take advantage of next week's Department of Energy and Climate Change questions to ensure that the Secretary of State gives him that further information that he is looking for.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): May we have a debate on the ability or otherwise of Highways England correctly to manage infrastructure projects, particularly in the light of its failure to manage the A483/A55 Posthouse roundabout project in my constituency? Might that debate also include the possibility of the private sector contractors, which have contributed to that failure, being precluded from further public sector work until they can demonstrate competence? Such a debate would be timely, because, in the next two weeks, we are coming up to the third deadline for the completion of the work.

Chris Grayling: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the House. He rightly raises an important issue that affects the Chester area, so I suggest that he looks to take advantage of the system of Adjournment debates to bring a Minister to this House so that he can raise the issue directly.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): May we have a debate on the future of consistent forms of renewable energy, such as wave and tidal, and of energy storage to future-proof our energy network? I wholeheartedly welcome this morning's written statement on the ending of lucrative taxpayer subsidies to onshore wind farms, which threaten to encircle the city of York.

Chris Grayling: I am glad that my hon. Friend is happy with today's announcement. I share his views about renewable energy and am very pleased that the scheme in south Wales has been given the go-ahead for tidal power generation. He will of course have the opportunity to raise these issues next Thursday with the Secretary of State and I hope that he will do so.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): May I add my voice to those from both sides of the House who want an urgent debate or statement on further delays to the Chilcot inquiry? I impress on the Leader of the House the anger and frustration about the issues

[Chris Stephens]

of Maxwellisation and impress on him the views of my constituent Mrs Rose Gentle, whose son, Gordon, was killed on active duty in Iraq. There is concern that these people have waited for answers for far too long.

Chris Grayling: I agree with the hon. Gentleman and share that frustration. I understand the frustration felt by his constituents. This is an independent process and I have no doubt that after it has been completed lessons will need to be learned, but the messages going out from both sides of the House are appropriate and will, I hope, speed things towards a proper conclusion.

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): To mark national care home open day tomorrow, I will visit three care homes across Pendle. The debate on care homes often focuses on bad care, so may we have a debate on national care home open day, which would allow hon. Members across the House to pay tribute to the many excellent local care workers in our constituencies and to celebrate the many examples of great care that we see?

Chris Grayling: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the important point he is making. Bad examples of care often hit the headlines whereas the good examples in all our constituencies and the devoted and diligent work done by the people who work in those homes often goes utterly unmentioned. It is right and proper that that should be championed and I commend him for what he is doing. The Minister for Community and Social Care will visit a care home in Cheshire tomorrow and I hope that all Members will take advantage of the opportunity in the next few days to say thank you to those people in their constituencies who do this important work.

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Lab): The whole House will be aware of the recent decision by the Director of Public Prosecutions not to prosecute Lord Janner for alleged child abuse owing to his apparent ill health. May we have a debate on this decision, and will the Leader of the House offer any advice on why Lord Janner can retain his seat in the other place, writing laws, when he is apparently unable to face the law himself?

Chris Grayling: This immensely sensitive issue is part of a much broader sensitive issue. I commend the hon. Gentleman for his work in this regard; he has done as much as anyone to bring this matter of great national concern to the fore. There has been a lot of debate and controversy about the decision that has been taken, and there will be an Adjournment debate next week in which Members will have the chance to raise concerns and issues about the Crown Prosecution Service. I am sure that the messages from that debate will be listened to very carefully.

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): I very much agree with what the hon. Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson) asked the Leader of the House. The Care Quality Commission has just inspected Admiral Court care home in my constituency, saying that it showed a blatant disregard for humanity. Residents were virtually imprisoned and were denied food and water, and wheelchair users were not allowed to wash. It is an absolute disgrace that this sort of thing happens in our country in 2015.

On the back of that, may we have an urgent debate on the quality of social care to ensure that those who are often the most vulnerable people in our society do not have to suffer in this way again?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman's point is the flipside of what we heard a moment ago. Although there is great care in this country, there is sometimes awful care. What I find encouraging at the moment is the willingness of the Care Quality Commission simply to close bad homes. It is not acceptable to leave people in that condition and anyone who is running a care home that is substandard in looking after our elderly should expect a knock on the door and should know that their livelihood is in danger. I commend the CQC for ensuring that that happens in enough cases to send out a message.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): In the past 12 months, the eight NHS hospital trusts in Greater Manchester have spent more than £100 million on employing agency staff. May we please have a statement from the Health Secretary about the training, recruitment and retention of nurses in the NHS so that our health service can be both financially and medically sustainable in the future?

Chris Grayling: This subject is debated regularly in this House and will continue to be so. I know that health service managers and Ministers in the Department of Health are focused on the unnecessarily high level of cost. Personally, I am strongly in favour of creating banks within the NHS rather than externally generated ones, and some trusts are now doing that—certainly, that is beginning to happen in my area. It is right and proper that we try to bring down costs in the health service where we can, and this is an important way of doing so.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): The Leader of the House will be aware that a few days ago the UK Government rejected a freedom of information request on the grounds that compliance would involve the release of information that could damage our relationship with France. Given that the request was about the circumstances in which a then Minister of the Crown authorised the deliberate leaking of a confidential, but probably inaccurate, record of a private conversation between another Minister of the Crown and a senior representative of the French Government, may we have an urgent statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland to reassure the House that the Government's attitude to secrecy and open government is based on what is in the interests of the public and not on what is politically expedient for individual politicians?

Chris Grayling: Given the recent changes, the Government have no particular reason to have a vested interest in this matter, but I would say two things to the hon. Gentleman. It is important that Government can operate in a way that is in the interests of the country, and I know that those who look at ways to respond to such inquiries will always seek to do that; but if he and others are concerned, the point of having an Information Commissioner and an Information Tribunal is to enable decisions to be challenged, to establish whether they were right or wrong.

Point of Order

11.46 am

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last week, I asked twice about onshore wind—once directly of the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change on the Floor of the House, and once in last week’s business questions requesting a statement on support for renewables. This morning, a written statement came out with appearances in the media, and they have added to the confusion. Even a few minutes ago in this morning’s business questions, Tory Back Benchers were seemingly clueless about what the announcement might mean for projects in the pipeline especially. What powers do you have to frogmarch DECC Ministers here to show respect to the House and those in the onshore wind industry, both those in jobs and investors?

Mr Speaker: I fear that the hon. Gentleman invests me with powers that I do not possess. I am not in the frogmarching business. There are procedures for bringing Ministers to the House with which the hon. Gentleman, as an experienced hand, is well familiar, and he can seek to deploy them if he thinks it appropriate. Whether a Minister makes a statement in the House today on the matter in question is a matter for the Minister. I heard the exchanges, and if the hon. Gentleman, who is a dextrous and versatile operator in this House, remains dissatisfied, he well knows that there are means by which he can continue to raise the matter on the Floor of the House.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Were you astonished, as I certainly was, when last week the Minister for Skills made an important statement about changing policy on apprenticeships in *The Sun*—not to this House, not in this Chamber? It was a real innovation in policy, but it was announced in *The Sun*. Is that right?

Mr Speaker: Very few things astonish me. I am not sighted on the matter and I want to let the hon. Gentleman down gently, but I am not invariably in the business of reading *The Sun*, so I have not seen the material so covered. If a Minister has erred, I hope that the Minister will make amends. If the hon. Gentleman, on the strength of his 36 years’ service in this House, continues next week to be dissatisfied, I have a feeling that both the Minister and the House will not be unaware of the fact. We will leave it there for now.

European Union Referendum Bill

[2ND ALLOCATED DAY]

Further considered in Committee

[NATASCHA ENGEL *in the Chair*]

Clause 2

ENTITLEMENT TO VOTE IN THE REFERENDUM

11.50 am

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Natascha Engel): I must notify the Committee that amendment 51 is wrongly marked on the amendment paper as applying to line 16, whereas it should apply to line 17, and should therefore be listed after amendment 18. Therefore we begin with amendment 18 to clause 2.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): I beg to move amendment 18, in page 1, line 17, leave out from “electors” to the end of line 12 on page 2 and insert—

“at a local government election in any electoral area in Great Britain, or

(b) the persons who, on the date of the referendum, would be entitled to vote as electors at a local government election in any electoral area in Northern Ireland.”

This amendment extends the franchise in the referendum to EU nationals resident in the United Kingdom.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this it will be convenient to take the following:

Amendment 51, in page 1, line 17, leave out “parliamentary” and insert “local government”.

The amendment would allow citizens of all countries of the European Union living in the UK and Gibraltar to vote in the referendum.

Amendment 1, in page 1, line 17, at end insert

“and persons who would be so entitled except for the fact that they will be aged 16 or 17 on the date on which the referendum is to be held”.

The amendment would entitle British citizens, qualifying Commonwealth citizens and citizens of the Republic of Ireland aged 16 and 17 to vote in the referendum.

Amendment 12, in page 2, line 9, after “Commonwealth citizens”, insert

“or citizens of the Republic of Ireland”

Amendment 2, in page 2, line 12, at end insert

“and persons who would be so entitled except for the fact that they will be aged 16 or 17 on the date on which the referendum is to be held”.

The amendment would entitle Commonwealth citizens aged 16 and 17 who would be entitled to vote in Gibraltar for elections to the European Parliament to vote in the referendum.

Amendment 19, in page 2, line 16, at end add—

“(3) A person is entitled to vote in the referendum if, on the date on which the poll at the referendum is held, the person is aged 16 or over and registered in—

(a) the register of local government electors, or

(b) the register of young voters maintained under section (Register of young voters) for any such area.”

This amendment follows the Scottish independence referendum model for the franchise, which includes 16 and 17 year olds and EU nationals.

Amendment 52, in page 2, line 16, at end add—

“(3) Notwithstanding the provisions of the Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended, or of any other statute, a British citizen resident overseas in a country within the European Union will be eligible:

[The Second Deputy Chairman]

- (a) to register to vote and
- (b) to vote in the referendum.

The amendment would entitle British citizens living in any country in the European Union to vote in the referendum irrespective of the time they have been resident overseas.

Clause 2 stand part.

New clause 2—

“Register of young voters

“(1) For the purposes of this Act, each registration officer must prepare and maintain, for the officer’s area, a register to be known as the register of young voters.

(2) The register must contain—

- (a) the names of the persons appearing to the registration officer to be entitled to be registered in the register, and
- (b) in relation to each person registered in it, the person’s—
 - (i) date of birth,
 - (ii) (except where otherwise provided by an applied enactment) qualifying address, and
 - (iii) voter number.

(3) Subsection (2) is subject to section 9B of the 1983 Representation of the People Act (anonymous registration).

(4) A person’s qualifying address is the address in respect of which the person is entitled to be registered in the register.

(5) A person’s voter number is such number (with or without any letters) as is for the time being allocated by the registration officer to the person for the purposes of the register.

(6) A person is entitled to be registered in the register of young voters for any area if, on the relevant date, the person—

- (a) is not registered in the register of local government electors for the area,
- (b) meets the requirements (apart from any requirement as to age) for registration in the register of local government electors for the area, and
- (c) has attained the age of 16, or will attain that age on or before the date on which the poll at an independence referendum is to be held.

(7) In the case of a person who has not yet attained the age of 16—

- (a) the person’s entry in the register must state the date on which the person will attain the age of 16, and
- (b) until that date, the person is not, by virtue of the entry, to be taken to be a voter for the purposes of any independence referendum other than one the date of the poll at which is on or after that date.

(8) Where a person to whom subsection (7) applies has an anonymous entry in the register, the references in that subsection to the person’s entry in the register are to be read as references to the person’s entry in the record of anonymous entries.

(9) In this section, “the relevant date” mean the date on which an application for registration in the register of young voters is made (or the date on which such an application is treated as made by virtue of section 10A(2) of the 1983 Act).”

This amendment extends the franchise in the referendum to 16 and 17 year olds.

Amendment 13, in clause 8, page 4, line 15, at end insert—

““Commonwealth citizens” does not include citizens of any country which has terminated its membership of the Commonwealth or which has been wholly or partly suspended from the Councils of the Commonwealth by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group.”

Stephen Gethins: I shall speak to amendments 18 and 19 and new clause 2.

It is apt that we are debating our future relationship with the European Union on this, the 200th anniversary of the battle of Waterloo. Even though we in the Scottish National party voted against the referendum, we want to see a good relationship with Europe going forward, not one that is damaged by the Prime Minister or the Conservatives. If we are to have a referendum—obviously, we voted against it—we want to see it meet the gold standard that was met by the Scottish independence referendum.

Even though it is the anniversary of the battle of Waterloo, French nationals and other nationals should be able to vote in that referendum. We have mentioned before the example of Christian Allard, a very fine Member of the Scottish Parliament, who is a French national who has made a significant contribution to Scottish public life—a more significant contribution than many have made. My hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) will build on that and my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) will discuss it further. On the subject of EU nationals, I refer hon. Members to the excellent intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) on Tuesday.

I shall focus on 16 and 17-year-olds. I am glad our Labour colleagues have tabled an amendment and are backing a long-standing SNP policy on giving votes to 16 and 17-year-olds.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Stephen Gethins: I would love to give way on that point—in fact, this is the first intervention I have taken.

Mr Sheerman: I feel privileged that I am able to give the hon. Gentleman his first intervention, but may I tell him that we are not united on the Labour Benches? I chaired the Children, Schools and Families Committee for 10 years. I believe that the measure that he proposes will shrink childhood. We will eventually have young people going into the Army at 16, and many of the protections that children currently have through to 18 will be destroyed. This policy will bring adulthood down to 16 and will take away protections just as childhood becomes less and less that part of life.

Stephen Gethins: I am not terribly surprised to find out that Labour Members are split. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He makes a good point but we disagree. That was not our experience in the Scottish independence referendum, which I shall go on to discuss.

We need to get more young people engaged in politics. All of us across the Committee can agree on that. Even if we disagree on this issue, we can all unite on that; I am sure the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) will agree on that. I know his views are held honestly. In the independence referendum, an astonishing 75% of 16 and 17-year-olds took the opportunity to vote. The same survey showed that 97% of them said that they would do so again. Turnout in the UK election was 66.1%. It was higher in Scotland than in the rest of the UK—because of the Scottish independence referendum, we like to think, and a more politicised electorate. There are lessons for us all to be taken from that.

In February 2015 a BBC “Newsbeat” survey found that young people in Scotland aged 18 to 24 were more politically engaged than in any other part of the United Kingdom. As somebody from Scotland, I am proud of that, and I think everybody from Scotland who engaged in the referendum, whether they voted yes, as we on the SNP Benches did, or no, as our colleagues from the other parties did, should be proud of that.

An Edinburgh University study has found that two thirds of Scottish 16 and 17-year-olds have said that they would vote if they could, compared with just 39% in the UK as a whole. That is a challenge for every one of us across this Chamber. That is why we think that the independence referendum was a great opportunity to get people politically engaged, and we would like to see young people continue to be engaged.

With the EU referendum we have a big question over whether we remain a part of that Union. We want to see a positive case not just for remaining a part of that Union, but for looking at where we could work together more closely, for example, on security, on dealing with the worst refugee crisis since the second world war in the Mediterranean, on climate change, which we were all lobbied about yesterday, or on creating a more socially just Europe. I think that the way to engage more young people is by having a positive campaign—not just tinkering around the edges of certain policies on which the Prime Minister might or might not be able to win the argument.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): On Second Reading the Secretary of State rejected the strong case that the hon. Gentleman is making for giving 16 and 17-year-olds a say, claiming that he would rather get 18 to 24-year-olds to turn out. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that those two things are not mutually exclusive? One of the best ways to get 18 to 24-year-olds to vote is by engaging all young people in precisely the way he is describing.

Stephen Gethins: As is often the case, the hon. Lady is absolutely spot on. The facts that I have read out show that giving 16 and 17-year-olds the vote is the way to make them more politically engaged from an earlier age, and therefore more likely to vote later in life.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): The hon. Gentleman was giving reasons why young people would be interested in the referendum in general. I referred in my speech on Second Reading to the wider horizons that young people have. The unity we seek in Europe is a matter not only of the stomach and the wallet, but of the imagination and the spirit. The referendum could be an opportunity for those young people to express that hope.

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Gentleman made an excellent contribution on Tuesday, and he makes an excellent point today. I think that 16 and 17-year-olds have a perspective that many of us lack, just as people from an older generation have their own perspective, and that is what makes our democracy so rich. He and the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) have made excellent points.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Is not this about trusting young people to make informed decisions about their future, given that 16-year-olds can leave school, go to work, pay income tax and national

insurance and consent to sexual relationships? This is about their future, too. That is why it is absolutely right to extend the franchise.

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Gentleman speaks for the other side of the Labour party on this—I wonder whether there is a third side—and he makes a very good point.

On the Scottish Parliament’s Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill, which I will talk about in a moment, YouthLink Scotland has stated:

“We believe that this Bill addresses the inequality that young people aged 16 and 17 years old have historically faced: the discrepancy between their democratic rights and responsibilities—16 and 17 year olds can join the armed forces, enter employment and be subject to taxation, get married and drive a car, yet they were deemed too immature to cast a vote in an election.”

That is exactly the point the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) made.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con) *rose*—

Stephen Gethins: I have given way to Members on the Opposition side of the Committee, so I would be delighted to give way to someone on the Conservative side.

Tom Tugendhat: The hon. Gentleman speaks fluently on the legitimacy of 16 and 17-year-olds participating in this debate, and I understand the points he is making. As a former soldier, I want to say how proud I was to serve with many who were 18, 19 and 20 years old—young men who served their country with courage and determination—and how pleased I was that we in this country do not use child soldiers. I think that the age of legal responsibility in that sense, whether on the military or democratic front line, should be aligned.

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, and I respect his service. Voting in an election and trying to get young people engaged in the democratic process is quite different from fighting on the front line, so there is a distinction to be made in that regard.

12 pm

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stephen Gethins: I will make some progress for the moment. I have been generous so far, and I will happy to take more interventions later.

On this very day, Scotland is again ahead of the rest of the United Kingdom. Today the Scottish Parliament is on stage 3—the final stage, for Members who are not in the know about the dealings of the Scottish Parliament—of the Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill. That is one of the many examples of where power has been devolved from this place to Holyrood and the Scottish Government have put it to good effect. Today the Scottish Parliament will historically pass that Bill into legislation and give 16 and 17-year-olds a vote. The Scottish Government deserve praise for what they are doing, just as they deserved praise in the independence referendum. I look forward to the next local authority elections, when we will be able to go out and canvass for the votes of 16 and 17-year-olds.

[Stephen Gethins]

Interestingly, as Members from across the House will be delighted to learn, this draws cross-party support. Even Tories are supporting it.

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): Surely not Tories!

Stephen Gethins: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that votes at 16 are supported not just by the SNP, Labour, the Greens, and even the Liberal Democrats—we still have some—but by the leader of the Scottish Conservatives, Ruth Davidson, who says:

“I’m a fully paid-up member of the ‘votes at 16’ club now”.

It is great to see progress being made even with the Conservative party in Scotland. The benefit of this is not just to 16 and 17-year-olds; it is in having a bit of common sense across all the parties.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the reasons there has been such a change in attitude in Scotland is the experience of seeing how well-informed young people were when they had the chance to vote, when they were among the best-informed parts of the electorate?

Stephen Gethins: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We found that 16 and 17-year-olds, in particular, were studying the information and taking it from a wide range of sources. As she says, they were among the best-informed parts of the electorate. That is a great credit to the 16 and 17-year-olds who took part in the democratic process.

Dr Murrison: I have lots of 13, 14 and 15-year-olds in my constituency who have very good political views on a variety of issues. On what basis has the hon. Gentleman fixed on 16 as the age of enfranchisement?

Stephen Gethins: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware—he was clearly not listening earlier, so I will repeat it—at 16 and 17 people can get married and pay tax; all sorts of responsibilities kick in at 16. We therefore think—and, interestingly, others across this Chamber think—that 16 is the right age at which to give people the vote. Ruth Davidson, the leader of his own party in Scotland, thinks that 16 is bang on the right age as well. She and I may not agree on many issues, but I am very glad that she has come round to our way of thinking on this.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stephen Gethins: Not at the moment; I will make some progress.

On the example of the Scottish Bill, for which we must give due credit to the Scottish Parliament, Children in Scotland said:

“Children in Scotland believes that it is vital that 16 and 17 year olds are able to participate directly in the democratic process, and strongly supports the extension of the franchise to young people. This Bill will play an important role in addressing the discrepancy that young people aged 16 and 17 continue to face as far as their democratic rights and responsibilities are concerned.”

Young Scot said:

“In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child...we believe that young people should be involved in making decisions

that directly affect them, and that one of the best ways of getting involved in decision-making is through voting. Therefore, Young Scot strongly supports extension of the franchise for all elections”.

We have a responsibility across this House to try to engage people as fully as we can in the democratic process. Each one of us, of every political colour, knows the challenge that we face. Scotland has some good ideas, believe it or not. When we came to this place, we came to be constructive. We know there will be good ideas from Members from other parties, and we look forward to hearing them, but we also want to look at areas where Scotland has been ground-breaking, and this is one of them.

Voltaire said, once upon a time:

“We look to Scotland for all our ideas of civilisation.”

Obviously, we know that the Labour leadership candidates are all looking for ideas on leadership from Scotland’s First Minister, but perhaps this is an area on which we can work together. The Electoral Reform Society puts it succinctly:

“There is a widening gulf between people and politics—we see lowering the franchise age as vital to nurturing more active citizens for the future health of our democracy.”

It then makes a good point:

“If they vote early, they vote often!”

That has been our experience in Scotland and we think that extending the franchise will result in it also being the experience of the rest of the United Kingdom.

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called so early in this debate. With no disrespect to the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins), I will speak to amendments 12 and 13, which stand in my name.

On Second Reading, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary indicated that this is an important matter for the United Kingdom—it is indeed—and therefore that the appropriate franchise is the general election franchise. That, in my respectful judgment, is absolutely correct.

This Bill extends the franchise to Gibraltar because it is part of the south-west constituency of the European Parliament. Clause 2(1)(c) states that those entitled to vote will include

“Commonwealth citizens who, on the date of the referendum, would be entitled to vote in Gibraltar as electors at a European Parliamentary election in the combined electoral region in which Gibraltar is comprised.”

The difficulty, however, is that the proposed franchise for Gibraltar is not the general election franchise, because it leaves out of the count those who are citizens of the Republic of Ireland.

I know not how many people that may affect—it may affect three, five or a dozen, or it may affect none—but if we are going to pass legislation, it should be consistent. I suspect that, because this is a new extension of the franchise, the issue was overlooked by the Government and the Foreign Office lawyers when they considered how the Bill should be drafted to extend the franchise to Gibraltar.

I do not intend to push the amendment to a vote, but, because this House aims for consistency and because the Government’s stated aim is to use the general election franchise, the franchise extended to Gibraltar, with the consent of its Government, should be the same franchise as that which is used for general elections in this country.

That is why I ask the Minister to consider amendment 12 and perhaps table it as a Government amendment. It would insert words designed to ensure that those who are citizens of the Republic of Ireland but who are none the less domiciled in Gibraltar are entitled to vote in the forthcoming referendum.

Amendment 13 seeks to deal with the definition of “Commonwealth citizens”. I have searched long and hard in electoral law, including the Representation of the People Acts, and, indeed, in this Bill and other sources to try to ascertain who is and who is not a Commonwealth citizen. There is, obviously, a broader debate to which this House may wish to turn in due course, particularly given the accession of Mozambique and Rwanda to the Commonwealth, about whether Commonwealth citizens should continue to be part of the franchise for general elections in this country. There is also, however, an entirely different problem, which relates most acutely to nationals of Zimbabwe who are resident in this country and in Gibraltar.

At the moment, Zimbabwe is not a member of the Commonwealth; it has simply withdrawn from it. The Commonwealth ministerial action group is charged with deciding who is and who is not a member of the Commonwealth, who is suspended and whose membership is terminated, and it is unclear whether or not some countries—for example, Fiji—are presently members of the Commonwealth for all purposes.

I know not whether there is non-statutory guidance for returning officers, but the law is unclear whether they are supposed to afford the right to vote in a general election to a national of Zimbabwe, which, as I say, is not presently a member of the Commonwealth.

As I understand it, a previous Government indicated that no Zimbabwean should, as a result of that country’s withdrawal, suffer in respect of their ability to vote in general elections. However, in the absence of a definition, who is and who is not entitled to vote among Commonwealth citizens of countries that have been suspended from the Commonwealth or that have terminated their membership is, in practice, entirely unclear. We might therefore end up with the position where in one place in this country, a Zimbabwean national is on the electoral roll and entitled to vote, whereas in another place, a Zimbabwean national is not entitled to vote because the returning officer takes the view, rightly or wrongly, that Zimbabwe is not a member of the Commonwealth and therefore that that person is not a Commonwealth citizen.

There is a much broader debate to be had about this matter, but the Government need to ensure that there is consistency across the entire country and to make it clear whether the national of a Commonwealth country that has withdrawn from the Commonwealth or been suspended by the Commonwealth ministerial action group who has permanent leave to be here and should therefore be entitled to a vote is able to vote. When the Minister responds, I would like to hear what his plans are in this area.

Amendments 12 and 13, although they originate from the Back-Benches, are meant to be helpful to the Government, in the sense that they will provoke debate and ensure that there is consistency across the legislation. For that reason, I look forward to hearing from the Minister what the Government’s attitude to them is.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): I rise to speak to amendment 1, which would extend the franchise for the referendum to 16 and 17-year-olds, and amendment 2, which would have a similar effect in Gibraltar.

The franchise that has been chosen for the referendum, which is set out in clause 2, is the franchise for UK parliamentary elections, but with two exceptions. First, it is extended to peers, and secondly, it is extended to the people of Gibraltar. The Opposition have no objection to those two extensions of the franchise, but we believe that they are incomplete. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) flagged up our concern on this issue on Second Reading, when he said that we wished to extend the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds for the purposes of the referendum.

There has been an active debate for some years about extending the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds, and we heard some of the arguments in the initial exchanges of this debate. People of that age can pay income tax and national insurance, obtain tax credits, consent to sexual relationships, get married, enter a civil partnership, become a company director and do many other things. In fact, both my party and the Conservative party allow them to join and have a vote in the selection of the party leader, if they so wish. Until very recently, 16 and 17-year-olds could not vote in national or local elections, despite their ability to select someone who aspires to become Prime Minister.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): If the right hon. Gentleman is going to cite a list of things that people can do at 16, he also needs to consider the things that they cannot do. They cannot leave school without being in full-time education until they are 18. They are protected in law as a minor if they commit a crime. They do not serve on the front line. They can only get married with parental permission, and they cannot buy fireworks, alcohol or cigarettes. I do not see the point of trading these lists. We have made a decision that young people at the ages of 16 and 17 receive protection in law, up to a point. That is agreed in relation to the franchise.

Mr McFadden: The hon. Lady makes the point that not every right and legal responsibility is conferred on people at 16. That is true, but many of them are. The question of the right to democratic participation is therefore not a science, but a matter of judgment. That judgment will be the subject of the rest of my remarks.

12.15 pm

Mr Sheerman: I find this very awkward, because I nearly always agree with my right hon. Friend, but is not what is missing from this debate the responsibility that we have as parliamentarians to care for young people who are very vulnerable? Up and down this country, young people are vulnerable to sexual predators and ghastly things happen to them right up to the age of 18. This move towards making people adults at 16 will make a lot of young men and women more vulnerable to sexual predation than they are at the moment.

Mr McFadden: I have huge mutual respect for my hon. Friend, but I do not see the connection between extending voting rights to people at 16 and making them more vulnerable to sexual predators.

[Mr McFadden]

Of course, the first major poll in the UK in which 16 and 17-year-olds were allowed to vote was last year's Scottish independence referendum. That major referendum tested all the familiar arguments that we have heard before and which we may hear in this debate about whether such people are old enough to understand the issues and mature enough to take part in the debate and exercise their democratic responsibilities. I do not think that anyone on either side of the independence debate argues that Scotland's 16 and 17-year-olds did not pass those tests with flying colours. Many campaigners have said that the debates among 16 and 17-year-olds were some of the most engaged and informed of the referendum campaign. The post-referendum report by the Electoral Commission said:

"109,593 16 and 17 year olds were included on the registers by the registration deadline and 75% of those we spoke to claimed to have voted. Importantly, 97% of those 16-17 year olds who reported having voted said that they would vote again in future elections and referendums."

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that schools and colleges have a role to play? Perhaps the thought that anyone who is vulnerable or who has certain issues can have a wider debate in the school or college context, and therefore be better educated about democracy and the role it can play, will put the mind of my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) at rest.

Mr McFadden: I do not think any of us would ever want schools to be engaged in partisan debate, but schools do have an important role in teaching young people about citizenship, their responsibilities, the importance of elections and so on. My hon. Friend is right about that.

The experience of last year is that young people did understand the issues and did take part. They felt empowered by their democratic choice, not apathetic or overawed. They exercised their democratic rights in huge numbers and, afterwards, said that they would be more likely to vote again. The hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) quoted the leader of the Scottish Conservative party as saying that she is now

"a fully paid-up member of the 'votes at 16' club".

There may be a relationship between allowing votes at 16 and 17 and encouraging voting in the 18 to 24 age group. If we get young people registered early and they stay on the register when they are between 18 and 24, it might address the low turnout among that group. That is the age at which people leave home to study, to go to work or for other reasons. That is a challenge on the registration front and the turnout front.

Dr Murrison: The argument that the right hon. Gentleman is employing could equally be made for 13, 14 and 15-year-olds, so may I put to him the same question that I put to the Scottish National party spokesman, the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins)? Why is he fixed on 16, as opposed to a lower age, for example 13, as the age for enfranchisement?

Mr McFadden: As I said, the rules of the hon. Gentleman's own party allow people to join at 15, but we have related our amendments to the age at which legal responsibilities and rights are conferred. There is a

slight difference between the general argument about the age of the franchise and its applicability to important constitutional referendums.

Stephen Phillips: The right hon. Gentleman says that he is fixed on 16 as the age at which legal rights accrue to the individual, but that is true only of some rights. It is not until an individual is 18 that we treat them as being a full member of society. Surely that is the point at which they should be enfranchised and be able to contribute to our national life through a full democratic debate.

Mr McFadden: We could argue that there are some rights that people do not get even at 18. In the end, it is a matter of judgment. I do not want to go through the list again, but when people can start to work, pay taxes and do many other things, there is at least a reasonable case for giving them the right to vote.

Mr Sheerman: A small minority of Labour Members worry that we will make 16 the age of becoming an adult, which will shrink childhood at a time when kids in this country are going to live to 100. The amount of time that they will be children is getting smaller as a percentage of their life. There are arguments for and against certain things happening at 16 and at 18, but if the Opposition amendments became law, they would mean that young people would become adults at 16.

Mr McFadden: My hon. Friend has made his point about shrinking childhood before. I say to him that maturity is not an exact science. There will be some people who are mature at 16 or perhaps less, and some who manage to hang on to their immaturity for a great many years after that. I do not believe that any of us can pinpoint an exact age.

One thing that the EU referendum has in common with the major constitutional referendum that took place in Scotland last year is that it is a decision for a long time into the future. To quote the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), who is not here today, it is a decision to be made once in a lifetime, or at least for a generation, not something to be repeated every few years. I hope that all hon. Members will agree with that. The referendum will not return every few years like general elections.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman will remember from our happy days together in the Labour club at Edinburgh University that in Scotland, unlike in England, the age of legal capacity is 16. However, child protection laws in Scotland, like those in England, go up to the age of 18. The hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) made the point that the age of legal capacity in England is 18, but it is worth making the point that it is 16 in Scotland.

Mr McFadden: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for her intervention.

The issue before us is the UK's future in the European Union, a huge constitutional issue that will affect the future of the country and its citizens for many years to come. The rights of Britain's young people will be directly at stake in the referendum. Let us consider the

politics behind why the referendum is coming about. A major reason is concerns about how the free movement of people operates in the EU and in this country. Our citizens currently have the right to live, work and study in 27 other member states by virtue of our membership. I do not think there are many people who want us to leave the European Union but do not want to restrict the right of free movement. There may be some, but not many, and that is pretty high on the agenda of those who want to leave.

If we leave the European Union, and as a result decide that we will restrict the rights of other European citizens to come to live and work in the UK, we can be sure that reciprocal action will be taken against young people from the United Kingdom. The rights that British citizens currently enjoy to live, work and study throughout the EU are directly at stake in the referendum. Even setting aside the general debate about the right of 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in elections, that is a strong reason for giving those citizens the right to vote in the referendum. Their future is directly at stake.

It is 40 years since this country last voted on membership of the European Union. As we hear perennially in these debates, someone would have to be in their mid-50s to have voted in the last EU referendum. The referendum will not come around every few years. It is a generational decision that will have a direct impact on young people's future rights, which is why I believe they should be given a voice in it.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): One of the key rights that we have as citizens in this country is to be judged by a jury of our peers, and eligibility for jury selection begins at 18 because of how important a responsibility it is. Is the right hon. Gentleman suggesting that that eligibility, which is drawn from the electoral roll, should be changed to 16?

Mr McFadden: That is not part of our amendments, but I am sure such things can be considered in other debates. My point, as the hon. Lady has just heard, is that the referendum result will have a direct impact on our citizens' right of free movement.

Tom Tugendhat: I associate myself with what my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) said, because her point is fundamental. We are talking about the constitution of the United Kingdom and the details that allow people to participate in decisions on it. The right hon. Gentleman is arguing that we should play with it in the case of this particular referendum, but in fact we should have a proper debate in the House about the age at which people should be enfranchised to debate the matters of our nation. That age should apply throughout, whether to juries or to an EU referendum.

Mr McFadden: I believe that the long-term trend will be towards enfranchisement at a younger age, for some of the reasons that have been set out in the debate. My party believes in a general reduction to 16, but the amendments are concerned with the EU referendum facilitated by the Bill. My argument is that there is a good reason for enfranchisement at 16 in this case, given the direct impact of the result on the right of free movement and the right to study and work in other EU countries. There is a good argument for that, and I do

not believe that it is a partisan one that is made only by Labour or Scottish National party Members. Some Conservative and other Members support it.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Although some say that the voting age should be dealt with generally rather than specifically, is it not the case that the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition Government and the House were quite happy for a specific change to be made for the Scottish referendum? Why cannot my 16 and 17-year-old constituents in London, and those in the rest of England, have a vote, yet Scottish young people can?

12.30 pm

Mr McFadden: The decision was taken for the Scottish referendum because the power to do so was devolved. The power has also been devolved to the Welsh Assembly.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): It may be helpful if I remind the right hon. Gentleman that in the last Parliament the House in fact voted for votes at 16.

Mr McFadden: It did, but it was not put into legislation in the way that we have the opportunity to do today.

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): I am delighted that the right hon. Gentleman has given way on the nature of the legislation before us as we are—after all—in Committee. I welcomed the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) about the electoral register and I am deeply alarmed that the proponent of any amendment would not have—in the right hon. Gentleman's words—"thought through" whether it would have an effect on such an important issue as jury service. I am a supporter of votes at 16, and I shall seek to make further comments on that later, but we are now examining the quality of legislation.

Mr McFadden: I thank the hon. Lady for her praise of my amendment, but its effect would be clear and we have taken advice on the point. The amendment would extend to 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote on exactly the same basis as the other changes to the franchise in the rest of the Bill. As was said on Second Reading, the Bill already changes the franchise—for Gibraltar and for peers—so the amendment, like the Bill, will apply only to the EU referendum.

The amendment on EU citizens is also in this group of amendments. The franchise in the Bill is that for UK parliamentary elections, except for the exceptions that we have discussed, and the amendments would extend it to citizens of other EU countries. EU citizens currently have the right to vote in local and European elections, but not in parliamentary elections. When other EU countries have held referendums on EU accession decisions or treaty changes in recent years, EU citizens from member states outwith those countries have not been given the vote. That is true for recent referendums held in France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Denmark and many other countries. When a member state makes a decision on its own membership of the EU, on whether to join the euro or on whether to accept treaty change, the pattern has been to use the franchise for national elections. It has not been the pattern to extend that to citizens of

[Mr McFadden]

other EU countries. For that reason, we do not support allowing citizens of other EU countries to participate in this referendum, but we do believe that it is important to extend the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): We all visit schools in our constituencies, and I am sure I am not alone in thinking that some of the most thoughtful and challenging discussions in those visits have been with 16 and 17-year-olds. Do I feel that they have the capacity to understand the information, to weigh it and to communicate their views? Absolutely I do. The question is whether Members of Parliament have the capacity to change our view and give those young people a voice and a vote. I could not return to my constituency, look those young people in the eye and tell them that I had denied them the opportunity to take part in the forthcoming referendum.

I have lobbied hard for everyone in my constituency to have their say on our future in Europe, but when I reflect on who will feel the impact of the result most, I conclude that it will be 16 to 25-year-olds, who will live with the decision for longer than the rest of us. I am delighted that we have extended the franchise to Members of the Upper House, and that their lordships will have the opportunity to vote in the referendum, but I feel strongly that we should extend the same courtesy to young people in our constituencies.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does my hon. Friend think that 16 and 17-year-olds are mature enough to decide whether to buy a pint of beer in a pub or 20 cigarettes to smoke?

Dr Wollaston: My hon. Friend will not be surprised to hear me say that I do not think that we should widen the opportunity for young people to be exploited by big tobacco or big alcohol—I am robust on that point. I do not think, however, that we need the same thresholds across the board. We have already heard that we judge people to have capacity at many different thresholds, but we do not deny people detained under the Mental Health Act the opportunity to vote. We do not deny the opportunity to vote to people who may lack capacity because of advanced dementia. We understand that those people need the opportunity to express their voice.

The wider point is that as the age of our population increases, which is a good thing—the only thing worse than getting older is the alternative—it will have profound implications for us all, and we should be concerned about that. Because older people vote, it tends to drive policy in their direction. There is a compelling case for balance, and we need to give young people a voice and a vote.

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): I, too, often speak to sixth-form colleges, and after a discussion about whether 16 and 17-year-olds should vote, I often ask them whether they would like the vote themselves. In my experience, the majority of sixth-formers say that they would prefer to wait until 18 to vote as they could then make a more informed decision. Has that been my hon. Friend's experience?

Dr Wollaston: Absolutely not. I am clearly talking to very different young people in south Devon. I agree that young people—indeed, people of every age—are crying out for clear information. Perhaps, instead of the Government churning out information that is not widely trusted, we could consider some way in which we could grade the quality of information, as we do for scientific papers, which are graded according to the quality of the evidence. Perhaps we could ask academic bodies, or the Library, to grade the information to which people have access, so that they can judge whether it comes from one perspective or another. People want clear information.

Chris White (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree in principle that votes at 16 is an idea whose time has come, but that it should not be introduced by means of an amendment on a matter of this significance? Does she agree that lowering the voting age to 16 is inevitable and would she welcome, as I would, the Government taking the initiative on that sensible and timely reform of our franchise?

Dr Wollaston: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend that the time has come. The time came in Scotland, and we saw very clearly how important that was for young people. More than 90% of young people in Scotland registered to vote. They now permanently have a voice and a vote, and I do not think they will accept its being taken away from them now. That would be infantilising. We should accept that they have the capacity to make these decisions, and the House should embrace that.

I believe this should be a decision for Parliament, not a party political decision through the Whips. I would like the whole House to have the opportunity to decide on this in a free vote. Furthermore, on my hon. Friend's point about whether we should take this as a stand-alone issue or debate the wider franchise, I will be making the same point and voting in the same way when this comes back and we have a wider discussion about the franchise in other elections. Let us not be dragged into this kicking and screaming; let us make a positive decision that we trust our young people and want to give them a voice.

Caroline Lucas: The hon. Lady is making a rigorous case. I agree with her very much about the importance of information, and certainly young people in Brighton are telling me that they would like more information too. Does she agree that things such as more personal, social, health and economic education in schools is one place where we could have that kind of debate? I have had a private Member's Bill for mandatory PSHE in schools, so I wonder whether she would support that point.

Dr Wollaston: I think the hon. Lady knows that I agree with her on the importance of PSHE in schools, and there are also opportunities through citizenship. I have heard people in this debate so far arguing, "Well, shouldn't we first be concentrating on getting 20-year-olds to vote?" I absolutely agree—that is important too, but the two are not mutually exclusive. We can set patterns for a lifetime if we get young people starting to think about the importance of voting, as well as about their active participation in politics. That is important, because although young people take part in politics—we know that; they are very engaged on issues and with community

activism—we need to persuade them that it is absolutely in their interest to vote as well, because of the way in which voting drives policy, as I said earlier.

In my opinion, too much of our policy across this House is being driven by issues that are important to people who vote, and as there are more and more people from the older demographic who vote, there is a risk that our debates will become even more distorted. We must recognise the need to balance that by giving young people a greater voice, but the voice is always stronger if it is accompanied by a vote. What message will we send to the young people we will be asking to vote in 2020 if we infantilise those same young people and deny them the vote as 16 or 17-year-olds in 2016 or 2017?

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a persuasive and enlightened case. She is right: we should never be fearful of making fundamental changes to the franchise; but they should be properly and fully considered, and not rushed. Does she agree that the Electoral Commission should be asked to carry out a full review of the voting age? I think it last did so in 2003-04, when it said it wanted to return to the issue in the next five to seven years, and we are now 11 to 12 years on.

Dr Wollaston: I agree with my hon. Friend, but we can sometimes use excuses to delay important issues. The important thing is to look at the experience in Scotland and the way the vote was energised. Is anybody seriously arguing that 16 and 17-year-olds in Scotland were incapable of taking in the information, weighing it in the balance and communicating their views? Is anybody seriously suggesting that there were harms to those young people from taking part? No, and I would say to those on our Benches that they should look at what has been written by Ruth Davidson for the Tory Reform Group. She makes a compelling case for Conservative Members to embrace that change and take this forward. We must do so for the referendum for the very reason that we are talking about the young people who will be most affected by the decision and living with it for the longest, but who will not, as in general elections, have an opportunity to change their view in five years' time. This decision will last for decades.

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a strong argument, but, to reflect the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), surely it is better that a constitutional issue that is so important that it affects all elections should be fully debated by the House as a separate matter. She has mentioned Scotland. Scotland has a heritage of 16 and 17-year-olds being able to vote in local elections, and when it comes to responsibilities such as marriage, there has been a long-standing position that people can get married there without their parents' permission. That is not the case in England at 16. Therefore, we need a far more in-depth discussion about this issue, rather than cramming it into today's debate on amendment 18 to clause 2.

12.45 pm

Dr Wollaston: My hon. Friend is right that we need to debate it. We need to do that too, and I will be making exactly the same argument at that point, but we must

not miss this opportunity to express a view as a House. I believe we should have a free vote—I believe that passionately—on whether 16 and 17-year-olds have the capacity. I say to my hon. Friend: what is the harm and what are the benefits? We should all weigh up—if we look at our ethical grid—the benefits versus the harms to the individual and society. As I said earlier, I believe there are compelling societal reasons why we must give young people a voice and a vote, because without the vote, they do not have the same voice. There are also societal reasons about the changing structure of our population, but I ask him: where are the harms?

Chris Skidmore: Taking a philosophical approach, if we look at, say, young offenders institutions and prisons, is my hon. Friend therefore arguing that 16-year-olds should go straight to incarceration in adult prisons? If we take voting as part of the age of responsibility, we will be opening a whole can of worms; therefore, the argument that they could be placed in prisons comes up. That is what I am worried about. Sixteen-year-olds are vulnerable. I appreciate what she is saying, but this is not just about the voting age; it is about looking after those vulnerable young people. She is making the case for voting, but the obverse of that is that equality must apply everywhere.

Dr Wollaston: Let me point out to my hon. Friend that one of the things I campaigned long and hard on in the last Parliament—one of the things that perhaps drove me into politics—was the scandal of children being detained in police cells under section 136.

Chris Skidmore: But they are children.

Dr Wollaston: But the point is that these are children who are being incarcerated. The inquiry on child and adolescent mental health services that I led as Chair of the Select Committee on Health at the end of the last Parliament shows, I feel, the opposite. The point is that one of the reasons we have such woeful services for young people suffering from mental health problems is partly the way that policy drivers tend to come from the other end of the age spectrum. If my hon. Friend is going to bring up incarceration in prisons, I would say yes, we do incarcerate young people in wholly inappropriate circumstances. Part of giving them a voice and a vote is about changing the way we treat our young people in those circumstances. I am delighted that the Government are finally making progress on this scandal and stopping the incarceration of children in cells—something that I witnessed as a forensic medical examiner and have felt passionately about for years.

One of the most extraordinary arguments I have heard this afternoon was from the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), who is no longer in his place. He suggested that children would somehow be at greater risk of abuse if they were allowed a vote. I would say absolutely the opposite, so I do not accept the argument that my hon. Friend has made about the criminal justice system. Let us stop infantilising young people; let us give them a voice and a vote.

Charlotte Leslie (Bristol North West) (Con): My hon. Friend may not be surprised to know that I agree that it is time for people to have votes at 16. However, we are seeing an interesting and passionate debate in the House,

[Charlotte Leslie]

and if something is worth doing and is important, it is worth doing well. Our hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) raises some interesting points. Whatever we think about them, these are important points for debate. If we open this new opportunity for young people, there may be inconsistencies. Consistency in when we feel that young people are adults and responsible is something that we have to get right. Does my hon. Friend feel that it is now time for the Government to grasp the nettle and have a proper debate about the franchise and when we have the vote? This is not the time for that, because a lot of debate needs to be had and there is too little time now in which to have it. If it is worth doing, it is worth doing well.

The Temporary Chair (Mr George Howarth): Order. Before the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) continues, I should say that there has been a great deal of tolerance of over-long interventions, but they are straying into the territory of mini-speeches. Those intending to make an intervention should try to keep it to a single point and be brief.

Dr Wollaston: There will always be inconsistencies. We will never get complete consistency on the threshold issues; we will continue to have different thresholds for different things, and the points at which we choose cut-offs tend to be around 16 and 18. I am comfortable with that. The issue is whether we feel as a House and as parliamentarians that we should look those 16 and 17-year-olds in the eye and say to them on an issue that will have far-reaching implications for their future that although they have the capacity to make decisions, we are going to deny them the vote and kick it into the long grass.

If we are honest, there are other political reasons at stake, and we should be honest about them. We should give young people a voice and the vote in this referendum and then let us have the other discussions. As I say, I will make the same arguments about the wider general election franchise, but I feel that the case for this particular referendum is compelling. I can see no reason why we would not want to give young people a vote on this extremely important issue, which will affect them for far longer than it will affect me.

Dr Murrison: I am always keen to follow what my hon. Friend has to say and the thoughtful way in which she makes her case. Does she agree that this is indeed all to do with maturity, and that the reason why we protect children concerns their level of maturity and the need for society to make sure that they are okay? The same argument can be deployed for the age of enfranchisement. We need to define what we mean by a child and what we mean by an adult. The argument about enfranchisement is really a supplementary and consequential argument, depending very much on the age we have determined.

Dr Wollaston: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, but I feel that this is the right age to have the opportunity. Do I think that 16-year-olds have the capacity to make decisions and weigh all the arguments in the balance in this referendum vote? Absolutely. I cannot believe how I could walk into classrooms to meet 16 and 17-year-olds,

look them in the eye and say, “Actually, I do not believe that you have the capacity to understand and make a case.”

Hywel Williams: Are not the people who are arguing against votes at 16 also doubting, by extension, the virtue of the vote in Scotland earlier this year, which came down, of course, on the Unionist side?

Dr Wollaston: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point and take another intervention.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Does the hon. Lady think there are lessons to be learned about what happened in Scotland, where there was massive engagement on the part of young people? Also, after a debate very similar to this one in the Scottish Parliament, when people saw what really happened, they stopped being worried about what might happen, so there is now very little opposition in Scotland to giving 16 and 17-year-olds the vote for every election.

Dr Wollaston: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Who could have watched that extraordinary debate, the most compelling debate of the referendum campaign, with thousands of people in the stadium in Glasgow, without feeling inspired by the opportunity and enthusiasm for the whole campaign and the wide turnout? I believe those young people will continue to be engaged in politics, not just in activism within their communities but in turning out to vote, which is the important issue here. We must increase voter engagement. If we do nothing, we could face a situation within a decade where half the population are simply not turning out to vote. That will have terrible consequences for our democracy.

I shall finish on that note. I really hope that any Members in doubt about the issue who feel that we can kick it into the long grass will ask themselves whether they want to walk into those schools after this debate and tell young people that they have denied them the vote.

Mike Gapes: I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) on her speech, and I absolutely agree with what she said. I will support votes for 16 and 17-year-olds and the position put forward by my Front-Bench team. I want to speak to my amendments 51 and 52. Amendment 51 relates to a serious anomaly in the current position regarding European Union citizens living in the United Kingdom, while amendment 52 relates to a further anomaly regarding British citizens living elsewhere in the EU.

Let me deal first with amendment 51. As things stand, a citizen of Malta, Cyprus or the Republic of Ireland, which are all European Union countries, can vote in the proposed referendum on the future of the UK in the EU. Those citizens can do so because, in the case of Malta and Cyprus, they are also in the Commonwealth. In the case of the Republic of Ireland, they can do so because it was once a British colony and there would be complications with regard to Northern Ireland if they could not vote. These are historical reasons. Under our parliamentary franchise, we allow citizens of those three countries and all other Commonwealth citizens in the UK to vote in the election.

Oliver Dowden: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a valid reason for extending the franchise to members of the Commonwealth—many of the citizens

of those countries fought and spilt blood in defence of the freedoms we enjoy, which gives them a unique entitlement to vote?

Mike Gapes: I will not be diverted into a long argument, but I have constituents and friends who are Poles, whose parents and grandparents fought with the British. I also have constituents whose relatives fought with the resistance, with the left in Italy and in France against fascism and Nazism. I have friends from other European countries who acted similarly, so I am afraid the hon. Gentleman cannot use that argument.

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. In Scotland, we have an excellent Polish community, for example. We have a huge Polish community who fought incredibly bravely during the war, and a newer Polish community who are making a significant contribution to Scottish life.

Mike Gapes: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention.

On the question of EU citizens, there is a very good organisation called New Europeans. I was privileged to be involved when it launched exactly two years ago on 18 June 2013 in the Boothroyd Room. I spoke at the launch. It brings together EU citizens living in the UK. New Europeans has just sent to the Prime Minister a letter signed by a large number of people. I will not list them all, but Nishan Dzhingozyan from Bulgaria, Monika Tlacyt from Poland, Anastasios Vourexakis from Greece and Dean Domitrovic from Croatia were the four main signatories. It was signed by a representative of each of the other EU countries resident in the UK. These are people who are paying taxes, studying, working and living here. Many of them have children born here.

In my recent general election campaign, I met a couple on the street: he was British, she was French. She has been living in this country for many years, and they have children at a school in my constituency. In the referendum, however, one of them will have a vote and the other will not. We have the interesting scenario whereby Commonwealth citizens can vote. A person from Jamaica can vote in the referendum. A person from India or Bangladesh can vote in it. However, someone from Italy or Spain who may have lived in the United Kingdom for longer than people from those other European countries that I mentioned cannot vote.

1 pm

During the general election campaign, a man stopped me in the street and said, "I am not sure whether I can vote." I asked, "What is your nationality?" He said, "I am an Italian citizen." I said, "In that case, you will not be able to vote in this election." He then said, "I am originally from Bangladesh, and I have dual citizenship." I told him, "Well, in that case you can vote." But if that man had been a Somali with Italian citizenship, he would not have been able to vote. Someone in a similar position who had come to this country in similar circumstances, as a migrant or an asylum seeker, with the nationality of another European Union state such as Sweden or the Netherlands, could not vote, but if that person had come from a Commonwealth country in such circumstances, he could vote. It is an absurdity.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his pronunciation of all those names.

In her brilliant speech, the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) spoke of sending a message. I hope that the Committee will accept my hon. Friend's amendment, which I have signed and which I support—I also support the amendment tabled by the Scottish National party—because it sends the message that those who come to this country and pay their taxes ought to have the same franchise as everyone else, and to be able to vote in the same way.

Mike Gapes: I take that point entirely. The letter that the New Europeans sent to the Prime Minister points out that it is unfair to discriminate against some EU citizens by not allowing "so many of us" to vote.

Antoinette Sandbach: The right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) read out a powerful list of other European countries that apply exactly the same criteria. I speak as the child of an EU citizen—my mother—who does not vote. She chooses to retain her nationality and her citizenship in the Netherlands, where she was born, although she has lived in this country for many years. Ultimately, it is for such individuals to decide what their citizenship is. If they wish to become British citizens, they can exercise the franchise here.

Mike Gapes: That is true, but there remains an anomaly which is not dealt with by what has been said by either the hon. Lady or my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East. We allow some EU citizens to vote in our elections; there is not a blanket ban. A Cypriot can vote, a Greek Cypriot can vote, but a Greek cannot vote.

Tom Brake: I am happy to have added my name to the hon. Gentleman's very sensible amendment. What reasons have his Front-Bench colleagues given him for not supporting it?

Mike Gapes: I will let my Front-Bench colleagues speak for themselves. I will not put words into their mouths. I am presenting a case that is linked with my other amendment, which relates to British citizens living in other EU countries.

Mr Dodds: The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful case for his amendment in arguing against differentiation between people of different nationalities who are resident here and pay taxes, but why stop at EU citizens? Why does he not apply the same argument to citizens of the wider world who are also resident here and pay taxes, and who will also be affected by the decision?

Mike Gapes: I understand what the right hon. Gentleman is saying, but the referendum is about the European Union. I agree that people in the United States and other parts of the world are affected, but we already allow a great many people from other countries who live here to vote in our parliamentary elections, because of the Commonwealth. A large number of British people living in other countries and a large number of Commonwealth citizens living in the United Kingdom—many of whom have not taken British citizenship, whether they have come from Pakistan, India, Australia or Canada—can vote in those elections.

Chris Skidmore: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman's argument relates to the complexities of our current system of eligibility to vote in either the potential European referendum or a general election, but may I take up the point made earlier by the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), who mentioned tax? How long does the hon. Gentleman think the period of contribution should be? Should it be five years or 10 years, or should taxpayers be eligible immediately?

Mike Gapes: That is not a question that I can answer at this stage. We have residence rules with regard to people's eligibility to vote. The essence of my argument is that there should be no discrimination against European Union citizens who are not from Commonwealth countries that are in the European Union. My amendment would end discrimination against EU citizens who may have lived in the United Kingdom for many years—perhaps with children who are at school or university—and may have been making a contribution during that time, whether they are directors of companies, accountants, traders in the City of London, or taxi drivers. Yesterday, I was taken to the climate change event on the South Bank and Lambeth Bridge in a rickshaw pedalled by a Polish guy who had been living in London for many years, working as a rickshaw driver.

The future of many people who are making a contribution to British society could be seriously affected by the referendum. If we leave the European Union, what will happen to the right of those people—many of whom have children who were born here—to stay in our country? The referendum has enormous implications for them and their families, and it also has huge implications for the 2.2 million British people who live elsewhere in the European Union. That is what amendment 52 is about.

The two amendments are balanced, in a sense. There are 2.3 million EU citizens living in the UK, and 2.2 million British citizens living in the other 27 EU countries. However, the demography is a bit different. The people who are living here are younger, they are paying taxes, and they are working. Many, although not all, of those British citizens are living in countries such as Spain and France. Today, I received e-mails from people in, for instance, Crete and Germany who believe that their voices should be heard.

It is possible for people who live abroad to register to vote in UK elections, although there is a restriction. A person who has lived in any other country as a British citizen for up to 15 years has a right to register as an overseas voter, although, despite the efforts of political parties, very few many people do. However, a person who has lived in another country for more than 15 years is not eligible to register.

I tend to study the manifestos on which general elections are fought, and I came across a paragraph in the Conservative party's election manifesto that states:

"We will complete the electoral register, by working to include more of the five million Britons who live abroad. We will introduce votes for life, scrapping the rule that bars British citizens who have lived abroad for more than 15 years from voting."

That is in the Conservative manifesto and was mentioned in the Queen's Speech, yet the Government propose a referendum that is not consistent with their own policy on which they were elected. I am perplexed by that, so perhaps the Minister when he responds will he explain

why they want to change the law and allow people in future general elections, presumably, and local elections, probably, to have a vote irrespective of how long they have lived abroad. They are not, however, going to allow those people—the 2.2 million—living in the EU, of whom a significant number have lived in Spain, France or elsewhere for more than 15 years, to have a vote in a referendum that is vital to their future.

There is an organisation that represents Labour party supporters who live in other countries. It is called Labour International. It is affiliated to the Labour party and sends people to our annual conference. Other parties have similar organisations; there is an equivalent Conservative one. Labour International this week sent an email to the general secretary of the Labour party. It quoted one of its members, who says:

The In/Out Referendum has the very real and very frightening possibility of making me an illegal immigrant overnight. How are you going to get the Government to protect me, my family and friends should the electorate turn their back on Europe. What will happen to my rights under the Freedom of Movement clause? What about my job, my pension, my health-care, my property? Will I be able to/forced to claim political asylum? Will I be compensated for losses? Who is making our voice heard in the UK? The list of questions just grows and grows along with my insomnia.

There are people, who perhaps went to Spain 25 or 30 years ago, who are extremely nervous about their future. They are apprehensive, because a decision will be taken in as little as two years' time that will have an enormous impact on their status, their future and their life. They thought they were settled in another European country, yet they will have no say over that decision, because the British Government—the Conservative Government—believe that their future can be put at risk through this referendum, while they as British citizens living in other European countries have no democratic voice because they have lived there for more than 15 years.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful case, as does that email, but first, may I gently remind him that it was the previous Labour Government, whom he supported, who introduced the 15-year limit; and secondly, may I assume from everything he has said that he will support the proposal he read out from the Conservative manifesto to extend the limit for life, beyond 15 years, when it comes before the House?

The Temporary Chair (Mr George Howarth): Order. Before the hon. Gentleman responds, I must say that interventions are supposed to be on a single point. When I hear the words "and secondly", I begin to get a bit concerned. Please keep interventions as brief as possible.

Mike Gapes: There is no proposal from the Government, and that is why my amendment explores exactly what their position is. It is unclear to me why they believe that British citizens living in a European Union country for 15 years and one month should not have a democratic right, while those living there for 14 years and 11 months do. That is an argument for all parties; I am just raising the democratic principles. A referendum is going to happen that will have a profound impact on British citizens and their families living in other European countries, on British-born children, on people in this

country with European Union backgrounds and on people from other countries who are married to, working with or employing British citizens in this country. Yet, none of those people has a voice in this debate. These are serious democratic anomalies which need to be dealt with, if not today, then by another place when it considers these matters.

1.15 pm

Chris Skidmore: Is the hon. Gentleman therefore restating his opposition in principle to a referendum and to allowing the British people to have their say? I thought the Labour party had finally done a U-turn and walked through the Lobby with us the other week.

Mike Gapes: It is a pity the hon. Gentleman was not here on Tuesday to hear my response to another intervention from one of his colleagues. I will not repeat it now. My views on a referendum are well known—they are the same as Margaret Thatcher's and Clement Attlee's—and if he reads Tuesday's *Hansard* he will see the whole quotation.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman consider the fact that some people who miss out during elections are impacted when such votes occur? Government Members are seeking to ensure that the rules are completely consistent and that those who vote in general elections—indeed, those who voted for this referendum—are the same people who vote to decide whether to stay in the European Union.

Mike Gapes: The problem with that argument is that the hon. Gentleman's party agreed to a local government and European Union-model franchise for the Scottish referendum. European Union citizens living in Glasgow or Edinburgh were allowed to vote in the referendum that took place in 2014, yet European Union citizens living in London, although they will be able to vote in the mayoral election next year, will not be allowed to do so in the referendum in 2016 or 2017, on membership of the European Union, which will have a profound impact on whether they can continue to live in London and whether their families stay here afterwards. There is an anomaly, and the Government need to get real about the problem and the damage it could cause to the presence of people who are a benefit to our country and to our own citizens in European Union countries.

I do not wish to prolong my contribution. I have made my points—[*Interruption.*] I am happy to take another intervention before I conclude.

The situation is clear: hon. Members on both sides of the House need to look carefully at the implications of this referendum for the future of our country, our citizens and those who are resident here. It is going to happen, and it needs to be seen to be fair—and to be seen to be in the interests of our country—so that we get the best possible result.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Surely, the hon. Gentleman recognises that one way to guarantee that the referendum will not be seen to be fair is to change the rules of the franchise from those which applied when he was elected—when all of us were elected—just a few weeks ago.

Mike Gapes: The choice is clear: we could have the local government franchise, which would allow European Union citizens to vote, as they did in the Scottish referendum and in the Mayor of London and local council elections; or we could have the restrictive franchise that the hon. Gentleman proposes. On the wider question, I quoted the Conservative party's manifesto, which stated that they would extend the franchise period for British citizens living abroad, yet mysteriously—perhaps the Minister will explain why—that proposal is not in the Bill.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman think that the Bill is a local or a national matter? If he thinks that it is a local matter, will he not seek to apply a local franchise? If he thinks that it is a national matter, will he not seek to apply the franchise that is traditional in this country at national elections?

Mike Gapes: This Bill is more than a local or national matter; it has wide-ranging international implications. Before the hon. Gentleman puts his hands up in the air, he should note that EU citizens living in the UK can vote for MEPs in this country. Given the wide ramifications for our relations with our partners in other European countries, and the mingling and movement of peoples and investments, which is an inevitable consequence of a European Union with a population of 500 million, there are enormous interests for many British people and their families in having a say on this proposal. That is not being allowed to many of them at the moment.

Hywel Williams: Conservative Members liken this argument to arguments about local government, but the Scottish referendum was based on a franchise of 16-year-olds and European citizens voting, and it could be scarcely have been on a more profound matter: the very Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mike Gapes: I absolutely agree with that. I will conclude my remarks with the hope that both Front-Bench teams are listening to the points I have made, because the voice of the European Union citizens living in the UK and of British people living elsewhere in the EU needs to be heard in this debate.

1.21 pm

Mrs Main: I would like to say it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), but I found his arguments somewhat confused and wide-ranging. Let me remind him that the reason we have a Conservative Government is because a Conservative manifesto promised the people that if we had a Conservative-led Government, they would have a referendum. That was decided on by the current franchise of 18-year-olds and over. Those people voted to have a Conservative Government—I like saying that—so that we could then give those aged 18 and over a choice on their future in Europe. As someone who is in her late 50s, I am sorry to say—[HON. MEMBERS: “Never!”] You are so kind. I would like to remind Labour Members that until this moment they, including the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), who led for the Opposition, wanted to deny me, in my 50s, a choice on the future of my country. I am glad there has been a Damascene conversion to allowing people of all ages, including me, to have a choice that I never had 44 years ago.

[Mrs Main]

We now have a choice on the future of our country. Muddying the waters by, as the hon. Member for Ilford South was suggesting, including every person who could be affected as a result of being in this country in the time of a referendum and trying to make the franchise so wide—

Stephen Gethins *rose*—

Mrs Main: Let me make a little progress, because Scottish Members have made a lot of comments in this debate. I am pleased that Scotland had its own referendum under its own rules, because that was devolved as such, but we are not devolved here. We have a franchise and I would like to stick with it. That is why I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) that I fully disagreed with the points she made. I understand the passion with which she made them, but I do not believe this is the time to adopt her approach. The electorate who decided that we would have this choice should now have the right to exercise that choice.

The hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) argued that we should have people on the franchise at 16 because it gets them into good habits, but he then made the confused argument that between 18 and 25 people dropped into bad habits, because they went off to university, got married, moved away or went travelling during a gap year. But those 16-year-olds would eventually become 18-year-olds, so surely they would then have the same chaotic approach to voting that he described. This is not a time to make the point that we will get 16-year-olds into good habits that they will continue for the rest of their lives.

In a relatively short time, we will have this momentous referendum, which I have wanted for a significant period. I would have been hugely disappointed because up until now a Labour Government would have denied me that choice—I am sure I would have gone to my grave without ever having had it. We should stick with the franchise we have. As people have said, they want there to be a recognised choice and a momentous decision. Eighteen is not so far past 16 to say, as my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes said, that these people are not going to be the ones who have that future—they are, too. We should be making the effort to engage the 18 to 25-year-olds and to increase the turnout. St Albans had a high turnout—

Stephen Gethins: A study by the University of Edinburgh showed that if people engage at 16, that increases their chances of being engaged from 18 to 24. That is one of the many reasons why we should have votes at 16.

Mrs Main: I respect the right of the Scottish people to draw those conclusions, but my conclusion is that we need to look at why in so many of our constituencies—perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to tell me the turnout in his in a further intervention—the turnout is so low. Why does the weather affect the turnout?

Stephen Gethins: The turnout in my constituency was 72%, which was significantly higher than the turnout across the UK, as indeed was the turnout in every Scottish constituency.

Mrs Main: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman, but his turnout was lower than my turnout. Having said that, many Members will know that in their constituencies the turnout, particularly in local elections, is woefully low. The turnout among young people is woefully low. I did 10 hustings—I am sure he did 110—but I can tell the House that many young people told me that those who were able to vote did not know enough. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes on that, because we need to make sure that that information is got across. We do not have the mechanisms at the moment to get the information to enough young people in a way that I would like. I do not believe now is the time to consider lowering the age for the franchise and including 16 and 17-year-olds. We need to put our energies and efforts into the 18-plus group.

In my intervention, I made the point that we have things that people can do at 16, but we have a lot of things that they cannot do. The comments made by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) have been somewhat misinterpreted by the Committee. I think the point he was trying to make is that we protect young people from a lot of things—he happened to discuss child and sexual abuse. If a young person gets involved in a bad group and eventually goes down the criminal path, we treat them in a way that accepts their youth in law. We treat them in a way that protects them and we hope they will learn the error of their ways before they enter the adult world when they would face extremely serious consequences. We take that approach on a lot of things for young people. We try to protect them from the evils of smoking, drugs and drink.

I know that this is different in Scotland, before someone bounces up and down to tell me so, but we say that a young person still needs parental permission in our country to get married at 16, which I would suggest is a very young age to be getting married. Now is not the time, in an amendment to a Bill as important as this, to decide that we have to review the whole franchise. I do not accept that it is infantilising young people to treat them as what they are—young people, pre-18, the age at which the full weight and consequences of the law fall upon them.

Let me also point out to Opposition Members that people pay tax aged three if they happen to be a child star—that has nothing to do with age. So let us leave that one out; “taxation and representation” is somewhat of a misnomer. We say that young people are protected. What we need to say is why those young people of 18 are then considered adults. They can leave school—they can leave full-time education—and enter the world of work. They lose that protection of that twilight era between being a very young child and an adolescent, and being a young adult.

Chris Skidmore: Has my hon. Friend considered the issue of who the electoral roll and electoral data should be made available to? During the general election we all had access to the data in order to ensure that we provided materials, but those data could be used in other ways, such as by marketing companies to target 16 and 17-year-olds. How would she ensure that the roll is used sensibly and is not used for damaging purposes?

Mrs Main: My hon. Friend makes a valid point, but I will be chided if I go down that route because it is not within the remit of the amendments under consideration.

Such a matter would have to be discussed if we were to reconsider the franchise. I do not think that we should pick and choose our franchise arrangements; I know that Scotland did for the referendum. At the moment, we have a franchise of 18 plus. Those voters elected this Government and asked this Government to deliver a referendum and it is those voters who should vote in the referendum; it is as simple as that.

If we are going to start treading in these waters of saying that 16-year-olds should vote, why should we stop there? As has been said in this House, why not 15-year-olds? Why not 14-year olds? How have we picked this arbitrary age? Scotland went down the 16-year-old route. Does that make it the right one?

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP) *rose*—

Mrs Main: I know that I mentioned the word Scotland, so I shall give way to the hon. Lady.

Alison Thewliss: Does it not strike the hon. Lady that whenever franchises have been extended in this country, whether it be from 21 to 18, or indeed allowing women the franchise, arguments about capacity and the ability to vote have always been made, yet the franchise age has gone down? More people have participated in elections, and that has been a good thing for democracy.

1.30 pm

Mrs Main: The hon. Lady has just made my point. My point is: why not any age? She has exactly made the point. We choose ages for a reason. My generation was one of the first to vote at 18. I am sure that my father thought I was barking mad and should not even be running a whelk stall. The point is that we made a decision, and that decision has stood us in good stead. We must face the fact that 18 to 24-year-olds are not exercising that franchise. Moving the franchise inexorably downwards, which the hon. Lady thinks is a good idea, does not necessarily mean that we get better political engagement, debate or even consequences.

The hon. Member for Ilford South seemed to feel that the franchise for this particular referendum should apply to everyone who may or may not feel they are affected by being in the country as a result of EU membership; well, I profoundly disagree. This is about the self-determination of our country and how we see our place within Europe. That is something that I have never voted on, and I wish to vote on. I am pleased that the public have been offered such a vote now.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is extremely rich of the Opposition to have a view on the details now when they were seemingly disinterested in the basic question for many years?

Mrs Main: My hon. Friend reinforces my point. Up until this very moment, the Opposition did not want us to have this debate. Suddenly, they are coming up with a whole load of detail that they feel is crucial to the debate. I think they suspect that the younger generation are more likely to want to remain in Europe. Political opportunism is why they are looking to move the franchise. I agree that, in the future, we should all have a larger debate on whether the franchise is pitched at the right age. Let us park that political opportunism, welcome

the fact that Opposition Members want to give us old birds an actual vote—at long last—but let us keep the franchise where it is. It has stood us in good stead. Any efforts and bluster—

Keith Vaz *rose*—

Mrs Main: I shall certainly give way to the right hon. Gentleman who does not bluster.

Keith Vaz: I missed that last comment. I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. Just to be clear: she keeps referring to Opposition Members. Some of us have been calling for a referendum on this subject for many, many years—and it was in the Liberal Democrat manifesto in 2010. It is just that the Front Bench team took a bit of time to get to where some of us were.

Mrs Main: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right; I hope that he will forgive my comments. We have many friends on both Benches who have wanted a referendum. I accept that he is a firm and staunch European. He wanted to have the referendum to give a choice, with the choice being, in his view, to stay in. He has colleagues who share that view, and others who share the opposite view. I am prepared to be corrected by the right hon. Gentleman, who holds staunch views.

The right hon. Gentleman is also right in another regard. I have that poster on my wall that says, “We are the only party that will give a true referendum”. I think we were playing games with the Lisbon treaty at the time. A poster of Nick Clegg, the former leader of the Liberal Democrats, is on the wall in my office, and has been there for some time, as are pictures of those who want to give us a true referendum.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): My hon. Friend said that her father might have thought she was eccentric voting at the age of 18, when she was first allowed to do so. The fact that she has a poster of Nick Clegg on her wall seems to add to her father’s view. Does she need some help in this matter?

The Temporary Chair (Mr George Howarth): Order. The hon. Gentleman is referring to the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg). I really hope that we are not going to spend a great deal of time talking about the artistic merit of what hangs on the hon. Lady’s wall.

Mrs Main: I have been gently chided from going down that route. The point is that a referendum is something that has been rattled around for a considerable time. We are now having one, thanks to the fact that we have a Conservative Government who have promised to deliver a referendum, and deliver it we shall. I do not wish to muddy the waters of something so vital, so important and so longed for by trying to move the franchise down to the age of 16 or 17.

I look forward to all sides expending as much effort and energy on this matter to ensure that those people who currently have the franchise exercise it. That will be the best way to ensure that we get a vote that represents the true wishes of the people of this country. Those people of 18 will be living with the consequences for a very long time—just as those of us in our fifties have

[Mrs Main]

lived with the consequences of what our parents chose for us. We should stick with our current franchise, and not be considering passing an amendment that does something so momentous as extending the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds. Such a decision may be for another day. All the implications raised by the hon. Member for Ilford South could be discussed then. We could consider who should vote at general elections and at local elections. That is an important issue, but it is not for today. I shall vote with the Government and not support the amendment.

Tom Brake: I rise to speak in favour of amendments 51, 1, 2 and 18. Having been advised that the lead amendment would be 51, I put my name to that, but I am also happy to support amendment 18, which seeks to achieve the same thing in relation to EU citizens being able to vote.

Briefly, on the subject of votes at 16 and 17, the Scottish referendum has demonstrated convincingly that 16 and 17-year-olds are interested in politics and that when there is a vote of substance, they will want to take part. They have demonstrated, I would have thought convincingly to the House as a whole, that they should be entitled to vote. Certainly, that is something that the Liberal Democrats have pursued vigorously for many years. Indeed, Stephen Williams, the former Member for Bristol West, pursued the matter in the previous Parliament and ensured that the House voted in favour of votes at 16. It was not legislated on, because it is not something that the Conservatives would agree to in the coalition.

My friend in the other place, Lord Tyler, has also pursued the issue through a private Member's Bill in the other place, calling for votes at 16 for all elections and referendums.

Chris Skidmore: The right hon. Gentleman takes a snipe at the Conservative party for refusing to take certain decisions within the coalition. But the Liberal Democrats refused to give us a referendum on Europe in the previous Parliament, which is why we are having it now. It is hardly fair to make those assumptions when his party, at heart, has always been against a referendum on Europe—certainly after 2010.

Tom Brake: The hon. Gentleman will know that that is not the case. In the previous Government, we legislated to allow a referendum to take place if there was a substantial transfer of powers—or proposals for such a transfer—from the UK to the EU.

There is one final reason why 16 and 17-year-olds should be given a vote in this referendum, which is that if the UK votes to come out of the EU, it will be a one-way street. If we choose “Brexit” rather than “Bremain” there will be no “Breadmission”. What does that mean for 16 and 17-year-olds? Their options for living, working, travelling and studying abroad are curtailed. Their horizons are restricted and their futures diminished. They have a right to have their say in a referendum, which, if the UK votes to leave the EU, could have a long-lasting and damaging impact on their life chances. We in this place should be giving them that right.

In relation to the franchise for EU citizens, currently 2.3 million citizens of other European member states live and work in the United Kingdom. In the regional and local elections that will be held across Britain and

Northern Ireland next year, all EU citizens living in the UK will be entitled to vote, yet, as clause 2 stands, EU citizens living abroad in the UK will not be entitled to vote in the referendum. To respond to the point made by the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), I do not think the fact that other countries have not allowed EU citizens to take part in similar referendums means that that is the path that the UK Government should follow.

I said earlier that EU citizens will not be entitled to vote, but of course, as several hon. Members have said today, a number of EU citizens will be able to vote in the referendum, because there is no consistency. Citizens of Ireland, Cyprus and Malta living in the UK will be able to vote in the referendum, but citizens from all other EU member states will not. As the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) said, it is clear that non-British EU citizens living in the UK have a very big stake in this election. If Britain leaves the EU, those men and women will still be EU citizens—unlike their UK counterparts, who will lose their EU citizenship rights—but they will no longer have the automatic right to live and work in the UK.

We should also remember that non-British citizens have the right to vote and stand in regional and local elections. There are many examples of European citizens playing a leading representative role in our democracy. As SNP Members will know, one of the best-known cases is that of the French-born Christian Allard, the SNP MSP for North East Scotland. It would be a disgrace if he was not allowed to vote in the EU referendum.

Do we really want to say to EU citizens who make such an outstanding contribution that they are good enough to represent us in the Scottish Parliament, in the Greater London Authority, or as our local councillor or mayor, but that they are not good enough to have a say in the EU referendum? Do we want to say to EU citizens that they are good enough to invest in Britain, set up a business here, pay their taxes and contribute to our communities, but that we do not want their voices to be heard in the referendum? Do we have the chutzpah to go to EU citizens next year, when all the political parties in this place will be competing for their votes in next year's local and regional elections, and say, “Sorry, we didn't give you the vote in the EU referendum, but please give us your vote now so that we can represent you”?

Simon Hoare: The corollary of the right hon. Gentleman's argument is that he is advocating the abolition of the distinctions between the registers for local government elections and for Westminster and European elections. Is that at the heart of what he is saying? While I am on my feet, may I stress that this is not a qualitative position? We are not saying that people are either good enough or not good enough. It is about whether it is right or not.

The Temporary Chair (Mr George Howarth): Order. Saying “While I am on my feet” is almost the same as saying “and secondly”. Members should make a single point.

Tom Brake: I certainly agree with the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) on the latter point, if I may respond to just one of the points that he made.

This is about what is right and what is wrong, but there are some Opposition Members who believe that it is right to give EU citizens the right to vote in the referendum. Clearly, most Members on the Government Benches, if not all of them, do not think that it is.

Most importantly, EU citizens are mobilising and demanding the vote. A former Member of this House, whom I knew quite well as he represented a constituency close to mine, Roger Casale, an Italian by origin, has set up an organisation, New Europeans, which has been mentioned by the hon. Member for Ilford South, to ensure that EU citizens living in the UK have their voices heard. The organisation is celebrating its second birthday today, so I wish it a happy birthday.

On Tuesday, Roger and fellow members of New Europeans visited the House of Commons during the first Committee day of the EU referendum debate to speak to MPs about the franchise in the EU election. We have already heard the names of many of those who attended and I will not attempt to pronounce them, as that was well done earlier by the hon. Member for Ilford South.

EU citizens in Scotland had the right to vote in the referendum and may have helped to keep Scotland part of the United Kingdom by voting no to its break-up. Many EU citizens living in the UK now demand the right to vote in the EU referendum to keep Britain in Europe. Would we have argued that the independence referendum in Scotland was illegitimate if it had been won by such a narrow margin as to make the votes of EU citizens there decisive in the outcome? If not, why should we deny EU citizens the vote in the EU referendum, fearing that the outcome of the vote might depend on them?

James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con): As we all know, rightly or wrongly, many of the people who would vote to leave the European Union would do so because of the perceived issue of the number of people coming into the country. If we were to vote to stay in specifically as a result of the votes of European citizens, would that not be inflammatory to many millions of people who voted no?

1.45 pm

Tom Brake: I will let the hon. Gentleman speculate on that, but what is clearly inflammatory is that 2.3 million EU citizens who live here will not be able to take part, if the Government have their way, in a referendum that will have a significant impact on them and their children. The Government disregard that at their peril.

This is exactly the argument that many Government Members have made to deny EU citizens the vote. It is a tactical and political argument that says that they want the referendum to be won—that is, for us to come out of the EU—on the votes of British citizens alone. There is no consistency in who can vote in the election, because it is not just British citizens who will be included. Citizens of 73 nationalities will be able to vote in the referendum, as they come from Commonwealth countries, and members of three EU states will be able to vote alongside British and Commonwealth citizens, yet citizens from the other 24 member states of the EU will not have the vote under the current parliamentary franchise.

Mike Wood: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's mention of consistency. Perhaps he could remind the House of what he did as Deputy Leader of the House until a few weeks ago to try to extend the parliamentary franchise to include all European Union electors?

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, but I suspect that given the ferocity with which the Conservative party opposes any proposed extension there would not have been much point in my trying to pursue that as Deputy Leader of the House.

EU citizens in the UK are the group whose future will be most affected by the outcome of the vote, as well as 16 and 17-year-olds, as the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) said earlier. EU citizens in the UK are demanding the vote and for too long, we in this place have not listened to their voice in our communities. That has to change. It is the Liberal Democrats' policy to allow EU citizens to vote and we call on other parties to follow suit. When we go to the polls next year in the regional and local elections, we will be held to account by more than 2.3 million EU citizens in the UK for the actions we take today. It is time to do the right thing and empower EU citizens by giving them the vote in the referendum. What better way to mark the second anniversary of New Europeans and to acknowledge the rights of the 2.3 million EU citizens they represent than to extend the franchise in the EU referendum to all EU citizens rather than just some? Basing the provision on the local election franchise and not the parliamentary franchise would achieve that, so I commend these amendments to the House.

Chloe Smith: I believe passionately—I have spoken on this point before, both in this place and outside it—that young people should have a place in our democracy. Doing nothing about their current position within our democracy is no option at all, and I would follow on from the arguments in that regard made by my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston). However, I shall not support the amendments today. Let me explain why.

Disraeli tells us with some wisdom, as he often does, that we can see two nations in one. I do not mean two nations under one roof in the United Kingdom, but rather that there are two nations of older and younger voters. His original point was that his two nations might as well have been dwellers on different zones or planets, as they had so little sympathy with each other's positions. One might be drawn to think that from the relative turnout figures for older and younger voters. In the 2010 election, the last one for which we have the complete figures, I believe, the average voting rate was around 65%. The rate among pensioners was about 75%, and the rate among 18 to 24-year-olds was about 44%. The data we have for the election just past are incomplete, but I understand that one set of data suggests that the turnout rate among 18 to 24-year-olds declined by one percentage point.

The point is this: we in the UK have a serious problem of low youth turnout—we are the sick man of Europe, or indeed the world on some counts. Some studies suggest that, at that statistical level, we are hopelessly behind other countries in Europe. There is a US-UK-Germany study on this point, which shows that, although young people turn out less than their elders in other countries—the US is a good example—in the UK the divergence is accelerating. That is a serious problem.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The percentage of young people who turned out in our election just past is expected to have been in the high 60s, compared with just above 40% here. I would lay that at the feet of the referendum. A referendum means that every single vote in the country counts. You will never inspire young people as much as with a referendum, because if they are in a safe seat, whether they agree or not, their vote may not count. A referendum is exactly the time to look at extending the franchise; otherwise, you are facing the prospect of your turnout in a decade's time being pitiful.

Chloe Smith: The hon. Lady makes a good point about the nature of a referendum, although if I understood her correctly, I probably ought to balk at her references to there and here and you and we, and some points of division that I think she is seeking to make. However, I believe she is broadly with me on my point that the UK as a whole, in national UK elections, has a problem about which we all despair.

Chris Skidmore: On the point about referendum turnout, is my hon. Friend aware of the Electoral Commission study of the ICM poll showing that, in the recent Scottish referendum, turnout among 18 to 24-year-olds was 54%? It was 75% among 17-year-olds, but the study concluded that many of them were accompanied to the ballot box by their parents. Among those who had turned 18 and were independent, turnout slumped to 54%.

Chloe Smith: I will attempt to draw the statistically based interventions together into a broader point: young people turn out to vote less than older people, and we should all be concerned about that. We are all in the business of looking for ways to improve that situation.

Stephen Gethins: The hon. Lady makes some good points, and I hope she will join us in the Lobby tonight, unlike the Labour Members who say they are for something but then do not actually vote for it. On the point that the hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) raised, what the study showed is that people who start voting at 16 and 17 are more likely to continue voting. As the Electoral Reform Society has said: vote early and vote often.

Chloe Smith: The hon. Gentleman makes a sound point. Voting is a habit that is formed early, and we ought to treat it as such. The franchise is but one element of all that we should do to encourage young people to take an early interest in politics and to sustain that throughout their lifetime. I will discuss that more broadly later in my speech.

The nature of young people's interest in politics compared with that of their elders is evolving. Some would argue that young people simply become like their elders as they get older—it is, in effect, a life cycle argument, which I think we should cease to make. There is a lazy complacency open to us to say, "It's all going to be okay. They'll just start voting when they get married and get a mortgage and settle down." To start with, we all know perfectly well that getting a mortgage is increasingly hard for young person. That is part of another evolutionary change we are seeing in our economy and society, but what we are confronted with is a generation—our generation; I include myself in that

generation and others in this House may choose to define themselves that way, too—who are willing to be involved in politics, but perhaps less willing to be involved in traditional, formal politics. We see young people who choose to make their voices heard using new technology and techniques, getting out there and rolling up their sleeves to achieve community change, and that is a very fine thing. I think that traditional politics has adapted to that, so my first point is that we have to do a range of things to make traditional, formal politics adapt to a new generation.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): My hon. Friend's point about low turnout among younger voters is a good one. What is her opinion on the possibility of extending the franchise to younger people having the effect of lowering average turnout, because it will take in a group whose propensity to vote is also low?

Chloe Smith: Unfortunately, mathematically my hon. Friend may well be right. I am endeavouring to avoid the dry maths, but her prediction may be correct. She returns me to my key point: we need to do more than just concern ourselves with percentages, turnout rates and franchises if we are to address the problem.

Damian Green: My hon. Friend is a great expert on these matters. The point has been made that efforts to encourage 17 to 18-year-olds and 18 to 24-year olds to vote are not mutually contradictory. Does she agree that, on the evidence we have so far, such efforts are mutually reinforcing—that we are more likely to increase lifelong voting by allowing people to vote before the age of 18 than by waiting until they are over 18? Such fairly limited academic evidence as we have suggests that that is the case.

Chloe Smith: Yes, I do agree. I think my right hon. Friend is echoing a point made by the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins). The question of the quality of the evidence available to us is a difficult one. Any "evidence" will be something like a poll of 16 and 17-year-olds asking, "Would you like this franchise?" My understanding of the evidence is that it is extremely mixed. I have seen polls of 16 and 17-year-olds asking them that question, and they say, "Yes please." I have also seen polls of a wider age group asking, "Would you like this franchise, or would you have liked this franchise?" to which they reply, "No, we're not so sure, because we think we might not be ready," if they are younger than 16, or, "We might not have been ready," if they are older.

Hywel Williams: One does not have to speculate about the effect of lowering the voting age to 16. Musings from the other side are not necessary when one merely has to look at what happened in Scotland.

Chloe Smith: I take that point, but I still think the evidence is mixed. We have one—very strong—example. Ruth Davidson is one Conservative, and I am another, who reflects positively on that experience and thinks that we should learn from it, but other evidence in this arena is scant and not concrete.

Tom Tugendhat: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and allowing me to make a point in response to the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams). In fact, the

evidence is not quite as clear as he suggests. The Scottish referendum was on a simple yes/no question and we know that such questions attract higher turnouts of every age, so the question whether 16 and 17-year-olds' participation attracted a higher turnout is moot.

Chloe Smith: My hon. Friend places me in a difficult position. As he was responding to the hon. Member for Arfon, he will have to allow me to skip his intervention and return to my speech.

Tom Tugendhat: Sorry, I apologise.

Chloe Smith: If I may, Mr Howarth, I will suggest that the two hon. Members sort themselves out. [*Laughter.*]

The Temporary Chair (Mr George Howarth): The hon. Lady has resumed her seat. Has she finished?

Chloe Smith *indicated dissent.*

The Temporary Chair (Mr George Howarth): In that case, may I commend her on her amazing good sense?

Chloe Smith: I have found, Mr Howarth, that it is always good sense to try to stay on the right side of the Chair, and I will do that.

Let me return to the main point of my remarks. We need to do a number of things to address the question of youth engagement in politics. I have already noted that there is high youth engagement in political activity, but not in traditional politics. That is one of the characteristics of the problem facing us. If Mr Speaker were in the Chair, he would no doubt refer us to some of the work that he has led on digital democracy, which is another aspect that we should consider. There is more to the question than the franchise and the age at which we enfranchise young people. The franchise age is no silver bullet on its own.

2 pm

Dr Whitford: Clearly, the hon. Lady is keen to see young people engaged. She talks about their broad interest in dynamic politics, but not necessarily in party politics. As the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) pointed out, referendums get a higher turnout. The question is simple and, as I said earlier, every single vote counts. The Conservative party is in danger of passing by the best opportunity to engage young people that we may have in a decade.

Chloe Smith: I thank the hon. Lady for her point, which I think is the point she was making earlier. I do not dispute the special quality of referendums which gets people excited. That is a good thing, and I am delighted that we are having a referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union. It is one of the things I was proud of in the Conservative party manifesto. It allows us to engage people of any age in an important question for our country. However, the referendum is not the vehicle for us to attempt to change the full franchise. I shall come on to that as my main argument.

When I was in the position now held by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose), who is one of the Ministers present today, I stood at the Dispatch Box

and demurred on the question whether we should change the age of the franchise. I referred to mixed evidence and said at that time that, on the basis of the evidence available to us, I was not convinced that we ought to alter the age of enfranchisement in this country. I have since changed my view and come to believe that we should have votes at 16. I have come to that view for a number of reasons: additional evidence has come in from the Scottish referendum and it is such an important signal to send to young people to welcome them into our democracy. As I have argued, it is no silver bullet, but it is a very important signal to give.

I endorse the work of the Tory Reform Group. My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes and my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green) have contributed to that and I have collaborated with them. There is an important argument to be made from the Conservative Benches in favour of enfranchising young people and engaging them in our politics. Let me make that Conservative argument briefly. The youngest generation in our adult world today is least interested in big redistributive schemes. Of the generations in our democracy today, it is most interested in welfare reform and in enterprise. We have an opportunity in our party to make the Conservatives the home for young voters, and we should grab that opportunity with both hands.

We have made a good start. We are the party that has just won a national election on the basis of an improving economy, jobs for young people and record youth employment figures, and on our record of fixing this country's debts so that they do not fall on the heads of future generations, helping young families with childcare and putting education in this country on a stable footing that serves those young people for their future. We are the party of young people and we can be the party of young voters. However, the Bill is not the vehicle for extending the franchise. Let me explain why.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): The hon. Lady seems to be making the case that 16 is not too young to vote, but the referendum would be too soon to make that change. Rather than the evidence being mixed, is she not giving us a very mixed argument?

Chloe Smith: The hon. Gentleman kindly brings me to my next point, which is the nature of making a change as important and as necessary as this through an ad hoc means. I am arguing for a lasting change for young people, not for an ad hoc change, as represented by making it on a one-time referendum. As good as referendums are, they are by their nature one-timers.

Tom Tugendhat: I fully agree that there is a strong argument for lowering the voting age in this country and I would welcome a full debate on the issue in this place in due course, but I am not sure whether the British public, who have waited more than 40 years for a referendum on Europe, would forgive us for squabbling over the franchise at this point. Does my hon. Friend agree that a full and frank discussion about the enfranchisement of 16 and 17-year-olds is needed in this place in the fullness of time and that such a discussion should not be rushed?

Chloe Smith: My hon. Friend is exactly right: we should do this properly. The Bill is not the place for that.

Mark Durkan: In that case, why has the franchise been extended in relation to peers? Now the only additional young voters we are going to get are four Lords called Young and one called Younger. The franchise is being altered specifically for them as a one-off. If it is okay to extend the franchise for them, why not for 16 and 17-year-olds?

Chloe Smith: My answer to that, as opposed to the Minister's, which he will give to explain the full point, is that if we agree here, as many of us do on a cross-party basis, that we ought to look at ways to bring young people into our politics, we need to do that more permanently. I for one would not be happy to settle for doing so only on the ad hoc basis of a referendum. For that reason, and because I want to make sure that this is good-quality legislation, as I mentioned earlier, I will not vote for the amendments today because they would not do that properly.

I refer to the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), who has just left her place. She emphasised the need to make sure the electoral register is robust, so that we can have a robust jury service system. I refer also to the argument put by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), who says that we should do this properly as a view of the age of majority. Several important points are not adequately dealt with by swiftly enfranchising 16 and 17-year-olds in an ad hoc manner.

Simon Hoare: My hon. Friend is being a little too kind by using the phrase “ad hoc”. The phrase I think she is looking for is “gerrymandered”, because those who advocate an amendment to the clause are trying to gerrymander a register to get the result they want.

Chloe Smith: My hon. Friend may think that—I couldn't possibly comment. What I will comment on is the need to ensure that everyone of a suitable majority in this country has a chance to play their role in democracy. Defining a suitable majority is a much bigger thing than we could do through the amendment, as the quality of the debate today has shown.

Tom Brake: Given that the hon. Lady wants to deal with the issue holistically, has she spoken to Ministers and asked them if they would urgently introduce a Bill that would deal with it in a holistic manner? The referendum could then take place with 16 and 17-year-olds voting.

Chloe Smith: I have great respect for the right hon. Gentleman, having served alongside him on some of these matters in the previous Government. I want to say to Ministers through my remarks in the House today, in addition to whatever I may say to them privately, that we ought to return to this matter in the House. Some very important issues have been raised in the debate and I hope my remarks serve to show that there is cross-party consensus on the need to involve young people in our democracy. I am sure the Front-Bench team are listening very carefully to that.

Andrew Gwynne: I am listening carefully to the hon. Lady and have a large degree of sympathy with her argument. Given how important the EU referendum is—the issue has defined the Conservative party's political

agenda for at least the past 15 to 20 years—does she not realise that giving the vote to 16 and 17-year-olds would allow them to take charge of their own destiny, because the EU treaty rights will be theirs as well as hers?

Chloe Smith: The hon. Gentleman is right that this is an important matter for the Conservative party, and I think that he would be forced to concede that its absence from his party's agenda has also been a defining matter for it. I repeat that I am delighted that we are in a position to have this historic referendum, which is wanted by many of my constituents and others. Indeed, during the election campaign, I could barely find one constituent who could comprehend the idea of not having the referendum.

Let me go to the heart of the technical point that the Committee is considering. Clause 2(1) gains its legitimacy from the parliamentary franchise. Any change that we might want to make should be made at the source. If the legitimacy of holding a referendum derives from a franchise, we ought to change that franchise if we think that is the right thing to do, rather than do so on an ad hoc basis.

Suella Fernandes: My hon. Friend makes another excellent point. Does she agree that throughout history this House has granted suffrage and extended the franchise after full and robust debate, not in a last-ditch, shoehorn way in Committee?

Chloe Smith: I think that my hon. Friend is with me in my argument. We should do this properly. Some very important issues have been raised, and some extremely important consequential matters, such as the quality of our jury service, should also be dealt with.

Today, I am calling on the Minister to review this issue. I hope that he will be able to take away from today's debate the nature of the cross-party support for enfranchising young people and empowering them to take their rightful place in our democracy. Taking my cue from my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes), I note that neither she nor I would have been here under the franchise of previous decades. It is important that we take—dare I say it?—a progressive stance on these matters. It is important that every party in this House considers how it can best encourage young people to take their rightful place in our democracy. We must not do that in a slap-dash way; we must do it in a way that allows every aspect of the age of majority to be properly discussed.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): Does the hon. Lady not agree that to refer to this as ad hoc is really quite disingenuous? In Scotland, we saw a generation of people engaged, and I think that any 16 or 17-year-old watching this debate would hear lots of technical points, but would she not consider it to be a regressive step to have given the young people of Scotland the opportunity to engage in their nation's future—we on the SNP Benches heard from many young people south of the border who were just as engaged—and then make them feel that they are losing out on a major opportunity?

The Temporary Chair (Mr George Howarth): Order. The conjunction “and” is rather like “secondly” and “thirdly”, and two “ands” is at least one too many.

Chloe Smith: Thank you for your guidance, Mr Howarth, and thank you for your patience; I am conscious that I have made some lengthy remarks and taken plenty of interventions.

I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) and share her desire to say to any young person watching today, “We believe in your place in this place. We believe in your place in politics. We believe in your place in changing the world in which you live.” I want to do that in a fundamental and lasting way, rather than a temporary, one-time way, which is inevitable with a referendum. I am pleased to have heard all the arguments built up for a case for change. I am delighted that there have been way markers in building up that case for young people to be properly involved in politics, both community politics and traditional, formal politics.

2.15 pm

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Chloe Smith: I will not take any more interventions, because I want to bring my remarks to a close and allow other Members to contribute fully.

My plea to the Minister is to take these issues away and review them fully. Will he speak to his colleagues, including those in charge of bringing forward the legislation needed to extend the enfranchisement of overseas voters? Perhaps that will provide an opportunity to return to these matters shortly. Let us do this in a way that achieves fundamental, lasting, good-quality change and that can make us all proud to go back to young people in our constituencies and across the country and say, “You have your place in politics.”

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): If we are going to have this referendum, we really should aspire to have the widest possible engagement in it. I rise to support the various amendments that seek to extend the franchise to all people over the age of 16 who are legally resident in this country.

Let me deal first with votes at 16. Growing up is clearly a process; changing from a child to an adult is something that happens over time. However, we must, as a matter of administration, put legal definitions on things. In this country we confer rights and responsibilities on people at different ages as they go through that process: at 16 they have the right to marry and to join the Army; at 17 they can drive a car; and at 18 they can buy a drink in a pub. The question, then, is this: why 16, rather than 17 or 15? To my mind, the answer is that 16 is the age at which we are given a number: our national insurance number. We turn from being simply a member of society to someone who has a liability to contribute to society. We reach the age of economic majority. That is why I believe that 16 should be the age at which people are allowed to vote.

Suella Fernandes: I note the hon. Gentleman’s point, but the argument about consistency just does not stack up, because 16 and 17-year-olds can marry only with the permission of their parents, and they cannot buy cigarettes or alcohol. If he is going down the consistency line, is he advocating extending the age for those activities?

Tommy Sheppard: I point out to the hon. Lady that 16-year-olds can marry without their parents’ consent in Scotland. I think that trying to draw a comparison to cigarettes and alcohol is mischievous, to be honest. I think that having the right to vote is an awful lot less dangerous than the consumption of cigarettes or alcohol. We should look for the widest possible and most generous interpretation.

We live in a changing world, and I think that this House needs to be aware of the world the way it is. There have been particular changes that relate to this debate over the past decade. There has been an information explosion in this country. People are more connected, aware and engaged than ever. Sixteen-year-olds are far more aware of what is going on in this world and in this country than many of their parents are. To say that they do not have the right to make up their minds on things, frankly, is to treat them with disrespect.

As I said earlier this week, we should be making our policy on the basis of evidence, and we are indeed fortunate in this case, as in some others, to have direct evidence of what happens when we lower the voting age to 16, and this is because of the experience of the Scottish referendum. We saw a remarkable thing. Despite concerns that young people would not be interested in voting, we saw a 97% registration rate among 16 and 17-year-olds and a 75% turnout. The turnout was slightly lower than average, but it was higher than some other age cohorts. That dismisses completely the idea that if they are given the opportunity, young people will not want to get engaged.

Tom Tugendhat: Will the hon. Gentleman elaborate on his economic argument, which I find extremely interesting? If he is saying that as soon as someone is economically viable, they have the right to vote, does he recognise that the duke’s boy who inherits millions of acres of land and starts paying tax at the age of three should be enfranchised, whereas the post office worker’s boy who does not pay tax until he is earning should not have the right to vote until that point?

Tommy Sheppard: I would not enfranchise him, but I would certainly be happy to take the money. I am grateful to the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) for addressing what I believe to be the elephant in the room. She let the cat out of the bag by expressing her concern about what 16 and 17-year-olds might do if they had the right to vote. I think there are probably too many people in this Chamber whose attitude towards whether to allow young people the right to vote is determined by their perception of how young people might exercise that vote.

Again, I refer to the experience of the Scottish referendum and ask hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber to put caution to one side. Two years out from the Scottish referendum date of 18 September, the attitude profile of 16 and 17-year-olds in Scotland was significantly different from how it ended up on the day of the vote. Quite simply, an awful lot of people changed their minds during the referendum campaign, because they applied their intellect and their thought. They listened to the arguments and made up their minds. To my mind, that vindicates not only the democratic process but the decision to allow young people to have the vote in the first place.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): On that note, I have a 16-year-old son, and before the general election I discussed with him and his friends whether they should be able to vote in the election. They came to the conclusion that young people of 16 are wont to change their minds very frequently, and that perhaps it was not good to be voting on something so important, and that they would prefer to be more mature. If we are all to live until we are 100, there is no hurry.

The Temporary Chair: Order. The hon. Lady will not go on any further.

Tommy Sheppard: Young people have different opinions about many things, and they will change their minds. I do not think that we can judge whether to accord somebody the right to vote based on their propensity to change their mind. That would be a contradiction of democracy.

The hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) brings me to my next point. The younger someone is when they vote in the referendum, the longer they will have to live with the result. It seems to me iniquitous that we should not allow our younger citizens to participate in a decision over the future of their country, when they will have to put up with the consequences of that decision for the longest.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend accept that we are having this debate because so many people have not been given the right to have their say in the EU debate? Does he accept that in extending the franchise for this election, it is of vital importance that young people have the right to have their say and have their voices heard in such an important debate?

Tommy Sheppard: My hon. Friend echoes the points that I am making. There are many international comparisons in this discussion. Young people—16-year-olds—have the right to vote in Australia, Brazil and many other countries. Nearer to home, they have the right to vote in the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. I think we should play catch-up and accord them the right to vote here. This is an idea whose time has come.

Several hon. Members have suggested that they are relaxed about the longer-term principle of lowering the voting age in this country but they feel that we are rushing into it with the referendum, so they object to it today because of their commitment to trying to get the process right. I suggest that they should look at it the other way around. They should treat the referendum as an experiment, a trial and an opportunity to see whether lowering the voting age would work. The results of that experiment could inform our longer-term discussions about the franchise more generally.

Will Quince: Is it appropriate to have experiments with our constitutional matters?

Tommy Sheppard: The hon. Gentleman's Government have been quite keen to inflict experiments on Scotland. I refer him to the poll tax, if nothing else, which the Government decided to implement first in Scotland on an experimental basis before applying it to the rest of

the United Kingdom. There is an argument for saying that with constitutional change of such magnitude as changing the voting age, we might want to try it first and see how it works in a referendum, after which we could certainly apply the results to the longer-term franchise.

Dr Philippa Whitford: I want to take up the point that we have heard from Government Members that making the change through this amendment would be inappropriate. I do not understand why we cannot allow young people to vote in this referendum and later go through the issue with a fine-toothed comb before making a permanent change.

Tommy Sheppard: My hon. Friend makes the point well. I commend those on the Government Benches who are curious about and interested in the idea of lowering the voting age to try it and see.

I turn to the question of EU nationals. I have the great fortune to represent a mainly thriving metropolitan area in central Edinburgh full of creative and dynamic people who have moved to the city and made it their home because of its attractions. Several of my constituents have contacted me because they are concerned about the fact that they may not be able to vote in the forthcoming referendum. Dr Carmen Huesa came here 18 years ago from her native Spain and got her PhD at Aberdeen University. Ever since, she has worked as a senior research scientist, and she is currently working on trying to develop a cure for osteoporosis as part of an important research team at the University of the West of Scotland. She has been here for 18 years, and her partner, children and family are here; she has no intention of going anywhere else. Another constituent, Esther Kuck, came here from Germany and settled in the thriving neighbourhood of Portobello. She has contributed to that community by building up her own small business and providing a vital service. She, too, has made her home here, and she has no intention of going anywhere else. Elia Ballesteros has also come from Spain and lives in the city centre. She is a BAFTA award-winning film maker, and a vital member of our creative community in the city of Edinburgh. They all have in common the fact that they are not on a gap year, they are not backpacking through this country and they have not come to visit. They have come to apply their intellect and their industry to make this country better.

Huw Merriman: If those individuals reside and work in the country, they are adding great value, but they are citizens of countries in the EU that govern their membership of the EU. If a vote came up in those countries, they would of course be entitled to vote. Otherwise, they would end up with two votes.

Tommy Sheppard: I will come to that point in a moment. It takes me on to the discussion about why people should be able to vote in the process in the first place. I reflect back a couple of weeks to when I made my maiden speech, and a Conservative Member—I think he was trying to be kind and helpful—said, in an attempt to endear himself to Scottish National party Members, that he had Scottish blood in his veins. I did not get the chance to say so at the time, but although he may well have some Scottish blood in his veins, I have none whatsoever in mine. I am a member of the Scottish

National Party and I represent my constituents because I have chosen to make my life in Scotland. I am going to die in the city of Edinburgh. It is a fine city, and I would not envisage going anywhere else. It is not a question of identity or genetics; it is a question of residence.

The thing I am most proud of in the Scottish referendum is that that was the principle we applied. We said that if people choose to come and live in this country, make their future here, contribute to the country and be part of it, they have an equal say with anyone else in the future of their country. I find an awkward national identity being proposed, which is not the current franchise for Westminster; amendments are being made to it anyway. Attempts are being made to couch it in these terms: if people have some sort of historical or genealogical connection with the country, they have a right to a say in its future, but if they have worked here for decades, contributed their taxes and raised their families here, they may not. I think that that is iniquitous. It will drive wedges between families and communities, and it will make many of our citizens feel second class. I urge the Committee to try to avoid that situation by supporting amendment 18.

Thangam Debonnaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I will speak in support of Labour amendments 1 and 2 to clause 2 to allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in the referendum. I will also argue generally in favour of lowering the voting age for all elections everywhere in the UK. I am arguing for 16 and 17-year-olds as young people, not as adults. I consider that all the arguments about this being a way of bringing down the age of adulthood are missing the point.

2.30 pm

The right to vote is enshrined in law in the Representation of the People Act 1983 and article 3 of the European convention on human rights. For a human right such as this to be limited, restrictions should be justifiable and proportionate, and restricting the right to vote in this way is no longer justifiable or proportionate. The evidence says so as well. People have referred to a lack of evidence, but I urge them to read the British Youth Council's report on the commission on this subject, published in 2014—a comprehensive and useful document, which provides many forms of evidence, as well as consultation.

Others have made the point about representation, but I reiterate my support for it. Taxation without representation is not democratic. Young people of 16 and 17 may be taxed in certain circumstances, and they should be allowed to be properly represented.

The arguments about the sale of cigarettes and alcohol and serving in the armed forces are not watertight. Because the United Kingdom is a signatory to the UN convention on the rights of the child, those who join the armed forces at 16 cannot see active service until they are 18. To marry, to work and to do various other things, 16-year-olds need parental consent. For those who do not have parental support or care, the state has duties of care up until 18. An argument for lowering the voting age is not an argument for lowering the age limits for all those other various forms of protection. They are different situations, and all present potential risks. As far as I am aware, walking into a polling booth does not, in and of itself, present a risk of harm to a young person, so that argument simply does not hold.

My experience of politically engaged young people is that they are as motivated and well informed as their adult contemporaries, if not more so. In fact, young Labour activists in the recent general election, particularly those from my local secondary schools of Cotham and St Mary Redcliffe in Bristol West, were among the most organised, passionate, articulate and determined campaigners I have ever had the pleasure of working with. They wanted to vote, and I believe they have earned the right to vote.

What of their contemporaries who are perhaps not so well informed? Many have said that because they are not well informed enough, they are not mature enough, and that because they do not know enough about politics, party politics, democracy, or the ways of this House or the other, they are not to be trusted. However, I am yet to become aware of any plan to restrict the franchise for adults to those who are fully tested before they enter the polling booth. Is there such a plan? I hope to be convinced that there is not. Why, therefore, should this argument be posed in relation to 16 and 17-year-olds?

My experience of hustings at the recent general election is that not only politically engaged young people are capable of participating fully in political debate. The hustings held at my local secondary schools of Cotham and St Mary Redcliffe were among the most well-informed and courteous, and the participants the most interested and interesting. The young people at both events included many who were not in any way involved in party politics but were interested in their world and their future. They were also knowledgeable. Because they were immersed in education, they were, in many ways, better informed than many adult voters. They had thoughtful insights, they wanted to know what was going on, and they wanted to participate. I agree with the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), who is no longer in her place, who said that she had consulted young people and they did want to vote. I would say that the young people in Bristol West have made their case very clearly to me.

Young people need protection from harm, and rights to that protection should be tapered as they gain maturity. Yet abilities to work, vote and make decisions about education and joining the Army are not all of the same quality. I have great respect for those, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), who argue that we need to protect young people from harm, but voting is not, in and of itself, harmful to the voter. I am not against certain forms of protection. I am certainly not arguing for lowering the age limits for drinking or for smoking—I would not ask for those to be tampered with in any way.

I am also not arguing for 16 or 17-year-olds to be termed “adults”. I have referred to them as young people, and I believe they are young people.

Tom Tugendhat: Does the hon. Lady accept that the hazards of drinking and smoking are to do with the ability to foresee the consequences, whether it be tomorrow's hangover or next year's lung cancer? Does she agree that some elections—indeed, some rather well-reported elections—can also bring hangovers?

Thangam Debonnaire: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, and I thank him for my first experience of an intervention. Yes, of course, those are potential

[*Thangam Debbonaire*]

forms of harm where young people may not be able to see the consequences of their actions. However, as I have said, going into a polling booth, in and of itself, does not present any harm, whereas smoking immediately presents harm to a young person.

Peter Grant: Is the hon. Lady aware that the argument against allowing younger people to drink alcohol is not merely social or one of predicting consequences? There is significant medical evidence that the human liver takes longer to develop than once thought, and allowing and encouraging young people to drink alcohol—some would even say up to 21—can have medical effects that are much more severe than they would be for drinking the same amount of alcohol at an older age.

Thangam Debbonaire: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point, and of course I agree. Again, I draw a contrast between the risks of harm from certain behaviours and the lack of risk of harm from going into a polling booth. The risks of harm from drinking early are well known and well presented. There is a large amount of evidence, as there is on smoking.

The Electoral Reform Society wrote:

“If we get more young people registered early and into the habit of voting, we will not only see lasting improvements in turnout but a lasting improvement in our democracy.”

I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House would like to see those consequences, for young people and for ourselves. I am not arguing that 16 and 17-year-old young people be termed “adults”. I am simply arguing that they are capable of voting and interested in voting, and the evidence suggests that it would be a good thing generally for democracy that they be allowed to vote. That does not make them adults; they should simply be given the right to vote.

Tom Tugendhat: Thank you, Sir Roger, for calling me to speak in this important debate. I have to declare an interest because—[HON. MEMBERS: “You’re 16.”] It is a somewhat different interest to the one that hon. Members are suggesting. My wife is not 16, or 17, but she is French. The hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) talked about divided households. I can say that none is as united as mine on this issue. My wife has identified what hon. Members would be well advised to note. As a constitutional expert in French law, she realises that what we are talking about is not a tactical political change, but a major constitutional change to the state of the United Kingdom.

I understand that nations within our great kingdom have taken different decisions, and I recognise and respect the right of those decisions to affect the laws and conduct—

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): The laws of Scotland, as well as the laws of England, recognise that majority is not attained until someone passes a certain age. In England that age is 18, but in Scotland it is 21. Legal rights are given to 16 to 18-year-olds in Scotland in relation to the economic activity that we have heard about.

Tom Tugendhat: I bow to my hon. Friend’s superior knowledge of Scottish law.

My point is not about 16 and 17-year-olds because my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) covered that so completely and so ably.

Joanna Cherry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tom Tugendhat: May I make a little progress, please?

I will instead make a few comments about citizenship, because that is what we are really talking about. This is a constitutional vote. It is not a tactical vote or a minor amendment; it is about the constitution and governance of our country. When someone chooses to be a member of our society and a participant in it, there are various things they can choose to do. They can choose to reside here for educational purposes and stay for year or two, or perhaps do a PhD and stay for longer. They can also choose to reside here for an occupation and stay for a few months or a few years; or they can choose—as I am extremely glad my wife has done—to reside here for significantly longer to raise a family, marry and settle. If they do so, they are choosing a specific state of existence in our nation. What they are not choosing is full citizenship, because that is governed by other laws.

Joanna Cherry: Following on from what the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) said in his intervention, the age of legal capacity in Scotland is 16.

Tom Tugendhat: The hon. and learned Lady has greater knowledge of that subject than I do, but I do not know whether her knowledge is greater or less than that of my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire. I will leave it to them to debate that.

Peter Grant: The hon. Gentleman has listed a lot of things that we can choose to do to set our position in society. Does he agree that a significant number of people—citizens of these nations—have chosen to surrender the right to vote in order to take a seat, often at the request of Her Majesty’s Government, in the other place? How can he justify giving them the chance to undo what should have been a permanent decision by giving them the right to vote, but not giving the right to vote to people who have lived here for 25 or 30 years?

Tom Tugendhat: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. I will leave it to greater minds than mine to decide whether noble Lords have made such a decision or whether they have simply chosen to access a different seat and therefore surrendered on one, but not every, electoral term. They do not rescind their right to vote universally; they merely rescind their right to vote in general elections, because they already hold a seat in Parliament.

Citizenship is not something to be added or taken away arbitrarily, and that is what we are talking about when it comes to the enfranchisement for the referendum. It is not simply a tactical choice; it is the act of citizenship. In constituency cases, I have been sad to hear time and again people think that they have rights that they do not. Concepts of “common law this” or “common law that” do not exist, and in this case there is no such thing as common law citizenship. If people wish to have citizenship, the laws of citizenship, immigration and naturalisation cover it. If people wish to have citizenship

in Her Majesty's great United Kingdom, they have a choice to ask for it. There are laws that allow them to do so and rules that set out at what stage they can or cannot apply.

As people move through the process of residency in our great kingdom, there are various moments at which they may or may not choose to take that citizenship, and there are consequences that go with that.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a cost of £1,005 to seek naturalisation in this country deters many people who cannot afford it from claiming citizenship, and that they should be allowed to vote in the referendum by virtue of residency? There should be no price on democracy.

Tom Tugendhat: The hon. Lady makes an interesting point, but I would argue to the contrary: the right of citizenship in this kingdom is so great that the price of £1,005 is but a small price to pay for the benefit of being British.

Citizenship is not a common law right: there is no common law marriage, common law contract or common law citizenship. It is, therefore, no more the right of this House to bounce people into citizenship than to bounce them into any other form of contract. The proposal seeks to push people into a deal that would change their relationship to this country without their having chosen to do so.

I know that for a fact, because my wife, who could, should she wish, begin the process of citizenship, chooses not to do so. She is—and there is some debate about this—proud to be French. She is—again, there is some debate about this—unwilling to become British. My argument is that becoming British is such a great honour that, even as a French woman, she should appreciate the joys it offers.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): Most of the English aristocracy were French at one time in history. The hon. Gentleman's wife is not going to be bounced into anything. If European nationals get the right to vote because of residency, there is no compulsion on his wife voting.

Tom Tugendhat: The right hon. Gentleman may say that he is not bouncing anyone into anything, but he is seeking to change the social contract between citizens who have specifically not chosen to be British and citizens who are British. In changing that contract, he would bounce people who have not made that choice into a relationship with the state that they do not wish to have. If he wishes to do so at a regional level—

Alex Salmond: Great nations!

Tom Tugendhat: I accept the correction and I apologise.

2.45 pm

If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to make that change at a national level, I accept that, but the United Kingdom is a different state. It is a sovereign state that exercises rights on a different basis from the nations of England, Scotland or, indeed, Ireland. Those who have come from across the European continent—my grandfather came from Austria almost 100 years ago—understand

that choosing British nationality is just that: it is an active choice and one of which we should be duly proud. It is not something that we should find ourselves with by accident of residency.

Peter Grant: Does that mean that those of us on the SNP Benches who never have and never will choose to be British will not be allowed to vote in the referendum?

Tom Tugendhat: The hon. Gentleman makes an entertaining point. The fact that he was born here and has residency here is what gives him citizenship.

As well as the question of citizenship in the constitutional sense, there is also the issue of the referendum's legitimacy. It would be wrong if we were to suddenly change the deal to benefit those who have a specific interest in doing so. I refer specifically to the hundreds and thousands of migrant workers who affect various states of the debate. We all know that there were some people who tried to get into this House whose principal argument was based on immigration. If we force ourselves to enfranchise those whom many people would not regard as British, the terms of the debate would be changed halfway through. I argue very strongly that that would be unwise and that it would call into question the legitimacy of the referendum itself. We could find ourselves with hundreds of thousands of European Union citizens who have not made the choice to become British citizens.

Mike Gapes: Is there not a danger that the argument being developed by the hon. Gentleman could also be used to argue against Commonwealth or Republic of Ireland citizens who are resident in this country having a vote?

Tom Tugendhat: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, but we are not making the argument on that basis; we are making it on the basis of the difference between what is normal in a national election and what is normal in a local or regional election. In doing so, we are sticking to the existing rules. In sticking to the existing franchise, we are allowing those who are normally entitled to vote in national elections in our kingdom to exercise that right. It is essential that we maintain that continuity, because if we do not, we leave the door open.

Dr Philippa Whitford: I, too, declare an interest, in that my husband is German. He has been here for 29 years, working as a general practitioner and paying tax, but he does not get to vote in elections to this House, which sets his rate of taxation, and he certainly did not get to vote for me.

Given the argument that the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) is making, is there not a danger that this will become a very nationalistic debate? That accusation was thrown at the SNP when our nationalism was completely civic and open to everyone. Pursuing a genetic-source, where-were-you-born franchise is a dangerous argument to follow.

The Temporary Chair (Sir Roger Gale): I remind the Committee that interventions are intended to be brief. [*Interruption.*] He's finished? I'm terribly sorry; I thought that the hon. Lady was intervening.

Dr Whitford: I was trying to intervene.

The Temporary Chair: Mr Tugendhat has the Floor.

Tom Tugendhat: I did not give way; I sat down.

The Temporary Chair: I call Hywel Williams.

Hywel Williams: I am glad to speak in support of amendments 18 and 19 and new clause 2, which stand in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), other SNP Members, Members from Plaid Cymru and the Green Member.

Usually I do not quote individual cases because there are many dangers in speaking about the individual circumstances of constituents, but in speaking about this matter I will describe briefly two cases that prove the rule, in the proper sense of the phrase. I am aware that hard cases make bad law, but we are talking about 2.3 million cases in total. These are just the cases of a couple of friends of mine.

The first is Swedish and has been resident here for more than 20 years. She is an NHS worker in the tough field of mental health and she pays her taxes. She is Welsh-speaking, English-speaking and Swedish-speaking, and she has two children and a husband who also speak Welsh, English and a bit of Swedish. In my book, she is a Welsh citizen—there is no doubt about that—but if she tried to vote in the referendum, she would be turned away.

The second is a Danish friend who has been resident here for 35 years. She is a university worker who pays her taxes. She is Welsh-speaking, Danish-speaking and English-speaking. She has two children and a husband. Again, in my book, she is a Welsh citizen, but should she try to vote, she would be turned away. That is plainly outrageous.

Those people are not public figures, they are not famous, but they are hard-working members of their communities. They have an equal stake in the collective future of those communities and, in my book, they have an equal right to have their voices heard. In that sense, I fully support the amendment. It would be outrageous if those people were denied the right to vote on a matter of such importance.

Briefly, I will turn to votes at 16. Right hon. and hon. Members will know that the Government's St David's day Command Paper on the future of devolution in Wales proposed that the Assembly should decide on the issue of votes for 16 and 17-year-olds. There is strong opinion in favour of that move in Wales. In 2008, the Welsh Assembly collectively decided that it was in favour of it. Interestingly, in 2014, the Children's Commissioner for Wales said that more work had to be done on the issue. He was pressing for the franchise to be extended before the 2015 election, but that did not happen. Opinion in Wales is strongly in favour of votes at 16.

There have been early-day motions and private Members' Bills in this place on extending the franchise. One of those was introduced by a Welsh Member, others were introduced by Liberal Democrat Members and one was introduced by the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel), although, given her current status,

I do not want to suggest that she is in any way biased on this issue now. There is, however, a great deal of support for votes at 16.

As I said earlier, any speculations that we make about the effect of introducing votes at 16 are trumped by the experience in Scotland. That experience trumps all the counter-arguments. We do not need any fanciful musing from Government Members, because we have the proof in respect of engagement in the debate and in respect of turnout. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon said on Second Reading, one reason why there was engagement in the referendum is that people were talking about a real question, whereas there are doubts about whether the referendum provided for in the Bill will be on a real question. Perhaps that might be explored later.

As I said earlier, if people doubt the value of 16 and 17-year-olds having a vote on this crucial question, that might be thought to throw some doubt on the value of the results of a referendum decided partly by the votes of those aged 16 and 17. I am sure that the opponents of the amendments today are not saying that, but one should make that point.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): Given what the hon. Gentleman has just said and the time it has taken the Welsh Assembly to provide an argument in favour of votes at 16, surely he should oppose the amendments to provide more time for a coherent review of the matter.

Hywel Williams: The hon. Gentleman's argument, which was also made by the hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), who is no longer in her place, reminds me of the ancient joke, "Make me holy, but not just yet". I believe that we need to move quickly on the matter.

Over the years, from my experience in my constituency of visiting sixth-formers during what I suppose we would call civics lessons to talk about my work, they are hugely interested in and committed to voting as soon as possible. They want to know what we do here, and they want to get involved. I have often felt humbled by the sincerity of the opinions that they hold, which can sometimes be compared with the insincerity of some of the opinions that their older peers have.

I also draw the Committee's attention to my experience during the election campaign, when hustings were held at my local secondary schools. It was a tough experience, and we were questioned hard by young people who were totally engaged in the campaign, some of whom were able to vote. Another experience that humbled me was seeing a large group of young people coming down from school to the polling booth at lunchtime to vote together. They were proud to do so, and I was even more proud to see that they were all voting for me. I cannot say how young people would vote in an EU referendum—I suspect I know, but I cannot guarantee it. However, I trust them, and I believe they have a right to be heard.

James Cartledge: I want to make two key points about the amendments on voting age, which are what most Members have been talking about. I agree in principle with reducing the voting age to 16 in general elections, but I do not think that that should happen in the referendum. The most important point for me—there is no nice way of saying this—is that the electorate in

the UK are top-heavy. In the election campaign, it was striking how issues affecting older voters had greater resonance simply because of the power of older voters. I have tried to put that as apolitically as possible, even though there are obviously political implications to voters' ages.

I am trying to be as objective as possible in saying that it is in the interests of public policy to extend the vote to 16-year-olds. We would make better policy as a country, because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) said in her fantastic speech, there is a growing intergenerational divide. She talked about the one nation idea, and I worry about the situation. We can look at how difficult it is for us to address older people's benefits—that is a psephological fact. Once those benefits have been handed out, they are hard to claw back, because people will vote accordingly. It might be easier to do something about benefits, public spending and so on for young people, because they do not have a say to the same degree. That is not a cynical point, just an observation on the polity as it is today, and it is my key reason for wishing to lower the voting age to 16.

I know that points are made about bringing adulthood to a younger age, as was mentioned earlier, and I do worry about that. I have four children—my eldest is eight—and I would worry about anything that made young people less innocent, but I do not think that comes into effect when we are talking about public policy.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's arguments. For me, 16 and 17-year-olds have a stronger right to vote in the referendum, because it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Notwithstanding the fact that people sometimes do not like the results of referendums, there might not be another one for 40 years, given that the last one was 40 years ago, whereas a general election is every five years.

3 pm

James Cartlidge: I will come shortly to my reasoning for not extending the franchise for the referendum, but I want to share one particular experience related to the speech by the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire), who is no longer in her place. She talked of her experience on the campaign trail. In my constituency we had a unique interaction with young people. We had a mock election at the biggest secondary school, Thomas Gainsborough school in Great Cornard, including a question time at lunch time that the whole school attended. It was filmed by ITV Anglia, with the result announced live on the 6.30 regional news, giving it extra credence. Interestingly, UKIP won—

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Was the SNP represented?

James Cartlidge: No, but nationalism was represented and was victorious on the day. The 16 and 17-year-olds took it incredibly seriously. They did not make fluffy, young person's points: they talked about Europe, the nuclear deterrent and so on, just like anyone else would. We are in danger of being patronising by saying to young people, "You couldn't possibly understand these big issues." They want to talk about the big issues and they are especially interested in the issue of Europe.

I would not lower the age limit at this time because there is no mandate for it, and that is an important point. We have just had a general election, in which the Conservative manifesto won the day.

Stephen Gethins: In Scotland, where we were of course in favour of votes at 16, the SNP won an overwhelming mandate, as a look at the Benches behind me will confirm. In the UK as a whole, the Tories got the support of about one in four voters—hardly an overwhelming mandate. Is not this a great opportunity to reach out to the whole of the UK for the benefit of democracy?

James Cartlidge: The mandate is based on the manifesto of the governing party. We are not in coalition, so it does not have to be watered down. Our position was that we would hold an in/out referendum on membership of the EU before the end of 2017. The manifesto did not say that the voting age would be lowered, so the clear tacit understanding is that the referendum will be held on the current franchise. More importantly, the general election was held on that franchise—

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: But does the hon. Gentleman agree that the franchise will be changed for the referendum, because the Government are seeking to allow unelected Members of the Lords to participate?

James Cartlidge: I am always vulnerable to peer pressure and I must admit that I look forward to the answers from the Minister on the point about extending the franchise to Members of the Lords, but—bar a very small number—the franchise will be the same as in the general election.

Mike Wood: Does my hon. Friend agree that the strong constitutional reason for excluding serving peers from parliamentary elections is that they serve in the other House? That is not the case for the referendum, so the normal basis for their disqualification should not apply.

James Cartlidge: I am indebted to my hon. Friend for answering the question superbly.

I made a point earlier about European citizens, and I tried to do so as objectively as possible, but the reason Europe is so high on the political agenda is because of immigration. There is no doubt about that. People across the country are concerned, rightly or wrongly, about the sheer number of people coming into the UK. On the campaign trail, I always made the point that this country is dependent on large numbers of foreign workers—

Mark Durkan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

James Cartlidge: I am not going to give way again, as other very fine hon. Members wish to speak.

We have to recognise that many people in Britain are concerned about the sheer number of people coming into this country. If we extended the franchise to people from the rest of the European Union and if their vote were decisive in keeping us in, that would be inflammatory for those who want to leave because they want to control their borders and would leave a lasting feeling of injustice.

[James Cartlidge]

To conclude, I believe in votes at 16, but we should refrain from having that now. We should have a full consultation and, if we decide we want to do it, it should be in our manifesto, so that we can achieve a mandate from the British people to have votes at 16 in elections and referendums thereafter.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: I rise to support the amendments 18 and 19 and new clause 2, which are in my name and those of my colleagues on the SNP Benches. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) and commend his excellent opening speech on 16 and 17-year-olds, who demonstrated a supreme ability to participate in the independence referendum.

The hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), who is no longer in her place, made some excellent points about why young people should participate in the EU referendum, but went on to say, “Yes, but not now.” What I would say to her is, “But if not now, when?” The hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) made the point that Scotland had “made a lot of comments in this debate”. I would like to remind the House that we are elected Members of this Parliament, and the House will be hearing a lot from us in this Parliament in the days and weeks to come, because that is why we have been elected. It is also worth reminding the House that Scotland did not vote Conservative in the last general election.

Politicians should not pick and choose their electorate. I do not believe that that should happen in the EU referendum either, and the franchise should absolutely be fair. The issues at stake in the referendum are serious and fundamental to the future of the UK and its constituent parts, so it is essential that all those living in the UK who will be affected by these decisions are given an opportunity to vote. With that in mind, we tabled amendment 18, under which EU nationals who live in the UK would be included in this franchise. Foreign nationals from Commonwealth countries who live in the UK will be able to vote, so why not EU nationals?

We have heard that there is already division, unsurprisingly, on the Tory and Labour Benches on this vote. Ruth Davidson, the Tory leader in Scotland, is in favour of votes for 16 and 17-year-olds, and a Labour leadership candidate, Kezia Dugdale, is in favour of EU nationals having a vote. I am pleased to see that there has been a slight increase in the number of Labour Members participating in this debate. They were rather thin on the ground—much like the Labour party membership in Scotland, but that is perhaps a debate for another day.

Over and above that, the Bill proposes to extend the franchise to Commonwealth citizens who would be entitled to vote in European elections in Gibraltar. I do not oppose that measure by any means, but surely if the Government agree with the principle of widening the Westminster franchise for the referendum, they should consider including this additional group—EU nationals—who make such an important contribution to our society and economy. By excluding them from the vote, we would be excluding constituents of mine in Ochil and South Perthshire, such as my friend Mireille Pouget, who lives in the village of Glendevon. In a message to me this week, Mireille said:

“I have lived, worked and paid taxes here for nearly 40 years. Staying in the EU is important to me as an EU and French citizen. I should have a voice in this referendum. It’s outrageous that EU citizens cannot vote.”

Hear, hear to that.

It is equally wrong that the Government propose to extend the right to vote to Members of the House of Lords—a place not known for its democratic foundations—without taking measures to ensure that all Members of the Scottish Parliament have the same right. Mention has been made by a number of hon. Members of my colleague Christian Allard, who came to Scotland to open an office in Glasgow for a European seafood logistic group in the 1980s. He subsequently met his wife and moved from Glasgow to the north-east of Scotland, to Aberdeenshire, with his three young daughters 20 years ago. Mr Allard has been chosen—elected—by the people of North East Scotland to represent them in the Scottish Parliament. He has undoubtedly made an enormous contribution to our country and the community that he and his family live in. I believe that he has earned the right to vote in this referendum.

In the Scottish independence referendum last year, the UK Government agreed in principle with the Scottish Government that the franchise for the vote should be as wide as possible. It is clear from the turnout and scale of political engagement across Scotland last year that seeking a wide inclusive franchise was one factor in encouraging a vibrant debate on Scotland’s future. By accepting our amendments, the Government have an opportunity—one that Government Members should not pass up—to use this new referendum to ensure that this wide-ranging inclusive debate is open to all people. It is so important for the UK’s future in Europe.

It would indeed be unfortunate if this Government sought to pick and choose the franchise for this vote, whether for 16 and 17-year-olds or EU nationals, in a way that could be considered as excluding a significant proportion of those who live and work here on the basis of how the Government think they will vote, rather than of taking measures to add depth to the national debate as a whole. I urge the Committee to accept the amendments and to be progressive, if that is what they plan to be.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. It is interesting to follow some of the speeches of hon. Members, and I will start by dealing with why the parliamentary franchise is as it is. Let us be clear. When we first joined in 1972, we did so on the basis of the parliamentary franchise and this House’s sovereignty. We then continued, and only a few weeks back, some were arguing that our membership should continue on the basis of the policies agreed in Parliament, based on those who voted in favour then. It is therefore interesting to see how those who were arguing a few weeks back that the referendum would be disaster or a “reckless gamble”, as one hon. Member said last week, now seem so enthusiastic for everyone to have a go with it.

Put simply, we cannot have a pick and mix on the franchise. The reason for peers having it is that it is decided en masse by Parliament that Members either have a vote in the other place or elect a representative from this House to exercise it on their behalf. That is why it makes sense to allow those who would not be able to exercise their vote in the other place on this decision to vote in the referendum. It also makes sense to extend the franchise to Gibraltar, which is a member

of the European Union via the UK's membership of it, so its citizens should have the ability to vote as if they were resident in the UK itself.

Today's debates have flagged up a whole range of issues about the franchise, but we do not need to have these debates on individual elections. Given that Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands are so dependent on decisions taken in this Parliament, it is right to reflect on how they can have a voice in future. Again, however, that is not a debate for today. Given that our membership is based on the UK state being part of the European Union, which is not a sovereign state in its own right, it is right to grant the vote to UK citizens on the basis of the parliamentary franchise, plus those who have benefited historically from the extension of the parliamentary franchise in the Commonwealth and the Republic of Ireland.

On the issue of 16 and 17-year-olds, I am a supporter of votes at 16. Experience where it has happened, as in the Scottish referendum, has been positive. It is not very helpful, however, to bandy around the different ages at which people can do various things. I am not sure how many hon. Members have read the pages on the Government website about learning to drive a tractor. It lists all the different ages that people need to be to drive different things. Anyone wanting to drive a road roller can do so at the ages of 17 to 20, unless it is a steam-powered road roller, for which one needs to be 21, while a mowing machine can be driven at 16. There are all sorts of anomalies in our law, so citing individual ages does not necessarily justify what the franchise should be. I support providing 16-year-olds with the opportunity to vote, but it needs to be done through a substantive debate on the franchise as a whole, not as an amendment tacked on to a Bill.

Mark Durkan: We have heard several Conservative Members argue that they are in favour of votes at 16, but that allowing it in this referendum would somehow be a form of premature emancipation against which they would have to vote. That is not a very convincing argument.

Kevin Foster: It is all about inconsistency. Another referendum is being considered in my constituency about the future of the elected mayorality of Torbay Council. It would be somewhat bizarre, assuming these amendments are passed, if a 17-year-old could decide on the future of Britain in Europe, but could not decide who is going to run the local council because the franchise remains at 18. That is why I do not support a pick and mix.

Mark Durkan: The Prime Minister has said that he will not opt for a third term. If he resigns before the end of the current term, the Conservative party will, in effect, choose the Prime Minister. What is the age of eligibility for members of the Conservative party to choose the Prime Minister? It is certainly below 18, and it is not confined to United Kingdom nationals either.

3.15 pm

Kevin Foster: The hon. Gentleman has been here long enough to know that it is not any particular party that chooses the Prime Minister. It is a question of whether the Prime Minister enjoys the confidence of the House of Commons. That is the constitutional position.

I think that we should stick to the present age limit because we should not set a precedent that might be abused by future Governments. We do not want a pick-and-mix franchise. When referendums are held on issues that would normally be decided by Parliament, it makes sense for us to use the parliamentary franchise rules, while also including Members of the other place who currently cannot vote directly because they have the opportunity to elect a representative here. I shall therefore vote against the amendment, although I have some sympathy for—indeed, I strongly support—the idea of 16-year-olds being able to vote. *[Interruption.]* The heckling from those who want to deny everyone a vote on this matter is laughable. Last week, they walked through the Lobby to vote against the Bill, apart from one Member who seemed to get a bit lost. This week, they are demanding a vote for everyone who could possibly live here.

We keep hearing about residency. What about citizens of the United States of America, one of our oldest allies, who are resident in this country? We know the answer: the system is based on citizenship and on the parliamentary franchise, and it is right for it to continue on that basis. I shall vote against the amendment, but I hope that Front Benchers have been listening to the debate, because the amendment has raised a legitimate point. In the not too distant future, we should have a proper debate about our franchise, so that we can deal with some of the numerous anomalies that we have discussed today. We could then set a franchise for the 21st century, and give Members who are in favour of reducing the age to 16 the chance to vote for such a move.

Mims Davies: It is a pleasure to take part in the debate, and to hear so many points made so well by Members in all parts of the House. We have a Bill before us, but I have not heard much about it today. The issue is whether the United Kingdom should remain a member of the European Union. Efforts by other parties to pile other issues on to the referendum will only make the question and therefore the result less clear. I believe that we owe the British public something better.

On the doorsteps in my constituency, people were crying out for a say on Europe. It has been too long since we last consulted the people on the very sovereignty of their own Parliament. I am proud that the Government have introduced the Bill and are answering the call from our nation. I do not support votes for under-18s, or, indeed, electronic voting. This referendum is simply too important for that. The question must stand alone, and I reject any attempts to hijack it. Young people should be encouraged to take an interest in politics from an early age, but let us have that debate on another occasion. It should be separate from the huge constitutional question that is before us.

I was very disappointed that the single one of my hustings that was cancelled was the one in which 16 and 17-year-olds were to have taken part. Perhaps they were too busy voting for candidates in "The X Factor" or "The Voice". However, we already have a youth parliament and mock elections, and they can become involved in those.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): The hon. Lady has made an interesting point about her experience in her constituency. In my constituency, I had completely the opposite

[Peter Kyle]

experience. At Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College—known as BHASVIC—people aged 16 and 17 experienced a whole week of democracy. They recalled me there seven times. There were multiple hustings with different Members of Parliament and their candidates. The passion and erudition with which they spoke was inspiring: indeed, it was one of the most inspiring aspects of the general election campaign. Why does the hon. Lady think that Hove is so different from her constituency in that respect?

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point. I know that college, being from Sussex.

I had visitors from my constituency recently, and we were in Westminster Hall. They were 15, and I asked them, “How does it feel to be here? Do you want to be involved in voting?” Lots of people’s eyes glazed over; they were not ready. So let us get people involved in youth parliaments and let us look at the issue more broadly.

I am delighted that Commonwealth citizens will be able to vote in the referendum. The Government are right to use those electoral qualifications. I, as someone with a critical eye towards the EU, am delighted to see the symbolic recognition and involvement of this other greater community of nations—the Commonwealth—but I recognise and respect what happened in the Scottish referendum. We did not agree to or accept the decisions that were made, but they were devolved powers.

On the referendum date and flexibility, the Government’s amendment, whereby the Secretary of State looked at May 5 and ruled it out, showed the care that they are taking over the matter.

I refer to my previous point and the question whether the United Kingdom should remain a member of the European Union. That is what we are going to let the people decide, and we need to let the Prime Minister get on with negotiating a better deal for the UK. This is the Prime Minister who delivered a reduction in the EU budget, so I absolutely believe we have the right person to do it.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: On the hon. Lady’s points about 16 and 17-year-olds, if young people in this country are not interested in what is happening in politics, that is a failing not of them, but of everyone else who is involved in politics in this country. It is also rather disingenuous to suggest that they might be watching television programmes, when there are probably more people much older than them doing so. We should give the young people of this country the respect that they deserve—and we can expect them to return that respect to us when they vote positively in this referendum.

Mims Davies: The hon. Lady makes an excellent point—those programmes are wide ranging and many people vote in them—but I return to my earlier point that we should look at the issue in the round. Members will see that we on the Government Benches are happy to consider the matter, but it dilutes the question before us. Ultimately, it is about the sovereignty of this Parliament and about the people being able to decide for themselves about the future of Europe. I believe that 18 is right at

the moment, but I am happy to look at the issue more roundly in a separate arena. I believe also that Ministers are listening to us on that.

Celebrating our magnificent Magna Carta highlights just how much our democracy has done for our islands and our nation. By giving the people—all the people—the chance to have their say on their own future and our constitution, we are delivering on our promises and paying tribute to this country’s long record of democracy. I believe that we in this House will go further and look at all the arguments in the round, but I do not believe that diluting this question and franchise—picking and choosing—is the right way to do so.

Huw Merriman: I am very grateful to you, Sir Roger, for squeezing me in towards the end, my having sat here for the past few hours listening to this excellent debate. I am open minded, which is why I have been so delighted to hear the excellent arguments from Members in all parts of the House. I am open minded about the voting age, and I seek to be persuaded by the arguments, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) that listing ages as hooks to hang voting on does not work, because there are so many different ages when one might be seen to be turning into an adult.

I do, however, find myself influenced by international comparisons. The voting age for national elections in EU countries is 18, except for in Austria, where it was reduced to 16 in 2007. Internationally, there are only seven countries where 16 and 17 year olds are able to vote, and there are considerably more where voting starts later than 18. We should take international comparisons into account—and it is to “international” that I make that reference.

Peter Grant: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm whether his figures are completely up to date? Does he appreciate that as of midnight tonight another nation will be added to the list of proud nations that allow 16-year-olds to vote?

Huw Merriman: My information has come from the House of Commons Library, so I am sure it is up to date—it goes up to 2013. It does not make reference to Scotland, but it does say that it is international.

I will not rehearse the arguments—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Huw Merriman: If I may, I will make a little more progress. Recent laws have moved more towards having 18 as the start point; I refer not only to smoking, but to the requirement to be in further education. I wish to pick up on the point about the University of Edinburgh study on the participation in the Scottish referendum of 16 and 17-year-olds. That study is persuasive in a way, but it also makes me concerned. If the voting proportions were high for 16 and 17-year-olds and for those above 24, there are younger voters in between who have not been engaged. I am concerned that 16 and 17-year-olds may have been more persuaded by their parents to vote.

I do not say that in a patronising manner, because I could use myself as an example. At 16, coming from a family of trade unionists and socialists, I dare say I would have been following their lead and voting in that

way. Thankfully by 18 I had seen the error of my ways, and I now find myself on the Conservative Benches. That point should be considered, because at 16 people are persuaded by family pressure. It is important that when people vote they do so on the basis of their own views and conscience, which they have developed over the years as they mature.

Ben Howlett: I must declare that I am an advocate of 16-year-olds having the vote. I am slightly surprised that Opposition Members have not decided to use the example of Austria, in that it spent a long time going through a proper process and having a proper debate to decide whether votes at 16 or 17 should be considered. I wish they would look at that example and take it on board before coming before this Committee with more amendments.

Huw Merriman: I take that point, which was very well made. I keep my mind open, but I tend towards using 18—

Mark Durkan *rose*—

Huw Merriman: If I may, I will make progress because I am conscious of the time.

I tend certainly towards using 18 for the EU referendum, because there is a danger that if we start to change the rules for it, there will be a feeling in this country that there is a taint, with people trying to get a certain outcome. I am so pleased that there is an EU referendum because we can at last lance the boil that is Europe and bring this matter to an end. If we start to change the rules beforehand, certain parties who feel sore from the result will try to make out it has been fixed in a certain way. That is why the status quo should remain.

Let me briefly deal with the matter of voter citizenship, which has somewhat been lost in the debate, albeit it is part of the amendment standing in the name of the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins). On that matter, I am not open minded at all: I support the decision to use the general election register as the referendum basis. I recognise that the Scottish referendum was based on a different arrangement, but it was for the Scottish Parliament to form those rules and it did so. This is a matter for this Parliament to form the rules, and I believe the rules set are the right ones. I also take the point about many residents who work and study in this country and contribute greatly, but they are citizens of another country in Europe and their country governs their relationship with Europe.

Stephen Gethins *rose*—

Huw Merriman: I will not give way because I believe I must end my speech. Changing the rules on which citizens can vote in the referendum would lead certain electors to accuse the House of taint and of trying to fix the outcome one way or the other. The way to get a successful referendum is to leave it as uncontroversial and to leave the rules on voting in place.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose): I thank all Members for yet another constructive, interesting and well-informed debate. Members from all parts of the Committee have spoken in some depth about the important matter of who can take part in this referendum.

Before I discuss the amendments, let me say a few words about why the general principle, which underpins the Bill, sets out the entitlement to vote. I will try to be brisk, because I want to leave a few moments for the SNP Front-Bench team to have a few words at the end.

3.30 pm

As a vote of national importance, the Bill starts with the parliamentary franchise. It extends it to Commonwealth citizens in Gibraltar—I will say a bit more on that in the next group of amendments—and to Members of the House of Lords, who do not vote in general elections. There have been suggestions that one franchise or another would favour one result or another. Even though the Whip in me finds that strangely appealing, it would be neither principled nor right to change the franchise to try to get a certain result. Instead, we should follow the precedent set in 1975 and again in 2011 when UK-wide votes on membership of the European Economic Community and on the alternative vote were put to the parliamentary franchise. This is the franchise that we use for big questions that will determine the future of our nation—I am talking about not just for referendums but for who should form the Government and lead the country. It is right that we apply it again here.

The right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) and the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) tabled a number of amendments seeking to use the local election franchise rather than the parliamentary one. Their aim is to add, “EU citizens resident in the UK”. The Labour Front-Bench team made some helpful comments, opposing the point in principle.

A few EU citizens have long been able to vote in UK parliamentary elections. Citizens of Malta, Cyprus and Ireland are already able to vote if they are resident in the UK, because of our historical connections to those countries and their citizens. But for the rest of the EU, British citizens living abroad do not have voting rights in their national elections. The only exceptions of which I am aware are in Ireland, where voting rights here are reciprocated, and in the upper chamber of Slovenia’s Parliament—I suspect that not many people here knew that they had that right. I doubt anyone will be dashing over there to set up residence in Slovenia, but if they do, they are of course welcome to vote when they get there. I am not aware of any national referendum in the EU that allowed citizens from other member states to take part.

Mr McFadden: Is not this the crucial point rather than arguments about ancestry or length of residence? Is it not the case that in any recent referendum on a European question held by a member state—whether that was the Austrian referendum on accession in 1994, the referendums held more recently in France and the Netherlands, or the frequent referendums held in Ireland on various EU treaty changes—residents from elsewhere in the EU have not been given the vote?

John Penrose: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It would be lopsided indeed if we were to take a different approach for our nationals than has been done elsewhere in the EU. As I was saying, British citizens were not entitled to vote in the Dutch or French referendums.

[John Penrose]

Finally, switching from the parliamentary to the local elections franchise would block British citizens living abroad from voting at all, because they are not entitled to vote at local elections. The net effect of the amendments would be to deny British citizens living abroad the right to vote on their own country's future while giving that right to other Europeans who are living here but have chosen not to become citizens. That strikes me as fundamentally unfair and inequitable. I hope that the hon. Members will withdraw their amendments when the time comes.

We have also heard about the need to give the vote to 16 and 17-year-olds for the first time in a UK-wide poll. There are a number of amendments to that effect, in the names of the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), the right hon. Member for Gordon and the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins). This is a referendum about an issue of huge national significance, and the starting point for determining who is entitled to vote must therefore be the franchise for parliamentary elections. Members will be aware that the voting age for parliamentary elections is set at 18. The voting age was 18 in the 1975 referendum on EC membership and the 2011 alternative vote referendum.

Let us not forget, as a number of Members have pointed out, that the voting age in most democracies, including most member states in the EU, is also 18. Only Austria in the EU currently allows voting at 16, although we have heard that Scotland is now heading in that direction, and that it is just hours away from extending its franchise for Holyrood elections as well, as is their devolved and democratic right. I salute its ability to do that.

Hon. Members have pointed out the precedent of the Scottish independence referendum, which was of course based on the devolved right, as we have heard. It is also right that the decisions about the franchise for elections and referendums that take place throughout the United Kingdom should be taken by this Parliament, in the same way as decisions taken for the franchise for elections to Holyrood are taken by the Holyrood Parliament.

Peter Grant: I recognise that this Parliament will take the decision, but will the Minister explain why he is so keen to follow the example set by other EU countries, which so many of his colleagues want to cut us off from, and why he will not follow the example of a country that his colleagues suggest should stay attached to the United Kingdom?

John Penrose: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the comments made by the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden). There is a degree of symmetry here and it would be bizarre indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) pointed out, to allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote on an issue of such national importance when they cannot vote on their local council and on who collects the bins. This needs to be done on a broader basis, and I shall come on to that point in a minute.

Hon. Members have also said that young people are engaged and politically active. That is absolutely true, but it is also true of many 15-year-olds and not of some 50-year-olds. Political engagement is not a strong enough

justification in and of itself for giving or denying the vote. Another argument that we have heard is that people can marry or join the Army at 16, and we have heard of a series of other activities that can or cannot be done at 16, 17, 18 or 21. I think the examples given included driving steam tractors. The important point is that in this country we have always viewed attaining adulthood and majority as a process rather than an event. It is not neat—I do not think it can be—and it varies from person to person and by activity to activity. If we want to compare different activities, the list on the parliamentary website that has been mentioned of things that are allowed at 16, 17, 18 or otherwise includes body piercing and having a tattoo at 18. I do not think that those are necessarily fruitful or relevant comparisons. We need to accept adulthood as a process, not an event, and that it is therefore tricky to deal with.

A number of my colleagues have said that they agree with, or are at least sympathetic to, the principle of votes at 16, but are concerned that it should not be done just for this election. I agree with that point. Many Members, such as my hon. Friends the Members for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White), for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), for Colchester (Will Quince), for South Suffolk (James Cartledge), for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), for Torbay (Kevin Foster) and for Bath (Ben Howlett), felt the same way and said that this is an important decision that needs to be taken for the franchise as a whole rather than for an individual election. I believe that that is right and I do not believe that this Bill is the right place to make significant changes to the franchise.

Alex Salmond: Is it not reasonable to make the case that if the Scottish Parliament, Government and the then First Minister had not legislated to allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in the Scottish referendum, the current Scottish Administration would not be in a position to legislate for 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in next year's Scottish election? Is it not time to start the process?

John Penrose: I am coming to the timing in a minute, if the right hon. Gentleman will allow me.

Although I do not think that this Bill is the right place to make significant changes to the franchise, the debate on the voting age is important. The Prime Minister himself has said that he thinks that it is right that it should take place, but making a change on this scale for a single specific vote will simply invite criticism that we are choosing a franchise that has been deliberately skewed for a low and partisan party political advantage. It is far better to hold the debate when the long-term question of votes for 16 and 17-year-olds at all future elections can be properly and soberly debated, and a moment's glance at the Conservative party's election manifesto, something that I am sure is bedtime reading for everybody on the Opposition Benches, will show that there should be opportunities to do just that during the course of this Parliament.

I now come to the amendments proposed by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips)—I am never sure whether that is pronounced "Hickham" or "Hikeham", and I apologise to his constituents if I have mispronounced it. He asks why the Bill does not enfranchise Irish citizens

resident in Gibraltar. It is extremely hard to identify Irish citizens in Gibraltar on the voting register, and it is not something that is done currently. At present, we do not have agreement from the Government of Gibraltar to do that, because it would clearly impose duties and work on them. It is also true that no one is quite sure how many Irish citizens there are in Gibraltar, although most estimates are pretty low. Although I cannot predict the outcome, I promise my hon. and learned Friend that we are already discussing the matter in some depth with the Government of Gibraltar and will continue to do so.

My hon. and learned Friend also asked about the definition of Commonwealth citizens. For the purposes of elections, schedule 3 to the British Nationality Act 1981 sets out the list of relevant countries. Two are not currently members of the Commonwealth, and citizens of those countries would be affected by the amendment. The first is The Gambia, which withdrew from the Commonwealth in October 2013. The Government have not yet removed The Gambia from the list of countries in schedule 3, but will do so at the next suitable opportunity. Once we have made that change, citizens of The Gambia will no longer have Commonwealth voting rights. Crucially, the second is Zimbabwe, which left the Commonwealth in 2003. At the time, the Government decided to maintain Commonwealth rights for Zimbabwean nationals, based on the view that Zimbabwean people should not be punished for the actions of a Government that the UK did not consider democratically elected. Given our serious concerns about the 2013 elections in that country, this view remains.

Amendment 52 deals with votes for life. I think the hon. Member for Ilford South is trying to be helpful by tabling an amendment that is closely in line with my own party's manifesto, and I thank him for that. I am not sure how his party's Front Benchers feel about it, but he has not let that stop him and I salute his courage and determination. I am now hoist on my own petard, though, because having made the argument that this is the wrong Bill through which to deal with 16 and 17-year-olds voting, I must abide by my own logic on this point. However, I can give the hon. Gentleman the same assurance as I gave my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), who was worried that we were kicking the question of 16 and 17-year-olds voting into the long grass. There will be opportunities in this Session of Parliament to vote on the matter, because we will be introducing our own Bill on votes for life, which will apply to all franchises, to make sure that British citizens who live abroad who are not currently able to vote and exercise their democratic rights, even though they are citizens of this country, are able to do so. I look forward to having the hon. Gentleman's support, even if not that of those on his Front Bench, on that very important matter.

Stephen Gethins: I thank you, Sir Roger, the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) for making time for me to sum up this good debate on a significant issue. I hope you will not mind my saying that it is good that we are discussing our relationship with Europe on this, the 200th anniversary of the battle of Waterloo. We remember those on all sides who fell on that day.

To deal with votes for 16 and 17-year-olds first, a number of Conservative Members, including the hon. Members for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) and for

Norwich North (Chloe Smith), seemed to be all for 16 and 17-year-olds having the vote—but not just yet. There is overwhelming evidence from the Scottish independence referendum—I presented it, my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) presented it, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) presented it—that extending the franchise to 16-year-olds is a good thing for democratic participation from an early age. As the Electoral Reform Society said: vote early and then vote often throughout life. The University of Edinburgh agrees. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), who in an excellent speech made some outstanding points on the contributions made by 16 and 17-year-olds, drawing from her own experience.

We all have a responsibility to try to increase young people's participation. This is a good place to start. My right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) made a pertinent point when he said that everyone talks about when we start, but there is no time like the present, folks. We have all been elected here to make decisions, so let us make a decision, tonight, to give young people the opportunity to vote in next year's referendum, to get involved in the debate and to make their voice heard in that democratic process.

3.45 pm

On EU nationals, I was astonished to hear Conservative Members run off European examples of EU nationals not being allowed to vote. This must be the first time we have heard the Tories telling us that they will not do something because other European countries do not do it. I am glad that they are opening up to learning from our neighbours and other members of the European Union.

As somebody who represents the University of St Andrews, I know that European nationals make a significant impact on the life of all the nations of the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire reeled off some excellent examples. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East made the very strong point that EU nationals living in our countries are here not as backpackers or tourists, but as an integral part of our society. What emerged powerfully from the Scottish independence referendum was the significant impact that our debate had on different communities—Polish communities, our Asian communities, people from almost every country in the world, who make up part of the fabric of Scottish society.

Scotland is a “mongrel” nation, which counts many peoples as Scots. We want to see them as an integral part of our country. What better way to say that they are an integral part of our country than by giving them the vote and putting them in a position to decide? The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) and others made the excellent point about Christian Allard, a Member of the Scottish Parliament, who has set up his business in Scotland and makes very good decisions in the Scottish Parliament, most of which I agree with, but he will not be allowed to vote in the European referendum. Yet Cypriots and Maltese will be allowed to vote. As was pointed out, Greek Cypriots may vote, but Greeks may not. It is a ludicrous situation.

There is so much that the House can learn from the Scottish Parliament, and it will do so over the next five years. The Scottish Parliament has sent out a strong

message that we are an open, inclusive and democratic country by lowering the voting age to allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote. I urge this House to follow the lead of the Scottish Parliament, as it should do on so many issues.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 71, Noes 514.

Division No. 19]

[3.47 pm

AYES

Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
 Arkless, Richard
 Bardell, Hannah
 Black, Ms Mhairi
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blomfield, Paul
 Boswell, Philip
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Day, Martyn
 Docherty, Martin John
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Durkan, Mark
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Flynn, Paul
 Gapes, Mike
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Hendry, Drew
 Hosie, Stewart
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Law, Chris
 Lucas, Caroline
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mc Nally, John

McCaig, Callum
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, John
 McGarry, Natalie
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Mullin, Roger
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Paterson, Steven
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, Angus
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Stephens, Chris
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomson, Michelle
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Weir, Mike
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Ayes:
Owen Thompson and
Marion Fellows

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Mr Graham
 Allen, Heidi
 Anderson, Mr David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Atkins, Victoria
 Austin, Ian
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bailey, Mr Adrian

Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baron, Mr John
 Barron, rh Kevin
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Bellingham, Mr Henry
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 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
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Brennan, Kevin
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bruce, Fiona
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Buckland, Robert
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cairns, Alun
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 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
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colville, Oliver
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Cox, Jo
 Coyle, Neil
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crausby, Mr David
 Creagh, Mary
 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
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Dromey, Jack
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Dugher, Michael
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Eagle, Maria
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Tom
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Esterson, Bill
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Chris
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Michael
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Frank
 Field, rh Mark
 Ffello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Foster, Kevin
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Gardiner, Barry
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glass, Pat
 Glen, John
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael

Graham, Richard	Johnson, Joseph	Mearns, Ian	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Grant, Mrs Helen	Jones, Andrew	Menzies, Mark	Robinson, Gavin
Gray, Mr James	Jones, rh Mr David	Mercer, Johnny	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Grayling, rh Chris	Jones, Gerald	Merriman, Huw	Robinson, Mary
Green, Chris	Jones, Graham	Metcalfe, Stephen	Rosindell, Andrew
Green, rh Damian	Jones, Helen	Miliband, rh Edward	Rotheram, Steve
Green, Kate	Jones, Mr Kevan	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Rudd, rh Amber
Greening, rh Justine	Jones, Mr Marcus	Milling, Amanda	Rutley, David
Greenwood, Lilian	Jones, Susan Elan	Mills, Nigel	Ryan, rh Joan
Greenwood, Margaret	Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald	Milton, rh Anne	Sandbach, Antoinette
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Kawczynski, Daniel	Moore, Mrs Madeleine	Scully, Paul
Griffith, Nia	Keeley, Barbara	Mordaunt, Penny	Selous, Andrew
Griffiths, Andrew	Khan, rh Sadiq	Morden, Jessica	Shah, Naz
Gummer, Ben	Kirby, Simon	Morgan, rh Nicky	Shapps, rh Grant
Gwynne, Andrew	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Morris, Anne Marie	Sharma, Alok
Gyimah, Mr Sam	Knight, Julian	Morris, David	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Haigh, Louise	Kwarteng, Kwasi	Morris, Grahame M.	Shelbrooke, Alec
Halfon, rh Robert	Kyle, Peter	Morris, James	Sherriff, Paula
Hall, Luke	Lammy, rh Mr David	Morton, Wendy	Shuker, Mr Gavin
Hamilton, Fabian	Lancaster, Mark	Mowat, David	Siddiq, Tulip
Hammond, rh Mr Philip	Latham, Pauline	Murray, Ian	Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Hammond, Stephen	Lavery, Ian	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Skidmore, Chris
Hancock, rh Matthew	Leadsom, Andrea	Murrison, Dr Andrew	Slaughter, Andy
Hands, rh Greg	Lee, Dr Phillip	Neill, Robert	Smeeth, Ruth
Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Lefroy, Jeremy	Newton, Sarah	Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Harper, rh Mr Mark	Leigh, Sir Edward	Nokes, Caroline	Smith, Angela
Harpham, Harry	Leslie, Charlotte	Norman, Jesse	Smith, Cat
Harrington, Richard	Leslie, Chris	Nuttall, Mr David	Smith, Chloe
Harris, Carolyn	Letwin, rh Mr Oliver	Offord, Dr Matthew	Smith, Henry
Harris, Rebecca	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Onn, Melanie	Smith, Jeff
Hart, Simon	Lewis, Brandon	Onwurah, Chi	Smith, Julian
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan	Lewis, Clive	Opperman, Guy	Smith, Nick
Hayes, Helen	Lewis, Mr Ivan	Osamor, Kate	Smith, Royston
Hayes, rh Mr John	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Osborne, rh Mr George	Smyth, Karin
Heald, Sir Oliver	Lidington, rh Mr David	Owen, Albert	Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Heapey, James	Lilley, rh Mr Peter	Paisley, Ian	Solloway, Amanda
Heaton-Harris, Chris	Long Bailey, Rebecca	Parish, Neil	Soubry, rh Anna
Heaton-Jones, Peter	Lord, Jonathan	Patel, rh Priti	Spellar, rh Mr John
Henderson, Gordon	Loughton, Tim	Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Hendrick, Mr Mark	Lucas, Ian C.	Pawsey, Mark	Spencer, Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen	Lumley, Karen	Pearce, Teresa	Starmer, Keir
Herbert, rh Nick	Lynch, Holly	Pennycook, Matthew	Stephenson, Andrew
Hillier, Meg	Mackinlay, Craig	Penrose, John	Stevens, Jo
Hinds, Damian	Mackintosh, David	Percy, Andrew	Stevenson, John
Hoare, Simon	Madders, Justin	Perkins, Toby	Stewart, Bob
Hodge, rh Margaret	Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Perry, Claire	Stewart, Iain
Hoey, Kate	Mahmood, Shabana	Phillips, Jess	Stewart, Rory
Hollingbery, George	Main, Mrs Anne	Phillips, Stephen	Streeter, Mr Gary
Hollinrake, Kevin	Mak, Alan	Phillipson, Bridget	Streeting, Wes
Hollobone, Mr Philip	Malhotra, Seema	Philp, Chris	Stride, Mel
Holloway, Mr Adam	Malthouse, Kit	Pickles, rh Sir Eric	Stuart, Ms Gisela
Hopkins, Kelvin	Mann, John	Pincher, Christopher	Stuart, Graham
Hopkins, Kris	Mann, Scott	Poulter, Dr Daniel	Sturdy, Julian
Howarth, Sir Gerald	Marris, Rob	Pound, Stephen	Sunak, Rishi
Howell, John	Marsden, Mr Gordon	Powell, Lucy	Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Howlett, Ben	Maskell, Rachael	Prentis, Victoria	Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Huddleston, Nigel	Matheson, Christian	Prisk, Mr Mark	Syms, Mr Robert
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	Mathias, Dr Tania	Pritchard, Mark	Tami, Mark
Hunt, Tristram	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Pursglove, Tom	Thomas, Derek
Huq, Dr Rupa	Maynard, Paul	Quin, Jeremy	Thomas, Mr Gareth
Hurd, Mr Nick	McCabe, Steve	Quince, Will	Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Irranca-Davies, Huw	McCarthy, Kerry	Qureshi, Yasmin	Thornberry, Emily
Jackson, Mr Stewart	McCartney, Karl	Raab, Mr Dominic	Throup, Maggie
James, Margot	McDonald, Andy	Rayner, Angela	Timms, rh Stephen
Jarvis, Dan	McFadden, rh Mr Pat	Redwood, rh John	Tolhurst, Kelly
Javid, rh Sajid	McGinn, Conor	Reed, Mr Jamie	Tomlinson, Justin
Jenkin, Mr Bernard	McGovern, Alison	Reed, Mr Steve	Tomlinson, Michael
Jenkyns, Andrea	McInnes, Liz	Rees, Christina	Tracey, Craig
Jenrick, Robert	McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob	Tredinnick, David
Johnson, rh Alan	McPartland, Stephen	Reynolds, Emma	Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Johnson, Diana	Meacher, rh Mr Michael	Reynolds, Jonathan	Trickett, Jon
Johnson, Gareth	Meale, Sir Alan	Rimmer, Marie	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, Valerie
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Watson, Mr Tom
 West, Catherine
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen

Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Phil
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wilson, Sammy
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wood, Mike
 Woodcock, John
 Wragg, William
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Stephen Barclay and
Mr David Evennett

Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Cox, Jo
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Mr David
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Piero, Gloria
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Docherty, Martin John
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Dugher, Michael
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Tom
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glass, Pat
 Giindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harpham, Harry
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hendrick, Mr Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodge, rh Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon

Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Hunt, Tristram
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Irranca-Davies, Huw
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Kyle, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCartney, Jason
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGarry, Natalie
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Meacher, rh Mr Michael
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert

Question accordingly negatived.

4.7 pm

More than four hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme Order, 9 June).

The Chair put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business necessary to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83D).

Amendment proposed: 1, in clause 2, page 1, line 17, at end insert

“and persons who would be so entitled except for the fact that they will be aged 16 or 17 on the date on which the referendum is to be held”.—(*Mr McFadden.*)

The amendment would entitle British citizens, qualifying Commonwealth citizens and citizens of the Republic of Ireland aged 16 and 17 to vote in the referendum.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 265, Noes 310.

Division No. 20]

[4.7 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allen, Mr Graham
 Anderson, Mr David
 Arkless, Richard
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barron, rh Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Ms Mhairi
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blomfield, Paul
 Boswell, Philip
 Bottomley, Sir Peter

Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Cherry, Joanna
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie

Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, Angus
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris

Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stuart, Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Susan Elan Jones and
Tom Blenkinsop

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Mr Henry
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bradley, Karen
 Brady, Mr Graham

Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, Alun
 Carmichael, Neil
 Carswell, Mr Douglas
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishty, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colville, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey

Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 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
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 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
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan

Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 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, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie

Morris, David	Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Morris, James	Spencer, Mark
Morton, Wendy	Stephenson, Andrew
Mowat, David	Stevenson, John
Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Stewart, Bob
Murrison, Dr Andrew	Stewart, Iain
Neill, Robert	Stewart, Rory
Nokes, Caroline	Streeter, Mr Gary
Norman, Jesse	Stride, Mel
Nuttall, Mr David	Stuart, Graham
Offord, Dr Matthew	Sturdy, Julian
Opperman, Guy	Sunak, Rishi
Osborne, rh Mr George	Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Parish, Neil	Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Patel, rh Priti	Syms, Mr Robert
Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Thomas, Derek
Pawsey, Mark	Throup, Maggie
Penrose, John	Tolhurst, Kelly
Percy, Andrew	Tomlinson, Justin
Perry, Claire	Tomlinson, Michael
Phillips, Stephen	Tracey, Craig
Philp, Chris	Tredinnick, David
Pickles, rh Sir Eric	Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Pincher, Christopher	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Poulter, Dr Daniel	Tugendhat, Tom
Pow, Rebecca	Turner, Mr Andrew
Prentis, Victoria	Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Prisk, Mr Mark	Vaizey, Mr Edward
Pritchard, Mark	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Pursglove, Tom	Vickers, Martin
Quin, Jeremy	Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Quince, Will	Walker, Mr Charles
Raab, Mr Dominic	Walker, Mr Robin
Redwood, rh John	Wallace, Mr Ben
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob	Warburton, David
Robertson, Mr Laurence	Warman, Matt
Robinson, Gavin	Watkinson, Dame Angela
Robinson, Mary	Wharton, James
Rosindell, Andrew	Whately, Helen
Rudd, rh Amber	Wheeler, Heather
Rutley, David	White, Chris
Sandbach, Antoinette	Whittaker, Craig
Scully, Paul	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Selous, Andrew	Wiggin, Bill
Shapps, rh Grant	Williams, Craig
Sharma, Alok	Williamson, rh Gavin
Shelbrooke, Alec	Wilson, Mr Rob
Simpson, rh Mr Keith	Wilson, Sammy
Skidmore, Chris	Wood, Mike
Smith, Chloe	Wragg, William
Smith, Henry	Wright, rh Jeremy
Smith, Julian	Zahawi, Nadhim
Smith, Royston	
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas	
Solloway, Amanda	
Soubry, rh Anna	

Tellers for the Noes:

Stephen Barclay and
Mr David Evennett

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4

CONDUCT REGULATIONS, ETC

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I beg to move amendment 48, in page 2, line 30, at end insert—

“(aa) the provision made under subsection (1)(a) shall include making arrangements to allow all those entitled to vote in the referendum to vote by electronic means.”

The amendment would provide for electronic voting in the referendum.

The Temporary Chair (Sir Roger Gale): With this it will be convenient to take the following:

Amendment 3, page 2, line 39, leave out subsection (2) and insert—

“(2) The referendum shall not be held on the same day as:

- (a) elections to the Scottish Parliament;
- (b) elections to the National Assembly for Wales;
- (c) elections for the Mayor of London; or
- (d) local authority elections”.

The amendment would prevent the referendum being held on the same day as Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales, London mayoral or local authority elections.

Amendment 7, page 2, line 39, leave out subsection (2) and insert—

“(2) The referendum shall not be held on the same day as elections, other than by-elections, that are scheduled to take place for:

- (a) the Scottish Parliament;
- (b) the National Assembly for Wales;
- (c) the Northern Ireland Assembly;
- (d) the Gibraltar Parliament;
- (e) Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales;
- (f) the London Assembly and Mayor of London; or
- (g) local authorities and mayors in the United Kingdom and Gibraltar.”

The purpose of the amendment is to ensure that the referendum is not held on the same day as other polls.

Clause 4 stand part.

Amendment 8, in clause 6, page 3, line 37, at end add—

“(5) Regulations made under this Act or the 2000 Act in respect of the referendum must be made and come into force not less than six months before the start of the referendum period.”

The purpose of the amendment is to ensure the legislative framework for the referendum is clear at least six months before it is required to be implemented or complied with.

Clause 6 stand part.

Clauses 7 to 11 stand part.

John McDonnell: Given the limited time available, I will be brief. I know that other hon. Members wish to speak on the other amendments. I just want to warn the Committee that on subsequent occasions I will bore Members by going on about electronic voting as often as I can. We have been waging a campaign for 15 years to see whether we can update our electoral methods and bring them into the 21st century. For brevity's sake, I will circulate the notes prepared by the Library for those Members who are interested. I want to thank Isobel White, the researcher, for preparing the notes, which go through the history of electronic voting, including the various pilots that we have undertaken since 2000.

We started the adventure way back in 2000, when we established the first pilots, and we had more in 2002, 2003, 2006 and 2007. At each stage we had reports back on the enhancements that electronic voting would bring to our procedures. The background to the attempt to introduce electronic voting is the declining turnout in elections, although the key issue is whether the subject of an election excites the general public, such as in the Scottish referendum. If people feel the issue is important enough, they will turn out and vote, but unfortunately

they do not have the same incentive in some elections. Part of the issue, therefore, is ensuring that voting is as easy as it can be, and we have been piloting electronic voting for a long time.

The Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy has explored the issue in the last two years and made several recommendations. The remaining issue to be confronted is the security of online voting, but I do not believe it to be an insuperable problem. The reason for raising the issue in the debate on the Bill—as I will for every other Bill that we consider, including the trade union Bill we are expecting—is to ensure that we force the Government to resolve the issue of security, which seems to be the only thing holding this back.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): This is possibly the first time in 18 years that I have had a slight disagreement with one of my hon. Friends, but my hon. Friend suggests that changing the way we vote will increase turnout. We introduced postal ballots for that reason and we have still seen a big decline in turnout. People do not vote if they see less difference between the parties: if there is a real difference and they have a real choice, they turn out to vote.

John McDonnell: Thank goodness, we are not disagreeing. That is the point that I tried to make earlier, but in a more complicated fashion. The issue about turnout is how people are incentivised to vote, but the minimum we can do is increase the access to voting procedures. We have done that through postal voting, as my hon. Friend says, and we have just introduced electronic registration, to assist in the registration process. It was argued that once we had introduced electronic registration we would revisit online voting, but unfortunately that is not the case in this legislation. I hope that the tabling of the amendment will make the Government go back to the Electoral Commission and ask it to make detailed proposals. Even if we have to pilot electronic voting in some areas in this referendum, we may be able to overcome some of the problems that have been identified.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): Not for the first time, the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) speaks good sense, but I fear that the hon. Gentleman has neglected to answer his point, which is that since the advent of postal votes on demand, there has been no demonstrable increase in voter turnout. Indeed, voter turnout since 1997 generally has gone down. Will he address that point?

John McDonnell: There was a slight increase at the last general election. The hon. Gentleman is right, because I can remember turnouts at around 77%. In some areas we went down to 56%, but this time round we went from 60% up to about 65%, so there was a slight increase—a significant increase in some areas—from the introduction of postal voting. If he looks, he will see that where the pilots that were undertaken throughout the 2000s were implemented effectively, turnout was increased significantly. I recommend examination and exploration of the Shrewsbury pilot, which took place in 2005.

I will not delay the Committee any further, but I refer Members not just to the findings of the Electoral Commission, but to the statement by Jenny Watson, chair of the Electoral Commission, that it would return

to this issue as its main feature of work in the coming period and report in due course. Again, the Electoral Commission's argument is simply about bringing our electoral system into line with practices in the rest of society, which is now largely online, and facilitating democracy by the use of online voting in that way. I also refer Members to the executive summary of the report undertaken by WebRoots Democracy—I will circulate it rather than delay the debate—which identifies the ability of online voting not only to increase turnout, but to reduce the cost of balloting procedures.

I raise this issue briefly on an amendment because it is something we need to return to rather than neglect; it has been neglected over the last few years. It is something that many Members will want to explore in a way that facilitates the improvement of democratic processes in our society, but I also give this warning: I will be raising this matter time and again. I mentioned the trade union Bill. We will be tabling amendments to such Bills to ensure that we establish the principle that this House will facilitate access to democracy on every occasion we can. Electronic voting is one mechanism through which we can enhance our society's democratic processes.

Mr McFadden: I would like to talk to amendment 3, which stands in my name and those of my right hon. Friends. On Tuesday, the Committee agreed amendment 55, which ruled out the possibility of holding the referendum in May next year, when there are other important elections taking place throughout the country. However, amendment 55 did not deal with the potential for a poll held in May 2017 to clash with local elections, which are scheduled in both England and Scotland, and the mayoral elections taking place in some places. Our amendment 3 deals with that, because it would rule out holding the referendum on the same day as local elections, as well as the other elections that are listed in the amendment.

There are two separate reasons why we believe the referendum should be held on a separate day. The first is that a referendum on such a large constitutional issue deserves its own campaign and its own moment of decision. The focus in a competitive election when parties are battling to control a local council or another elected body is different from that in an election on a yes/no constitutional question of this kind. The focus in a local election battle should be on who will run the body that is up for election. In a referendum, the focus is different. Views on the European referendum will cross party lines.

Mr Jackson: I am listening carefully to the right hon. Gentleman, but can he confirm that Her Majesty's Opposition opposed holding the AV referendum in May 2011 on the same day as local authority elections, but that to a certain extent that referendum drove up turnout for those elections, to 42%?

Mr McFadden: If the hon. Gentleman is seriously holding up the AV referendum in 2011 as a model of democratic engagement, I am afraid that, based on my experience, I beg to differ. I really do not think that is a model we should follow.

Andrew Gwynne: In 2017, we will have the inaugural elections for the metro mayor for Greater Manchester. That in itself will pose a challenge for those of us who

[Andrew Gwynne]

are politicians in the city region, because it is a new post and we will have a duty to explain what it will be. Is that not another reason why we do not need this added complexity?

Mr McFadden: My hon. Friend makes a good argument. That is an important election and, as I say, the focus will be on who should be that mayor. There will be different candidates standing, and it is a different question from whether or not we remain members of the European Union.

4.30 pm

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. As part of the complexity of the situation relating to the election, is he aware that elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly will take place on the same day as elections to the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales on 5 May 2016? I note that that is not included in the Labour amendment.

Mr McFadden: I take the hon. Lady's point, but the issue of May 2016 has already been dealt with through amendment 55, and I am focused on May 2017, when local elections are taking place in various parts of the country.

Kelvin Hopkins: I strongly agree with my right hon. Friend that, when we are voting on whether to leave or stay in the European Union, it should not be confused or blurred with party allegiances and so forth; there should be a clear understanding that on that day we are voting on our membership of the European Union and nothing else. No other elections should be held on that day; we want a unique day for that vote.

Mr McFadden: On European matters, it is not always the case that I am in agreement with my hon. Friend, but this time on this point, I am. I entirely agree with his point.

The first reason, then, is that on such a major constitutional question about the country's future, the focus should be entirely on that question, but there is a second reason why on this occasion it makes sense to separate this poll from other polls, which relates to the discussions we have had about purdah arrangements. Without re-running Tuesday's debate, the Government's argument is that there needs to be some qualification of the purdah arrangements that would normally apply. The jury is still out on what the eventual outcome of that argument will be, but we know from Tuesday that the Bill will be amended in one way or another on Report.

However, purdah arrangements also apply to a local election period, so combining the referendum with other elections could mean we had full purdah in place for some things and qualified purdah or no purdah in place for others. In such circumstances, what exactly would the role of Ministers and the civil service be? We could have one set of rules for one poll taking place on that day, and another set of rules for another poll taking place on the same day. We do not need to think long and hard to realise that that is not an ideal arrangement for clarity on the conduct of the poll.

Our point is that the Bill deals with a big constitutional issue, which deserves to be considered by the public on its own merits, not tacked on as an add-on to local elections in various parts of the country. For those reasons, we feel that there is unfinished business from Tuesday. Amendment 55 was not the end of the matter, and our amendment 3 would, if passed, make it clear that this has to be a stand-alone poll and not one combined with other elections—either next May or in May 2017. To conclude, if given an opportunity to do so this afternoon, we intend to press the amendment to the vote.

Peter Grant: Briefly, we intend to support amendment 3. As the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) said, only part of the problem was addressed earlier, and a major problem remains if the referendum is held on the date of other elections.

First, on a point of principle, if this is truly—certainly for voters in England—the most important democratic constitutional decision taken for 40 or more years, it is surely worth a day of its own rather than being tacked on to something else. A second, practical point is that some of the elections that are listed—the Scottish local government elections, for example—are run according to a completely different electoral system. Last time the local government elections took place on the same day as a straightforward first-past-the-post election, there were well over 100,000 spoilt ballot papers, because those who were voting in the local government elections did not understand how to vote in a different way. The one thing that we do not want is doubt about the result of the EU referendum caused by a lot of spoilt papers.

I am surprised that we are having to debate the impartiality of broadcasters. Members should be aware that there is a widespread perception in Scotland—I will not comment on whether I share it—that some broadcasters were not impartial during the Scottish referendum. I do not think that that tainted the validity of the result, but it has tainted the reputation of those broadcasters, and it may be a generation before it has been sufficiently restored. We need to send the broadcasters a message, whether through legislation or by some other means. We need to convey to them that this referendum has to be fair, which means that the broadcasters must be impartial and seen to be impartial, not only during the purdah but from today. Otherwise, the impression will be given that the referendum was not fair.

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): I shall deal first with the arguments about combination advanced by the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden). I shall then respond to what the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) said about electronic voting. If time permits, I shall also say something about clause 3 stand part and conduct rules.

Let me begin with combination. As the right hon. Gentleman said, we settled the issue of May 2016 on Tuesday, by means of amendment 55. In practice, what we are discussing today is whether we should also rule out any possibility of May 2017. I am not yet persuaded that the arguments are sufficiently compelling. The principle ought to be that the timing of a referendum concerning our future in or out of the European Union should be determined by the progress of negotiations at EU level. I suspect that once those negotiations have

concluded and the Prime Minister is ready with his recommendation, there will be a pretty strong appetite in all parts of the House of Commons—and, I think, an even stronger one among British voters and, indeed, our partners in the European Union—for the issue to be brought to a head and settled as soon as possible, in so far as that is compatible with a campaigning period that is seen to be fair and that allows all the arguments to be set out clearly so that people can make a well-informed and deliberate choice.

Ultimately, it will be for Parliament itself to decide whether to approve the specific date that the Government propose. The Bill includes an order-making power for the Secretary of State to set down the referendum date, and that date must be approved through a statutory instrument, which must be tabled in accordance with the affirmative procedure. I can give an undertaking that the debate, whenever it comes, will take place on the Floor of the House. It will be for the House of Commons as a whole—and, separately, the House of Lords—to decide whether, in all the circumstances of the time, to agree to the date that the Government have proposed. Given the reservations that have been expressed about a hypothetical combination with local elections in May 2017, the Government will need to make a persuasive case at that time.

The right hon. Gentleman advanced his argument with his characteristic courtesy and in a constructive tone, so I shall try to respond in kind. I think that he underestimates the British public: I think that voters will be able to distinguish between the different outcomes that they want.

Mr Jackson: I have not always been too helpful to my right hon. Friend this week, but I hope to be helpful now. He will have noted that the Opposition spokesman did not address my point that there was a constitutionally significant vote in May 2011—whether or not he agreed with its taking place in the first place—and, at the same time, very important local elections. One did not invalidate the other. Also, in terms of *purdah*, voters were clear about the issues they were deciding on at the time. He did not address that issue in his remarks.

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend is quite right. The precedent, from 2011, is that the British public were able to make that distinction perfectly reasonably in their own minds.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): If the Government have accepted the principle that there should be no clash with elections for the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2016, why do they not go a step further, accept the amendment and rule out a referendum in 2017 at the same time as local authority elections?

Mr Lidington: Partly for the reasons that I have given, and also because I think there is a qualitative difference, which we acknowledged when we introduced amendment 55, between elections held for a constituent nation of the United Kingdom and elections held for local government. We accepted that distinction in the amendment we introduced earlier this week.

If we look at the number of occasions when local elections and general elections have been held on exactly the same day, we find plenty of examples where the public have indulged happily in ticket splitting, sending a Member to this House representing one political party and electing a different political party to run their local authority. The public are able to make that distinction perfectly well.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): The Minister and I have discussed this issue before, but I want to place on the record that my constituents, across Winchester and Chandler's Ford, are quite capable of distinguishing between two elections. When they have one piece of paper for a parish election, for a district election or even for a county election, as well as a parliamentary election on the same day, they seem to manage it.

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend puts it very well.

Andrew Gwynne: May I take the Minister back to his earlier answer to the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) and point out politely that the population of Greater Manchester is greater than that of Northern Ireland and almost as large as that of Wales? We are going to have an inaugural election for a metro mayor, which is a creation of his own Government. Do we not deserve to have that argument separately from the EU referendum?

Mr Lidington: I take the hon. Gentleman back again to 2011, when we had the London mayoral election on the same day as the referendum on the voting system for the House of Commons. That did not appear to cause the electorate any great problems.

The other question that the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East put to me was about the difficulty of operating different regimes for *purdah* during overlapping electoral and referendum periods. To some extent, the riposte to that came from my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson), but given that the Government have this week undertaken to consult all parties on the appropriate framework for *purdah* in the run-up to the EU referendum, I am happy to take on board the right hon. Gentleman's points as part of that consideration and future discussion.

There are some technical flaws in the Opposition's amendment. There is, for example, no carve-out regarding by-elections, so an unanticipated by-election could inadvertently result in an agreed referendum date becoming invalid at short notice. Nor does it capture police and crime commissioner elections, which, if the amendment were agreed to, would still be possible on the same day as the referendum. Even if the right hon. Gentleman had his way, there would need to be some tidying up at a later date.

Kelvin Hopkins *rose*—

Mike Gapes *rose*—

Mr Lidington: I am overwhelmed by Members' enthusiasm.

Kelvin Hopkins: The Minister implies there is more to be discussed and there has been too short a time to have a proper debate about the issue. It should be returned to on Report and, possibly, in another place before the final Bill is approved.

Mr Lidington: As I said earlier, whatever the decision in this House during our progress on the Bill, the House will discuss the timing of the referendum again when the Government table a statutory instrument to designate a date for that.

4.45 pm

Mike Gapes: Have the Government considered the fact that if there is a referendum on the same day as local elections, in some wards one candidate for a party will be campaigning for a yes vote and another from the same party will be campaigning for a no vote? That might make it difficult for the political parties to co-ordinate their literature, apart from anything else, if they are going to take a united position.

Mr Lidington: One thing about the European referendum campaign, which I think the public will expect, is that people from both the hon. Gentleman's party and mine will be campaigning in both the yes and no camps. Both parties are broad churches and we accept that that is a reality. I do not think the British public are incapable of understanding that the European question is one that cuts across normal party political boundaries.

I wish to move on to deal with the amendment on electronic voting tabled by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell). I do not want to cause him too great a shock in saying that I am not wholly unsympathetic to some of the points he makes. I have been to Estonia and talked to Estonian Ministers about what they have put in place, not only on electronic voting, but in delivering almost all interaction between citizen and government through digital means. Given current advances in IT, I can see how e-voting sounds attractive, but we would have to consider a number of issues carefully and thoroughly before this country committed itself to going down that path.

Most obviously, there are genuine concerns that e-voting is not sufficiently rigorous and could be vulnerable to attack or fraud. The last thing that would serve the interests of Parliament or of democracy in this country would be for us to move swiftly to a system of electronic voting that led to still greater public mistrust in the integrity of our democratic process. Particularly when selecting elected representatives or deciding an issue of national importance in a referendum, it is essential that we have the highest possible security, and I am not convinced that we have the requisite assurance yet. Even in the short exchanges that have taken place on this subject, different views have been expressed about whether or not the pilots in the past have led to a serious increase in turnout. That is another point to be borne in mind.

John McDonnell: Even the Conservative elements of the campaign group have been a problem, too. May I suggest something to the Minister? This referendum will be in two years' time, the Electoral Commission is focusing its work this year on electronic voting and we will have elections before then. Can we look again at reviving some of the pilots, at least for next year's local government elections, so that we can learn the lessons and overcome the security issue, which he rightly mentions? Things have moved on from the last pilots and we need a new pilot to give us the confidence that we can then use e-voting more extensively in referendums.

Mr Lidington: I am sure my colleagues in the Cabinet Office, who lead on constitutional matters, will have heard that point. E-voting may be something that the Government will want to consider in the future, but it is not a priority immediately for the legislation to authorise the arrangements for this referendum.

I want to say a few things about the conduct rules more generally. Clause 4 provides that Ministers may make provision about the conduct of the referendum in regulations. The provisions in clause 3 and schedule 3 already set out the key aspects of the conduct of the referendum, and broadly they are concerned with the overall framework. In addition to those general provisions, it will be necessary to set out more detailed rules for conduct. Clause 4 grants Ministers the power to do so by regulation.

Our intention will be to draw on the rules used for the conduct of the parliamentary voting system referendum in 2011 and those used for elections more generally, in particular for our parliamentary elections. We will also take account of recent changes to electoral law to ensure that they also apply for the purposes of this referendum. The clause also requires that Ministers consult the Electoral Commission before making any regulations on these issues.

Kelvin Hopkins: The Minister will know that there have been serious concerns in the European Scrutiny Committee, the Chair of which is in the Chamber at the moment, but there is not the time at this stage to discuss bias in the media on European Union matters. Will there be a time on Report for a more thorough discussion of this, because there are some serious concerns? As he will know, the chair of the BBC Trust and the director-general of the BBC have both been before the European Scrutiny Committee to discuss the matter.

Mr Lidington: Obviously, what we discuss on Report will be in the hands of Members who table amendments. I have known my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) for many years, and I know that he is ingenious and creative in finding opportunities for parliamentary debate on subjects that are close to his heart.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): With great respect, may I be ingenious for one moment, as I wish to put amendment 8 on the record? The amendment is supported by the Electoral Commission. Given the time that is available, I just want to say that the Electoral Commission supports the proposal, which is that the detailed regulations required to administer and regulate the referendum

"must be made and come into force not less than six months before the start of the referendum period."

We do not propose pressing the amendment to a vote, but we would like to return to it on Report. I know that the Minister understands it, and that the Electoral Commission supports it.

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend's amendment proposes that the legislation be put in place at least six months before it is required to be implemented or complied with by campaigners or administrators. Although it is not necessary or appropriate in this specific case to set

an arbitrary timeframe in statute, I can offer him some reassurance on the point. The reason for the Electoral Commission's recommendation, to which he alluded, is that it is important to ensure that the people who are responsible for organising and administering a referendum and the people who will be responsible for accounting for expenditure on behalf of campaign organisations are clear about the rules that apply. To some extent, as I said a few minutes ago, the general framework of those rules is set out in the body of the Bill. The more detailed rules on conduct will be provided for by regulations that the Government will have the power, under the Bill, to table.

I can assure the Committee that it is the Government's intention to publish the conduct regulations this autumn. That will mean, especially given the decision that the Committee took on Tuesday not to combine the referendum with the devolved local elections in May 2016, that there should be plenty of time for the Electoral Commission, and returning and counting officers and campaigners to familiarise themselves with the detail of the rules under which the referendum will be conducted. We would expect those detailed rules to cover such matters as the referendum timetable and the key stages within that; the provision of polling stations; the appointment of polling and counting agents; the procedure for the issue of ballot papers and for voting at polling stations; the arrangements for the counting of votes and declaration of results; the disposal of ballot papers and other referendum documents; arrangements for absent voters and postal and proxy votes and so on.

There will be a great deal of information, which it is our intention to have publicly available for everybody to see in the autumn of this year, well ahead of the referendum date. I hope that on that basis my hon. Friend the Member for Stone and others who have signed his amendment will be reassured that the Government are fully committed to our declared intention of ensuring that the referendum is conducted in a way that is not only fair but that is seen to be and is accepted as fair by everybody who takes part on both sides.

John McDonnell: I am not convinced that the Government are taking the matter of electronic voting seriously, but I welcome the warm words from the Minister that there could be some movement in the future. Although we might not be able to achieve it for this referendum, I hope that we can encourage the Electoral Commission to undertake pilots again next year that might resolve some of the issues with security. On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment proposed: 3, in clause 4, page 2, line 39, leave out subsection (2) and insert—

(2) The referendum shall not be held on the same day as:

- (a) elections to the Scottish Parliament;
- (b) elections to the National Assembly for Wales;
- (c) elections for the Mayor of London; or
- (d) local authority elections". —(*Mr McFadden.*)

The amendment would prevent the referendum being held on the same day as Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales, London mayoral or local authority elections.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 267, Noes 308.

Division No. 21]

[4.56 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Debbonaire, Thangam
Abrahams, Debbie	Docherty, Martin John
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Alexander, Heidi	Doughty, Stephen
Ali, Rushanara	Dowd, Jim
Allen, Mr Graham	Dowd, Peter
Anderson, Mr David	Dromey, Jack
Arkless, Richard	Dugher, Michael
Ashworth, Jonathan	Durkan, Mark
Austin, Ian	Eagle, Maria
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Edwards, Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah	Efford, Clive
Barron, rh Kevin	Esterson, Bill
Beckett, rh Margaret	Evans, Chris
Benn, rh Hilary	Farrelly, Paul
Betts, Mr Clive	Fellows, Marion
Black, Ms Mhairi	Ferrier, Margaret
Blackman, Kirsty	Field, rh Frank
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Blomfield, Paul	Fiello, Robert
Boswell, Philip	Fletcher, Colleen
Brake, rh Tom	Flint, rh Caroline
Brennan, Kevin	Flynn, Paul
Brock, Deidre	Fovargue, Yvonne
Brown, Alan	Foxcroft, Vicky
Brown, Lyn	Gapes, Mike
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Gardiner, Barry
Bryant, Chris	Gethins, Stephen
Buck, Ms Karen	Gibson, Patricia
Burden, Richard	Glass, Pat
Burgon, Richard	Glindon, Mary
Butler, Dawn	Godsiff, Mr Roger
Byrne, rh Liam	Grady, Patrick
Cadbury, Ruth	Grant, Peter
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Gray, Neil
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Green, Kate
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Greenwood, Lilian
Carswell, Mr Douglas	Greenwood, Margaret
Champion, Sarah	Griffith, Nia
Chapman, Douglas	Gwynne, Andrew
Chapman, Jenny	Haigh, Louise
Cherry, Joanna	Hamilton, Fabian
Coaker, Vernon	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Coffey, Ann	Harpham, Harry
Cooper, Julie	Harris, Carolyn
Cooper, Rosie	Hayes, Helen
Cooper, rh Yvette	Hayman, Sue
Cowan, Ronnie	Hendrick, Mr Mark
Cox, Jo	Hendry, Drew
Coyle, Neil	Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Crausby, Mr David	Hillier, Meg
Crawley, Angela	Hodge, rh Margaret
Creagh, Mary	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Creasy, Stella	Hoey, Kate
Cruddas, Jon	Hopkins, Kelvin
Cryer, John	Hosie, Stewart
Cummins, Judith	Hunt, Tristram
Cunningham, Alex	Huq, Dr Rupa
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Hussain, Imran
Dakin, Nic	Irranca-Davies, Huw
Danczuk, Simon	Jarvis, Dan
David, Wayne	Johnson, rh Alan
Davies, Geraint	Johnson, Diana
Davies, Philip	Jones, Gerald
Day, Martyn	Jones, Graham
De Piero, Gloria	

Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Kyle, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs
 Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Mr Angus
 Brendan
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGarry, Natalie
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Meacher, rh Mr Michael
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela

Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, Angus
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr
 John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stuart, Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds,
 Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Susan Elan Jones and
 Tom Blenkinsop

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Mr Henry
 Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, Karen
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, Alun
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Colville, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 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
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matthew
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Hald, Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald

Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy

Osborne, rh Mr George
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin

Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John

Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Stephen Barclay and
Mr David Evennett

Question accordingly negatived.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): On a point of order, Mrs Laing. For the third time this week the House has taken a position in votes that will be recorded in *Hansard* and in the official record of the House. Unfortunately shortly after those votes have been taken certain SNP MPs have tweeted out completely the contrary to the result of the votes. That happened on the Scotland Bill on Monday, the European Union Referendum Bill on Tuesday and again this evening. Can you rule on whether that is bringing the House into disrepute and how we stop that happening?

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mrs Eleanor Laing): I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, and he has done well to draw it to the attention of the House and, no doubt, further afield, but he will appreciate that it is not a matter on which I can rule from the Chair at present. One would hope that a reasoned report of what happens in this Chamber will be disseminated widely throughout the country by many means of communication, not just on social media, and that people will always choose which report they wish to believe.

5.10 pm

Proceedings interrupted (Programme Order, 9 June).

The Chair put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83D).

Clause 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 6 to 11 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair.

Bill, as amended reported, (Standing Order No. 83D(6)).

Bill to be considered tomorrow.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek the advice of the Chair on a matter that has come to my attention concerning the business that has been announced for next Tuesday: consideration of the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill: Instruction (No. 3). As I understand it, that will extend to the Select Committee the power to consider amendments to accommodate the requirements of landowners and occupiers in my constituency, particularly in Little Missenden, the Lee and Great Missenden.

Further, there will be consideration of the amendment to accommodate changes to the design of the works authorised by the Bill in Great Missenden and Little Missenden. The Select Committee scrutinising the hybrid

[Mrs Cheryl Gillan]

Bill is visiting my constituency on Monday morning at 9.15 to look at the effects of HS2 on an area of outstanding natural beauty. However, I understand that the Government are not planning to publish the additional provisions that would give this House, the Committee and my constituents the information on what additional provisions HS2 Ltd and the Department for Transport will make for the Committee's consideration.

Perhaps you could advise me, Madam Deputy Speaker, on whether that is the correct procedure for this House, because it seems to me that my constituents and this House should know about those additional provisions prior to the Committee's visit, and prior to the business before the House next Tuesday. As I understand it, those additional provisions might not be available until the second week in July. Could the Speaker's Office and the Chair assist me in any way on that procedure?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): The right hon. Lady raises a matter of some concern. If the procedure under which the House is scrutinising that important Bill has not been properly followed, it is indeed a matter of concern. I am quite certain that Mr Speaker will wish to have the procedural elements of the right hon. Lady's concerns investigated, so I will ensure that such an investigation is undertaken. She has eloquently made clear to the House her concerns, and I am quite sure that those on the Treasury Bench will have taken note of what she has said and that her concerns will be conveyed to the relevant Ministers. If there has been a procedural oversight, one would hope that it will be put right in time.

Mrs Gillan: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am grateful to you for undertaking to investigate the procedure. Would it also be possible for the Chair to investigate whether those details could be made available to the Committee, to me and to my constituents prior to the visit at 9.15 on Monday morning?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the right hon. Lady for that further point. I am quite sure, in undertaking an investigation, that if matters can be put right, they will be. I am quite sure that if they are not put right, the right hon. Lady will inform the House of it next week. We all look forward to seeing progress on the matter.

Recruitment and Retention of Teachers

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Charlie Elphicke.)

5.15 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I thank Mr Speaker for granting this Adjournment debate on a critical issue that is of real and growing concern to my constituents and to people across the country, namely whether we are doing enough to recruit, train and retain the teachers who will inspire the next generation to learn and create things that our parents could not even have imagined. During this short debate, I will set out the background, touch on why the problem is of understandable concern to schools and the teaching profession, and suggest a couple of positive ways forward, which would carry the support of the profession, including head teachers, staff and their trade unions.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House will be aware that figures have demonstrated for some time that there is a problem with teacher recruitment and retention. Only today, Sir Michael Wilshaw said that the main challenge facing the education system was encouraging people to enter it. He said that one of the solutions was raising the status of teachers, and I could not agree more. I will come back to that point shortly. The Association of School and College Leaders has gone further, describing the crisis in recruitment and retention as a "perfect storm" and attributing the significant decline in postgraduate teacher training and the pool of graduates to the hike in tuition fees.

The impact is being felt in my constituency. One of my first meetings as a newly elected MP was with the head teacher of Newfield secondary school, when I was shocked to learn that after placing a national advert for a science teacher, the school had not received a single application. That matters to the pupils of Newfield, because despite the fact that it is an improving school with dedicated and brilliant staff, it took several rounds of recruitment to fill a teaching position. In a subject as important as science—part of the core subject group of science, technology, engineering and maths, which are so vital to our future—pupils in my constituency should not miss out on the continuity of teaching that is essential to success.

The problem is not peculiar to Sheffield. Vacancies in teaching have doubled during the past year, and a survey for schools weekly found that for the upcoming school year, only 83% of secondary places have been filled. Delve deeper and we find an even more troubling pattern. In the subjects that are vital to the jobs of the future—science, technology, engineering and maths, where we need more than 1 million in training just to keep up with demand—the pool of teachers is chronically undersubscribed. Figures taken from the initial teacher training census in physics and maths reveal a 33% undersubscription. For design and technology, the figure rises to a shocking 56%. One of the leading thinkers in the field, Professor John Howson, has said that the Department for Education "almost certainly" will not meet the recruitment target needed to fill places. Such targets are now being missed year in, year out.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware that the much vaunted School Direct programme has failed to recruit sufficient numbers of teachers in every single year since its introduction in 2011?

Louise Haigh: My hon. Friend makes a really important point. Government reforms have done little to help in that regard. The Government's push towards recruiting teachers via School Direct has created a confused and fragmented system, with schools across the country reporting that they are struggling to access the School Direct programme. That will only get worse in the upcoming school year, as 17,000 places formerly allocated to university departments are transferred to School Direct. Since its creation by the former Secretary of State for Education, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), the School Direct programme has under-recruited every single year.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware that figures produced by TeachVac show that teacher recruitment is more difficult in this year than it has been at any time for a decade? With something like 800,000 children coming into the system over the next decade or so, a national strategy will be needed to solve this important problem.

Louise Haigh: My hon. Friend raises an important point, which is further evidence of more failed ideological experiments from the Tories.

Justin Madders: My hon. Friend has highlighted some disturbing issues. Has she managed to obtain from the Minister any details on the current performance of the School Direct programme?

Louise Haigh: The Government have provided figures on the failings of the Teach First programme, which have revealed that we are losing more recruits from Teach First than we are gaining every year. The Government's management of the Teach First programme has produced very poor results. Even among Teach First ambassadors, over a third left teaching after two years and nearly half after five years. We are now losing more Teach First graduates from secondary education every year than are joining. The Government's intention to expand recruitment makes little sense if it leads to an ever-higher turnover.

The problem is not that teachers are failing the system but that the system is failing them. These results are no reflection on their commitment to education but must surely be a reflection of their experience of teaching under this Government. How can we possibly hope to rebalance our economy away from its over-reliance on the City of London and the banking sector and towards manufacturing, high-tech industry, IT and engineering if we cannot even find the teachers to teach maths and science?

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a serious problem in parts of London, in particular? In my constituency, house prices average £606,000. That means that even if a teacher can be recruited, keeping them is a real challenge.

Louise Haigh: My hon. Friend anticipates my next point.

The problem does not start and end with encouraging people to become teachers in the first place. Retaining experienced teachers is better for schools, better for pupils, and of course better financially as it is so much cheaper than recruitment and training.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): One of the reasons people are leaving the profession is work-related stress—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I appreciate that hon. Members are new to the House, but the hon. Lady must address the Chair. You cannot turn your back on the Chair; you are not addressing the hon. Lady.

Rachael Maskell: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Does my hon. Friend recognise that people are leaving the profession due to the high levels of work-related stress? We know that 83% of teachers are experiencing work-related stress and 67% are experiencing mental and physical health problems due to excessive workloads, the target-driven culture, and over-burdening inspection regimes.

Louise Haigh: My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point.

The OECD workload diary survey found teachers working a staggering 50 hours per week compared with the average of 38.3 hours across the countries surveyed. It is becoming harder and harder to keep hold of qualified and experienced teachers. Frankly, that is no surprise. Demoralised, overworked and undervalued by a Government who treat the profession as a political football and a group to be taken on and beaten, its dedicated members are doing their best in extremely challenging circumstances.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): Teacher workload is often cited as a major reason for the increased problems with teacher retention. Forty-four per cent. of teachers in the Department for Education teachers workload survey said that their time spent on doing unnecessary and bureaucratic tasks has increased under the Conservative Government. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should investigate what those unnecessary tasks are and what can be done to relieve teachers of them?

Louise Haigh: I could not agree more.

The irony is that the Government's criticism of teachers comes at a time when teachers are working harder than ever before. It is a scandal that the teaching workload is growing out of control and that, even as they work harder than ever, teachers remain so undervalued. The Government must know that this is happening. Their own figures tell the story of the teacher retention crisis. In the 12 months up to 2013, 50,000 qualified teachers left the state sector, equivalent to one in 12 of the entire profession, and the highest rate for over a decade. Furthermore, 100,000 teachers never even taught despite finishing their training.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): I used to be a teacher and I have trained teachers. In my view, the problem is that it is no longer fun, and that teaching, which used to be a wonderful career, is now drudgery. Will my hon. Friend ask the Minister to make teaching more fun, both for the pupil and for the teacher?

Louise Haigh: Absolutely. That is why we are losing so many teachers every single year.

[Louise Haigh]

The total wastage rate, or loss of teachers, from the sector is now at over 10%—the highest for over a decade. To make matters worse, the number of teachers taking early retirement has risen to levels not seen since the Conservatives were last in power nearly two decades ago. Is not the Minister concerned that his own Government's policies have caused a crisis in teaching numbers, the consequences of which will be felt by parents and pupils nationwide?

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware of figures from the Government's workload challenge which show that the politicisation of Ofsted, and the pressure that teachers are brought under as a result, is one of the most commonly stated reasons for increased workload?

Louise Haigh: I could not agree more. The politicised inspection regime is clearly a major issue, and it is cited by teachers when leaving the profession.

Without working with the teaching profession, including their representatives in the teaching unions, to try to bridge some of the animosity of the past five years, it will be next to impossible to solve the crisis in teaching recruitment and retention. The morale of teachers will continue to decline and they will continue to look for ways out of a profession that feels increasingly undervalued, even as the pressures of work continue to grow.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend also consider the effect that the cost of living crisis is having on teachers? The combination of the high cost of rent and all sorts of other things, as well as the pressures on their time, mean that some see no way of being able to support a family in the future, while others are unable to spend time with their families due to their excessive workload. Either way, the family lives of teachers are suffering.

Louise Haigh: As pay and conditions continue to decrease as the system fragments, the situation will only continue to get worse. Indeed, the profession is now so unattractive that for every 1% the economy grows, applications fall by 5%.

There is, of course, a financial as well as a human cost to this crisis. The past five years have seen a massive increase in the number and cost of agencies supplying teachers to schools, some of which charge up to £1,000 per week per teacher. As much as half of that money goes to the agency and not to the teacher. A survey for the National Union of Teachers found that almost eight in 10 supply teachers found work through such agencies, and only 6.9% were paid according to national pay rates.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the proposals on regional pay for public sector workers would kill recruitment and retention in areas further away from London such as west Cumberland?

Louise Haigh: Absolutely. Increasingly, teachers and supply teachers are being exploited, both by agencies and by certain schools.

It is clear from all the points that have been raised that there is a recruitment crisis as a result of fragmented and confusing pathways into teaching, and a retention crisis caused by a complete collapse in morale. The cost of those crises is being felt in the education budget, through the use of extortionate agencies.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend accept that in places such as Bradford, where many schools are already full or oversubscribed, it is even more difficult to retain teachers, particularly in the light of the school places crisis?

Louise Haigh: Absolutely. The lack of school places is clearly yet another factor in the issue.

This leaves the Minister with a number of questions to answer. First, will he review the use of supply agencies, particularly in the light of the fact that spending on supply is 5% of the education budget? In the US, where supply teachers are employed directly by school districts, the figure is less than 1%.

Secondly, given the declining pool of teaching graduates, will the Minister consider writing off the annual repayment of student loans to act as an incentive to teach in key subjects?

Thirdly, will the Government bring forward the workload survey planned for spring 2016, given that workload has clearly been identified as one of the key causes of teachers leaving the profession?

Finally, what are the Government doing to ensure that science, technology, engineering and maths, which are so chronically under-subscribed, will be filled in time for the new school year?

I hope the Minister will agree that, in order to tackle the crisis in teacher recruitment and retention, we must act to encourage graduates and make it easier for would-be teachers to enter the teaching profession, and do much more to value those already there. The next generation of our constituents deserve nothing less.

5.27 pm

The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb): May I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) on securing this Adjournment debate and on attracting so many colleagues to it? I also congratulate her on her maiden speech earlier this month. Her commitment to promoting social justice and greater opportunities for young people is shared by the Government, and her passion for her constituency of Sheffield, Heeley has been very clear in her earlier speeches.

The single most important factor in determining how well a pupil achieves at school is the quality of the teaching they receive. An analysis by Slater, Davies and Burgess in 2009 showed that being taught by a high-quality teacher rather than a less able teacher adds 0.425 of a GCSE point per subject to a pupil. In September 2011, the Sutton Trust found that the difference between a very effective teacher and a poorly performing teacher is large. For example, during one year with a very effective maths teacher, pupils gain 40% more in their educational attainment than they would with a poorly performing maths teacher.

The hon. Lady is right, therefore, to emphasise the importance of recruiting and retaining the best teachers so that all young people receive the high-quality education

to which they are entitled. We are fortunate, therefore, that there are more teachers working in our schools than at any previous time, and that today's teachers are the best qualified generation of teachers ever.

For every year in the last decade, the number of teachers joining the profession has outstripped those leaving. Last year, 50,000 new teachers entered our classrooms, swelling the size of the teaching profession in England to a record 451,000. Newly qualified teachers only account for just over half of those entering the workforce every year. Just under a third enter teaching having delayed entry post-initial teacher training, and just under a fifth are experienced teachers returning to the state sector.

Overall, teaching continues to be a hugely popular career. The latest 2015-16 UCAS figures show that we are on course to meet our postgraduate recruitment target for primary trainee teachers and are making good progress in secondary recruitment. The figures also confirm that we are ahead on acceptances for mathematics, physics, chemistry and design and technology, compared with the corresponding point last year.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Is the Minister confident that the figures he just read out reflect the reality for children in my constituency? A mother told me that eight out of 10 classes her son attended last week were taught by supply teachers, and one of my excellent secondary schools cannot recruit a senior science teacher. Is he confident that the Government are providing a good standard of education for students in Brentford and Isleworth?

Mr Gibb: I will come to the vacancy rate in a moment, but it has remained stable at about 1% of the teaching profession since 2000, so it has been stable for 15 years. No one in the Government underestimates the challenge that having a strong economy presents in professions such as teaching.

Ian Mearns: Does the Minister accept that many head teachers are reporting that they have stopped advertising vacancies, because they do not feel that they have any chance of recruiting and they do not want the unnecessary expense of placing adverts in the national journals?

Mr Gibb: I am aware of those examples, which were set out in the hon. Lady's speech. There are challenges but, as I said, the vacancy rate is the same this year as it was 15 years ago. It has remained stable across the system at about 1% of the teaching workforce.

To get more high-quality teachers into England's classrooms, we need to continue to promote teaching as a profession for top graduates. Our recruitment campaign, "Your Future Their Future" is getting results, with registrations on the "Get Into Teaching" website up by about 30% compared with last year. In 2014-15, we recruited 94% of our postgraduate ITT target, at a time when the economy was improving and good graduates had more choices open to them. As I have said, the teacher vacancy rate remains very low, at about 1% of the total number of posts—a figure that has remained steady since 2000.

Contrary to the hon. Lady's suggestion, retention remains strong. Ninety-one per cent. of teachers who qualify are teaching a year later, and 76% remain in the classroom five years later. More than 50% of teachers who qualified in 1996 were still teaching 17 years later.

Louise Haigh: It is interesting to hear the Minister refute those assertions, given that his own written answer confirmed that 400 Teach First graduates started teaching maths and science in the last school year, but nearly 600 left the profession. Does he agree that the Government's administration of the Teach First programme is failing on recruitment and retention?

Mr Gibb: On the contrary, Teach First has been a huge success. The purpose of Teach First is to attract people who might not otherwise consider entering teaching and ask them to commit to two years, so there has always been the expectation that a considerable number of the graduates who come into Teach First will leave and go into other careers in the City or elsewhere. The overall retention rate of more than 50% is actually staggeringly successful and reflects just how successful Teach First has been in recruiting high-calibre graduates into teaching.

The strong recruitment and retention figures have not been achieved by lowering our expectations for the quality of those joining the teaching profession. Almost three quarters of teachers now have an upper second or first-class degree, 10% higher than in 2010. A record proportion of teacher trainees—17%—have first-class degrees, and for several years running teaching has remained the most popular career destination for graduates of Oxford University. Teach First has played a huge part in that.

In spite of those successes, we recognise that there are still challenges. As the economy improves and the labour market strengthens, high-performing graduates are being tempted by opportunities in other sectors. Our task is to continue to champion teaching as a career choice for the brightest and the best, and not only to attract those people into our classrooms but to keep them there once they have joined the profession.

Fiona Mactaggart: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Gibb: I am happy to give way to the right hon. Lady, who I think has been itching to get in for a few minutes.

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank the Minister. He talks about the 1% vacancy figure with what headteachers in Slough might feel is a degree of complacency. At what point would he think the level of vacancies was unacceptable?

Mr Gibb: It would be a figure considerably higher than 1%. If I may cite another figure, UCAS publishes statistics every month, and they show that acceptances are down by 2% compared with the corresponding period last year. That is an improvement on last month's figures. We are not complacent, and we understand the challenges that exist, particularly with the strong economy that we have, but being 2% down does not represent the crisis that Opposition Members are intimating.

The Government are responding to the challenges. We have funded the geographical expansion of Teach First into every region of England, and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley's home city currently has 28 participants completing the two-year programme. A further 21 teachers who have already completed the programme are still teaching in Sheffield schools. The expansion will give

[Mr Gibb]

Teach First the scope to reach 90% of eligible schools by 2016. That will strengthen the Government's commitment to recruit more top teachers throughout the country, including in rural, coastal and disadvantaged areas.

Sue Hayman: My constituency is in north-west Cumbria, a rural area far from the centre, and we struggle enormously to recruit and retain in teaching. Can the Minister confirm that the programme will start to do something to change what is happening in west Cumbria?

Mr Gibb: The hon. Lady makes a good point. Despite being among the most beautiful parts of England, such rural areas find problems in recruiting. That was why we wanted to extend Teach First to those areas. We are cognisant of the fact that some parts of England find challenges in recruiting teachers, particularly younger teachers, who like to be in the cities.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): The challenge of recruiting and retaining teachers is not only in rural areas but in some of the more deprived areas, which many of us represent. The challenge for all of us is class sizes and the impact on families and children in our constituencies. I think the Minister is being quite complacent about the impact on families of the challenge of recruiting and retaining teachers.

Mr Gibb: We are not complacent at all. One of the Secretary of State's objectives is to take action in underperforming areas of the country where schools are not reaching the standard that we would expect of them. We are determined to do so. The national teaching service, for example, is a scheme by which we are encouraging high-performing teachers to second themselves to areas that have had problems in recruiting high-calibre teachers, so that we can raise standards in those areas. We are far from complacent, and we are determined to ensure that we have high-quality schools in every area and that every parent can send their child to a good local school, wherever they are located, including in areas of deprivation, rural areas or the coastal strip.

Of course, as the economy continues to recover and rebalance towards manufacturing, demand for STEM skills is increasing. Since 2010, we have therefore significantly increased the value of bursaries available to top graduates entering teaching in priority subjects. Those bursaries are now worth up to £25,000 tax-free, and we have worked closely with the leading learned societies—the Institute of Physics, the Royal Society of Chemistry and others—to develop prestigious scholarships for specialists in those subjects who want to teach.

Meg Hillier: I wish to bring the Minister back to the issue of housing costs in London. Is he having discussions with other Departments about how we can address the fact that teachers on these salaries are still a long way from being able to rent in London, let alone buy a property?

Mr Gibb: Those challenges face young people in London whatever their chosen profession, and that is why we are committed to addressing the housing shortage and building more houses. London is an attractive place

for young teachers to teach, and Teach First and other organisations engaged in placing newly qualified or qualifying teachers into schools find London the least problematic place to place trainee teachers.

Even with generous bursary and scholarship schemes, we know there is still more to do to recruit high-quality mathematics and physics teachers—

Thangam Debbonaire: To return to the point about the recruitment of teachers of physics, I was concerned to hear this week from the Royal Society that in 50% of state-maintained schools, no girls study physics after the age of 16. That is surely a situation that we cannot ignore if we are to recruit from the best possible talent. What will the Minister do to redress the situation?

Mr Gibb: I could not agree more with the hon. Lady and I hope that she will join us in addressing the problem. We have established the Your Life campaign, with leading business people such as Edwina Dunn from Dunnhumby, which is designed to attract more young people into physics and maths at A-level, focusing particularly on young women, because that is where there is considerable scope to attract more young people. It is aimed at young people at about the time they choose their A-level options, and we are determined to increase the numbers taking A-level physics and maths, especially young women. The hon. Lady makes a very good point.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): Following up that interesting and important point, surely one of the things that will make a difference is that now most teachers going into primary education have done well in maths and physics and will be able to give children—both boys and girls—the idea that in secondary school they can take those subjects forward. That will contribute to helping to change the current situation, which is frankly unacceptable.

Mr Gibb: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We have made some significant reforms to primary education, including how we teach maths in primary school. We want children to leave primary school after six or seven years fluent in arithmetic, so that they can cope with a more demanding maths curriculum at secondary school. We hope that that confidence will take them through to A-level when they reach sixth form.

We are also addressing the shortage by spending some £67 million over the next five years to train an extra 2,500 mathematics and physics teachers and to improve the knowledge and skills of 15,000 existing teachers. We also established the Maths and Physics Chairs programme to support post-doctoral researchers to train as teachers with the aim of enthusing, engaging and inspiring students to progress to A-level study, to lead subject knowledge development with teachers in local school partnerships and to forge links with business. Very able young PhDs are now working in schools, and it is an inspiring and successful project.

We have given schools the freedom to pay good teachers more. That gives schools more scope to retain their best teachers by offering faster progression up the pay scale. It also allows them to adapt to any local circumstances where recruitment in particular phases or subjects is more challenging.

Since 2010, we have focused on reforming initial teacher training, so that schools have greater choice and influence over the quality of both the training and trainees recruited. School Direct, which the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley referred to, is already proving hugely popular with both trainees and schools. Last year, we recruited 9,232 trainees to initial teacher training, an increase of 40% on the previous year. As a result, 35% of the postgraduates training to be teachers are doing so via School Direct. The School Direct salaried route provides an excellent route for career changers to train as teachers. They receive rigorous teacher training, at the same time as working in a school and earning a salary. These new entrants to the profession can bring different, valuable experience from their previous careers in industry. The success of that route is reflected in a substantial increase in the number of places offered by schools.

I am conscious of the time, but I think the hon. Lady and her colleagues are overstating the case. We understand the challenges, but we have engaged in a huge number

of initiatives, including very generous bursaries, to address the problem, and I am confident—

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Gibb: I give way to the hon. Lady.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. The Minister cannot give way and the hon. Lady cannot intervene, because it is half an hour after the debate began. I was hoping that the Minister was going to get his last word in, but the hon. Lady intervened, and I am afraid that we have to go straight to the conclusion of proceedings.

5.45 pm

House adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 9(7)).

Westminster Hall

Thursday 18 June 2015

[MR JAMES GRAY *in the Chair*]

Tibet

1.30 pm

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Tibet.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I am delighted that we have the opportunity so early in this Parliament to debate a subject that is close to my heart and, I know, to the hearts of many Members of the House. When we last debated Tibet in Westminster Hall, about six months ago, it was for an hour and a half. I seem to remember that it was over-subscribed; there were far too many Members who wished to speak and far too little time for them to do so. That is why I asked the Backbench Business Committee, before the end of the last Parliament, for a three-hour debate, and I hope that we will have one now.

This week, as all Members present will know, we celebrated the 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta. Commentators here in Parliament and around the world have been eager to remind us of the importance of our tradition of democracy and the rule of law. Speaking about the anniversary, the Foreign Secretary said:

“The UK will continue to defend the values of the rules-based international system which can trace its origins to this landmark document.”

Addressing the United Nations Human Rights Council on 15 June, just three days ago, the Foreign Office Minister of State, Baroness Anelay, said:

“It is our solemn duty to give voice to those whose rights have been violated and abused, to call for accountability and to work with those who want a different future—a future where universal values are not simply words in a UN treaty but a reality of everyday life... So in this year of anniversaries, eight centuries after Magna Carta, let us give a voice to all those whose views and fears are not heard. Let us ensure that our voice goes beyond words to action. Let us remember that universal values need to be truly universal, for everyone everywhere.”

Those are fine words, and I am sure that every Member in this debate and in Parliament would endorse them fully.

It is timely at the beginning of a Parliament to remind ourselves of the practical applications of those values and to illustrate our commitment by considering closely the position of one group of people whose rights have been violated and abused, and who might expect this Parliament, this country and our Government to speak out for them, to give them the voice that they are systematically denied. They are the people of Tibet.

Many Members present will have had a long involvement in the issue of Tibet, and I have no doubt are well informed about its history and the oppressions suffered by its people since the Chinese invasion in 1951, but many new Members who are just as interested might be less well informed, so I make no apology for giving an overview of the historical situation of Tibet and of the

Dalai Lama, who will celebrate his 80th birthday—his 56th in exile—on 6 July, just two and a half weeks from now.

Tibet has had a tumultuous history, during which it has spent long periods functioning as an independent nation. An early example of British involvement in Tibet is the short-lived treaty of Lhasa, signed after a British colonialist excursion into that country under the leadership of Francis Younghusband in 1904. It is worth mentioning as evidence that, at least during that period, Britain regarded Tibet as an independent state with which it was legally possible to treat. That contradicts the view promoted by the Chinese Government that Tibet has never been more than a province or collection of provinces forming part of China. Indeed, Chinese official histories refer to the exchange of envoys between the Tang dynasty, which ruled China between the seventh and 10th centuries, and the Tubo kingdom, the ancient name for Tibet, suggesting that they were separate nations at the time.

What is not in question are Tibet's unique cultural traditions. Ethnic Tibetans have a four centuries-long allegiance to the Buddhist tradition of which the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, is the spiritual leader. In the years before the Communist party came to power in China, Tibet was governed by a priestly caste and was a separate, independent state. When the Communist party came to power, the Chinese army invaded Tibet and attempted, but failed, to force the young Dalai Lama to act as a client ruler. However, after a popular uprising against Chinese rule, the Dalai Lama and his supporters were driven into exile in India following an alleged threat to his life. The Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, welcomed the exiled Tibetans to Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh, where they established a Parliament and Government in exile.

In May 2011, the Dalai Lama announced his retirement as the political leader of his people, but he will of course always remain the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism. However, that step by the Dalai Lama has in no way diminished the fear and loathing with which the Chinese Government regard His Holiness. They describe him as a separatist, a supporter of terrorism, and—maybe worst of all in the lexicon of communist China—a splittist. Since the 1980s, the Dalai Lama has not pursued the aim of full independence for Tibet, but has sought only what he calls a middle way—full autonomy for the people of Tibet—although many Tibetan activists still believe in the possibility of a truly independent Tibet.

Meanwhile, the Chinese, having created what they describe as the Tibet Autonomous Region, or TAR, have done everything in their power to undermine that autonomy and to destroy the ethnic and cultural identity of Tibet. They have sought to isolate the Dalai Lama and have used their political and economic influence to bully the Governments and parties that support him. I aim to outline some of the ways in which they have done so and to explain why I believe that we have a moral obligation to support those suffering under the oppression that has resulted from the “Chineseification” of Tibetan culture.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am grateful to my fellow officer of the all-party parliamentary group for Tibet for giving way. I am sorry that I will not be able to stay for the whole debate

[Tim Loughton]

and make a full contribution. Is it not ironic that the Chinese constitution recognises the diverse culture and heritage of the various peoples who make up the People's Republic of China? Whatever arguments we may have about the politics of it, China is clearly failing to recognise and protect the culture, heritage and, indeed, language of the Tibetan people, which is being destroyed at the hands of the Chinese Government.

Fabian Hamilton: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend, if I may call him that, and fellow officer of the all-party parliamentary group for Tibet. In May 2006—more than nine years ago—I had occasion to visit Lhasa and the TAR under supervision by the Chinese Government, along with four other members of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, to see for myself exactly how much change had taken place.

The Chineseification of Lhasa, through the encouragement of ethnically Han Chinese citizens to settle in Lhasa and other parts of Tibet, was extraordinary. We learned while we were there that Tibetan was not allowed to be the main language in schools in the city of Lhasa. Mandarin had to be spoken first, and Tibetan was, to all intents and purposes, outlawed by the mayor and provincial Government of the TAR. That was sad to see.

Many elements of Tibetan culture were being suppressed by the Administration and the local Communist party. I know that that has continued apace since the opening of the Chengdu to Lhasa railway, which has allowed many more people to travel much more easily to that extremely high city, where those who are there for only a few days suffer from altitude sickness.

I hope to show that events in Tibet have global implications, and that by failing to speak out against the political, environmental and economic oppression in the TAR, we risk allowing a bully to influence world events and undermine our values.

As an example of that bullying process, let us consider that the 14th world summit of Nobel peace laureates was scheduled to convene in South Africa in October 2014 to honour the late Nelson Mandela's legacy. However, it had to be cancelled when several Nobel peace laureates pulled out after the South African Government failed to issue a visa to one of the laureates, the Dalai Lama. That is just one example of Chinese pressure; in fact, China went on to thank South Africa for not issuing the Dalai Lama a visa. The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Qin Gang, said:

“China highly appreciates the support offered by the South African government on issues concerning China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We also believe that South Africa will continue to uphold this correct position and continue to support China in this regard.”

Let us remind ourselves that the Dalai Lama has been in exile since 1959. That a country such as South Africa should be so afraid of losing important Chinese investment that it was willing to renege on the solidarity offered by Nelson Mandela himself when the Dalai Lama visited Cape Town years ago is truly a tragedy.

China has tried such tactics on many Governments, our own included. In May 2012, David Cameron and Nick Clegg privately met the Dalai Lama in London, outside St Paul's cathedral, where the Dalai Lama was

being awarded the Templeton prize for his contribution to human spirituality. The Chinese Government made a formal protest to the British ambassador in Beijing, saying that that meeting had “harmed” China-UK relations and had

“hurt the feelings of the Chinese people”.

In addition, in a public statement, a Foreign Ministry spokesman, Hong Lei, urged the UK

“to respond to China's solemn demand and stop conniving and supporting Tibetan separatists”.

The Chinese Government then cancelled the visit to the UK of a top official, Wu Bangguo, Chair of the National People's Congress.

In April 2013, David Cameron postponed an official trip—

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. I let it go the first time, but I think the hon. Gentleman means either “the Prime Minister” or “the right hon. Member for Witney”, but not “Mr David Cameron”.

Fabian Hamilton: I am so sorry. Thank you for correcting me, Mr Gray. Let me try again.

In April 2013, the Prime Minister postponed an official trip to China after Beijing indicated that senior leaders were unlikely to meet him, yet the Government have been clear on their position. They regard Tibet as “part of the People's Republic of China.”

Does that mean that Her Majesty's Government do not support those Tibetans who call for independence? With their professed support for the right of self-determination and their commitment to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, would it not be more appropriate for the Government explicitly to support the Tibetans' right to self-determination?

I ask the Minister to clarify the Government's position on dialogue between Chinese and Tibetan representatives. Without such dialogue, the Dalai Lama's call for genuine autonomy for Tibet cannot possibly be achieved. The Chinese Government have put obstacles in the path of such dialogue by requiring, in their own latest White Paper on Tibet, that His Holiness the Dalai Lama make a

“public statement that Tibet has been an integral part of China since antiquity”.

In the past, the Chinese maintained that a precondition for talks would be the abandonment by the Dalai Lama of his stance on independence. He has effectively done that, but after every concession made by His Holiness further barriers have been raised by the Chinese Government. I strongly hope that Her Majesty's Government can and will resist efforts to force the UK to isolate the Dalai Lama.

However, this is not simply a debate about history. The rights of the Tibetan people—both collective rights, and the rights of individuals and families—have been horribly breached. Religious freedoms have been attacked for decades, and religious institutions have been suborned. Along with the call from the political head of the Tibet autonomous region for Buddhist temples to

“become propaganda centres for the ruling Communist Party”,

there are proposed new counter-terrorism laws that will allow sweeping measures to be taken to suppress religious activity. Many rites that are central to the traditional

worship of the Tibetan people, such as the lighting of butter candles, will be treated as subversive acts, as they imply support for the Dalai Lama. Have our Government raised concerns about these proposed new counter-terrorism laws, which appear to contravene the protection of religious freedoms enshrined in international and—until now—Chinese law?

The Chinese Government have given themselves the right to interfere in spiritual life and to deny the approval of the reincarnate lamas named by Tibet's spiritual leaders, all of whom they have forced into exile. A key role of the Dalai Lama is the obligation to select the successor to the Panchen Lama. The selection of His Holiness is Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, who was a six-year-old boy in 1995—20 years ago—when he was hailed as the reincarnation. He was abducted by the Chinese authorities, along with his family. The Chinese authorities will not reveal his whereabouts and say that he is in “protective custody”. The Chinese authorities have decreed that another young man, Gyaltsen Norbu, will be the next Panchen Lama.

If Choekyi Nyima's custody can be described as protective, he may be much more fortunate than the many other political prisoners being held in Tibet today for a range of offences, from displaying hand-drawn copies of the Tibetan flag to taking part in explicitly religious practices. For example, one monastic leader, Thardoe Gyaltsen, was sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment for possessing copies of the Dalai Lama's religious teachings and another, Geshe Ngawang Jamyang, was beaten to death in jail.

We should also be aware of the case of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, which I have raised with the Minister before. He was sentenced to death for alleged involvement in a bomb plot, for which there was no evidence. His sentence was later commuted to life in jail. He has served seven years and is believed to be in dangerously poor health. I urge Her Majesty's Government to call for immediate medical parole for him, and to continue to press for answers on the whereabouts and safety of the Panchen Lama.

For these prisoners, as for other political prisoners, justice is very hard to achieve. At present, there are more than 600 known political prisoners in Tibet. Lawyers and human rights campaigners who take up the cases of such prisoners are threatened, and in many cases lose their licence to practise law. How do the Government propose to support their right under international law to a fair trial? Furthermore, with regard to the annual publication of Her Majesty's Government's report on human rights, do the Government review their policies in relation to countries of concern? How can the United Kingdom strengthen its policies on Tibet, so as to take a clear stance on the essential issue of human rights?

Tragically, in desperation at their situation, as many as 120 Tibetan activists have sought the ultimate expression of frustration and grief and committed self-immolation. Such actions are certainly not sanctioned by the Dalai Lama, who has spoken of his sadness and questioned the effectiveness of such actions in the face of the Chinese authorities, who treat them as criminal and immoral acts, punish the families of victims and portray such suicides as terrorist acts.

Of course, monks and nuns bear the brunt of Chinese wrath. Many are barred from their monasteries, and almost none can get visas to travel even within their

home country. However, it is not only members of religious communities who suffer in Tibet. Other victims of Chinese displeasure include those Tibetans who have worked hard to preserve the country's linguistic heritage. That falls foul of new regulations issued in many parts of Tibet, such as Rebkong, where new rules criminalising freedom of expression are being reinforced. They include rule No. 4, which prohibits

“establishing illegal organizations... under the pretext of ‘protecting the mother tongue’”

and

“literacy classes”.

Many artists, poets and musicians who have attempted to celebrate ethnic identity are among those who have been arrested, jailed and—in many cases—tortured. Meanwhile, across the world China promotes its own language and culture by interfering with the academic freedoms of universities, in which they have funded so-called Confucius Institutes. Those schools actively undermine western support for Tibet and Taiwan, and control the employment of staff within the institutes, often under employment law that conflicts with that of Europe and the United Kingdom.

What steps will Her Majesty's Government take to ensure academic freedom and the human rights of staff in those institutes? Although it is hard for western Governments to protect the culture and human rights of minority groups in faraway countries, is it too much to ask that the Government take steps to control the spread of Chinese propaganda in the United Kingdom? The rigid censorship that the Chinese seek to impose on news media and the internet is well known. We must not allow similar restrictions on the freedoms of commentators, educators and students in our own country.

Tim Loughton: My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech, as he always does on this subject. I have made representations to the Home Secretary on this issue, but does he share my concern that His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who is visiting this country at the end of the month and again in September, has been afforded no police protection? During recent visits to other countries people have tried to disrupt his peaceful meetings and conferences, so there is the threat that many of his meetings may have to be abandoned.

Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the Dalai Lama's free speech is being put at risk? What message will be sent to the Chinese people if the British Government do not afford him the protection that is normally afforded a dignitary of his stature?

Fabian Hamilton: I will mention that issue at the end of my speech. My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I am very concerned. People in the Tibetan community, supporters of the Tibetan community in the UK, supporters of the Dalai Lama, and Buddhists and non-Buddhists throughout Britain who love to hear the Dalai Lama's words are extremely concerned that there is a threat to his personal safety. So far, the Government have offered no security for His Holiness' visits to the United Kingdom. I thank my hon. Friend for taking up the issue with the Home Secretary. We need to put more pressure on the Government to ensure that the personal security of His Holiness is protected by our security services, especially as it is under threat.

[*Fabian Hamilton*]

Events in Tibet and our response to them have global implications that cannot be ignored. Many of those who have been shot at, arrested and intimidated in Tibet have been campaigning against the environmental exploitation of and damage to the fragile ecosystem of that beautiful country. That damage must certainly have global consequences. Almost half the world's population depends on water from Tibet, and about 1.3 billion people directly depend on its major rivers.

The Chinese have increased the number of dams in the Tibetan plateau region, and further planned works will deprive millions of water in the downstream regions. In addition, unchecked mining operations in Tibet have been a major cause of environmental degradation and pollution of the water systems. Tibet's glaciers are the fastest melting in the world, and many scientists regard Tibet as an environmental barometer. The opening of the Gormo-Lhasa railway, which I mentioned earlier, has not only sped up the Chineseification of Tibet by allowing a massive influx of ethnically Han Chinese, but enabled the swifter and more voracious exploitation of Tibet's natural resources. Many rare native species of plants and animals will have to take their chances in a landscape that is at serious risk of destruction.

Protests against such pollution, exploitation and destruction—many of them by members of traditional nomadic groups that depend on the country's grasslands and the purity of its waters—have been among those crushed by the Chinese. Many nomadic groups have been forcibly resettled, as I saw for myself in 2006. The US Special Co-ordinator for Tibetan Issues, Sarah Sewall, has said:

“Tibetans have an inalienable right to be stewards of their own cultural, religious and linguistic heritage”.

Will Her Majesty's Government add their support to that of the US in encouraging the Chinese to live up to their international obligation to respect that right?

Many will ask what we in the UK can do to help the Tibetans in their attempts to preserve their language and culture, defend their spiritual freedom and traditions, and save their country from physical exploitation and damage. We should not underestimate our authority and resources. In China, a new law—the foreign non-governmental organisation management law—is being drafted, which seeks to restrict the activities of foreign NGOs and give the Chinese police the authority to enter their premises and seize documents and property. Those powers may have a massive impact on the work of groups that are working to promote health education and develop civil society in China as a whole and Tibet in particular. How will Her Majesty's Government respond to those proposals, and what steps will they take to support the work of NGOs?

Many thousands of Tibetans now live in exile as refugees who depend on the welcome and support of host Governments and of campaigning and fundraising groups. We must continue to work with the groups representing Tibetans abroad. Will the United Kingdom Government continue to explore the possibility of cultural exchanges with Tibetans, whether from within Tibet itself or from the communities living in places such as India and Nepal? Programmes such as the Chevening scholarship, excellent as they are, have only a limited availability to Tibetans living within Tibet and are not

available to refugees. If the UK Government were to extend that scheme and help refugees to take up degree and postgraduate courses in Britain, they would be better able to contribute to their host societies and help build civil society on their eventual and much desired return to Tibet.

The promotion and survival of the Tibetan language depend on it continuing to be heard. Will Her Majesty's Government call on the BBC Trust to consider including Tibetan as one of the languages in which the World Service is broadcast?

The mention of those refugee communities brings me to my final, most topical, point. The terrible earthquakes in Nepal in April and May had a horrific impact on the Nepalese people, who are some of the poorest in the world. In the past, they have extended generous hospitality to their Tibetan neighbours who have continued to flee from the oppression in their homeland. At this time of crisis, it has become more difficult for them to do so. The catastrophe has heavily affected the Tibetan refugees in particular, as they are effectively stateless citizens. Many of them survive by making traditional Tibetan handicrafts, and many of the small factories in which they work have been destroyed.

There is grave concern, as recently expressed by Amnesty International, that the Tibetans' lack of status within Nepalese society will make it hard for them to access the aid that is being provided by international communities. I recently had a case in my constituency of a British man of Tibetan origin, whose wife and child were made homeless by the earthquake in Kathmandu, but were having serious problems trying to obtain a visa to come to the United Kingdom because my constituent does not earn enough to support them. Meanwhile, over the border inside Tibet, there is some evidence that the Chinese authorities are using the earthquake as a pretext to redevelop parts of Tingri county against the wishes of local people, who are being forcibly relocated.

Finally, will the Government ensure the personal safety of His Holiness the Dalai Lama when he visits the UK at the end of this month to lecture at a Nepalese Buddhist temple? Sadly, one of the world's foremost proponents of peace and compassion is the subject of threats from groups opposed to what he stands for. It is essential that when His Holiness comes to the UK we guarantee that he will be safe and secure. His message has huge resonance throughout this country and in every country in the world. We should value it more, and stand up more strongly to the bullying tactics of those who continue to oppress the Tibetan people and vilify His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

1.59 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a genuine pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray, as I have discovered that you were brought up in my constituency. I did not have a lot of time in my maiden speech to sing my constituency's praises, and I do not intend to detain hon. Members by doing so today. I note that what was Kelvinside parish church next to your childhood home is now the Óran Mór, a tremendously popular and vibrant cultural venue for the city and the country as a whole. Indeed, it contributes much to the local economy and the wider cultural scene.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) on bringing this important debate to the Chamber. I commiserate with him on the result of this morning's ballot, but wish him every success, should he seek to be a member of the International Development Committee. In contributing briefly to the debate, I would like to offer some perspectives from the Scottish National party, the Scottish Parliament and the country more broadly.

Much as there is a system of all-party groups in Westminster, a system of cross-party groups exists in the Scottish Parliament. My colleague, Linda Fabiani, the Member of the Scottish Parliament for East Kilbride, chairs the cross-party group on Tibet. Much like the all-party parliamentary group here, it has shown considerable cross-party interest in and concern over issues affecting the area. It is supported by Aberdeen University's Scottish Centre for Himalayan Research and in particular by Dr Martin Mills and Dr Sam May.

It is important to recognise the important work of that institute in promoting and researching issues that affect Tibet and the wider Himalayan area. Some of its current topics include tantric medicine, 17th century Scots in the Himalayas—there are similarities between Scotland and Tibet, and I saw an interesting chart comparing the heights of the mountains of the two areas—plant collecting, spirit categories in Afghanistan, and Tibetan divination, which is relevant to this debate. The cross-party group is active, meets regularly and has campaigned on a range of issues. It called, for example, for a portrait of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be displayed in Holyrood to mark his 80th birthday. Though the conventions in that place unfortunately did not allow for that, I think the suggestion indicates the respect and affection in which the Dalai Lama is held by parliamentarians in Scotland and the wider public.

Tibet was the subject of a debate in Holyrood, which was led by Maureen Watt, the MSP for Aberdeen South and North Kincardine. The debate focused specifically on immolation. By February of last year, there had been 127 reported incidents, and that number is now up to 137. The way Members' business debates work is not dissimilar to Westminster Hall, only they are debated on a slightly fuller motion than we would have here. The motion said:

“That the Parliament... understands that these actions are largely acts of protest against restrictions on religion, the Tibetan language, access to employment and the degradation of water resources and grazing lands; expresses concern at what it understands has been the state's attempts to prevent accurate reports of self-immolations reaching the media; condemns what it considers the criminalisation of family members and sometimes witnesses to the incidents; believes that 11 countries urged China to improve the human rights of Tibetans at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on 22 October 2013”.

That demonstrates the consensus. I and my colleagues in this House share the sentiments expressed and put on record our sadness that such numbers of people have felt the need to resort to such dramatic and desperate gestures. The Scottish Government's response to that debate very clearly condemned human rights abuses, wherever they occur. The Cabinet Secretary for Cultural and Government Affairs said:

“Upholding basic civil and political rights is a core duty of the state, and individuals must be free to celebrate their cultural traditions and demonstrate their faith in any society.”—[*Scottish Parliament Official Report*, 4 February 2014; c. 27401.]

The Scottish Government recognise the role that China has to play. On a number of occasions when visiting China, Ministers have raised concerns about freedom of religious expression, transparency and access, and the situation in Tibet. Indeed, the Scottish Government's overall China engagement strategy has four guiding principles: securing sustainable economic growth by building Scotland's prosperity by strengthening links to China; understanding the culture, including attaching great importance to learning more about the culture through a memorandum of understanding; increasing the influence we can have; and, most relevantly for the debate, respecting human rights and the rule of law, supporting China's process of modernisation and internal reform, and the need to balance the demands of economic development with social justice.

In Scotland, we are justly proud of our reputation for ethical business practices, human rights and the rule of law. We want to continue to share our experiences wherever we can. Key to “Scotland's National Action Plan for Human Rights” is ensuring that we all play a part in building a better world, giving effect to our international obligations at home and abroad. That hopefully demonstrates that many of the broad concerns expressed in today's debate and elsewhere in the House over the years are being taken seriously and acted on by our colleagues north of the border.

I will finish with some personal reflections. As part of a crowd of some 4,000 people in the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre, I saw the Dalai Lama 11 years ago when he visited Scotland. I was struck by how, even with such a vast crowd, he appeared to be addressing each of us individually. It is important to recognise the importance of spiritual leaders to the world. Today, Pope Francis has released an encyclical that includes a radical and prophetic call for environmental justice and care for creation. That is particularly important when we consider pollution and climate change, particularly in the Himalayan region that the hon. Member for Leeds North East spoke about. My maiden speech was on the theme of justice and peace around the world, and peace must be built on respect for human rights and democracy, whether in Tibet or elsewhere. The dignity of human beings and their fundamental right to be agents of their own destiny are hugely important, and that should be the start and ending point of any such debate.

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): The hon. Gentleman was speaking on behalf of the Scottish National party as the third party. Normally, I would now call the spokesman for Her Majesty's loyal Opposition. However, with the leave of the Chamber, I shall call Mr Nic Dakin.

2.6 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Gray. It is a pleasure, as ever, to serve under your chairmanship. You have just demonstrated its great clarity in making that decision. It is also a pleasure to follow the spokesperson for the Scottish National party, who gave us a good picture of what is going on in Scotland, which is replicated across all the regions and nations of the United Kingdom. In this Chamber, we are concerned to look at how the United Kingdom and its Government respond on our behalf on this important matter.

[*Nic Dakin*]

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton), who has been a doughty campaigner on Tibetan rights for many years. We got the full sense of that through the comprehensive way in which he laid out the issues in terms of the international perspective and the UK perspective, as well as issues more germane to our domestic policy.

I want to pick up on the words of Sarah Sewall, the US Government's Under-Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights, because they capture the essence of the issue. Speaking at an event recently, she said:

"The problem of Tibet is, of course, also a problem for China. For the United States, just as for many countries represented here today, China is a vital strategic partner, and we welcome its participation and leadership in the web of international norms, laws and practices that have helped preserve global stability since the end of World War II. As we look at the past 70 years, one of the key long term lessons is the cost and fragility of the repressive state. Thus, as we look for China to play a growing role in the international community, we also look for it to abide by its international commitments with respect to the human rights of people in Tibet."

That captures the challenges of the moment and of our time. China is an important strategic partner, and the Chinese people are terribly important to the world's future, but if China is to be a truly modern state, taking its place in the world and showing the leadership I am sure the Chinese Premier wishes it to, it needs to step up to the plate and behave in a way that recognises the human rights of others.

In a sense, Tibet is symbolic of all that. China will have to get its head around how to respond to Tibet in a 21st century way, so that it does not become or remain a repressive state, because as a repressive state it cannot realise its full potential and take its full place in the world. That is an issue not only for the Tibetan people but for the Chinese people—it is global issue.

We have an excellent Minister who I am sure will rise to the challenge when he responds. The UK Government, in various manifestations, have a good record on Tibet. That does not mean that they please everyone or that there are not voices saying, "The UK Government should be doing more," and it is right and proper that the voices in this debate have tested the Government, but they have a good record on Tibet. I am confident and hopeful that, when he responds, the Minister will give us a strong sense of forward direction in friendship and support of both the Tibetan and Chinese peoples, because they are important not only for us, but for the world.

Thank you for allowing me to join the debate rather late, Mr Gray.

2.11 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): As ever, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) on securing this debate. As has already been said, he has done a tremendous amount of work and advocacy in support of the people of Tibet over the years. Having visited Tibet himself and worked with the exiled Tibetan community in Dharamshala, he provides valuable insight. I was present for his speech in the Chamber last year on

International Human Rights Day, when he conveyed the profound beauty of Tibet, which too often provides the backdrop for scenes of grotesque suffering. I will return to that.

I should begin by stating that China's sovereignty is not in question. We recognise Tibet as part of China, but we support genuine autonomy for Tibet and recognise that that is what His Holiness the Dalai Lama is seeking. The Dalai Lama's middle-way approach is about not independence, but autonomy that respects the rights and culture of Tibet. Of course, they are not currently being protected, as we heard in compelling detail from my hon. Friend. China must recognise that a more authoritarian approach will not strengthen its sovereignty; it will only diminish its moral authority.

The international community must raise concerns about the treatment of Tibet, but we recognise that the issues can be resolved only by meaningful dialogue between the Chinese Government and representatives of the Dalai Lama. Disappointingly, we are now into the fifth year without talks, making it all the more important that both the UK and the EU do everything they can to promote a resumption of dialogue. Will the Minister tell us what the Government are currently doing on that front?

Autonomy is a matter for China and Tibet, but human rights should be a concern for all nations and all peoples. As we have heard, freedom of expression is severely restricted in Tibet: websites are blocked and violence and intimidation are used as means of repression. There have also been worrying signs that the situation is deteriorating, with China expanding its police and military presence. Tibetans' religion and loyalty to the Dalai Lama is a particular concern to China, and over the past year we have seen greater efforts to restrict religious expression. Photos of the Dalai Lama are banned, and so too are songs praising him; monks are at particular risk of persecution and must seek permission to travel; and nuns have been expelled from their nunnery for refusing to denounce the Dalai Lama.

In March, the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief warned that China's actions are "really destroying the autonomy of religious communities".

Tibetans' cultural identity is also being undermined: their language is under threat, their flag is banned, and last year China announced a programme to help local artists to

"form a correct view of art"—

chilling words. In addition, musicians are being detained on charges of separatism. We have heard about the Chineseification of Tibet, and it is feared that the development of Lhasa and the InterContinental resort will mean that Tibetan culture is further subjugated.

Those deemed to be on the wrong side of the authorities have been subject to excessive force—we have heard about the number of political prisoners, many of whom have died from injuries sustained in prison. Last August, Tibetans protesting against the detention of village leader Dema Wangdak were met with tear gas and live ammunition. Protestors have been injured and jailed for demonstrating against mining, and people have even been jailed for messaging each other about an anti-fur campaign.

There are many other examples—we have heard some from my hon. Friend—but the self-immolations are the most shocking evidence of the extent to which freedom

of expression and peaceful protest are restricted in Tibet, as well as of the length to which people will go to try to make their cause heard. Last month, a mother of two children resorted to self-immolation. The Chinese authorities reportedly then arrested a family member and ordered others to lie about her death.

There were at least 10 self-immolations last year, and there have already been five this year, bringing the known total to 140, the majority of whom will have died. As I said in the debate in December last year, self-immolation is a harrowing indictment of human rights in Tibet, and it is shameful that it continues. Criminalising bereaved relatives is not preventing the self-immolations—of course, it would not. The solution is dialogue with the Dalai Lama's representatives and an end to repressive practices. Since December's debate, there have been further steps backwards. For example, it has been announced that monks and nuns will come under even greater scrutiny and must "educate themselves in patriotism", and 20 new rules have been issued to prevent perceived "splittist" behaviour.

My hon. Friend mentioned a number of cases. I remember that last year he highlighted the case of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, whom he mentioned again today, a senior monk whose death sentence on false charges was commuted to life imprisonment. There are serious concerns about his deteriorating health. Last year, the Minister told us that he shared our concerns about Tenzin Delek's conviction and wellbeing, and said that he had urged the consideration of parole on medical grounds. Last week, the Tibet Society issued an urgent appeal because the parole request has still not been considered. I hope that we hear from the Minister on that.

Over recent months, and indeed years, there has been very little progress, stalled talks and a number of worrying developments. China has even sought to put pressure on other Governments and isolate the Dalai Lama, as we saw after the Prime Minister rightly met the Dalai Lama, and when South Africa denied His Holiness a visa to attend the peace summit for Nobel laureates.

Tibetans have tried to protest their cause peacefully, with dignity and restraint, but China's failure to engage and steadfast refusal to consider genuine autonomy suggests that it does not recognise such a measured approach. It is a missed opportunity for China to reach a positive agreement that enables Tibetans to live peacefully in accordance with their culture and religion in a stable Chinese Tibet autonomous region. China is also missing the opportunity to demonstrate to the international community that it can engage on human rights, and that it is a genuinely outward-looking, forward-thinking nation with a leading role to play in the international community.

China's global role is not in doubt. The UK values our bilateral relationship with China. We want a strong partnership, and the Government should look to work constructively with China on a whole range of strategic issues, as is happening in some areas. Nevertheless, we cannot let that work inhibit us when it comes to universal principles of human rights. The Government cannot allow the UK's message on human rights to be undermined by an inconsistent approach. Of course, it is somewhat difficult for the UK Government to send that message to China when they themselves are threatening to renege on international human right agreements—although perhaps that is a debate for another time.

We heard in the debate in December—the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's latest human rights and democracy report also emphasises this—that the Government continue to raise Tibet as part of the UK-China human rights dialogue. That should be an important part of our bilateral relationship, yet the dialogue seemed to be held rather sporadically during the previous Parliament; indeed, my understanding is that China cancelled some sessions. Will the Minister advise us on how effective he thinks the dialogues have been, and on the extent to which he feels China has taken our concerns on board? We know that the Government have urged the Chinese authorities to exercise restraint in Tibet, but does he think that they have done so, and, if so, was that in response to the Government's urging?

From what we have heard today, it does not seem that the UK has been particularly influential. I appreciate that it is not an easy task, but is the Minister able to tell us what progress he thinks the Government can make during President Xi Jinping's state visit later this year? Was the decision to invite the President a response to agreement from the Chinese Government on any areas of concern? Encouragingly, the FCO's human rights and democracy report noted that a UK diplomat had been granted permission to visit the Tibet autonomous region—the first such visit for three years. I would be grateful for any information the Minister has on China's response to the UK's request for unrestricted access for international journalists, non-governmental organisations and diplomats. Can he also confirm that the Government have made representations in support of a visit from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who has, we understand, been in discussions with China directly?

My hon. Friend touched on several other issues. During December's debate, a number of hon. Members expressed concerns about the impact of mining in Tibet, not least following Greenpeace's report exposing illegal mining on the Tibetan plateau; Tibetans have faced severe punishments for challenging that mining. The Minister had limited time during the last debate and was unable to comment in detail on that, but I am sure that he has enough time now to tell us whether the UK has had any discussions with Chinese authorities or with mining companies on those mining operations.

Tibet was described earlier as an environmental barometer and is sometime called the third pole. Its susceptibility to climate change makes it all the more important that China demonstrates responsible environmental stewardship as part of its welcome international commitments to tackling climate change. With the Paris talks taking place in December, this year is incredibly important for international climate dialogue. China has made some welcome moves towards taking a stronger position in Paris this year, but has Tibet, given its particular environmental sensitivities, formed part of the discussions?

Finally, my hon. Friend mentioned the Nepal earthquake, which also led to people in Tibet losing their lives. The impact on Tibetan refugees in Nepal is important, and I hope that the Minister touches on that.

2.21 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) both on his re-election—I am sorry that he was not elected to the

[*Mr Hugo Swire*]

chairmanship of the Select Committee on International Development—and on securing a second debate on Tibet, maintaining the momentum that followed the debate in Westminster Hall on 10 December last year. I said during that debate that Tibet commands great interest and that such matters should continue to be raised regularly in the House. I am glad that he took me at my word and has given us the opportunity to debate the issue in greater detail this afternoon.

The UK's relationship with China—I gently remind the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) that the UK or British Government handle relations with overseas countries—is both strong and important. Our co-operation on shared interests and challenges is broadening and deepening by the day. We have a shared interest in a peaceful and prosperous China, which includes Tibet. Let me reaffirm that it is the clear position of the British Government that Tibet is part of the People's Republic of China, and that we do not support Tibetan independence. The Prime Minister reaffirmed that position during the UK-China summit in June 2014. I am aware that some hon. Members—and indeed some who follow Tibet closely—question the UK's stance, but the Dalai Lama himself has publicly said that he does not call for independence. I wish to state the Government's position, and that of the official Opposition, publicly and clearly to avoid any ambiguity.

As the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs told the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on 10 June, our relationship with China has never been closer. We engage on a wide range of subjects, both in areas where we work closely together and in others where we may have different views. China is now the UK's 6th largest export partner, and the UK is Europe's No. 1 destination for Chinese foreign direct investment. Visa applications are up 20% year on year. 2015 will be a particularly important year; it started with His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge's visit to China in March, will culminate in President Xi's state visit to the UK in October, and is punctuated by a range of dialogues. Such high-level visits and dialogues are a key part of our engagement with China. They are underpinned by concrete commitments, activities and shared agendas, all of which help to deliver a partnership for growth, reform and innovation in the interests of shared prosperity and security in the UK, China and the world.

I want to turn to Tibet and human rights, which many hon. Members rightly raised, but before I do, I should like to mention the devastating Nepal earthquake in April. Its effects were felt in the wider region, including in Tibet, where a number of people lost their lives and at least 2,500 people were relocated to temporary settlements. I extend the Government's deepest condolences to all those who have lost family and loved ones. Like the UK, China has responded quickly to the international effort and has been involved in search-and-rescue attempts and offered medical assistance. Within China, the central Government have also released emergency funds to help reconstruction in Tibet.

Despite the pressures that natural disasters and other challenges may bring, I am pleased to report that rapid economic growth has raised living standards across China and has improved access to a range of social and economic rights. In Tibet, investment in education, healthcare and employment has led to a doubling in life

expectancy since the early 1950s. It is essential that that growth across China, including in Tibet, is underpinned by the rule of law and full respect for human rights, as guaranteed by the Chinese constitution. We watched China's fourth plenum with interest; we welcomed President Xi's commitment to move to a more independent, transparent and professional legal system, and the further commitment to ensure that China is ruled according to the law, with human rights fully protected, by 2020.

Of course, as the Chinese Government have acknowledged, proper implementation of the announced reforms will be paramount. That is why the UK is sharing with the Chinese authorities its own experiences, many ongoing, of domestic legal reforms, and why we continue to raise cases of alleged human rights violations directly with Chinese officials at all levels, at the United Nations Human Rights Council, and at the annual UK-China human rights dialogue, the 22nd round of which took place in Beijing in April, focusing on judicial reform and identifying common ground for future co-operation.

Specifically on Tibet, the Chinese Government have been clear in their commitment that Tibetans should share the same social and economic rights as the rest of China. Nevertheless, we have specific and long-standing concerns, particularly in three areas, all of which should be protected under the Chinese constitution. First are ethnic minority rights, because everyone must have the right to enjoy their own unique culture and language, wherever they live, without fear of discrimination. Second is freedom of religion or belief, which is one of this Government's core human rights priorities. Third is freedom of expression.

The hon. Member for Leeds North East mentioned counter-terrorism. We have a regular dialogue with China on such issues, and held the last round of the UK-China counter-terrorism dialogue in London. Through the EU, we have contributed comments on proposed legislation, including non-governmental organisation laws, and we continue to monitor the development of such laws extremely closely.

As in the debate in December, much focus this afternoon has been on freedom of expression. We remain concerned that many individuals are detained for the peaceful expression of their views. Many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) and the hon. Member for Leeds North East, mentioned Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, who was discussed during the human rights dialogue in April and who continues to suffer from ill health in detention. We again urge the Chinese authorities to ensure that, while detained, all such people have access to adequate medical care or, in severe cases such as Tenzin's, are released on medical parole.

Several self-immolations in Tibetan areas have been reported in the past few years. Disproportionate force, sometimes lethal, is also reported to have been used to disrupt peaceful protests. We maintain our belief that the best way to address and resolve the underlying differences between Tibetan communities and the Chinese Government is meaningful dialogue. We have made that point in our discussions with the Chinese Government, including in our annual human rights dialogue. We will continue to work with China for the protection of citizens' constitutional rights, in line with the international frameworks to which China is a party.

Various hon. Members raised the issue of the Panchen Lama, which we continue to raise with Chinese authorities. We have urged them to ensure that the restrictions on his freedom of movement and communication are lifted, so that he may select the career, education or religious life of his choosing, wherever he is. We continue to support calls by the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for the relevant authorities to facilitate a meeting between the Panchen Lama and independent international observers.

A number of hon. Members talked about issues to do with the Tibetan plateau. I assure the House that we continue to work closely with the Chinese Government on all environmental issues. As set out in the UK-China joint statement on climate change, our shared objective is agreement of an ambitious global deal from the international negotiations in Paris this year, alongside substantial domestic action to reduce emissions. We also encourage the adoption of better governance in the extractive industries. It is important that high standards are applied throughout China, including in the Tibetan autonomous region, and by Chinese companies operating internationally.

As part of our dialogue and co-operation, we have made it clear that improving understanding through international access to Tibet is important, both for diplomats and for the wider international community, including journalists. We are disappointed that foreign journalists and diplomats are regularly refused access to the Tibetan autonomous region. We regularly visit ethnic minority groups, including in Tibetan areas, and we continue to press for access to the Tibetan autonomous region. As the hon. Member for Bristol East pointed out, a British diplomat was granted access to the TAR in June 2014 for the first time in three years. In answer to her question, we have one request pending and Her Majesty's ambassador in Beijing is also considering an application.

In answer to the hon. Lady's other question, three UN special rapporteurs intend to visit China this year, although their schedules remain unknown: the special rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; the special rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation; and the independent expert on the effects of foreign debt. China has also invited the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to visit, but dates are still being agreed.

Finally, I will respond to the points made about the Dalai Lama. Let me reaffirm that the Government regard the Dalai Lama as an important religious figure and esteemed Nobel laureate. He has visited the UK on numerous occasions, and I understand that he is headlining at Glastonbury in the run-up to his 80th birthday in July. As to any protection required by the Dalai Lama or his party, visits of that sort—as the House knows—are subject to a routine threat assessment. We will certainly be keeping this and subsequent visits under review.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who is not in the Chamber, raised the issue of the Confucius Institutes and the Chinese cultural centres. We are strongly supportive of links between educational institutions in the UK and China. It is true that we have seen significant growth in student numbers from both sides. Our higher education institutions have a great deal of autonomy and the right to accept funding from where they see fit. That said, a commitment to free speech is at the heart of UK educational philosophy, and the autonomy of educational institutions is extremely important. The Confucius Institutes have been raised with me before. For the record, we are not aware of any evidence to suggest that they are compromising those principles in the UK, but we remain alert to any impropriety or allegations of impropriety.

The hon. Member for Leeds North East spoke about the World Service, and he will be aware of its new arrangements. It will make an assessment of where its funds are best employed and where it can reach the best audiences. I suggest that he approaches the World Service himself; it is for the Foreign Secretary to agree, rather than to initiate, where new World Service broadcasts should be made.

In conclusion, I fundamentally disagree with those who say that we are neglecting the interests of Tibetans. A broad, deep, equal partnership with a strong China is a prerequisite for being able to discuss sensitive issues such as Tibet. We will continue to do that as we deepen our relationship with China—a relationship that is in all our interests. I thank the hon. Member for Leeds North East for providing the opportunity to debate this important issue and allowing me to restate the Government's position. I have a sneaking feeling that this is a subject to which he and other hon. Members will return—quite properly—on a regular basis.

2.36 pm

Fabian Hamilton: I thank all hon. Members who have contributed this afternoon. I thank the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), for her speech and the Minister for his responses to my points and those of other hon. Members.

As the Minister says, the subject will continue to be debated in this place—rightly so. As long as this Parliament is the centre of free speech and debate in our nation, I am absolutely sure that the rights of the Tibetan people will be one of the subjects with which we will be concerned, until any injustices are put right. I thank everyone for this afternoon's contributions, and I hope that we will be able to debate this subject again in future and see progress on behalf of the Tibetan people.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Tibet.

2.37 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 18 June 2015

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Planning

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): I am today setting out new considerations to be applied to proposed wind energy development so that local people have the final say on wind farm applications, fulfilling the commitment made in the Conservative election manifesto.

Subject to the transitional provision set out below, these considerations will take effect from 18 June and should be taken into account in planning decisions. I am also making a limited number of consequential changes to planning guidance.

When determining planning applications for wind energy development involving one or more wind turbines, local planning authorities should only grant planning permission if:

the development site is in an area identified as suitable for wind energy development in a local or neighbourhood plan; and

following consultation, it can be demonstrated that the planning impacts identified by affected local communities have been fully addressed and therefore the proposal has their backing.

In applying these new considerations, suitable areas for wind energy development will need to have been allocated clearly in a local or neighbourhood plan. Maps showing the wind resource as favourable to wind turbines, or similar, will not be sufficient. Whether a proposal has the backing of the affected local community is a planning judgement for the local planning authority.

Where a valid planning application for a wind energy development has already been submitted to a local planning authority and the development plan does not identify suitable sites, the following transitional provision applies. In such instances, local planning authorities can find the proposal acceptable if, following consultation, they are satisfied it has addressed the planning impacts identified by affected local communities and therefore has their backing.

[HCWS42]

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Onshore Wind Subsidies

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): The Government are committed to meeting objectives on cutting carbon emissions and the UK's 2020 renewable energy targets. Onshore wind has deployed successfully to date and is an important part of our energy mix. We now have enough onshore wind in the pipeline, to be subsidised by bill payers through the renewable obligation or contracts for difference, for onshore wind to play a significant part in meeting our renewable energy commitments. The Government were

elected with a commitment to end new subsidies for onshore wind and to change the law so that local people have the final say on onshore wind farm applications. We are now giving effect to these changes in full through the introduction of an Energy Bill this Session. The Energy Bill will devolve powers out of Whitehall so that applications for onshore wind farms are considered by democratically elected councils.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government is today making a statement on onshore wind development and local planning in England. This will set out new considerations to be applied to proposed wind energy development so that local people have the final say on wind farm applications.

I am now setting out proposals to end new subsidies for onshore wind, specifically in relation to the renewables obligation (RO). Onshore wind is currently subsidised through three schemes: contracts for difference (CfDs) introduced by the last Government, and the renewables obligation and feed-in tariffs introduced previously.

With regard to CfDs, we have the tools available to implement our manifesto commitments on onshore wind and I will set out how I will do so when announcing plans in relation to further CfD allocations. I will also shortly be considering options for continued support for community onshore wind projects through the feed-in tariff (FITs) as part of the review that my Department is conducting this year.

The RO supports the overwhelming majority of current and future onshore wind capacity. Unlike CfDs, which introduce competition for subsidy and therefore drive costs down more quickly, the RO is demand-led and so poses more risk of pressure on consumer bills from increased demand for the subsidy. I am therefore announcing today that we will be introducing primary legislation to close the RO to new onshore wind from 1 April 2016—a year earlier than planned.

My Department's analysis indicates that, after taking into account an early closure, onshore wind deployment under the RO will be in the region of 11.6 GW. In addition to the 0.75 GW of onshore wind that has secured a CfD, this puts us above the middle of the range set out in the EMR delivery plan, our best estimate of what we would need to meet our 2020 targets. It is therefore appropriate to curtail further deployment of onshore wind, balancing the interests of onshore wind developers with those of the wider public.

To protect investor confidence in the wider renewables sector, I am proposing a grace period which would continue to give access to support under the RO to those projects which, as of today, already have planning consent, a grid connection offer and acceptance, and evidence of land rights for the site on which their project will be built. I believe this draws the line in the right place but I want to hear views from the industry and other stakeholders before framing the terms of the legislation.

I intend that any final proposals are applied across Great Britain and I am in the process of consulting with Scottish and Welsh Ministers on this matter. Since energy policy is devolved in Northern Ireland, I am currently in discussions with Ministers there to agree how our commitments on onshore wind will be implemented in Northern Ireland.

[HCWS40]

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Palace of Westminster (Restoration and Renewal)

Sir Paul Beresford (*Representing the House of Commons Commission*): An independent appraisal of options for the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster is published today. It was requested by the House of Commons Commission and the House of Lords House Committee in the last Parliament following a pre-feasibility study and preliminary strategic business case which was published in October 2012. The new study has been carried out by a consortium consisting of Deloitte Real Estate, AECOM and HOK. The IOA (together with two volumes of detailed supporting materials) is available on the Parliament website at: www.restorationandrenewal.parliament.uk.

The restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster will be a major challenge facing Parliament in the coming years and is certain to be a matter of public interest. The process to establish a Joint Committee, which will make recommendations to both Houses on how to proceed, is already under way. It will be for the Joint Committee to decide how best to carry out its task.

[HCWS43]

TRANSPORT

EU Transport Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): I attended the second Transport Council under the Latvian presidency (the presidency) in Luxembourg on Thursday 11 June.

The Council adopted a general approach on the proposed directive laying down technical standards for inland waterway vessels. There was broad support from member states and the Commission for both the text and the related creation of the European Committee for Inland Navigation Standards (CESNI). The Commission indicated that it would now attempt to capitalise on this success by looking to harmonise other standards in the inland waterway sector, including training for crew.

The presidency appreciated the support of all member states and the Commission in their efforts to reach agreement with the European Parliament on the complex technical pillar of the fourth railway package.

On the market pillar, however, the presidency was clear that more time was needed. I welcomed the improvements to date to address concerns on over-regulation but pressed that more needed to be done to ensure that competition could flourish and rail continued to be an attractive investment. In highlighting the success of the UK's liberalised and competitive rail market, I invited other member states to visit the UK to learn from our experience. The main point of contention was the nature of possible exemptions from competitive tendering with the Commission supporting an exemption based on performance criteria while some member states called for an exemption based on their share of the EU

rail market being less than 1%. I strongly pressed that any exemptions to competitive tendering had to be based on objective criteria and fully justified.

On air passenger rights, the presidency presented its progress report.

I underlined the UK's strong support for the improvements in air passenger rights while reinforcing our position that the balanced and proportionate trigger points of 5/9/12 hours should be maintained, a view strongly echoed by some member states. I also voiced strong concerns on the proposed inclusion of a compensation scheme for missed connecting flights, highlighting the negative impacts for both passengers and airlines. Two member states called for a lower trigger point of three hours with another suggesting anything other than including three hours in line with interpretative case law from CJEU rulings was a step backwards in passenger rights. There was no discussion on the application of the regulation to Gibraltar airport.

Under any other business, the Commission presented the conclusions of its interim evaluation on road safety, taking stock of progress towards the 50% reduction in fatalities by 2020. With regards to next steps the Commission indicated that it was considering proposing a target for reducing serious injuries.

On the Trans-European Network—Transport (TEN-T) and Connecting Europe facility (CEF), the Christophersen-Bodewig-Secchi report which looks at making the best use of the new EU financial schemes for transport infrastructure projects, was presented. The authors called for urgent action to ensure the success of the European fund for strategic investments (EFSI) for the transport sector and presented 12 recommendations for bringing private capital to the transport sector. The Commissioner invited member state views on these recommendations ahead of the TEN-T days set to take place in Riga on 22 and 23 June.

The presidency presented the outcome of the third Asia-Europe meeting (ASEM) Transport Ministers' meeting where ASEM member countries made a strong commitment to fostering closer co-operation in the field of transport connectivity.

The Commission updated the Council on the Shift2Rail research and innovation programme. The Commission regretted the delay in the recruitment of the executive director but considered the remainder of the programme was on track. I joined several member states in thanking the Commission for the update and encouraging all efforts to ensure an accelerated deployment of the programme.

The Luxembourg Minister for Sustainable Development and Infrastructure presented the work programme of their upcoming presidency stating their focus would remain on the fourth railway package and achieving a general approach on the market pillar by the October Transport Council. He invited Ministers to an informal Council on 7 October focusing on cycling, followed by the formal Council on 8 October where there would be a policy debate on the Commission's review of its transport white paper. At the December Council there would be a policy debate on social conditions in road transport.

[HCWS41]

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