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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 15 July 2015**



# House of Commons

*Wednesday 15 July 2015*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### SCOTLAND

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Tax Credits

1. **Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the effect on claimants in Scotland of changes in entitlement to working tax credits and child tax credits. [900931]

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke):** The Chancellor has regular discussions with Treasury colleagues, as well as with the rest of the Cabinet, on a wide range of topics. The changes to tax credits are at the centre of the Government's intention to move to a higher wage, lower tax and lower welfare society.

**Debbie Abrahams:** The independent Institute for Fiscal Studies has shown that the poorest 20% of the population will lose proportionately more than any other income group as a result of the benefit and tax changes. Given that International Monetary Fund analysis has shown that an increase in income to the poorest 20% stimulates growth, what is the Minister's assessment not just of the increase in poverty in Scotland but of the stifling of growth?

**Mr Gauke:** The point I would make to the hon. Lady is that if we want to have a strong economy, we have to move to a higher wage, lower tax and lower benefits system. That is what the Government have been elected to do; that is what we are delivering.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that part and parcel of changing the system is to encourage the Scottish people to live on the wages they earn from the jobs that will be created under the long-term economic plan?

**Mr Gauke:** The key to prosperity is to ensure that we have a dynamic economy. That is why we are cutting business taxes so we have higher wages and higher productivity; that is why we are improving our skills and investment in the United Kingdom; and that is the way we can ensure we have higher living standards for the people of Scotland and all parts of the United Kingdom.

**Angus Robertson** (Moray) (SNP): The UK Government are planning to restrict child benefit to two children for new parents. The Department for Work and Pensions and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs have in the Budget been asked to

"develop protections for women who have a third child as a result of rape, or other exceptional circumstances."

Can the Minister explain how that will work?

**Mr Gauke:** The point I would make to the hon. Gentleman is that we think it is right that all families face the same situation, having to make choices bearing in mind the financial consequences of the number of children they have. It is right that a regime is put in place for exceptional circumstances. If the hon. Gentleman does not want to restrict tax credits to two children per family in future, he will be able to bring in top-ups paid for by the Scottish taxpayer under the powers provided in the Scotland Bill.

**Angus Robertson:** Rape is one of the most serious crimes and has one of the poorest clear-up rates. It is thought that 85% of women who are raped do not confirm that they have been raped. May I urge the Secretary of State and his colleagues to look very, very closely at this issue? I have already asked the Minister the question once and he did not give an answer as to how the Government are going to manage this very, very sensitive issue. May I ask him again how the Government plan to make this work?

**Mr Gauke:** We will set out the details in due course, but it is perfectly reasonable to limit in future—this is prospective; this is for future births—the support that is provided to families to two children under the tax credits system, so that all households face the same consequences of decisions about how many children they have. That is what most families have to live with.

#### Benefit Sanctions

2. **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): If he will make an assessment of the effect of benefit sanctions on (a) levels of poverty and (b) social cohesion in Scotland. [900932]

**The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel):** All evidence shows that work is the best route out of poverty. This Government have taken action to reform the welfare system to support people to come off benefits and get into work.

**Alison Thewliss:** May I ask the Secretary of State for Scotland for an urgent review, as recommended by Citizens Advice Scotland, of the 323% increase in requests for food parcels in the past four years owing to the main triggers of benefit sanctions and benefit administration?

**Priti Patel:** I return to the comments I have just made. The best route out of poverty is to increase work incentives and to support employment opportunities—having a job. To do that, we need a Government with a long-term economic plan that secures employment prospects for the country as a whole.

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): Since the question about having a review will not be answered, is it not time that the powers were transferred to the Scottish Parliament to carry out this pressing and urgent review of the increase in the use of food banks in Scotland?

**Priti Patel:** Welfare powers will, of course, be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, so it will be up to it to use them effectively as it sees fit.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I agree with the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), because yesterday I also met Citizens Advice Scotland, which told us that more than 200 people a day were being sanctioned by the Department for Work and Pensions and that 100,000 children were being affected. Will the Minister please answer the question? Why will she not instigate a full review of the sanctions regime, as recommended by the Church of Scotland?

**Priti Patel:** When it comes to sanctions in particular, individuals are asked to meet reasonable requirements to take into account their circumstances, which is right and proper when people are looking for work and employment. *[Interruption.]* I see SNP colleagues laughing at the prospect, but we are all about supporting individuals into the employment market. As we have seen, 70% of jobseeker's allowance recipients say that the system of sanctions and conditionality leads them to engage positively with the support on offer to help them into employment.

### Onshore Wind Farms

3. **Robert Flello** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the First Minister of Scotland on the Government's decision to end new subsidies for onshore wind farms by April 2016. [900933]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** I have regular discussions with the Scottish Government on issues affecting the energy sector, including on our manifesto commitment to end new subsidies for onshore wind. I have also listened to organisations and communities across Scotland who support our policy of an affordable energy mix that also protects Scotland's natural landscapes.

**Robert Flello:** According to the UK Government's own report, 5,400 jobs depend on onshore wind. Surely the decision to end the subsidies prematurely puts many of these jobs at risk. Why are the Government so complacent about putting 5,400 jobs at risk?

**David Mundell:** The Conservative position on this issue was clear heading into the election. Of course the interests of the industry are important, but so are the interests of taxpayers and local communities, and I believe that the policy we have set out gets it right in Scotland and across the United Kingdom.

13. [900944] **Callum McCaig** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): On "Sunday Politics Scotland", the Secretary of State, following the early closure of the renewables obligation for onshore wind, stated that projects with the prospect of a grid connection would be eligible under the grace period. Will he stick to that commitment?

**David Mundell:** I have repeatedly made clear my support for this policy; I believe it is the right thing to do. It is clear in Scotland that the UK Government are on the side of local communities, but the SNP is on the side of developers.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Niall Stuart, the chief executive of Scottish Renewables, says of this decision that it is

"bad for jobs, bad for investment and can only hinder Scotland and the UK's efforts to meet binding climate change targets".

Why does the Secretary of State think he knows better than Niall Stuart?

**David Mundell:** I certainly think I know better than the Liberal Democrats, who have been complicit in covering Scotland with wind farm developments. It is clear that ours is a popular policy among communities right across Scotland who do not want to see our landscape covered with unnecessary wind farm developments. I stand behind our policy.

### Income Tax

4. **Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): What recent discussions he has had with Ministers of the Scottish Government on progress on implementing the Scottish rate of income tax. [900934]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** The UK and Scottish Governments continue to work closely with each other on the implementation of the Scottish rate of income tax. The question now is how the Scottish Government will use the new power when it comes into effect in April 2016.

**Seema Malhotra:** Transferring control of income tax to Scotland requires HMRC to identify who Scottish taxpayers are, but over the last year we have seen an increase in the risk rating by HMRC in terms of its ability to identify those taxpayers. Has that risk increased or decreased recently?

**David Mundell:** I can tell the House that the UK Government and the Scottish Government work closely together on this issue. Despite the bluster that we often see here, the reality is that the UK and Scottish Governments are working closely on many important issues for the people of Scotland. I am absolutely confident that the Scottish rate of income tax will be capable of being introduced next April. HMRC has done the necessary work; what we need now is to hear from the SNP what they intend to do with those tax powers.

**John Mc Nally** (Falkirk) (SNP): In discussions with Scottish Ministers on the implementation of the Scottish rate of income tax, has the Secretary of State considered the benefits of devolving national insurance? Has he ruled out the devolution of additional tax powers or the full devolution of income tax to the Scottish Parliament—despite what was said before the "indyref"?

**David Mundell:** I would have given the proposal to devolve national insurance contributions a lot more credibility if a single SNP Member had stood up and spoken in favour of it during the Committee stage of the Scotland Bill. Instead, we had the spectacle of putting the issue to a vote without one Member setting out why the measure would benefit the people of Scotland.

### Scotland Bill

5. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): If he will make it his policy to table substantive Government amendments to the Scotland Bill in the House of Commons rather than in the House of Lords. [900935]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** It is my intention to make substantive amendments in the House of Commons when the Bill comes back on Report.

**Martyn Day:** The Secretary of State knows that not a single amendment from the Opposition parties—not even amendments backed by 58 out of 59 Scottish MPs—has been accepted by his Government. Does he understand the anger people will feel if changes are brought through in the House of Lords rather than here in the Commons where they can be fully scrutinised by democratically elected Members? Will the Secretary of State make a commitment today to bring forward substantive changes to the Bill on Report to deliver on the Smith commission in full and implement the additional powers people voted for in the election?

**David Mundell:** What I know angers people in Scotland are stunts, soundbites and press releases aimed solely at taking opportunistic positions on issues. The Scotland Bill is a matter of substance, which will transfer significant powers to the Scottish Parliament, and it should be treated seriously. Some of the amendments, not least those for full fiscal autonomy, have not been serious. I am looking at all the amendments, sorting the wheat from the chaff, and will bring forward Government amendments on Report.

**Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con):** In welcoming my right hon. Friend's statement, may I ask him how much notice he is going to ensure will be given of these forthcoming amendments?

**David Mundell:** I have already said to the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee in the Scottish Parliament that I will share our amendments with it—and I will, of course, share them with Members here and encourage a full debate. However, I want a debate on substance; I do not want stunts, soundbites and press releases. I want the best for the people of Scotland.

**Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP):** That will not do, Secretary of State. You have been asked a very straight and clear question: will you now rule out bringing significant and substantial changes to the Scotland Bill in the unelected House of Lords? The House of Lords has never been held in such contempt by the Scottish people, who see it as nothing but a repository for the cronies of and donors to the UK parties. Will you rule out making significant changes through the House of Lords and do it in front of the elected Members of the House of Commons?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I say very gently to the hon. Gentleman that I will rule out nothing, but I will leave it to the Secretary of State to do so. The debate runs through the Chair, and the hon. Gentleman, who is an experienced denizen of this House, should know that.

**David Mundell:** The hon. Gentleman does not listen. It was made clear repeatedly during the Committee stage of the Bill that amendments would come forward on Report and be debated in this House. The hon. Gentleman has been rumbled. He does not want to participate in a proper debate about the issues of concern to the people of Scotland; he is interested in press releases and stunts.

**Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab):** My party has submitted more than 80 amendments to the Scotland Bill, more than all the other parties in the House combined. The Secretary of State has said today that he will listen, and will return to the House with amendments to the Bill. May I ask which of Labour's amendments he will be accepting?

**David Mundell:** I will be reflecting on the amendments that Labour has tabled. Some were tabled in a constructive way, while others were obviously tabled in a partisan way. I will reflect on amendments to the Bill that are in the interests of the people of Scotland.

**Ian Murray:** New research conducted by the House of Commons Library, which I am releasing today, shows that the average family in Scotland working full time on the so-called national living wage will be more than £1,800 a year worse off after the Budget. The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has said that the Budget has

“the potential to be just as damaging as the ‘bedroom tax’.”

Will the Government therefore accept Labour's amendment to the Scotland Bill that would give the Scottish Government the power to design a welfare system fit for the Scottish people?

**David Mundell:** I believe that the substantial welfare powers in the Bill, which constitute responsibilities worth £2.5 billion, will give the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament a significant say in welfare arrangements in Scotland. What we need to hear from the SNP is exactly what sort of welfare system it intends to introduce, and, most important, who is going to pay for it.

### Gaming Machines

6. **Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the potential effects in Scotland of the devolution of decisions on varying the number of applications for new gaming machines where the maximum stake is above £10. [900936]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** The Scotland Bill will give Scottish Ministers the power to vary the number of high-stakes gaming machines for new betting premises in Scotland. It is now for those Ministers to set out their policy intent.

**Graham Jones:** Fixed odds betting terminals are a plague on poor communities—they are known as the crack cocaine of gambling. Why is it acceptable for the Government to devolve that power to Scotland but not to local authorities like mine, which, along with 93 other authorities, has tabled a request for action from the Department for Communities and Local Government?

**David Mundell:** I know that the hon. Gentleman feels very strongly about this issue, and I know that he and, indeed, others tabled amendments relating to it during the Committee stage of the Bill. I am definitely reflecting on it.

**Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con):** Horse-racing depends on its income from betting shops—that is, the money that they pay for picture rights. Has the Secretary of State made any assessment of the impact that this decision will have on funding for horse-racing?

**David Mundell:** The view of the all-party Smith commission was that the proliferation of betting terminals was not good for Scotland, that it needed to be dealt with, and that the Scottish Government were best placed to deal with it. That is the measure that we are implementing.

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): The draft clause would provide a power to restrict the number of FOBTs only when a new betting premise licence was being sought. The Law Society of Scotland has proposed that the clause should be amended to include existing and new premises. Will the Minister at least concede that to the Scottish Parliament?

**David Mundell:** I think I said in my earlier answer that we had not reached those amendments on that day of the Committee stage, but I am reflecting seriously on them.

### Public Expenditure

7. **Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): What estimate he has made of the level of public expenditure per person in Scotland in each of the last three years. [900937]

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke):** The latest edition of the Country and Regional Analysis calculates that in 2013-14 total identifiable expenditure on services in Scotland was 15% higher than the UK average. Once the Smith agreement has been implemented, changes in Scottish Government funding will increasingly come from changes in Scottish taxes rather than as a result of the Barnett formula.

**Mr Bone:** If we translate that into English, we find that more than £2,000 less per person is spent on people in the east midlands—including my constituents in Wellingborough—than is spent on people in Scotland, yet my constituents pay exactly the same taxes. Does the Minister think that that is fair and just?

**Mr Gauke:** There is no consensus on what the solution should be. The Barnett formula has been in place for some time. In future, however, more than 50% of funding will come from Scottish taxes rather than from the block grant, and the Barnett formula will therefore become less important over time.

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): The Government are very keen to focus on public spending, but not so keen to talk about tax contributions. People in Scotland have paid more, on average, for more than three decades. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the public expenditure cuts in Scotland, on top of the tax credit cuts for working people, will mean that the poorest in those communities will suffer the most? Given that Scotland has rejected the Secretary of State's austerity programme, when will he give the Scottish Parliament powers to choose a different path?

**Mr Gauke:** We are giving the Scottish Parliament the powers to follow a different route. Perhaps it is time the SNP explained how it would use those powers, rather than constantly complaining about wanting more powers. On hurting the poorest, full fiscal autonomy, which would cost the Scottish people £10 billion a year, would hurt the poorest in Scotland.

### NEETs

8. **Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): How many young people aged between 16 and 24 in Scotland are not in employment, education or training; and if he will make a statement. [900939]

**The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel):** Latest figures show that the number of NEETs aged 16 to 19 in Scotland in 2014 is down by over 8,000 to its lowest level since comparable records began in 2004.

**Dr Blackman-Woods:** Figures from the Scottish Government show that 59,000 young people are unemployed in Scotland, the largest number for any age group, and many are not able to access either a job or training. What is being done to address that?

**Priti Patel:** The hon. Lady raises a valid point, and the Department for Work and Pensions has helped young people in Scotland through a range of initiatives such as the new enterprise allowance and sector-based work academies as well as the Work programme. I am pleased to take further the Chancellor's announcement in last week's Budget that the Government are determined to support young people in Scotland and across the UK by introducing a youth obligation.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The Minister will be aware of Scottish Government plans to increase the number of modern apprenticeship places in Scotland to 30,000. How will the new apprenticeship levy announced in the Budget operate? Will it deliver additional resources to the Scottish Government to invest in apprenticeships, and does the Minister have an estimate of how much new money will be available?

**Priti Patel:** The details of the policy will come forward in due course, but it is commendable that across the UK this Government are supporting the creation of 3 million new additional apprenticeships, which just goes to show that we are investing in our young people and supporting them as they get closer to the employment market.

### Smith Commission

9. **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): What progress has been made on implementation of the recommendations of the Smith commission. [900940]

**The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell):** We are making good progress in implementing in full the all-party Smith commission agreement. The Scotland Bill, which will deliver significantly increased powers to the Scottish Parliament, was introduced on the first day of this parliamentary Session and has just completed four days of intense scrutiny on the Floor of this House.

**Andrew Bridgen:** Does the Secretary of State agree that the progress of the Smith commission recommendations shows that the three main Unionist parties are fulfilling their commitment to devolve further powers to Scotland, and that it is therefore unacceptable for others to seek baseless grievances to create the impression of some betrayal to further their own narrow political agenda?

**David Mundell:** I could not agree with my hon. Friend more. This week more than any other the narrow opportunism of the SNP has been exposed. The only issue on which that party is consistent is breaking up the United Kingdom, on which it will say or do anything.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): At business questions on 2 July the Leader of the House stated:

“Independent assessments say we are implementing the Smith commission report”—[*Official Report*, 2 July 2015; Vol. 597, c. 1633.]

To date the Scottish Secretary has been unable to produce these. Will he now name those independent assessments or ask his right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to correct his previous statement?

**David Mundell:** I am confident in the statements I have made throughout the passage of this Bill. I did not see the hon. Lady contributing in Committee or on Second Reading, but, if she had, she would have heard me say that I am absolutely confident that this Bill will deliver the Smith commission in full.

### Trade Union Reform

10. **Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): What discussions he has had with the Scottish Trades Union Congress on trade union reform. [900941]

**The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel):** As part of the trade union reform process, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills Ministers will invite the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss the Bill. This Government are committed to modernising trade union law. The Trade Union Bill to be introduced later today will introduce a balanced package to ensure working people are not disrupted by strikes without sufficient mandates.

**Chris Stephens:** The Minister confirms that the largest part of Scottish civic society has not yet been consulted on the Bill. Is that perhaps characteristic of a Government with a casual approach to legislation, or is it simply an ideological attack on those who stand up against exploitation?

**Priti Patel:** In contrast to the bluster, we are all about reforming and modernising trade union rules and, as I have just stated, BIS Ministers will invite the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss the Bill further.

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

Q1. [901016] **Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 15 July.

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

**Dr Blackman-Woods:** The “Intergenerational Fairness Index” published this week shows that prospects for young people have deteriorated since the Conservatives came into Government. Will the Prime Minister explain

why he is reducing opportunities for young people further by removing the maintenance grant for poorer students, thereby either reducing their opportunities or increasing their indebtedness?

**The Prime Minister:** We are increasing opportunities for young people by making sure that more of them have a job. Yet again, we have seen today a decrease in youth unemployment, which is down 13,000 on the quarter and 92,000 on the year. We now have record numbers of young people going to university and, because of the action we are taking, we are able to take the cap off university numbers and see many more people going. Replacing grants with loans is the right approach. Interestingly, it was the approach taken in 1997 when the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) sat in the Cabinet.

Q2. [901017] **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): It is bad enough that the latest figures show that there are 363 murderers in open prisons and that 106 murderers have absconded from open prisons in the last 10 years, but the figures also show that there are 179 offenders in open prisons who have previously absconded from an open prison. Will the Prime Minister give a commitment to ensure that nobody who has ever absconded from an open prison will ever be allowed back into an open prison?

**The Prime Minister:** I know that my hon. Friend takes a keen interest in this matter, and I will examine his proposal. We have already overhauled the process for allowing prisoners out on temporary licence, which has led to a 39% drop in the number breaching their licence conditions. The rate of prisoners escaping from prison has reached a record low. As I understand it, prisoners with a history of escaping or absconding while on temporary release are prevented from transferring to open conditions other than in the most exceptional cases. I will look at those exceptional cases to see whether there is a case for the blanket ban that my hon. Friend has talked about, and I will write to him over the summer.

**Ms Harriet Harman** (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): May I ask the Prime Minister a question about Greece? It is important that a deal on Greece has now been reached. The economic trauma that the people of Greece are going through is on a scale unprecedented in Europe since the end of the second world war, and the agreement should be implemented in a way that is fair to the people of Greece as well as being acceptable to the creditors. It is being reported this morning that the IMF is concerned about whether the deal is sustainable. Will the Prime Minister tell the House whether the Chancellor has had discussions with Christine Lagarde about how those concerns can be addressed?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. and learned Lady is absolutely right to raise this. We all feel for the Greek people, who have had a very difficult time, and there are no early signs of relief on the way. We talk regularly to the IMF, and the point that it is making that there needs to be debt relief for Greece must be right. The problem is that there is an argument at the heart of the eurozone about whether it is a single currency in which member states have to look after each other's debts and have a

fiscal union, a banking union and a social union—that is one view—or whether the single currency should have very strict rules and cannot deal with these things. Frankly, it is in our interests for the eurozone to resolve these issues. We are not involved in the debate directly because we are not in the euro—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”] And we are not going to join the euro. But the eurozone needs to resolve these issues and it needs to resolve them quite fast.

**Ms Harman:** It is important that the deal is sustainable, and it is interesting to hear the Prime Minister’s view about a measure of debt relief being necessary. Does he agree, however, that with President Putin waiting in the wings, this is about more than just economics—it has wider geopolitical significance? What is his view about that?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. and learned Lady is absolutely right. Greece is a member of the European Union, as well as of the euro. It is a friend and ally of Britain—we are NATO members and trading partners. It is not for Britain to bail out eurozone countries, and we would not do that, but, as a member of the European Union, if Greece were to leave the euro and it wanted humanitarian assistance, I am sure this House and the British public would take a more generous view. Sorting out the problems of the eurozone—we have always warned about the dangers of it—is a matter for eurozone countries, but she is right about the dangers of Russian involvement.

**Ms Harman:** But of course what happens in the eurozone affects this country, and therefore it is important that we are fully engaged.

Turning to the Budget, we are all concerned to see today’s rise in overall unemployment. For those in work, the Chancellor said that his changes on pay and tax credits will make working families better off, but they will not. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has now made it absolutely clear that the idea that a higher minimum wage will compensate for the loss of tax credits is “arithmetically impossible”. Will the Prime Minister now admit that as a direct result of his cuts to tax credits millions of working families on low incomes will be worse off?

**The Prime Minister:** First, let me comment on the unemployment figures. The right hon. and learned Lady is right in that there are mixed messages in the figures. It is disappointing that the claimant count has gone up, having fallen for so many months in a row—it is still at the lowest level since 1975—but long-term unemployment is down, youth unemployment is down and the rate of employment for women is at a new record high. Interestingly, when you look across the last year, you can actually see that all of the rise in employment in the last year has been among people working full time. Interestingly, in the light of the debates we had in the last Parliament, wages are up by 3.2% in these figures, which compares with yesterday’s inflation figures of zero. On the Budget, I remember her asking me from that Dispatch Box and making the point that reforming welfare would not work unless we increased minimum wages by a quarter. I can tell her that we are not going to—we are increasing them by a third, through the national living wage.

**Ms Harman:** So the Prime Minister is refusing to accept the fact that has been clearly established by the IFS: that the minimum wage increase will not compensate for his cuts in tax credits. That takes me to another claim he made about the Budget. He said that he would protect the most vulnerable. You are obviously vulnerable if you have a condition such as Parkinson’s or you are being treated for cancer, but the Budget changes mean that the support people like that will get will be cut from £100 a week to £70 a week. We agree that the deficit needs to come down, but what kind of Government is it that think the way to do that is to hit people who, through no fault of their own, are suffering from life-limiting illnesses? That is what his Budget is doing.

**The Prime Minister:** First, let us deal with the effects of this Budget and let me give the right hon. and learned Lady the figures. A family with two children where both parents work full time on the minimum wage will be better off by 2020 by a full £5,500. I do not think the Labour party has fully grasped the importance of this national living wage. Labour fought an election on it being £8 by the next election, but it is going to be over £9 by the next election because of the action of this Government.

The right hon. and learned Lady wants to ask questions about welfare, and I welcome what she has said. She said this week:

“we won’t oppose the Welfare Bill, we won’t oppose the household benefit cap”—

and Labour would not oppose—

“restricting benefits and tax credits for people with three or more children”.

I welcome that. What a pity the rest of her party does not agree with her. She asked specifically about employment and support allowance, and it is really important that we get this right. There are two groups of people on ESA, with the first being the support group, who will continue to get extra money—more than on jobseeker’s allowance—for as long as they need it. In terms of future claimants in the work-related activity group, existing claimants keep the existing amount of money but it is right that new claimants should get the same amount as jobseeker’s allowance and then get all the help that we give to jobseekers to help them into work. [HON. MEMBERS: “Why?”] Members ask why. I will tell them why: we want to get people into work. We want to give people a chance. We want to give people a life. That is what this Budget was all about.

**Ms Harman:** The Prime Minister talks about new claimants, but he does not really understand the reality of the situation. A lot of these people are in and out of work—they want to work but can do so only intermittently. Every time they go back into work and then come out of work, they are treated as a new claimant. I do not need to be patronised by the Prime Minister about not understanding the minimum wage—we introduced it. The Institute for Fiscal Studies says that 3 million families will be at least £1,000 a year worse off. The Minister for Skills, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), was on the radio this morning talking about party funding. He said that the Government’s curbs on trade union donations were not an attack on working people and the Labour party. Well, it does not look that way. There is an issue about big money in



politics, but it must be dealt with fairly. Will the Prime Minister commit not to go ahead with these changes unless it is on a cross-party basis? Will he include the issue of individual donation caps? It is not acceptable for him to be curbing funds from hard-working people to the Labour party while turning a blind eye to donations from hedge funds to the Tories.

**The Prime Minister:** Finally, we see where all those questions were going. The Labour party can go round and round and round, but it always comes back to the trade unions, which call the tune. Let me answer all the questions that the right hon. and learned Lady asked. First, if the Labour party is so keen on the national living wage, why did it vote against it in the Budget last night? Secondly, on the employment and support allowance, the number of people coming off jobseeker's allowance is more than seven times higher than that for those who have come off incapacity benefits since 2010. We want to help these people get back into work. Now she asks about the issue of trade union funding for the Labour party. There is a very simple principle here: giving money to a party should be an act of free will. Money should not be taken out of people's pay packets without them being told about it properly. If this was not happening in the trade unions, the Labour party would say that this was appalling mis-selling. It would say that it was time for consumer protection. Why is there such a blind spot—even with the right hon. and learned Lady—when it comes to the trade union paymasters?

**Ms Harman:** There is a simple principle here—it must be fair. What the Prime Minister is doing amounts to one rule for the Labour party but something completely different for the Tories. To be democratic about this, the Prime Minister must not act in the interests of just the Tory party. Instead of helping working people, he spends his time rigging the rules of the game. Now he wants to go even further and attack the rights of working people to have a say about their pay and conditions. That is on top of the Government already having changed the rules to gag charities and trade unions from speaking out. The Prime Minister says he wants to govern for one nation, but instead he is governing in the interests of just the Tory party.

**The Prime Minister:** The law for company donations was changed years ago, but the law for trade union donations has been left untouched. The principle should be the same: whoever we give our money to, it should be an act of free will. It should be a decision that we have to take. The money should not be taken from people and sequestered away without them being asked. Today we have seen it all. I thought that the right hon. and learned Lady was the moderate one, and the leadership contenders were the ones who were heading off to the left. What have we heard from them? They oppose every single one of our anti-strike laws; every single one of our welfare changes; and some of them even describe terrorist groups such as Hamas as their friends. In the week when we are finding out more about Pluto, it is quite clear that they want to colonise the Red Planet.

**Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con):** On Monday two men were tragically killed in an industrial explosion in my constituency. The families are devastated, and the thoughts of everyone in Norwich are with them and with the friends and colleagues of the two workers. The

emergency services worked tirelessly and investigations are ongoing, including that of the Health and Safety Executive. Will the Prime Minister join me in expressing our deepest sympathy and ensuring that the relevant parts of Government do all they can to support my constituents at this difficult time?

**The Prime Minister:** This is a very sad case, and I certainly join my hon. Friend in sending my condolences, and those of all Members of the House, to the family and friends of Barry Joy and Daniel Timbers at what is obviously a very difficult time. No words can do justice to the loss felt by those affected. I understand that the emergency services are continuing to investigate the circumstances surrounding the incident in order to get to the bottom of what happened. There will need to be a proper investigation and proper answers for the families.

**Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP):** Rape is an horrific crime that is abhorred by MPs of all political parties. Under the Prime Minister's plans to restrict child benefit to two children for new parents, the Government's Budget asks the Department for Work and Pensions and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to "develop protections for women who have a third child as the result of rape, or other exceptional circumstances." Can he explain how that will work?

**The Prime Minister:** We are very happy to look very closely at such issues, because there is absolutely no intention to penalise people who have been treated in this way. The principle we are applying is one that I think was set out very clearly by the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman). I think she put it extremely well when she said:

"When I was going around the country... talking specifically to women, so often they would say, 'You know, we've got one child and we'd really love to have another, but we just can't afford it'... They're working hard and they feel that it's unfair" when other people can have

"families they would love to have... We have to listen to that."

I think she was absolutely right, as I think all of us would agree. But, of course, in cases such as the one the hon. Gentleman raises, we will have to look very carefully to ensure that we look after them.

**Angus Robertson:** Rape is one of the most under-reported serious crimes in the UK. It is believed that 85% of victims do not confirm it to anybody, for a variety of very understandable reasons. Women Against Rape has said:

"Asking women to disclose very difficult information and expecting them to be able to prove it—in what is frankly a very hostile environment when the DWP is trying to take your money away—will have appalling consequences."

I urge the Prime Minister to look again and think again about what impact his proposals will have on rape victims.

**The Prime Minister:** I can reassure the hon. Gentleman, because he is reading from the Budget Book, which sets out the issue, that we do need to look very carefully at this, think about it and ensure that we get it right. At the same time, I am sure that he welcomes what was in the Budget about investing in women's refuges and rape crisis centres to ensure that we look after people who have suffered this appalling crime.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend indicated over the weekend that he would like to see greater use made of drones in the fight against terrorism, but is he aware that for every terrorist taken out by a drone between five and 10 innocent civilians, especially women and children, lose their lives? Will he accept that we need to bear that effect in mind as we seek to win hearts and minds in the conflict against the evils of terrorism?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course we must always think very carefully before we act, but the rules of engagement that both Britain and America follow are there to limit collateral damage to the absolute minimum. But if my right hon. Friend is asking me whether Britain should give up using drones in extremis to take out people who are threatening our country and seeking to bring terrorism to our streets, I would say very firmly no. I will say something that I am sure we both agree with. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, a missile can kill a terrorist, but it is good governance and strong Governments that can kill terrorism.

Q3. [901018] **Mr Jeffrey M. Donaldson** (Lagan Valley) (DUP): Enniskillen, Portadown, Lisburn, Belfast, Manchester, Warrington, Canary Wharf and the Grand hotel, Brighton are all places synonymous with the use by the IRA of Semtex explosives supplied by the Libyan Government to maim and murder thousands of innocent people in the United Kingdom. The American Government have secured compensation from the Libyans for the victims of state-sponsored terrorism. In the light of the recent political agreement in Libya, will the Prime Minister now commit to press the case for UK victims of state-sponsored Libyan terrorism to be given compensation as well?

**The Prime Minister:** Let me commend the right hon. Gentleman for raising this issue time and time again; he is absolutely right to do so. The fact is that it was Libyan Semtex that was used, and frankly could still be being used by dissident IRA groups because so much of it was delivered by Colonel Gaddafi and his hateful regime. Yes, we have raised with the Libyan Government in the past the issue of trying to seek compensation, and when there is a Libyan Government—there is not yet one in place—we will certainly raise it again.

Q4. [901019] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Last week thousands of my constituents and millions of Londoners and visitors to London were severely inconvenienced by the pointless tube strike. They will all welcome the Government's published proposals for changes to trade union laws, but will my right hon. Friend go further and state to this House and the people of this country that strikes in essential services should be absolutely the last resort and not a negotiating tactic?

**The Prime Minister:** I think the whole country will agree with my hon. Friend: they should only ever be a last resort. Frankly, with regard to the London tube services, the people driving these trains are well paid, and they are getting a pay rise and the chance of a bonus. It is absolutely right that we publish the Trade Union Bill today and we take these important steps—that a strike should not go ahead unless there is a 50% turnout and in essential services there should be an

additional threshold of 40% support for the strike. *[Interruption.]* I know that Labour Members will not like this, and they talk about thresholds, but the fact is that people affected by this—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) says I would not have been elected on that threshold. The fact is this: people affected by these strikes do not get to vote. That is why it is right to have these thresholds. I think the whole country will see a Labour party utterly in hock to the trade unions and a Conservative Government wanting to sort this out for hard-working families.

**Dr Alasdair McDonnell** (Belfast South) (SDLP): The Prime Minister will be aware of the vicious disorder that we saw in Belfast on Monday of this week, when police officers were seriously injured and a 16-year-old girl was left hospitalised as a result of disgraceful violence relating to parading. A car was driven intentionally and malevolently at a protest group. Will he join me in calling for the loyal orders to accept the genuine offer of residents, particularly those in Ardoyne, to engage in direct and meaningful dialogue to reach an honourable solution to the dispute that exists there, and hopefully to other disputes around parading?

**The Prime Minister:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman that those sorts of scenes are deeply damaging to Northern Ireland's reputation and to Northern Ireland's future. We all want to see these situations sorted out and not occurring in future. Overall, this year's twelfth of July was overwhelmingly a peaceful celebration in most areas of Northern Ireland, but what happened in the north of Belfast is not acceptable. I agree with him that where it is possible for people to get together and solve these problems, of course that is the best thing that can happen, but in the meantime it is obviously the Parades Commission that runs the adjudication process.

Q5. [901020] **Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): May I welcome the recent announcement in the Budget that this Government are pledging an extra £8 billion for the NHS in England? Launceston medical centre in my constituency of North Cornwall has been waiting two years for the green light for its expansion. Can my right hon. Friend provide me with an update regarding the progress of its bid?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the £8 billion—effectively £10 billion when we think of the £2 billion already put in for this Parliament—is a real vote of confidence from this Government in the NHS, and money that will make a real difference. I know that he has been campaigning to expedite the situation at Launceston medical centre. I am told by NHS England that it is a priority development. I hope that perhaps it can form part of the work we are doing to create a genuine seven-day NHS—seven days for people to access the NHS and always get the same levels of high-quality treatment.

Q6. [901021] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): GP practices across Sheffield serving patients with complex and therefore more costly health needs are threatened by the withdrawal of the minimum practice income guarantee and the personal medical services premium. Will the Prime Minister ask NHS England to

review the impact of these decisions to ensure that no practice closes, and will he ask Health Ministers to meet me and other Sheffield Members to consider what can be done to support effective practices?

**The Prime Minister:** I am sure that the Secretary of State for Health and his team will listen carefully to that and see if they can speak to the hon. Gentleman. What is happening in his city is that the number of GPs is actually increasing. This year, NHS Sheffield clinical commissioning group is getting £708 million, which is an almost 2% increase at a time of almost zero inflation. What we need to do is get the negotiations on this contract right. That does mean making some changes over time, but the contract has got to deliver the quality that the patients deserve.

**Steve Brine** (Winchester) (Con): I know that the Prime Minister is very aware of the tragic deaths of Corporal James Dunsby, Lance Corporal Craig Roberts and my constituent Lance Corporal Edward Maher on an SAS selection exercise in the Brecon Beacons two years ago this week. Yesterday, the coroner said that their deaths were the result of a series of “gross failures” and a

“catalogue of very serious mistakes”

by those involved in planning and running the exercise. Obviously, nothing can turn the clock back for the families, but will the Prime Minister ensure that the Army service inquiry that will now get under way does everything it can—recognising, of course, that we can continue to train the best armed forces in the world—to bring in whatever changes are needed to prevent this from ever happening again and to see that those responsible are held to account?

**The Prime Minister:** I am sure I speak for the whole House and indeed for the whole country when I say that our hearts go out to the families of James Dunsby, Craig Roberts and Edward Maher. Having seen at first hand some of the extraordinary things that our special forces do, the bravery of people who volunteer to join and the training that they do, I know how vital this is, but it is an absolutely tragic case. I understand that the Ministry of Defence has accepted the failures identified by the coroner and has apologised for these. I also understand that a number of changes have already been made to this particular exercise. We now need to study the coroner’s conclusions very carefully, and make sure that this cannot possibly happen again. I know the Army will also hold its own service inquiry as soon as all the civil investigations have been completed. It is an absolutely tragic case, and we will learn from it.

Q7. [901022] **Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): Cardiff has 600, Newport has 400, Rochdale has 700—yet the constituencies of the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Home Secretary have a grand total of only three. Is this a fair and efficient way to locate asylum seekers?

**The Prime Minister:** I believe we are operating the dispersal system in the same way it was operated for many years under the previous Labour Government, but I will look very carefully at the points the hon. Gentleman makes.

Q8. [901023] **Will Quince** (Colchester) (Con): Colchester is not only the oldest recorded town in Britain, but the fastest growing. Our claimant count is down 57% since 2010, but we want to go further. Does my right hon. Friend agree that only with much-needed investment in our local road and rail infrastructure can we attract businesses, create jobs and get Colchester moving?

**The Prime Minister:** Let me welcome my hon. Friend to the House. I remember campaigning with him in Colchester and how much he talked about the importance of these infrastructure schemes. That is why we have asked Network Rail to look at the options for the Anglia franchise, because we want to deliver reduced journey times on the great eastern main line. We have approved a series of major upgrades to the A12 that are absolutely vital. Now that he is speaking up for Colchester, I am sure we will be able to do even more.

Q9. [901024] **Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): The Secretary of State for Transport has refused to say when he first told the Prime Minister that the electrification of the trans-Pennine line could not go ahead. There is huge concern about this in my constituency and across the north. Was the Prime Minister told about this before the general election—yes or no?

**The Prime Minister:** No, I was told about this after the election, as we have set out before. The point now is that we need to do everything we can to get to the bottom of the overspending and the engineering difficulties. Frankly, we have committed vast sums of money—a £38 billion programme—to rail, and instead of griping and raising these grievances, the whole House should get behind this programme and make sure we get on with it.

**Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): With the threat level at an unprecedented high, will my right hon. Friend support 2% of GDP for the defence budget and prioritise no further cuts to front-line forces, as the constituents of Eastleigh have asked me to ask him?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We made the pledge in our manifesto that there would be no further reductions in regular armed services numbers, which was absolutely right. With the 2% and the extra commitment that we are making throughout this Parliament, we can have a strategic defence and security review that looks at options to make this country even safer. The Chancellor and the Defence Secretary have made sure that we look at options for counter-terrorism and intelligence and security, as well as defence assets, to ensure that we do everything we can at this time of heightened security to keep Britain safe.

Q10. [901025] **Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): A combination of changes that were made to the state pension in 1995 and 2011 means that many women who were born in the 1950s will not have the kind of retirement that they had hoped for. Given that senior civil servants, judges and even Members of Parliament have their pensions protected within 10 years of their normal retirement age, is it not time for the Prime Minister to look again at ensuring that this group of women have fairness in the system?

**The Prime Minister:** I will look carefully at the hon. Gentleman's question, but it was absolutely right to raise the pension age. That has been one of the most important long-term changes that have enabled us to go on paying very generous pensions. It has enabled us to have the triple lock, which means that the pension will always go up by earnings, prices or 2.5%—whichever is the highest. If we went down the path that he is suggesting of not changing the pension age, pretty soon we would find that we could not pay proper pensions. That is always the Labour way—you take the easy way, you duck the difficult decisions and then you can't pay.

**Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con):** Is my right hon. Friend aware that 120,000 Europeans and 140,000 non-Europeans settled in this country in 2013? Does he agree that the UK Government have to control the number of migrants?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, I do. That is why we took so much action in the last Parliament to cut net migration from outside the European Union. Obviously, inside the European Union there is the freedom to go and work in another European country. One reason we are focusing so much on the welfare issue is that of the people who come from Europe to the United Kingdom, 60% are jobseekers, not people who already have a job. Our proposals that people will not get benefits for the first six months of being here, that if they do not have a job after six months they will have to go home, and that they will have to pay into the system before they get anything out of the system will make a real difference.

Q11. [901026] **Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab):** My constituent, Kylie Strassenburgh, is a home carer who is on call six days a week. She works every hour God sends, but needs working tax credits to help make ends meet. Will the Prime Minister be honest with Kylie and admit that even with a higher minimum wage, the cuts to tax credits will make her worse off?

**The Prime Minister:** Care workers up and down the country who are currently on the minimum wage and who get no more than that will benefit, not least from the 50p increase from the national minimum wage to the national living wage, which will happen straight away next year. We are only able to do that because we are cutting taxes for working people, cutting taxes for business, making welfare affordable and introducing the national living wage. Let the whole House focus on this: last night the Labour party voted against the national living wage. Put that on your leaflets!

Q12. [901027] **Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con):** Youth unemployment in Worcester has halved over the

past two years. As of today's figures, it is down two thirds from its peak under Labour. With this one nation Government investing in increasing the number of apprenticeships by half, will the Prime Minister back my long-term plan to have 15,000 apprenticeships a year in Worcestershire by 2020?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for all that he does to support apprenticeships in his constituency. Some 4,490 have been created since 2010. He is right that the challenge for the future is to have the right number of apprentices and quality of apprenticeships. That is why it is right to introduce a levy on larger firms, whereby they get the money back if they invest in apprenticeships, but have to pay if they do not. That will be one of the key ways in which we achieve our goal of 3 million apprentices in this Parliament.

**Mr Speaker:** Last but not least, Mr Michael Meacher.

Q13. [901028] **Mr Michael Meacher (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab):** If this is such a great economic recovery, why are wages still 6% below the pre-crisis level of seven years ago? Why was the growth rate in the last quarter a mere 0.4%? Why has productivity been flat for five years? Why is UK investment as a proportion of GDP one of the lowest in the world? And why is the balance of payments in traded goods now in deficit by £100 billion a year?

**The Prime Minister:** If the right hon. Gentleman wants to know why, there are two words: ask Gordon. But if he wants to know what is actually happening in our economy, let me tell him. The deficit has been halved from its peak—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Andy McDonald, calm yourself, man. Take some sort of soothing medicament. You will find it beneficial.

**The Prime Minister:** If the right hon. Gentleman wants to know what is happening in our economy, the deficit is down by half, we have seen the fastest growth of any major advanced economy in 2014, we grew by 3% last year, the economy is 10% bigger than when I became Prime Minister, there are 2.2 million more people in work, and just today we can see inflation at zero, wages growing by over 3%, and a 5% cut in gas prices for 7 million customers. I would call that a long-term economic plan that is working. Added to that, just this week we have introduced a national living wage, we are building a welfare system that rewards work, and we are cutting taxes for working people. That is a Conservative party standing up for working people and delivering on the one nation agenda.

## Speaker's Statement

12.37 pm

**Mr Speaker:** I would like to make a very short statement. I am sure that the whole House will welcome the news that the new education centre on the parliamentary estate will be formally opened today. This will allow more than a doubling of the number of school pupils who can visit this place to 100,000 a year, or an additional 1 million visitors over the next decade. The quality of their time here will be hugely enhanced by this inspiring facility. My thanks to the House of Commons Commission for its support in this enterprise and to all those in the House team who have worked on it to such outstanding effect.

## Iran: Nuclear Deal

12.38 pm

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the outcome of the nuclear negotiations with Iran.

In recent days the world has held its breath as the talks between world powers and Iran edged towards a conclusion. They were difficult negotiations and all sides faced tough decisions. In the early hours of yesterday morning, a process that began over a decade ago came to a conclusion. The result is an historic deal, a landmark moment in efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation, and a victory for diplomacy. The UK, with its partners in the E3+3—China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States, with the EU High Representative as our co-ordinator—have at last reached a comprehensive agreement with Iran on its nuclear programme. With the conclusion of these negotiations, the world can be reassured that all Iranian routes to a nuclear bomb have been closed off, and the world can have confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian civil nuclear programme going forward.

The origin of these negotiations lies in the revelation some 12 years ago that Iran was concealing nuclear activities, in violation of its international obligations. At that time, Iran—under a different Government—was not willing to meet the requirements of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the international community responded with multiple UN Security Council resolutions. The agreement that we have reached does not absolve Iran of blame for its previous activities, and neither does it wipe the slate clean. Instead, it offers Iran the opportunity to draw a line under its past behaviour, and gradually to build the world's trust in its declarations that it is not pursuing the development of a nuclear weapon. That will not be a quick process, but with the implementation of this deal, it should be possible.

The Government's purpose in seeking an agreement has always been clear: to secure assurance that Iran will not be able to develop a nuclear weapon. To that end, this agreement imposes strict limits on Iran's nuclear programme that are comprehensive and long lasting. For 10 years, Iran's enrichment capacity will be reduced by more than two thirds from current levels. It will enrich uranium only to a level of 3.67%—well below the 90% level of enrichment considered necessary for a nuclear weapon—and its stockpile of low-enriched uranium will be limited to 300 kg, down from more than seven tonnes at present, with the balance exported to Russia. Its research and development activities will be constrained so that it will not be able to enrich with advanced centrifuges for at least 10 years. Additionally, no uranium enrichment, enrichment research and development, or nuclear material will be permitted at Iran's underground Fordow nuclear site. The agreement also cuts off the plutonium route to developing a nuclear bomb. Iran's heavy water research reactor at Arak will be redesigned and rebuilt so that it will no longer have the capability to produce weapons-grade plutonium.

Given the historical levels of mistrust that have built up between Iran and the international community, a strong inspections regime and a framework for addressing concerns about past military dimensions to Iran's nuclear

[Mr Philip Hammond]

programme are vital for building trust and providing us with the confidence that Iran is meeting its commitments. Some of the crucial monitoring and transparency measures of this deal will last indefinitely, such as the implementation of the additional protocol to the comprehensive safeguards agreement. The AP for every country allows access to sites about which the IAEA has concerns that cannot be addressed in any other way. Iran is no exception. Iran's non-proliferation treaty obligation—including the obligation never to acquire or develop nuclear weapons—will apply during and after the period of the deal. We will not hesitate to take action, including the re-imposition of sanctions, if Iran violates its NPT obligations at any time, and our concerns about the possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear programme will be addressed. The IAEA and Iran have agreed a “road map” of actions to clarify those issues.

Taken together, those measures mean that if Iran were to renege on its promises and try to “break out” for a bomb, it would take at least 12 months even to acquire the necessary fissile material for a single device. The robust transparency measures that we have agreed mean that we—the international community—would know almost immediately, and we would have time to respond.

In return for implementing those commitments, and as our confidence in Iran's programme develops over time, Iran will receive phased and proportionate sanctions relief. Initially, there will be relief of EU, US and UN nuclear-related economic and financial sanctions, but let me be clear: that sanctions relief will be triggered only once the IAEA verifies that Iran has taken the agreed steps to limit its nuclear programme.

Other core provisions in the existing UN Security Council resolutions will be re-established by a new UN resolution. Important restrictions on the import and export of conventional arms and development of ballistic missiles will be re-imposed through an annex to that resolution, and only lifted later in the agreement. Those relaxations are backed by a robust enforcement mechanism: if there is a significant violation of the nuclear provisions of the agreement, all previous UN sanctions can be re-imposed through a snap-back mechanism, which any party to this agreement can invoke. The EU and the US could also re-impose their own sanctions in such a scenario. Clearly, having made this agreement, it will be strongly in Iran's interest to comply with the provisions of it to avoid a return to the sanctions regime that has crippled its economy for so long.

We now need to look ahead to the implementation of the agreement. After such a tough negotiation there will inevitably be bumps along the road. We entered into the agreement in good faith, and all sides must try to resolve together any problems in implementing the deal, but the deal includes robust enforcement provisions and we will not hesitate to use them if Iran goes back on its word.

This agreement is focused solely on Iran's nuclear programme, but its conclusion could have wider positive consequences. By providing the means through sanctions relief for Iran's economic re-engagement with the world, it will allow the Iranian people to feel the tangible benefits of international co-operation. As that economic re-engagement materialises, we will, of course, seek to

assist UK businesses to take advantage of the opportunities that will arise. That assistance would, of course, be enhanced through having a functioning British embassy in Tehran. We remain committed to reopening our embassies in each others' countries and will do so once we have resolved some outstanding issues.

The deal also has the potential to build a different kind of relationship between Iran and the west, and to change in a positive way the dynamics in the region and beyond. In an atmosphere of developing confidence and trust, there will be an opportunity for Iran to re-align its approach in support of the international community's efforts, in particular in confronting the shared challenge of ISIL and the resolution of regional crises, such as those in Yemen and Syria, but this will be a process. It will take time. In the meantime, we remain realistic about the nature of the Iranian regime and its wider ambitions. We will continue to speak out against Iran's poor human rights record and we will continue to work closely with our friends, allies and partners in the region who live with Iranian interference in their neighbourhood. Iran will not get a free pass to meddle beyond its borders.

An Iranian bomb would be a major threat to global stability. That threat is now removed. We and Iran now have a common responsibility to ensure that the wider potential benefits of this deal for the region and for the international community as a whole are delivered. The UK is fully committed to playing its part, and I commend the statement to the House.

12.47 pm

**Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I offer the apologies of the shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), who cannot be with us today as he is recovering from a minor operation.

I thank the Foreign Secretary for advance sight of his statement and for setting out the details of this landmark agreement. Let me begin by paying tribute to him, John Kerry, our European and international partners and everyone involved for their efforts in securing a major diplomatic breakthrough.

There has long been consensus among those on the Front Benches that seeking an agreement with Iran was the right thing for the international community to do. We have always supported the twinned approach of sanctions and negotiations, backed up by UN Security Council resolutions, and it is welcome that the talks have reached a conclusion more than 12 years since they first began with the support of, among others, the then Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw.

None of us wants Iran to have a nuclear weapon and no one believes that the world would be a safer place if Iran were ever to acquire one, so it is worth reflecting on how much more grave the world might have looked today if the Foreign Secretary had returned to the House to report that the talks had collapsed without an agreement. We would be facing the almost certain restart of Iran's nuclear programme, with no means of monitoring or inspection, the possibility of a nuclear arms race in the middle east and greater instability in an already volatile region. That is why it has been right to use the negotiating opportunity that the pressure of sanctions against the Iranian regime has created, and that the

process was not rushed in order to get this right. The question now is to ensure that this agreement lives up to the words of the joint statement made yesterday by EU and Iranian Foreign Ministers, namely that it

“is not only a deal but a good deal. And a good deal for all sides”.

Negotiations of this complexity are never easy—that is the nature of diplomacy—but this agreement presents the international community with a real chance to make progress in the right direction, and we should grasp it. The Foreign Secretary has outlined many aspects of the agreement in detail. Let me touch on a number of them.

Iran has reaffirmed, as part of the agreement, that “under no circumstances will it ever seek, develop or acquire any nuclear weapons”.

That is significant, but the world, especially those countries in the region that have particular concerns, will want to see that Iran’s words are matched by its deeds. I therefore welcome the Foreign Secretary’s assurances that thorough and independent inspections are at the heart of this agreement. It is vital that the implementation is based not on faith, but on facts, evidence and verification.

We on the Labour Benches have always said that Iran should have to demonstrate beyond doubt that it is not pursuing the development of nuclear weapons. If realised, the measures outlined in the joint action plan should now enable everyone to see that that is the case. That is essential if this agreement is to command the confidence of world opinion.

Much has been made of the proposals to manage access to particular sites, with a commission to rule on whether inspection requests by the International Atomic Energy Agency are justified. I would therefore be grateful if the Foreign Secretary could provide further detail on how that would work in practice. What assurances were given in Vienna to ensure that that process will not prove to be an obstruction?

On enrichment, it is welcome that Iran has pledged to remove 98% of its stockpile of enriched uranium and two thirds of installed centrifuges. There has been much discussion of the numbers and of the timescales involved. As the Foreign Secretary has said, some parts of this deal, such as the arms embargoes, will remain in place for five years, and other restrictions for 10 to 15 years, while other transparency measures will stay in place permanently. Will the Foreign Secretary explain the rationale for those timescales, and are the Government satisfied that they are sufficient?

Does the Foreign Secretary agree that, although we should be positive about the implementation of the agreement, we must also go into it with our eyes open? If there is a lesson to be drawn from the collapse of the agreed framework negotiated with North Korea by the Clinton Administration in the 1990s, it is that the success of such agreements should be judged not over months, but in years. It is right, therefore, that some sanctions should be removed gradually and only as Iran honours the commitments it has made. Were Iran to violate the terms of the agreement, are the Government satisfied that the provisions for sanctions to snap back are tough enough to block its path to a nuclear weapon?

Does the Foreign Secretary agree with Javad Zarif, the Iranian Foreign Minister, who said yesterday that the deal represents not a ceiling, but a foundation to build on? It is no secret that Iran has been involved for many years in exploiting sectarian tensions in the region,

whether through proxy armies or support for terrorist groups. Those issues and difficulties in our own relationship with Iran will not go away overnight, but this agreement presents Iran with an opportunity to play a much more constructive global role, particularly given our shared interest in defeating the threat from ISIL/Daesh.

How confident is the Foreign Secretary that Iran is ready and willing to use this breakthrough to improve its relations with its neighbours? Does he agree that opening up better links with Iran will help the process of reform in that country, which, as the Foreign Secretary has said, needs to include improving its human rights record? On Britain specifically, the Foreign Secretary mentioned ongoing efforts to reopen our embassy in Tehran. When does he realistically expect that to happen?

The phrase, “Working together as an international community”, is well worn, but this moment shows what can be achieved through patience and diplomacy. If history teaches us anything, however, it is that peace is a process, not an event. The Iranian President yesterday called this a new chapter. We all live in hope that it will help lead to a safer and more peaceful world, free of nuclear weapons, and we on the Labour Benches will continue to support all efforts to make that hope a reality.

**Mr Hammond:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the constructive tone with which he has approached the announcement, and I thank him for the continued support of Opposition Front Benchers for—fortunately, in view of its duration—the cross-party approach over many years.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the long duration of the negotiations. This is not just about Foreign Secretaries and US Secretaries of State; it is also about the experts and diplomats who have been carrying out the negotiations. There was at least one person on the team that travelled back from Vienna with me yesterday who has been on this project for 10 years and who now faces finding a new career.

These have been incredibly complex negotiations and it is important that the outcome is a win-win. To have come back from Vienna with something that was a triumph for us but not a win for Iran would have been a hollow victory, because it would eventually have fallen apart. There has to be something solid for Iran and the Iranian people. They must have an opportunity to build a new future and ensure the future prosperity of their country, and I am confident that this agreement will allow that.

In a country such as Iran, we should not underestimate the importance of the religious edict against building a nuclear weapon. That is now firmly enshrined in the words of the Supreme Leader: Iran will not build or seek to acquire a nuclear weapon. The hon. Gentleman is right to say, however, that we have to be pragmatic, and a robust inspection regime is at the heart of our ability to do this deal.

The hon. Gentleman asked how the monitoring and access arrangements would work. The monitoring is multifaceted: there will be electronic monitoring; sophisticated, advanced telemetry; and seals on equipment that has been taken out of use. There will also be CCTV cameras in the facilities and regular inspections by IAEA inspectors. If the IAEA suspects that it needs

[Mr Philip Hammond]

access to a site that it does not regularly inspect, it can demand access. If the Iranians deny that access, the question of whether it should be allowed will be referred to the commission on the joint comprehensive plan of action and it will be determined on a “five out of eight” majority vote. The members of that commission are the E3+3, the EU High Representative and Iran itself. We are confident that, through that format, proper access will be ensured.

On the different timescales, we are comfortable with the end result. Obviously, this was a negotiation and we did not get as long as we would have liked on some of the restrictions, such as conventional arms control. On the nuclear part of the deal, however, we are very comfortable that we have respected our timelines, which are about maintaining a minimum 12-month breakout for a minimum of 10 years. We are very confident that we have well in excess of that minimum breakout period for well in excess of 10 years as a result of the practical effects of the agreement.

The mechanisms for “snap back” are robust and we insisted on them. If any member of the joint commission, including the United Kingdom, believes Iran is in significant violation, that member is entitled to ask the UN Security Council to vote on a negative resolution, which would cause the sanctions to snap back.

I understand why the hon. Gentleman mentioned North Korea, but, having spent some time with the Iranian negotiators and finding out a bit more than I previously knew about Iran, I know that Iran is a very different country from North Korea. Iran is a major player in the region. It is a big country with huge resources and a large and well-educated population. It can, if it chooses, play an enormously positive role in the development of the middle east and, indeed, contribute positively to world affairs.

Mohammad Javad Zarif is a reformer, as is Rouhani, but we do not delude ourselves that everybody in Tehran welcomes this agreement and shares their vision of a more open and more engaged Iran. Our job is to make sure that, as this agreement is implemented, we reinforce the hand of those in Iran who represent the majority who would like Iran to engage in a responsible way with the world. Part of that is ensuring that we work with Iran to deal with the shared threat of ISIL across the region.

Finally, on the question of the embassy, as I have explained to the House there are some technical issues on both sides that will have to be resolved before this can be done, but there is a very clear will to do it. I will be working directly with my Iranian counterpart to ensure that we clear away those obstacles over the next few months. I very much hope that we will be in a position to reopen our respective embassies before the end of this year. I look forward to going to Tehran to do so.

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): The Foreign Secretary, his political director and all his officials are to be congratulated on their role in this historic agreement. I very much welcome the tone of the Foreign Secretary's remarks about Iran in his answer to the Opposition spokesman. This now opens the way for Iran to play a constructive role in regional affairs. Noting that we have

a profound common interest in defeating Daesh and the welcome, measured tones of the official reaction from Riyadh, will he use this opportunity to employ the full weight of British diplomacy to forge intelligent and effective co-operation between Riyadh and Tehran towards a common strategy to defeat Daesh?

**Mr Hammond:** My hon. Friend is right that the big prize is to achieve a measure of reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and a constructive engagement between those two important regional powers in addressing the many challenges facing the region. That will not happen overnight, but he is absolutely right that the measured tone of the response we heard from Saudi Arabia, which was in stark contrast to some of the less measured responses we heard from elsewhere in the region, is promising. I spoke last night to the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. We will maintain our engagement doing two things: encouraging our partners and allies in the Arab countries around the Gulf to be willing to engage with Iran over time in a sensible and measured way; and providing them with the reassurance they need about their security to allow them to take a little more risk in trying to realise the opportunities that the agreement presents.

**Sir Gerald Kaufman** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): May I congratulate the Foreign Secretary and all others involved on this historic agreement, which is meticulous and has taken an enormous amount of time, effort and detail? I think it is appropriate to congratulate Barack Obama on what is probably the greatest achievement of his presidency. This agreement demonstrates the dictum of Winston Churchill that jaw-jaw is better than war-war. Yes, the Iranian regime has many aspects that are objectionable and nasty, and we look for improvements in their treatment on civil rights and on other matters in Iran, but Iran is a player and it is very important indeed that she be engaged rather than shunned. Will the Foreign Secretary make it clear to the Government of Israel, which unlike Iran is not a signatory to the non-proliferation treaty and has hundreds of nuclear warheads and missiles, that any attempt by them to interfere with, negate or frustrate this agreement will not be tolerated?

**Mr Hammond:** I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's remarks. He takes the words out of my mouth. I was trying to explain, in my conversation with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia last night, why jaw-jaw was better than war-war, but I found it rather difficult to convey across the language barrier. What he says is right: Iran has been subject to 35 years of isolation—that was its own choice and its own fault—and getting it engaged in the affairs of the region again, in a sensible and measured way, will be a huge benefit. I am going to Israel tonight and will have a chance to convey our message about this deal directly to Prime Minister Netanyahu tomorrow. He has made it clear that he intends to fight it all the way and that Israel will seek to use its influence in the US Congress to obstruct the progress of the deal. I am confident that that action will not succeed. I am also confident that Israel has shown time and again that it can be pragmatic, and that once it has exhausted that avenue of opportunity it will seek to engage in a sensible and pragmatic way to deal with the new reality on the ground in the middle east to the benefit of everyone.



**Dr Liam Fox** (North Somerset) (Con): My right hon. Friend is right that if Iran gives up its nuclear ambitions it is a huge move forward in regional and global security, but if we are to have confidence in verification it must be unfettered and unrestricted. Can my right hon. Friend guarantee to the House that under this agreement Iran can be forced to grant access to any site that is designated, and how quickly would Iran be forced to do so? He is right that there are wider potential positive implications for this agreement, but there are also wider potential negative implications. If Iran has sanctions lifted and money pours back into that country, what assurances and guarantees have been sought that it will not simply be used to fund proxies, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, and provide greater instability to the region?

**Mr Hammond:** My right hon. Friend makes a series of good points and he is right that access for verification is the crucial underpinning of this agreement. If we had not been able to secure robust access and monitoring arrangements, we would not have been able to make this deal; there would have been too much risk attached to it. In response to the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) I described the arrangements for the identification of sites for inspection, and reference of any Iranian objections to the commission. We are confident that those arrangements will work. It would mean typically a period of around 20 or 21 days between initial demand and mandated access. Of course, if Iran continues to deny access to a site that the commission has mandated should be accessed, that would be a breach of the agreement and subject to snap-back under the UN Security Council resolution.

My right hon. Friend asked about Iran's assets. Ultimately, if the deal is fully implemented it will lead to the unfreezing of about \$150 billion of Iranian assets, which are currently frozen outside that country. This will not happen overnight. It will be a progressive process.

My right hon. Friend asked two questions: what will happen with that money and how can we be sure it will not be used to foster interference in the region? Of course, we cannot be absolutely sure that it will not, but let me say two things. First, Iran has a huge deficit of infrastructure investment in its country—in its energy exporting infrastructure and in its transport infrastructure; it needs a new fleet of civilian aircraft—so there are huge demands for the use of those assets. The reformers in Iran, of whom President Rouhani is one, understand very well that this deal has to deliver real benefit to ordinary people in Iran as they go about their everyday business, and they will want to invest in those things. Secondly, with very little money available and under the full burden of international sanctions, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard command has made a pretty effective job of interfering in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and elsewhere. It is not as if this body was itching to do things but was unable to do them because it did not have the funds. It has been able to be pretty effective on a shoestring and we do not think, frankly, that the release of these funds will make a material difference.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I just gently point out to the House, and for the benefit of Ministers, that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald

Kaufman) is not an hon. Gentleman, but a right hon. Gentleman and the Father of the House. It is important to get these things right.

**Alex Salmond** (Gordon) (SNP): I know the Foreign Secretary will be aware that President Rouhani is a distinguished graduate of Glasgow Caledonian University. In his doctoral thesis, he wrote:

“This thesis verifies that no laws in Islam are immutable.”

That is true and it is also true of relationships between nations. Will the Foreign Secretary undertake not to listen to the prophets of doom, wherever they come from, but to see this welcome agreement as a start of a process of engagement that will bring the Government, and above all the people, of this remarkable country back into the community of nations?

**Mr Hammond:** I confess to the right hon. Gentleman that I was not aware that President Rouhani was a graduate of Glasgow Caledonian University, but I am delighted to hear it. It puts a new spin on my meetings with him where he relied on consecutive English translation; he clearly does understand what we are saying—or perhaps not.

I completely agree with the right hon. Gentleman that there is a huge opportunity to grasp, and it is in our interest and the region's interest that we do so. We must ensure that we do so.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Like most of the contributors so far, I welcome this development, but will the Foreign Secretary bear it in mind that the world also breathed a sigh of relief in 1972 on the signing of the biological weapons convention, only to discover, after a defection in 1989, that Russia had been cheating on a massive and industrial scale? We must always hope for the best in such negotiations, but I hope he will bear it in mind that we must also be prepared for the worst.

**Mr Hammond:** I take my right hon. Friend's cautionary statement. Of course, the difference in the case of Russia's cheating on the biological weapons agreements was that we did not have the kind of comprehensive intrusive inspections and access regime that we will have in relation to Iran. He is right, however, that while we should go forward with optimism, as others have suggested, we should also be cautious and recognise that there is a big deficit of trust to overcome. We need these access and inspection regimes, and we need to proceed cautiously, not least because, if we cannot reassure our partners in the region that we are approaching this cautiously and sensibly, we will lose them and we will not be able to encourage them to engage in the way we want to see.

**Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): I say gently to the Foreign Secretary that history will decide whether this was an historic agreement; it might be a bit premature to say so now. These negotiations took longer to conclude than some of the safeguards he talks about will be in place—it has taken us more than 10 years to get to this point. I want to return to the point about Iran using the lifted sanctions to support its proxies. The right hon. Gentleman needs to reassure the House a little more that when we lift the sanctions Iran will not simply become our proxy to fight our enemies?

**Mr Hammond:** First, the hon. Lady is obviously right to correct me on an error that many of us have made—prematurely describing something as historic. She talks about the 10-year timescale. Of course, the significance is that many of the measures taken will have an effect that lasts much longer than 10 years. The challenge now is to change the mindset in Iran—of the Iranian people and the Iranian leadership. We have a 10 to 15-year period, starting now, in which to get it firmly enshrined in the Iranian mentality that it is better for Iran—that it will have greater influence, prosperity and success—if it works with the international community rather than in isolation. That is why it is so important that we engage with Iran, and I look forward to doing that.

**Sir Eric Pickles** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I hope my right hon. Friend will forgive me if I press him on one aspect of the agreement. He talked about drawing a line, but we do not have a line yet; we have, in the words of the agreement, a “road map” through which we will arrive at a line. Given Iran’s record of clandestine sites and obfuscation, will he say how we will arrive at that line so as to know exactly what the position is in order that, when verification takes place, we know it is against a position that actually exists?

**Mr Hammond:** My right hon. Friend makes a good point. The International Atomic Energy Agency, which has responsibility for this, has agreed with Iran a road map and set of activities that need to be carried out so that it can publish its final report. We do not know how long that will take—probably six months or so—but there is conditionality here: until that report is published, the sanctions will not be lifted. That is part of the process that needs to be completed. The IAEA will have the ability to gain technical access, where it needs to do so, and to have technical discussions with Iranian experts, and it is confident—this is completely independent of the negotiators in Vienna—that the measures put in place, which Iran has agreed to as part of the deal, are adequate to allow it to do its job, complete its mission and issue that report.

**Mr Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): The Foreign Secretary talked about inspections and the 20 or more days for access to be gained to sites of concern. How confident is he that the citizens of this country can be assured that, in that period of arbitration and discussion about access, Iran will not be able to cover up illicit activity?

**Mr Hammond:** These negotiations have gone on for a very long time, and on each and every one of these issues, we have had very lengthy, detailed and technical discussions, and this is one of the issues I have been particularly focused on. I have sought detailed reassurance from our US allies that their assets and resources allow them to be confident of maintaining eyes on the situation from the time access is demanded to the time it is granted. After many hours of discussion, I have been satisfied that it will be possible for us to retain a high degree of confidence that a site has not been tampered with, or, if it has, for us to know exactly how it has been tampered with during that interval. Of course, removing radioactive material from a site is not easy; the radioactive footprint will be present, unless very extensive remediation and cleaning works have taken place.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Forgive me, but on the present trend, it would take a further hour and a half to accommodate all interested colleagues, so the present trend needs to be bucked. Let us look to a new Member to lead us by example. I call Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan.

**Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): My late father wrote extensively in the 1960s on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the key point was that it was prestigious to have nuclear weapons. Does my right hon. Friend believe that the Iranians are genuine when they say they are not seeking to develop a nuclear weapon?

**Mr Hammond:** I believe that President Rouhani and the Supreme Leader are genuine in their edict against nuclear weapons, but I am not naive; I am sure there are some within the Iranian power structure, including in the military structure, who still hark after nuclear weapons.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): I am pleased that this agreement has been reached; it is a huge step forward. As a result of it, does the Foreign Secretary think there is a possibility of holding the middle east weapons-of-mass-destruction-free-zone conference, which was envisaged at the last nuclear non-proliferation treaty review conference and was supported by all parties, including Iran? This is surely a great opportunity to push forward to end proliferation across the whole region.

**Mr Hammond:** The hon. Gentleman has been a supporter of such a conference for a long time, and as he knows, the Government also support it. The UK has been advocating such a conference and moving forward on this agenda, but I do not think that removing the Iranian issue in itself will solve the problems with bringing the matter to a conclusion. None the less, we will continue to press for the conference.

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): However the House looks at it, the agreement is clearly a diplomatic triumph for the partners. Does my right hon. Friend agree that in this long-term project—with all the verification involved—greater contact between this country and Iran, across a much broader area than is currently possible, will be essential? Does he also agree that it is essential that the Arab partners to the deal are firmly brought in behind the efforts to normalise relationships with Iran?

**Mr Hammond:** Yes, I agree with my right hon. Friend. Contacts with Iran will now be critical, opening the country up through trade and investment, travel, people-to-people contacts and Iranian students travelling abroad. One thing the US will do as part of this deal is to end the pre-notification required for certain categories of Iranian students seeking to study in the US. The more Iranians travel abroad and the more foreigners travel to Iran, the better we will understand each other and the greater the chances of making this stick.

**Mrs Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Iran currently supports the terrorist organisation Hamas in promoting terrorism in Gaza and elsewhere. What impact will the agreement have on this situation?

**Mr Hammond:** It is obviously early days, but in an ideal world, as Iran becomes more engaged in the international community and more engaged in the affairs of the region, we will be more able to engineer a situation in which Iran's leverage over organisations such as Hamas can be a force for good. We are not there yet, and we are not there automatically, but there is at last an opportunity to engage with Iran on these wider issues, which there has not been while the nuclear file has been hanging over us.

**Nadhim Zahawi** (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): The agreement obviously judges Iran by its actions rather than by its words. Foreign Minister Zarif and President Rouhani are moderate, but hard-liners remain at the heart of the Iranian Government. The Foreign Secretary talks about not giving Iran a free pass to interfere in the region, but it is already interfering massively. Has he spoken to our NATO ally Turkey; what is its reaction to this deal?

**Mr Hammond:** I have not spoken to my Turkish counterpart since we did this deal, but I have met him on many occasions over the past few months. Turkey is another important player in this region. All the powers in the region—Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Israel—have to be engaged if we are to have a stable region that has any chance of breaking out of the cycle of despair that we have seen for the past 40 years or so.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): Does it not say a lot about this Government that, in the past hour in this quaint place of ours, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have been dealing with this matter and are prepared to put their trust in the current Iranian regime; yet less than an hour ago, this same Tory Government declared war on the British trade union movement. Be careful what you wish for!

**Mr Hammond:** The hon. Gentleman has not disappointed me. I shall take that as an endorsement of the diplomatic triumph that we have achieved in Vienna.

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): For those of us who have long advocated a greater focus on diplomacy in our dealings with Iran, this agreement is to be very much welcomed, and I congratulate the Foreign Secretary and his team on the part they have played in achieving it. Let us hope that it becomes ever more self-fulfilling in that it will strengthen the hands of the many moderates within Iran. To promote dialogue, what measures will the British Government take to encourage or help British business to realise the potential of the Iranian market, given that planeloads of our competitors have been landing in Tehran for some time?

**Mr Hammond:** My hon. Friend is right. Clearly, the key thing we need to do is to get our embassy reopened. I have spoken to the Chancellor over the past few days, as we approached the conclusion of this deal, to ensure that the Treasury is engaged in the opportunities that will arise—some quite substantial and early. I think that Iran will want to use some of its unfrozen assets to address some large infrastructure deficits, including in the oil and gas production industry, where the UK is

well placed to play a role. The visa regime will be another important part of normalising our relationship with Iran.

**Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary has kept his promise not to do a bad deal, but only because he has done an absolutely terrible one. That is why people are celebrating in Tehran, but are utterly dismayed in Tel Aviv. The truth is, as President Obama said, that this will allow Iran to reduce the time needed to acquire nuclear weapons almost to zero when restrictions expire in 10 to 15 years. This will trigger a middle eastern arms race. In response to an earlier question, the right hon. Gentleman referred to the potential release of \$150 billion, which is utterly naive, given that while sanctions existed and its economy was in trouble, Iran still used its money to send thousands of rockets to Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza.

**Mr Hammond:** The question we have to ask is what kind of a deal would have been welcomed in Tel Aviv. The answer, of course, is that Israel does not want any deal with Iran. It wants a permanent state of stand-off, which I do not believe is in the interests of the region or in our interest. The hon. Gentleman says that this agreement reduces the time needed to produce a nuclear weapon. It does not: it increases the time needed to do so. He talks about the restrictions expiring, but Iran has undertaken restrictions that are perpetual in nature in the non-proliferation treaty. Of course, any country in the world can break its internationally binding legal obligations, but the world has a set of measures to deal with that, including UN sanctions. If in 15 or 20 years' time, we are sitting here talking about how to deal with an Iranian dash for a bomb, it will mean we have failed to exploit the opportunities that the deal offers. I think we should be optimistic. We should go into this trying to ensure that we draw Iran back into the international community, reinforce the hand of the moderates within Iran and make a positive outcome for the region and the world.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I almost always seek to call everybody following these statements, but we need brief, pithy questions without preamble and brief replies—otherwise people will be disappointed and the next business will be unreasonably delayed. Let us be led by Mr Richard Bacon.

**Mr Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk) (Con): When the Foreign Secretary sees the Israeli Prime Minister tomorrow, will he remind him that his own head of Mossad believes that the failure to solve the Palestinian conflict is a greater threat to Israeli security than a nuclear Iran?

**Mr Hammond:** Now that my hon. Friend has reminded me of that, I shall certainly put it in my briefing note for the meeting.

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): This is tremendous news and, in my view, a great result for the international community. Since we are congratulating, it is only right to mention the great work of Baroness Ashton, who worked on this matter for five years. It is important to recognise her work.

[Emily Thornberry]

Does the Foreign Secretary agree that bringing such a major power in this region in from the cold may well have a more positive effect on security in the area than practically anything else?

**Mr Hammond:** I am delighted that the hon. Lady has mentioned Baroness Ashton, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to endorse her important role. Yes, I agree. That is the point I have been making. There are two parts to this. There is the nuclear deal and the robust verification of Iran's compliance with it, but let us move beyond that and exploit the wider opportunity for this large, wealthy and important country to be part of the wider region or picture rather than to be isolated from it.

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): One of my earliest statements here was a plea for no military action to be taken against Iran, so that diplomacy could be given a chance. However, many Members are worried about the deal that has been struck, so will my right hon. Friend outline what would have happened and what destabilisation would have occurred if Iran had reached its goal of building a nuclear weapon before diplomacy had its triumph?

**Mr Hammond:** Iran, having acquired a nuclear weapon, would have triggered at the very least a nuclear arms race in the middle east. At least two other powers in the middle east would clearly not tolerate Iran possessing a nuclear weapon without going for one themselves. It could be even more stark than that. Almost certainly at some stage and by some means or another, the real alternative to a deal to prevent Iran from building a nuclear bomb would have been war. What we have averted with this agreement is the threat and prospect of a war to resolve the issue. We have resolved it through diplomacy, which I think is hugely to be welcomed.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): In light of this very welcome agreement and noting that, in May, Iran joined 112 non-proliferation treaty member states in signing the humanitarian pledge initiated by Austria to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons, will the Foreign Secretary explain what steps the UK Government will take to decommission our own arsenal, instead of spending billions on locking ourselves into yet more nuclear weapons?

**Mr Hammond:** As the hon. Lady will know, we have reduced the number of warheads to the absolute minimum necessary to maintain our continuous at-sea deterrent and the UK remains committed to the principle of a world free of nuclear weapons, but we will be able to get there only when there is consensus about multilateral nuclear disarmament—and we are not there yet.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Iran's future in world affairs depends largely on its educated, cultured and surprisingly liberal middle class. What does my right hon. Friend think could be done to renew the cultural ties between this country and Iran that have been in the freezer for too long?

**Mr Hammond:** As I have said before, I think that this is about contact: it is about travel, about trade and about investment; it is about allowing small and medium-sized Iranian businesses to start exporting again. I cannot adequately express how important I think it will be that the United States is to remove restrictions on the import of Iranian foodstuffs and carpets. Those may sound like small measures, but they will affect many thousands of entrepreneurs across Iran and change their prospects significantly.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): In his statement, the Foreign Secretary said that there must be something in this for the Iranian people. Iran has the most appalling record of human rights abuses, particularly the targeting of women with acid attacks and the deliberate persecution of Christians. What has the Foreign Secretary been able to do about that?

**Mr Hammond:** Our negotiations have been about the nuclear deal. We have deliberately not widened them to make them into a negotiation about Iran's activities in the region, which we view negatively, or its human rights record, which we also view negatively. As I have said in the House many times before, the only way in which we can have any influence over what people do is to engage with them. By re-engaging, as this agreement will allow us to do, we will have a greater ability to influence Iran's behaviour in the future, and as I said in my statement, we will continue to target Iran's appalling human rights record.

**Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): In view of the indefinite monitoring and transparency measures, may I return to the questions asked by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon)? When my right hon. Friend visits Israel, will he ask its Prime Minister to consider this a present chance for peace, not an historic mistake?

**Mr Hammond:** As my hon. Friend would expect, I shall put the case for the agreement to the Israeli Prime Minister, and I have no doubt that I shall hear, in great detail, his case against it.

**Roger Mullin** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): In 1991, I sat in the office of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, having a fairly robust discussion about the plans in relation to Iraq at that time and, in particular, the prospect of transporting nuclear waste. Will the Foreign Secretary tell us how the issue of the nuclear waste that is being generated will be handled as a result of the agreement?

**Mr Hammond:** I am not sure that I quite understand the question. At present, Iran does not have a functioning civil nuclear power generation programme. The position is very clear, however. Under the agreement, there are restrictions on the amount of enriched uranium, even at 3.67%, that Iran can hold. Any excess must be immediately and irreversibly converted back into a different form, or else exported. The Russians, who have been extremely helpful during the negotiations, have agreed to act as an export point for any material that Iran needs to export to comply with the agreement.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): My right hon. Friend rightly highlighted the activities of the Iranian revolutionary guard corps as an example of Iran's current meddling beyond its borders. Given the large amount of resources that will be released to Iran as a consequence of the agreement, will my right hon. Friend tell us what assurances he and his fellow negotiators have received from the Iranians that those resources will not be directed towards further funding for the IRGC's export of the Iranian revolution?

**Mr Hammond:** As I think I have made clear before, we have no specific commitments. Iran will have access, over time, to about £90 billion-worth of frozen assets. That will not happen overnight; it will happen over a period of many years. No doubt, the IRGC will have ideas about recommending how some of the money could be spent, but so will people in many other parts of the Iranian system. Iran has a huge infrastructure deficit. If it is to increase its oil-exporting capacity, which it will want to do, it will need to invest very heavily in the oil industry, and we would expect a fair amount of the unfrozen funds to go into that sector.

**Mr Mark Hendrick** (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): How confident is the Foreign Secretary that Iran will comply with the terms of the deal, that it will in future become a constructive international partner and that it might even become a partner in the battle against ISIL?

**Mr Hammond:** The hon. Gentleman has asked three separate questions. How confident am I that Iran will comply? I believe that I am highly confident that it will comply with its specific obligations under the deal. How likely is it that Iran will become a partner in the battle against ISIL? I believe that it is likely, because Iran shares our view that ISIL is an existential threat. How we collaborate will have to be managed very carefully, because of the legacy of mistrust and the challenges of co-operation, but we are strategically aligned in relation to ISIL.

How confident am I that Iran's behaviour in the region will change? That is a bigger question. I think that it is a potential prize, but we have not yet gained it. We have to build trust, and we have to show Iran, by our actions and not just by our words, that collaborating and acting reasonably works for both sides and provides benefits for both sides.

**Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): If the agreement is fully adhered to, it has the potential to change the regional dynamic in a positive way. Given that a number of countries are party to it, does the Foreign Secretary, at this stage, anticipate its smooth ratification by all those countries, or does he anticipate any challenges or bumps in the road?

**Mr Hammond:** I think that the only big bump—speed bump—in the road ahead is the United States Congress. I am confident that, although Congress will want to debate the issue and scrutinise the agreement, it will come out in favour of it, but President Obama has made it clear that, if it does not, he will use his veto power.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): May I return the Foreign Secretary to the issue of human rights? Iran has the highest execution rate in the world.

I accept that the scope of the agreement is very narrow, but will the Foreign Secretary tell us precisely how he can use the agreement to try to enter into a more productive dialogue with Iran about its human rights record?

**Mr Hammond:** I think that it would be a mistake to view the agreement simply in terms of opportunities for foreign powers to lecture Iran about its human rights record. The big prize here is that the agreement takes the brakes off Iranian society. It allows more interaction with the rest of the world through trade, investment, travel and study, and it changes the way in which Iranian society works from the inside. We will continue to promote our views on human rights to the Iranian Government, but the message will be much more powerful if Iran starts to receive it through internal change.

**Sir Edward Garnier** (Harborough) (Con): I believe that a very large proportion of the population of Iran is under 30 years old. To develop long-term good relations with the country following the agreement, will my right hon. Friend ensure that we, like the Americans, allow Iranian students to come to our universities, study and become friends with us? Then future Presidents might go not just to Glasgow Caledonian University, but to some other very good universities here as well.

**Mr Hammond:** My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right: Iran is a young country. I believe that 70% of the population is under the age of 35. Most of those people are desperate to normalise their lives and establish contact with the outside world, and we should encourage that. The United Kingdom's higher education sector is open to those who wish to come here and study, and we should extend that invitation to Iranians as our relations with Iran also normalise.

The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), has just reminded me that there is a significant Iranian diaspora in the United Kingdom, consisting in many cases of people with high levels of skill who left Iran after the revolution in 1979. Judging by the experience of many other countries that have opened up—for example, countries in eastern Europe—there will be great benefits for Iran if it can lure some of those people to go back over the coming years.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary will go to Tel Aviv and Washington with a wide spectrum of support from the House and the country. It is right that we seize this rare opportunity of allowing modern elements, both secular and religious, to take charge. The agreement is a great triumph, which enables us to envisage the development of a future involving the achievement of peace in the middle east. It is practical; it is courageous; and it is likely to work.

**Mr Hammond:** Whatever the question was, I am sure I can answer it in the affirmative, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support.

**Oliver Dowden** (Hertsmere) (Con): Many of my constituents still have concerns about whether this deal will be strictly enforced, in particular in respect of the inspectors' ease of access to facilities and whether those facilities can easily be switched back. What further reassurances can the Foreign Secretary give the House?

**Mr Hammond:** As I said in answer to an earlier question, I am confident that the access regimes are robust and the monitoring regimes—with CCTV cameras, telemetry control and seals on pieces of equipment and so on—will be effective, and the IAEA is assuring me it is confident it can do the job asked of it. All this is of course supplemented by the satellite surveillance capability, which will allow us to see anything that is happening in buildings or on sites targeted for access if there is any delay in achieving that access. I think we can be reasonably confident that overall this regime will work.

**Jonathan Ashworth** (Leicester South) (Lab): The deal is important and welcome, but the right hon. Gentleman will be aware that there have been rumours that Saudi Arabia would respond to a deal by trying to develop its own nuclear programme. What assessment has he made of those rumours, and does he think Saudi may go in that direction?

**Mr Hammond:** I think Saudi Arabia may well have been tempted to look at acquiring its own capability if it believed Iran was developing a military nuclear capability. This deal reassures us that Iran cannot develop that military nuclear capability, and I believe other powers in the region will feel they now have no need to go down that route.

**Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): I greatly welcome my right hon. Friend's work in securing these improved diplomatic relations with Iran. He mentioned that he has, rightly, spoken to the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia in the last 24 hours. What discussions will he be having with other Persian gulf states, such as the United Arab Emirates, to reassure them as well?

**Mr Hammond:** I and my hon. Friends will be talking to our colleagues across the Gulf, and the Prime Minister is also intending to engage with some of his interlocutors. I was very pleased that the UAE issued a statement welcoming the deal, indicating that it intends to engage positively with the opportunities that now arise. That is hugely important. The UAE is an influential state in the Gulf, and its commitment to making this agreement work and changing the dynamic in the region is hugely significant.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The Secretary of State said the deal would help the alignment of western and Iranian foreign policy in the middle east. What does he think the implications of this deal will be for western foreign policy in respect of the conflict in Syria?

**Mr Hammond:** I did not say that; what I said was that we are aligned in our view of ISIL as an existential challenge that needs to be dealt with. We do not agree on everything and we will not agree on everything, but where we do agree we can work together, and that is the important thing.

**Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): Given the clandestine history of the Iranian nuclear programme, particularly in regard to the Fordow and Natanz facilities, one of which is constructed under a mountain, what reassurance can the Secretary of State give my constituents that Iran will not clandestinely continue to seek a bomb?

**Mr Hammond:** We have specifically excluded Iran from carrying out any enrichment or research and development activities at Fordow, the underground site. All Iran's enrichment activity for the civil fuel programme will be at Natanz, the single site in Iran authorised to carry out enrichment, and the range of surveillance, access and electronic and CCTV monitoring that has been agreed under this joint comprehensive plan of action will give us the assurance my hon. Friend seeks for his constituents.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I too welcome the announcement of this deal, and think the Foreign Secretary is absolutely right that there is the potential for a wider positive consequence for the region. Will he describe in a little more detail the next steps for engaging with Iran and reassuring those who remain sceptical?

**Mr Hammond:** First, it is not possible to sit with somebody in a hotel for six weeks negotiating a deal without getting to know them a bit better, and I and, I think, all my western counterparts have forged much better personal relationships with the Iranian Foreign Minister and his team and feel we have a channel we can communicate on now. That does not mean that all the problems will be solved or that we are going to agree on everything. Reopening our embassy, supporting our businesses to get in there, supporting Iranian businesses to start exporting again, and building the people-to-people links are the ways to build, over time, the trust that is so missing between our countries, and has been missing for the last 35 years.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): What aspects of this agreement with Iran can my right hon. Friend point to as having been particularly influenced by the UK and his negotiating team?

**Mr Hammond:** I am glad my hon. Friend has asked me that question, because it gives me the opportunity to pay tribute to the experts on our team. The UK has contributed to the grinding, detailed, expert effort by nuclear scientists to get this deal right—to check and double-check every aspect of it, to make sure what is written on the paper will deliver the assurances the politicians seek. We have played a very important role in that. We have also played an important role in ensuring that the conventional arms embargo and the missile technology embargo remain in place. These are not directly related to the nuclear agreement, but are very important to reassure our neighbours in the Gulf, and they therefore form a vital part of the overall package.

**Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): I give a hopeful but cautious welcome to the Foreign Secretary's statement. He will know that the UK and NATO partners are in dispute with Russia over a number of critical defence issues. Will he therefore recognise that many of us are uneasy about Russia's role in this process? What assurances can he give the House on that?

**Mr Hammond:** All I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that Russia has played a completely constructive role in these negotiations. The interests of the P5 countries have been broadly aligned throughout this process, and

nobody else was in a position to take and reprocess the Iranian materials that have to be exported from the country—and the truth is that Russia has mountains of this stuff anyway, so sending it to Russia does not materially alter the position Russia is in.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): There are suspicions that Iran may have acquired nuclear weapons already. One of the concerns will be about establishing, under the wording of the agreement, that it will not seek to proliferate nuclear weapons. What measures has my right hon. Friend taken in this agreement to ensure that existing military establishments are identified and inspected so that the west can be assured that Iran is not in a position to launch nuclear weapons?

**Mr Hammond:** It is not our assessment that Iran has developed nuclear weapons. We assess that under the programme Iran has been operating, it has been getting close to having enough fissile material for a single nuclear device, and that is why this agreement was so urgently needed. As part of this settlement, the road map agreed between the IAEA and Iran will allow the IAEA to make a full assessment of Iran's nuclear programme, including any military dimension to that programme, and it will publish a report in due course. The publication of that report is a condition precedent for the relaxation of sanctions, so Iran has a very big stake in getting it done.

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I hope I am wrong, but I fear the Foreign Secretary and my Front-Bench team are mistaken on this deal. Just 60 days ago President Obama described Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism. Could we at least have a guarantee that we will track the unfrozen assets so we know whether they are being used to finance further terrorist activity?

**Mr Hammond:** Well, I hope the hon. Gentleman is wrong, too. Let us be clear that we are talking about two different things. We are talking about an agreement to prevent Iran from being able to build a nuclear weapon, and I am very confident about the effectiveness of that agreement. We have spent much of the discussion here talking about the wider potential benefits of opening up relationships with Iran, but those are not guaranteed. We do not have any guarantee that Iran will stop sponsoring terrorism in the middle east or that it will engage more effectively with its neighbours, but common sense tells me that as the country opens up and as its overwhelmingly young population sees its standard of living rising and is able to travel abroad, we will stand a much better chance of engaging Iran constructively in the world.

**Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Iran and North Korea share an appalling human rights record, particularly in relation to religious minorities. Would it not be catastrophic if reports that they have also shared nuclear activities proved to be true?

**Mr Hammond:** Well, potentially, but this agreement and the non-proliferation treaty obligations that Iran has undertaken include the proliferation of nuclear know-how, technologies and materials from third countries into Iran, so that route to a bomb is also covered by these agreements.

**Mr Jamie Reed** (Copeland) (Lab): The enforcement of this deal will be well served by the deployment of British nuclear expertise at every technical level. Will the Secretary of State tell the House what specific involvement the British nuclear industry will have in the decommissioning and monitoring of the Iranian programme?

**Mr Hammond:** The Iranians will do most of the decommissioning work themselves. It is relatively low-level work involving taking out pipework and destroying centrifuges, and it will be done under a regime that will be overseen by the IAEA. The big piece of engineering work is the redesign of the Arak reactor. Britain does not have industrial capabilities that are relevant to that particular project, which will be led by the Chinese with other international partners working in consortium.

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): I echo the compliments that have been paid to the Foreign Secretary, his colleagues and predecessors and to all those involved over the long course of the negotiations. I hope that this agreement will prove that firm UN resolutions, sanctions and applied diplomacy can be a workable combination. Will the UK Government be influenced as to the pace and scope of sanctions relaxation by how well the Iranian Government move towards respecting human rights, so that the minorities who are being discriminated against do not feel a new sense of exclusion by being denied the benefits of the reduction in sanctions?

**Mr Hammond:** The UK does not have any bilateral sanctions against Iran; we are talking about EU and UN sanctions. The programme under which the sanctions will be removed is strictly related to Iran's progressive compliance with its nuclear obligations under the joint comprehensive plan of action. As Iran delivers steps of compliance, we will remove bits of the sanctions regime. That is the way it has to be, if we are to get a win-win agreement. We will continue to press Iran on its human rights record and on its interference in the region, but those factors are not part of the conditionality of this agreement.

## Water Cannon

1.53 pm

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May):** I want to inform the House of my decision regarding the potential authorisation of water cannon for use by the police in England and Wales. Members will remember that in the wake of the disturbances that took place in cities across England during the summer of 2011, the police reviewed the range of tactics and equipment available to them to manage public disorder. In its report following those disturbances, the Metropolitan Police Service identified water cannon as a potential option, and, in May 2013, chief constables took the decision collectively to bring forward a business case for authorisation.

It was not until March 2014 that I received the formal request seeking authorisation for the Ziegler Wasserwerfer 9000 water cannon to be made available as a policing tactic on behalf of all forces in England and Wales, at which time I began the detailed consideration of whether to authorise. In June 2014, the Mayor of London's Office for Policing and Crime approved the purchase of three Ziegler Wasserwerfer 9000 water cannon from the German federal police, and they arrived in the UK in July 2014.

My decision relates specifically to the application submitted by Chief Constable David Shaw, the relevant national policing lead, in March 2014. It applies to all 43 forces in England and Wales, but it does not apply to Northern Ireland, where the use of water cannon is already authorised. The decision whether to authorise water cannon is a serious one. Water cannon, without safeguards, have the capacity to cause harm. Their use is a police tactic that has not been used in Great Britain previously, and there are those who argue that its introduction would change the face of British policing. I have therefore taken the utmost care to ensure that the testing and assessment on which a decision is made is as thorough and exhaustive as possible.

Water cannon are classed as a less-lethal system and technology, for which there is an established authorisation process to gather the evidence necessary for a decision by the Secretary of State. It is the same process that my predecessors followed to authorise the use of less-lethal weapons such as baton rounds and Taser, and similar to that by which the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland approved water cannon for use by the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

The assessment process is comprehensive. It has involved a full independent review of the medical implications of water cannon and a further review of the latest police guidance, training and maintenance documents, both of which were conducted by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory as advisers to the independent Scientific Advisory Committee on the Medical Implications of Less-Lethal Weapons—SACMILL. The process has also included formal operational performance trials of the three water cannon vehicles procured by the Metropolitan police, conducted by the Centre for Applied Science and Technology. I received the evidence from these reviews, and the final assessment from SACMILL, from the Surgeon General immediately before the general election. I shall place copies of all the reviews and the formal request from Chief Constable David Shaw in the House Library.

In addition to undertaking the scientific and medical assessment, I wrote to a number of senior serving and former chief constables in August last year to gain a better understanding of the operational context in which water cannon could be used. This was with particular reference to the potential use and effectiveness of water cannon in major operations, including the Countryside Alliance demonstrations in 2004, the Israeli embassy demonstrations in 2008-09, the student protests in 2010, the G20 protests in London in 2009, and the summer riots in 2011. I shall place copies of this correspondence in the House Library.

On the basis of the evidence provided by the police and the relevant independent bodies, I can inform the House that I have decided not to authorise the Wasserwerfer 9000 water cannon as a policing tactic for operational use in England and Wales. My rationale is threefold. First, the medical and technical issues raised by the reviews do not give me the degree of confidence that I need to authorise less-lethal weaponry. While evidence suggests that these water cannon are unlikely to result in serious or life-threatening injuries as currently built, and used as envisaged, the assessment nevertheless poses a series of direct and indirect medical risks from their use. Those risks include the possibility of causing primary, secondary and tertiary injuries, including musculoskeletal injuries such as spinal fracture, as well as other serious injuries such as concussion, eye injury and blunt trauma. International evidence supports this conclusion: during a protest in Stuttgart, a 66-year-old protester was completely blinded by a model of water cannon similar to those under consideration.

At the same time, I remain unconvinced of the operability of the machines under consideration. They are 25 years old and have required significant alterations and repairs to meet the necessary standards. The final SACMILL assessment found 67 separate outstanding issues that would still need to be addressed before the machines could be deployed, including serious faults that would result in significant operational implications if they were deployed.

Secondly, my decision takes into account the operational case for water cannon. The original police request argued that water cannon offered a flexible option to disperse crowds, protect premises and deter disruptive behaviour that might otherwise have to be dealt with by forcible means. However, it made it clear that water cannon have limitations, especially in response to fast, agile disorder. This has been borne out by further discussion with chief constables, who raised the possibility that the vehicles might serve to attract crowds to a vulnerable location and noted that evidence from Northern Ireland suggests that the deployment of water cannon usually requires significant advance notice, which casts doubt on their utility in a riot scenario.

Finally, I am acutely conscious of the potential impact of water cannon on public perceptions of police legitimacy. As a number of chief constables argued, in areas with a history of social unrest or mistrust of the police, the deployment of water cannon has the potential to be entirely counterproductive. This country has a proud history of policing by consent, and this decision goes to its very heart.

Since I became Home Secretary, I have been determined to give the police the powers and tools they need to cut crime and tackle disorder on our streets. I have extended police discretion over areas such as police-led prosecutions.



I have consistently made the case for legislation on communications data to ensure that technology does not outpace the ability of the intelligence agencies and law enforcement to keep us safe. And I have cut central targets and bureaucracy to save officer time and ensure the police focus relentlessly on what they are trained to do: cut crime. But where the medical and scientific evidence suggests that those powers could cause serious harm, where the operational case is not clear and where the historic principle of policing by consent could be placed at risk, I will not give my agreement. The application for the authorisation of the Wasserwerfer 9000 water cannon does not meet that high threshold.

I would like to end by saying this: this Government's programme of police reform intends, fundamentally, to transform the relationship between the public and the police. We have reformed stop and search to ensure that its use is targeted, intelligence-led and accountable. We have taken steps to reduce the use of police cells for those with mental health problems and to free up police officers to do their job. We have taken steps to reform undercover policing—tomorrow I will lay the terms of reference for Lord Justice Pitchford's review before this House—and established the College of Policing to drive standards and training on behalf of all policing. Later this year, our police and criminal justice Bill will propose reforms to strengthen police integrity, reform the complaints and disciplinary systems, and introduce limits on the length of time people spend on pre-charge bail.

But however much we have achieved, this mission does not stop. Crime may have fallen by more than a quarter since 2010, according to the independent crime survey for England and Wales, but it remains too high. Public trust in the police has risen in recent years, but it remains too low. That is why I initiated my programme of reform in 2010, and it is why this Government are determined to finish the job. I commend this statement to the House.

2.1 pm

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for her statement. She and I are often at odds on Home Office issues—she will know that we have disagreed on issues relating to police reform, including on police and crime commissioners, and she referred to that at the end of her statement—but today, on the main substance of her statement, I could not agree with her more. She is exactly right to reject the application from the police and the Mayor of London to use water cannon, and I support her decision today. I also welcome the thorough and comprehensive way in which she has done so and agree with her on each of her three counts.

The Home Secretary is right to take immensely seriously the safety and health risks from this kind of weapon. She referred to the case from Stuttgart in 2010, where a man was blinded when he was hit in the face by a water cannon during a protest against a local infrastructure project. It was troubling that the submission from the Association of Chief Police Officers in 2014 calling on her to authorise water cannon did not even refer to that case—that did not reflect well on the thoroughness of the case being put forward.

Secondly, I agree with the Home Secretary that the operational case that was put forward is too weak to justify the authorisation of something so potentially

dangerous. During the riots in 2011, the then president of ACPO, Sir Hugh Orde, described calls for the use of water cannon then as

“the wrong tactic, in the wrong circumstances at this moment”.

He said that

“excessive force will destroy our model of policing in the long term”.

Significantly, Sir Hugh Orde is one of the few chief constables to have authorised water cannon in Northern Ireland, where of course the circumstances are very different and where a unique threat is faced.

The ACPO paper from 2014 also says that

“history would suggest that the most serious outbreaks of public disorder have occurred spontaneously”

and therefore water cannon would not be suitable. Instead, it says water cannon would be useful for “planned events” and points to

“ongoing and potential future austerity measures likely to lead to continued protest”.

However, Britain has policed planned events in this country for centuries without the need for water cannon, by using communication with event organisers, using sensible policing strategies or, in exceptional cases where violence is expected, such as with English Defence League marches, using the power to ban marches or relocate them. Can the Home Secretary confirm that she believes the police do have a wide range of powers available to them to deal with serious public order threats or serious criminal threats on our streets, be it in the capital or across the country? I agree with the Home Secretary that water cannon has never been deployed in England, Scotland or Wales and no one has put forward any justification for why that should change now.

The Home Secretary also pointed out that the Mayor of London has already purchased three water cannon. Can she confirm that that cost £218,000 of Greater London Authority money, and that it was done before getting her authorisation and was based on an operational case that has now been proven to be extremely weak? Can she also confirm, as she seemed to be saying in her statement, that he did not even seem to have bought particularly good water cannon, as it appears that they are 25 years old and need at least 67 major repairs and alterations? Given that the Chancellor has now grounded the Mayor's airport ambitions, may I strongly welcome her comprehensive pouring of cold water on his cannon ambitions, too?

I agree with the Home Secretary that deploying water cannon could also be counterproductive and could damage our long tradition of policing by consent. She rightly has a responsibility not only to look seriously at any proposal put to her by the police and to make sure that they have the powers they need, but to take account of the fact that our model is based on nearly two centuries of policing by consent, with people becoming police officers from their communities to represent and protect their communities. Public order policing, just like any other aspect of policing, is based on that consent and confidence, and to weaponise policing further would create significant risks. The Home Secretary is therefore right to reject water cannon today and Labour strongly supports her decision.

**Mrs May:** I thank the right hon. Lady for her remarks about the decision I have taken. May I echo one of the comments she made about Northern Ireland? It is important

[Mrs May]

that we recognise that the policing circumstances there are completely different from those the police face in England and Wales, and I would just like to commend the work that the Police Service of Northern Ireland does. Its officers face significant threats and significant trouble, and they do that job with integrity and professionalism.

The right hon. Lady is also right to say that a range of powers are available to the police in England and Wales to be able to deal with public order, as they have been doing for many years. At least one chief constable referred in his correspondence to me to the way in which they like to work with communities when public demonstrations or marches are about to take place, and would prefer to be able to use those methods of communication and working with communities to ensure that public order is maintained at all times.

The decision on the three machines was a matter for the Mayor of London. The point that she makes, crucially, about the level of trust is a significant one; it is about that model of British policing. As Peel said,

“the police are the public and the public are the police”

and we should treasure our model of policing by consent.

**Boris Johnson** (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary very much for her statement, and for the care and thoroughness with which she has considered this case. Obviously, I do not necessarily agree with the conclusion. May I remind her that the decision to buy the Wasserwerfer was taken in the light of the strong support of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis for this operational crowd control tool, and of the strong support of the Prime Minister and indeed of the people of London, as expressed in a poll that found that 68% were in favour? Indeed, it was taken in the interests of economy, as we are able to buy these machines and thereby save £2.3 million. No Member on either side of the House wants to see the deployment of water cannon anywhere in the United Kingdom, and I fail to see the physiological difference between the people of England and Wales, and the people of Northern Ireland—I will read her study with great interest. Will the Home Secretary confirm that, in the vanishingly unlikely event of a serious outbreak of violence on the streets of London or indeed any other city in this county that poses a threat to life and limb and to property, it would be open to the Metropolitan police, and indeed any other police force, to present an application for the use of non-lethal methods of crowd control?

**Mrs May:** It is of course open to the police at any time to apply for the use of a less lethal weapon that has not been authorised. A proper process is undertaken, and that is the process that has pertained in this case. A business case is put forward, the proper medical and technical evidence is taken and the decision is then made by the Home Secretary.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I thank the Home Secretary for an advance copy of her statement. I will probably not say this very often during the life of this Parliament, but I wish to commend her for her decision and for the careful reasons she has given. This was a decision for England and Wales only. I

have been in touch with the Scottish Government this morning and can confirm that Scottish Ministers do not support the use of water cannon in Scotland. Water cannon do not offer a proportionate response, and they cut across the traditional approach of policing in Great Britain. They are indiscriminate and target peaceful protesters with a significant risk of injury. The Home Secretary was not convinced of the case for water cannon back in 2010 when she said:

“A range of measures is available to the police...and we do not believe water cannon are needed.”

We are delighted that nothing has happened to make her change her mind. Will the Home Secretary confirm that there will be no change in her announced approach over the next five years?

**Mrs May:** The hon. and learned Lady was probably entirely correct in her initial surmise that this is possibly going to be an unusual occasion when she and I agree on matters related to home affairs. I am grateful to her for outlining the Scottish Government's position. As it happens, I will meet the Scottish Justice Minister later this afternoon to discuss a number of issues. As for the next five years, I have taken the decision on the basis of the evidence that has been put before me. As I have indicated in response to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), it is open to the police at any time to apply for the use of a less than lethal weapon. At that time, the evidence available would be considered and a decision taken on that basis.

**David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): Does the Home Secretary agree that, in the summer of 2011, police officers were worried about not only the imminent threat of physical violence to themselves, but the consequences had any violent rioters been injured while the police were trying to deal with them? With that in mind, does she accept that the advantage of water cannon is that they enable the police to deal with people at a distance and that the alternative is that police officers will have to deal with people at very close quarters, probably using batons, spray and shields? Will she give some reassurance that police officers in that situation will not themselves face serious disciplinary consequences if violent people who are trying to attack them receive injuries while doing so?

**Mrs May:** I have always made it absolutely clear to the police that if they act within the law I will stand by them. Our police officers do a magnificent job. I spoke to many of them immediately after the riots of 2011 and heard from them at first hand the danger they were under. The nature of the riots of 2011 was predominantly such that water cannon would not have been able to be used. Police had to deal with smaller groups of individuals who were very mobile, and it was not the stand-off situation that we see, for example, in the parades in Northern Ireland, which is a completely different circumstance from that which we saw in 2011.

**Sadiq Khan** (Tooting) (Lab): I also commend unequivocally the statement made by the Home Secretary. London has a rich history of demonstration and protest. Very rarely is there disorder, and I support the police when there is. During the course of her detailed statement, she talked about our history of policing by consent. We

are all concerned about the 25-year-old water cannon. Can she ever foresee a situation in which she consents to the use of those cannon in London?

**Mrs May:** I say to the right hon. Gentleman that the statement I made today was on the basis of an application for the use of those water cannon, and I have decided not to authorise that use.

**Damian Green (Ashford) (Con):** Just as there is unusual agreement on this, there are also unusual disagreements. I think that this is a regrettable decision. Does my right hon. Friend accept that this is not a case of either water cannon or policing by consent as normal? The water cannon would be used only in circumstances where it is either water cannon or some other violent force that the police need in an emergency. Will she therefore comment on the relative merits of water cannon as opposed to individual batons, tasers, baton rounds and other forms of less lethal force? It is not obvious to me that water cannon are more dangerous in such situations.

**Mrs May:** I recognise my right hon. Friend's experience as a former policing Minister in looking at these issues. The police have a range of tools available to them. Of course there will be circumstances in which they will have contact with those who are demonstrating—those who are causing public order problems. He referred, I think, to the use of tasers in this context. I say to him that they would be unlikely to be used in the circumstances he describes. For his information, I have set in hand a piece of work to look at the use of tasers by police, because a number of issues have been raised around their use.

**Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab):** Many Londoners will be surprised that the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), the current Mayor of London, spent nearly a quarter of a million pounds of public money on water cannon before they had even been authorised, but they will be relieved, none the less, that they have not been authorised. Twice in my time as a Member of Parliament, I have seen public disorder on the streets of Hackney—first, the poll tax riots then the events following the shooting of Mark Duggan. I take these issues very seriously. They are as frightening and difficult for the communities in which they occur as they are for anyone else. I do not believe—and thinking Londoners do not believe—that undermining a centuries-old tradition of policing by consent is the way to go on these very serious matters. Does the Home Secretary agree that many Londoners will welcome her decision today?

**Mrs May:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question. I hope this decision will be welcomed by many people. As I have said, that issue of trust between the police and the public is very important. Indeed there are many communities in which we need to build that trust rather than the reverse.

**James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con):** There are very few issues on which I find myself at odds with my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson). Unfortunately, this is one of them. Rather than using water cannon, would my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary consider authorising the use of traceable liquid such as SmartWater and other similar

products, so that the small number of violent offenders in these protests can be individually identified and, at a time and a distance, when tensions have subsided, be arrested and brought to justice?

**Mrs May:** I have seen the examples of SmartWater. Obviously it is a product of great interest. If the police feel that they wish to be able to use it in certain circumstances and it requires authorisation, there is a process by which an application can be made.

**Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab):** On every occasion that the Home Secretary has appeared before the Select Committee—at least in the past 13 months—we have asked about this issue, and she said that she wanted to deliberate very carefully and make a decision after she had looked at all the evidence. May I commend her not just for the decision she has made but for not being pushed into making this decision? She has studied the matter carefully and come to the House and given her version, so well done.

**Mrs May:** I think that I should probably just say thank you and sit down.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Mr Nick Herbert when he has finished consulting his mobile phone.

**Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con):** I know that the Home Secretary will have taken this decision with great care. I therefore regret to say that I, too, have grave concerns about it. Does it not directly contradict the statement of the Prime Minister during the London riots of 2011 that water cannon would not be taken off the table and that indeed they could be made available within 24 hours? The Home Secretary has not been directly responsible for policing in the capital for 15 years. The elected Mayor has responsibility in that regard and the senior operational commander in London has made it quite clear that he supports the use of water cannon. Surely a riot is a riot whether it is in Northern Ireland or on the streets of London and it is hard to see why it should be dealt with differently. Just this week, water cannon have been used in the Province.

**Mrs May:** I thank my right hon. Friend the former Policing Minister for sharing his views. On the point about comparisons with Northern Ireland, I simply point out that he is talking about water cannon being used in a riot, which—this is important in thinking about their operability—is a fast-moving situation in which circumstances can arise very quickly that require the police to make quick decisions on the use of the tools available to them. Last August, as I indicated in my statement, I wrote to a number of senior officers and serving and former chief constables to ask about the circumstances in which water cannon would be used. In response, the then temporary deputy chief constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland wrote—his letter will be placed in the Library—that:

“the predominant method of deployment for the PSNI is within a pre-planned public order operation, with cannons deployed to either a reserve, holding or forward location, depending on an assessment of the ‘immediacy’ of use.”

They are pre-planned operations, so the fact that they might be used is known some time in advance. That is a different scenario from a rapidly moving, spontaneous occasion of the sort my right hon. Friend refers to.

**Alex Salmond** (Gordon) (SNP): Have I got this correct: instead of engaging in careful analysis of the sort undertaken by the Home Secretary, the Mayor of London charged ahead and bought three antiquated, expensive, dangerous, and now totally redundant, German-made water cannon, aided and abetted by the Prime Minister? Is that not the sort of behaviour that local councillors used to be surcharged for, and has the Home Secretary any plans to use such a penalty against her future rival in the Tory leadership contest?

**Mrs May:** We are grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for contributing to the debate, and on a matter that, as my hon. Friends have pointed out, is devolved; the decision in Scotland is for Scottish Ministers. I am sure that all of us who have taken decision in relation to the matter have done so on the basis of the advice and evidence put before us.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): The Home Secretary has commented on the powers that the police have to deal with such situations without the use of water cannon, but she has also commissioned a study on the use of Tasers. I wonder whether this is not the time for a comprehensive assessment of those powers and how they can be used.

**Mrs May:** My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. There are circumstances in which particularly tools that are available to the police are used, and there are questions about their use, particularly for Tasers, in particular environments, so it is right that we look at their use. With regard to the wider use of police powers, I am always looking to ensure that the police have the necessary tools and powers available to them, commensurate with requirements relating to medical and technical advice and with the need to maintain the firm trust between the police and the public.

**Keir Starmer** (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I spent five years in Northern Ireland monitoring the police, and I spent time in the command room and during briefings when the use of water cannon was being planned. The situation there is very different from the situation in London, and it is important to bear that in mind in this debate.

**Mrs May:** I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for making that point. Indeed, I have had that conversation with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, who is a former Minister in the Northern Ireland Office, and he is conscious of that real difference, both for policing more generally and for the circumstances that the police there have to deal with. As the hon. and learned Gentleman points out, the use of water cannon in Northern Ireland is very much pre-planned.

**Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): The Home Secretary talks about the public perception of legitimacy. Did she formally consult the public before making the decision? A poll shows that two thirds of Londoners support the use of water cannon in exceptional circumstances. In particular, has she consulted the victims of the 2011 riots, such as those in my borough of Enfield? They certainly admired the police's restraint, but they also want them to have more tools in the box to be able to take exceptional action in a proportionate and reasonable manner.

**Mrs May:** I am very conscious of the poll that the Mayor of London, my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Boris Johnson), undertook on the views of Londoners. I am also conscious that a number of views were expressed in 2011 by those who sadly found themselves living in parts of London that were affected. I reiterate my earlier point that people often assume that because what happened in 2011 were riots, water cannon would necessarily have been operable in every circumstance. In fact, they would not have been. There is evidence from the chief constables of West Midlands police and Merseyside police, where riots also took place in 2011, that water cannon would not have been the answer because of the nature of the riots taking place.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. In talking about Uxbridge, we must not forget South Ruislip.

**Boris Johnson:** I am most grateful, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** It is a very important part of the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary's decision. It feels as though the Government are preparing for a number of confrontations. Is she confident that the police have the necessary resources for what could prove to be a long, hot summer?

**Mrs May:** I was asked by the shadow Home Secretary about the tools and powers available to the police. They have a range of powers available to them, and a range of guidance and training in relation to public order policing.

**Byron Davies** (Gower) (Con): As a former Metropolitan police officer, I was relieved to hear my right hon. Friend's announcement. Does she agree that the use of water cannon would have changed the face of traditional policing on the mainland beyond all recognition? Will she ensure that the police are provided with the most up-to-date equipment to fight criminality, including robust stop-and-search powers?

**Mrs May:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point, particularly given his experience. We do indeed believe that stop-and-search powers are an essential tool, but they must be used properly and in a targeted way that will be effective. That is what our "Best Use of Stop and Search" scheme is for. I echo the question that Lord Condon asked the Minister in another place in March:

"Does the Minister agree that no compelling case has been made, now or in the past, for the use of water cannon in London and that that is why all former commissioners, me included, have resisted calls for their use?"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 17 March 2015; Vol. 760, c. 1001.]

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I do not wish to be unkind to the hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan), who has struck me, in the short time I have known him, as a very decent fellow, but he has only just toddled into the Chamber and is now rising to ask the Home Secretary a question. He cannot expect to be called in relation to this statement, because he was not here for it. We will hear from the hon. Gentleman on another occasion—we are saving him up.

**Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): The Home Secretary has clearly considered this matter, and I respect her decision. All that I will say is that when the Police Service of Northern Ireland makes it clear that it requires water cannon for public order situations, it rightly receives the support of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. But when police in England and Wales say that they require that capability in their respective contexts, the Home Secretary disagrees. Why is one chief constable right and entitled to support while the other is wrong and not?

**Mrs May:** As I have said in answer to a number of points raised today, the policing situation in Northern Ireland is different from the one in England and Wales. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to assume that all chief constables in England and Wales think that water cannon are a tool that they should have, or indeed that they would use, because the evidence shows that their views on the issue are very mixed.

**Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): I thank the Home Secretary for sharing a copy of her statement in advance. I rise simply because Northern Ireland has been mentioned a number of times today. I wish to commend her for the statement. There will be a range of views on how water cannon can best be deployed, but I think that it is incumbent on Members of this House to recognise that it is not for parliamentarians to frustrate the full range of non-lethal means that the police can use in a riotous and difficult situation.

**Mrs May:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution. As I have pointed out, water cannon have been used for some years in Northern Ireland, and they are used in a pre-planned way and in a particular set of circumstances. It is right that we recognise that the circumstances of policing in England and Wales are different; the police in England and Wales face different types of issues from those faced by the PSNI.

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): Chief Constable David Shaw was very clear that water cannon would not have helped in the London riots in 2011 and that the coalition Government were right to resist their use, so I commend the Home Secretary for her decision. She has clearly done her scrutiny in an entirely proper and admirable way. Will she also ensure that there is proper parliamentary scrutiny of any changes to the deployment of less-lethal weapons in this country?

**Mrs May:** There is a very clear process by which the use of less-lethal weaponry is authorised for use in England and Wales. It is for the Home Secretary to take a decision on the basis of the evidence that is put before SACMILL and the various other bodies I mentioned that are part of the process of looking at this. In order to ensure that parliamentarians are as fully informed as possible, I am making as much of the evidence as possible available in the Library so that people are able to look at it themselves.

## Points of Order

2.30 pm

**Sir Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker—perhaps before the Home Secretary leaves, for it is pertinent to her Department. I am not sure if you are aware, but for the second day running Parliament Square has been blocked by a demonstration, and the police seem completely powerless to do anything about it. Traffic is backing up down Victoria Street and, for all I know, the other streets around Parliament Square, making it difficult for Members of this House and the other place to access this place. Today's protest appears to be about something going on in a foreign country. May I ask you whether you have had a chance to have a word with the Home Secretary, or indeed with the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, whose job it is to ensure that access to this place is guaranteed, about clearing Parliament Square of this demonstration, which is causing huge inconvenience to the people of London? Perhaps you might like to engage the services of the Mayor of London, my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson).

**Mr Speaker:** In the course of his point of order, the hon. Gentleman referred to a litany of distinguished personalities. I have not discussed the matter with the Home Secretary. I was at an event with the Metropolitan Police Commissioner the other day, and we did have a brief exchange, but I did not know then of the upcoming demonstration, still less of the intellectual ferocity of the hon. Gentleman's prospective point of order, so I did not discuss the matter with him either. The Mayor of London is not far away; I suggest that the hon. Gentleman might have a chat with his hon. Friend. The important point, of course, is that notwithstanding the right to demonstrate, the right of Members to go about their business unimpeded must be upheld. If the hon. Gentleman has concerns on that front, this is an issue that can very properly be taken forward with the appropriate authorities, of which there are more than one.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker, of which I have given the relevant Minister notice. Is it in order for a Minister to threaten to exclude an hon. Member from information and correspondence about his local NHS, to bar me from access to senior NHS officials, and even to threaten negative consequences for me and my constituents—and all because I have been critical of the Government's continuing failure to grip the unprecedented financial crisis facing Devon NHS? That was the essence of an encounter with the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer), just outside this Chamber last night. Will you please remind the Minister that he is accountable to this House, that it is the job of a Member of Parliament to speak up on behalf of his or her constituents, and that such behaviour from a Minister of the Crown is completely intolerable?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for his courtesy in giving me notice of it. I do not want to be drawn, and fear that I cannot be drawn, into conversations between hon. Members to which I was not myself privy, including those between hon. Members and Ministers. What I will say is this: I am sure that the hon. Member for Ipswich is well aware

[Mr Speaker]

of his responsibilities and that the right hon. Member for Exeter will continue to be a doughty champion for his constituents. He has a right to be, he has a responsibility to be, and I am sure he will be.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Three weeks ago today, the Prime Minister promised to publish data on the number of people in receipt of employment and support allowance and incapacity benefit who had died since November 2011, including those who had been found fit for work. Indeed, I raised it as a point of order on the same day. To date, nothing has been published. These people who died and their families deserve better than this. As we are approaching the summer recess, I will be very grateful if you can advise me on how I might expedite the publication of these data—on actual deaths and not just mortality rates as the Government have proposed.

**Mr Speaker:** The short answer to the hon. Lady, whose long-standing interest in this subject is well known, is that she must use the device of questioning, and there are further opportunities for questioning of various sorts between now and when we rise for the summer recess. If that method does not suit her, for whatever reason—and sometimes it has to be done more than once, even several times—there will be the opportunity, of course, to offer thoughts in the summer Adjournment debate, though I accept that she might not elicit a substantive reply from the responsible Minister. Use of the Order Paper and of the various opportunities for oral questioning—she will know that there are a number of different options on that front—would be her best course, and I advise her to try to take it. [Interruption.] The hon. Lady very courteously says from a sedentary position that she has done that several times. As I have sometimes had cause to observe, repetition is not a novel phenomenon in the House of Commons, and sometimes a Member who has done something several times simply has to resolve to do it again and again—and there will be such opportunities for the hon. Lady on that matter and for other Members on matters that concern them.

## BILL PRESENTED

### TRADE UNION BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Secretary Sajid Javid, supported by Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Patrick McLoughlin, Secretary Jeremy Hunt, Nick Boles and Matthew Hancock, presented a Bill to make provision about industrial action, trade unions, employers' associations and the functions of the Certification Officer.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 58) with explanatory notes (Bill 58-EN).*

## Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (Statutory Requirement)

*Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)*

2.36 pm

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State to provide that Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) be a statutory requirement for all state-funded schools; for PSHE to include Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) and education on ending violence against women and girls; to provide for initial and continuing teacher education and guidance on best practice for delivering and inspecting PSHE and SRE education; and for connected purposes.

PSHE—personal, social, health and economic education—is the part of the curriculum in which pupils learn how to stay healthy and safe and prepare for life and work in modern Britain. Despite its importance and the evidence of its potential, the subject is not statutory, meaning that millions of pupils miss out on the high-quality learning they need and deserve. Moreover, the last statutory SRE—sex and relationships education—guidance was produced 15 years ago, before the mass use of mobile phones to access the internet and the rise of social media, so it is seriously out of date. All children deserve a curriculum that promotes resilience and physical and mental health, encourages life skills, and teaches about equality. A postcode lottery for our young people is just not acceptable.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary of State for Education for her own personal commitment to this agenda and her positive engagement with me over it. As hon. Members will know, this is an important time for this debate as we await the Government's response to the Education Committee's report, which itself recommended statutory status for PSHE following its own very thorough inquiry. I understand that the Government's response to that report will be forthcoming shortly, and I very much look forward to seeing it, because it is clear that the Government think that PSHE is a good thing too. Indeed, the Minister for Schools said in March:

“We believe that all schools should teach personal, social, health and economic education and, within that, SRE. Indeed, the introduction to the new national curriculum makes that explicitly clear.”

That commitment is genuinely very welcome. He went on to say that the key thing with PSHE is the quality of the teaching. I agree with that, too.

The point that I hope the Government will take today, however, is that for as long as PSHE remains a non-statutory and non-examined subject with a low priority in the Ofsted framework, there will be virtually no coverage of PSHE in teacher training. In school, PSHE teachers are not given the curriculum time or the training that they need and want. This lack of teacher training is a well-documented problem. Ofsted's report entitled “Not yet good enough” found that teaching required improvement in 40% of schools. A PSHE Association survey of 40 local authorities suggests that 52% of teachers are not adequately trained in the subject.

So the call for statutory status has wide support that the Government can have confidence in. It is backed by 87% of parents, 88% of teachers, and 85% of business leaders. Joining the Education Committee are organisations

such as the UK Youth Parliament, the Office of the Children's Commissioner, Public Health England, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and four recent inquiries into child sexual exploitation, all of which back having statutory status. In addition, more than 100 leading organisations—from Mumsnet to Stonewall, from Girlguiding to the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners—have joined the PSHE Association campaign to make PSHE statutory. Support for SRE also comes from what some may see as more surprising places—for example, *The Daily Telegraph* has run the Wonder Women campaign for better sex education—which reveals that PSHE and SRE are no longer so controversial.

Working with parents is critical. This is about partnership. Parents want PSHE and SRE in school next to traditional subjects. YouGov and the PSHE Association have found that 90% of parents believe that schools should teach about mental health and emotional wellbeing. I know that some people believe this issue should be left to parents, but what schools do when they provide good-quality SRE is precisely to involve parents and work with them. The truth is that many parents simply do not have these vital conversations with their children. A national survey showed that fathers were the main source of information about sex for only 3% of boys.

Union backing has come from heads, teachers, students and nurses, including the National Association of Head Teachers, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, the National Union of Teachers, the National Union of Students and the Royal College of Nursing. Teachers back statutory PSHE because they know it is not about dictating to schools; it is the opposite of burdening them because it is about supporting teachers with appropriate training. Making PSHE statutory is not to prescribe the detail of lessons, but to give all children the same entitlement to good-quality provision while giving all schools the freedom to meet individual needs.

Some great examples of PSHE have underscored its potential. Patcham high school in my constituency has excellent provision. It has a dedicated PSHE team and significant time on the timetable, and tough subjects are sensitively discussed with pupils, which helps them to become informed young adults. The head and the teachers are passionate about the connection between happy, healthy students and academic achievement.

There are so many areas in which PSHE plays a vital role, as numerous organisations working with children have made clear. On safeguarding, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has shown that girls and boys are gleaning distorted and inaccurate information about sex relationships via online pornography. Sexting, which is often coercive and non-consensual, is a reality—girls are far more likely to be pressured to share explicit images of themselves—as is the pressure for children to document their lives and relationships online and in chatrooms. Shockingly, ChildLine has found that 60% of 13 to 18-year-olds had been asked to share a sexual image or video of themselves.

The issue that originally led me to draft the Bill concerns the link between media sexism and violence against women and girls. One in three girls say that they experience groping or unwanted sexual touching at school. Young people are growing up surrounded with negative and conflicting messages about sex, relationships and gender roles. We do both our girls and our boys a

serious disservice if we ignore the ways in which our culture routinely portrays men as sexual aggressors and women as dehumanised and objectified. It was reported last year—this was recorded by the police in 2013—that more than 1,000 alleged sexual offences had happened in schools, including 134 rapes, and that more than half of them were committed by other children.

There are so many other dimensions to PSHE—far more than I can cover now—but let me mention the need to support and protect young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersexual and queer people, because homophobic language and bullying remain common in schools.

Some hon. Members may, understandably, have questions about age-appropriateness, but good-quality PSHE and SRE are always age-appropriate. For example, at primary level, SRE for five-year-olds begins with teaching children about safety and basic understanding about their bodies, about respecting their own boundaries and those of other people, and about how families care for them. Let me assure hon. Members that five-year-olds are not taught about how people have sex. Instead, lessons are designed to help children to develop the language and the confidence they need to describe unwanted behaviour, as well as where to go for help.

A key point is that SRE is part of the solution to concerns about the sexualisation of children. The evidence shows that quality PSHE and SRE delay sexual activity for young people and reduce the level of teen pregnancies. Good PSHE helps young people to make sensible choices.

As well as being an essential part of safeguarding our children, PSHE has huge potential in relation to employability and academic attainment. It raises girls' career aspirations, and it is not rocket science that the thinking encouraged by PSHE has benefits well beyond the classroom. Business leaders want such skills. The British Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses and the CBI are all concerned that schools are not doing enough to equip students with skills for work. The CBI's director for employment and skills has said that

“developing the right attitudes and attributes in people—such as resilience, respect, enthusiasm and creativity—is just as important as academic or technical skills.”

We cannot put our heads in the sand and simply hope for the best. Ministers need to make sure that quality PSHE happens for all children. I am optimistic that we will get change; I think it may just be a question of when. I am delighted by the cross-party support for the Bill. Now we are waiting for the decision of the Secretary of State for Education, and I am very hopeful that it will be positive. I close by reminding hon. Members what she said in relation to PSHE in a very excellent speech back in March:

“There is no trade-off between learning about these things and academic success—they are two sides of the same coin.”

In other words, there is a real connection with the way in which PSHE also helps people to succeed with their wider academic work.

The Bill is not about wanting to make a whole long list of subjects statutory; it is about ensuring that all children receive their right to fulfil their potential as rounded human beings and to thrive both as individuals and as members of a modern and complex society. I very much hope that the Government will listen.

2.46 pm

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): I rise to oppose this ten-minute rule Bill. I am sorry to oppose the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) because, despite our policy differences, I admire her very much. If that endorsement does not cost her her seat at the next election, nothing will.

I believe in parental responsibility, and I make no apology for that whatsoever. The hon. Lady said that 85% of parents agree with this measure. I am surprised that she of all people advocates the tyranny of the majority over a small minority. I would have thought that she was the person thinking that the 15% who do not agree deserved to be represented and to have their views heard, but she clearly now believes in the tyranny of the majority. I will happily remind her of that in many future debates.

I firmly believe that we in this country have been going down the wrong path when it comes to parental responsibility. The message we should give to parents is that being a parent is a position of great responsibility and that certain things are the responsibility of parents and parents alone: they cannot just be farmed out willy-nilly to the state to do on their behalf. In my opinion, those things include the values with which children are brought up, and part of that involves sex education and violence against women and all the rest of it.

**Mr Graham Allen** (Nottingham North) (Lab): They do not do it.

**Philip Davies:** I am afraid that that is my entire point. If we say to parents, “Don’t worry about what you do; don’t worry about how well you bring up your children; don’t concern yourself about it, because if you don’t bother with it, the state will do it for you”, we should not be surprised when parents do not take responsibility for bringing up their children as well as they should.

**Mr Allen:** They have got to take responsibility.

**Philip Davies:** The hon. Gentleman makes my very point for me: unless and until we give parents responsibility for bringing up their children, they are not going to exercise that responsibility properly. We should not think that the state can be parents in disguise; we must trust parents to bring up their children and do the best for them.

I oppose the Bill in principle. Parents who do not want their children to have the values of their teacher inflicted on them when they may be against the values of those parents should be supported by this Parliament in being able to remove their children from such lessons if they see fit. Parental responsibility, parental choice and the freedom of parents to allow children to be brought up with their values should be protected in this House, not just trampled over because we happen to have different individual opinions.

I also oppose the Bill in practice, because I do not think that it will actually make a blind bit of difference. In this country, we have been trying sex education in schools in various forms for decades. In that time, the level of teenage pregnancies has gone up, gone down, gone up again and gone down again, and the level of

sexually transmitted diseases has gone up, up and up even more. There is no evidence that this makes any difference whatsoever.

The sex education fanatics use Holland as a prime example of why we should have more sex education. Holland has lots of sex education in its schools and very low levels of teenage pregnancy. Of course, the sex education fanatics never mention Italy, which has very low levels of sex education in schools, but equally low levels of teenage pregnancy. Clearly, it is not sex education that makes the difference, so it must be something else.

I have looked at what Holland and Italy have in common, because that might help us to improve our record on teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. After all the sex education that we have in this country, we still have the fourth highest teenage birth rate in Europe, so it does not seem to be working that well. What Holland and Italy have in common in respect of teenage pregnancy is that they are spectacularly lacking in generosity through their benefits systems to single parents and they do not give single mothers priority on their housing lists. If we want to reduce the level of teenage pregnancy in this country, we would be much better off looking at the benefits system and the housing allocation system than faffing about with more and more sex education, which seems to make not a blind bit of difference.

I therefore do not think that the hon. Lady’s Bill would even bring about the outcome that she wants. There is no evidence that, as we have had more and more sex education in this country, things have got better. I mentioned sexually transmitted diseases. I happen to have the figures from Public Health England. Between 2005 and 2014, the number of people with chlamydia went up from 97,000 to 206,000, the number of people with gonorrhoea went from 17,632 to 34,958 and the number of people with herpes went from 17,379 to 31,777. The figures go on and on. These things have been getting worse since we have had more and more sex education. If sex education was the solution, presumably they would be getting better.

Over the years, when sex education has not made any difference, we have heard that what we need is more sex education. When more sex education has made no difference, we have been told that we need better sex education. Now that better sex education has made no difference, we are told that we need compulsory sex education. When that makes no difference, perhaps we will try the proper solution, which is to abandon sex education altogether and try something completely different.

The hon. Lady says that parents may not always be the best people to provide sex education. Who is to say that teachers are always the best people to do it? I keep reading in the paper about more and more cases of teachers being convicted for inappropriate sexual relations with their pupils. What about those teachers who are teaching sex education in schools? Why would she trust those people over the parents to teach sex education? It is a complete and utter outrage.

Not that long ago, we had the case of a teenage boy—[*Interruption.*] I am glad that everyone finds this very funny. I am talking about the case of a teenage boy who raped a female classmate shortly after a sex education lesson. The reason he did it was that after the sex education lesson, he wanted to try having sex with somebody. He raped a classmate off the back of it. I am



glad that Opposition Members find that funny. I do not think that the parents of the victim found it very funny. That is how trivial Opposition Members find these issues.

We have heard about public opinion, but a poll by Angus Reid found that 67% of the public think that parents or guardians should be primarily responsible for teaching sex education to children and teens, and only 17% believe that sex education should be taught in schools to children below the age of 10. My children are 12 and 10, and I certainly do not want them going to school to learn about sex. I want them to learn about the things that I have sent them to school to learn about: maths, physics, chemistry, history—all the things that parents do not have the skills to teach their children. I do not want their teachers acting as pseudo-parents and bringing them up with their values, rather than mine.

Finally, the hon. Lady mentioned that the Bill would make a big difference to violence against women and girls. In a recent answer to a parliamentary question, I found that 23% of women and 45% of men who were convicted in court of violence against the person were sent to prison. If she really wants to tackle violence against women and children, I suggest that she joins me in calling for harsher prison sentences for the perpetrators of those crimes, rather than faffing about with sex education, which will not make a blind bit of difference.

In this House, when a politician is given a problem, their solution always has two ingredients: it allows them to be seen to be doing something and it does not offend anybody. We see that once again with the hon. Lady's Bill. She is proposing a measure that does not really offend anybody and that makes it look as though we are doing something. I would prefer it if we took action to actually make a difference on these things. Let us adopt a benefits system and housing allocation system that might reduce teenage pregnancy, and let us send the perpetrators of domestic violence to prison for longer. That would make a difference. This airy-fairy Bill will make no difference at all; it will just trample over the rights of parents and put another nail in the coffin of parental responsibility.

*Question put (Standing Order No. 23).*

*The House divided: Ayes 183, Noes 44.*

#### Division No. 49]

[2.55 pm

#### AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Bryant, Chris
Abrahams, Debbie	Buck, Ms Karen
Alexander, Heidi	Burden, Richard
Allen, Mr Graham	Burgon, Richard
Anderson, Mr David	Butler, Dawn
Ashworth, Jonathan	Cadbury, Ruth
Austin, Ian	Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Beckett, rh Margaret	Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Berger, Luciana	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Betts, Mr Clive	Champion, Sarah
Blackford, Ian	Chapman, Jenny
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Coaker, Vernon
Blomfield, Paul	Coffey, Ann
Blunt, Crispin	Cooper, Rosie
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Cooper, rh Yvette
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Coyle, Neil
Brown, Lyn	Crausby, Mr David

Creasy, Stella	Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Cruddas, Jon	Madders, Justin
Cummins, Judith	Malhotra, Seema
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Mann, John
Dakin, Nic	Marris, Rob
Danczuk, Simon	Marsden, Mr Gordon
David, Wayne	Maskell, Rachael
Davies, Geraint	McCabe, Steve
De Piero, Gloria	McCarthy, Kerry
Doughty, Stephen	McDonald, Andy
Dowd, Jim	McDonnell, John
Dromey, Jack	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Durkan, Mark	McGinn, Conor
Eagle, Ms Angela	McInnes, Liz
Eagle, Maria	Meacher, rh Mr Michael
Edwards, Jonathan	Meale, Sir Alan
Efford, Clive	Mearns, Ian
Elliott, Julie	Miliband, rh Edward
Elliott, Tom	Morden, Jessica
Ellman, Mrs Louise	Morris, Grahame M.
Esterson, Bill	Mulholland, Greg
Evans, Chris	Nokes, Caroline
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Onn, Melanie
Fletcher, Colleen	Onwurah, Chi
Flynn, Paul	Osamor, Kate
Fovargue, Yvonne	Owen, Albert
Foxcroft, Vicky	Pearce, Teresa
Gapes, Mike	Pennycook, Matthew
Gardiner, Barry	Percy, Andrew
Glass, Pat	Perkins, Toby
Green, Kate	Phillips, Jess
Greenwood, Lilian	Phillipson, Bridget
Greenwood, Margaret	Pound, Stephen
Griffith, Nia	Rayner, Angela
Gwynne, Andrew	Reed, Mr Jamie
Haigh, Louise	Rees, Christina
Hanson, rh Mr David	Reynolds, Jonathan
Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Rimmer, Marie
Harpham, Harry	Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Harris, Carolyn	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Hayes, Helen	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Hayman, Sue	Saville Roberts, Liz
Hendrick, Mr Mark	Shah, Naz
Hermon, Lady	Shuker, Mr Gavin
Hillier, Meg	Skinner, Mr Dennis
Hodge, rh Margaret	Slaughter, Andy
Hollern, Kate	Smeeth, Ruth
Hopkins, Kelvin	Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Howarth, rh Mr George	Smith, Cat
Howlett, Ben	Smith, Jeff
Huq, Dr Rupa	Smith, Nick
Jarvis, Dan	Smith, Owen
Johnson, rh Alan	Smyth, Karin
Johnson, Diana	Starmer, Keir
Jones, Gerald	Stevens, Jo
Jones, Graham	Streeting, Wes
Jones, Mr Kevan	Stuart, Ms Gisela
Jones, Susan Elan	Stuart, Graham
Kane, Mike	Tami, Mark
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald	Thomas, Mr Gareth
Keeley, Barbara	Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Khan, rh Sadiq	Thornberry, Emily
Kinahan, Danny	Timms, rh Stephen
Kinnock, Stephen	Turley, Anna
Kyle, Peter	Twigg, Derek
Lamb, rh Norman	Twigg, Stephen
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Umunna, Mr Chuka
Lewis, Clive	Vaz, Valerie
Long Bailey, Rebecca	West, Catherine
Lord, Jonathan	Williams, Hywel
Lucas, Caroline	Williams, Mr Mark
Lucas, Ian C.	Wilson, Phil

Winterton, rh Ms Rosie  
Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
Woodcock, John  
Wragg, William

Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Tom Blenkinsop and**  
**Karl Turner**

#### NOES

Amess, Sir David  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Burrowes, Mr David  
Cash, Sir William  
Caulfield, Maria  
Chope, Mr Christopher  
Churchill, Jo  
Davies, David T. C.  
Davies, Philip  
Davis, rh Mr David  
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel  
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.  
Double, Steve  
Gale, Sir Roger  
Grant, Mrs Helen  
Gray, Mr James  
Green, Chris  
Hoare, Simon  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Howarth, Sir Gerald  
Howell, John  
Jackson, Mr Stewart  
Jenkyns, Andrea  
Jones, rh Mr David

Kawczynski, Daniel  
Knight, rh Sir Greg  
Leigh, Sir Edward  
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
Main, Mrs Anne  
McCartney, Karl  
Mills, Nigel  
Redwood, rh John  
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
Robinson, Gavin  
Rosindell, Andrew  
Shannon, Jim  
Thomas, Derek  
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
Turner, Mr Andrew  
Vickers, Martin  
Warburton, David  
Watkinson, Dame Angela  
Wiggin, Bill  
Wilson, Sammy

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Mr Peter Bone and**  
**Mr David Nuttall**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Caroline Lucas, Thangam Debonnaire, Caroline Nokes, Norman Lamb, Liz Saville Roberts, Barbara Keeley, Valerie Vaz, Yasmin Qureshi, Dawn Butler and Cat Smith present the Bill.

Caroline Lucas accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 January 2016 and to be printed ( Bill 59).*

#### SUPPLY AND APPROPRIATION (MAIN ESTIMATES) BILL

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith ( Standing Order No. 56 ), That the Bill be now read a Second time.*

*Question agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time.*

*Question put forthwith, That the Bill be now read the Third time.*

*Question agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.*

### English Votes for English Laws

*[Relevant documents: English Votes for English Laws: Revised Proposed Changes to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons and Explanatory Memorandum.]*

3.8 pm

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling):**  
I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of English votes for English laws.

This is, as I promised in the business statement last week, the first of two days of debate on the subject of English votes for English laws. It gives me the opportunity to explain once again the Government's proposals and to listen to views from across the House. We committed last week to have two days of debate. We will have the second day when the House returns in September. I decided that for practical reasons it was not sensible to have a debate over two days with a large gap between them, so today's debate is on a motion for the Adjournment. We will continue after the recess with the second day of debate, when the substantive motions will be put and debated. As I committed to the shadow Leader of the House, we will make provision for amendments to be tabled for that debate. It was always the intention that that would happen. The appropriate motion will be passed ahead of that debate to enable her and anybody else who wishes to do so to table amendments for discussion during that day's debate.

**Mr David Davis** (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for amending the timetable on this matter, which is serious and important for the interests of the English, the Scots and the Union. Before the next debate, will he publish a list of the measures in the Queen's Speech that he thinks will be affected in terms of who can vote for them?

**Chris Grayling:** I am happy to do that. We have already indicated previous Bills that would have been affected by this measure, and we continue to work on that. The certification process that will exist in future has not existed in the past, and there is a fundamental difference between territorial extent as indicated in a past Bill that, for example, might refer to England and Wales as a single jurisdiction but be applicable to England only. I am happy to ensure that what my right hon. Friend asks for happens. In the current Session, I am aware of only one Bill that is likely to be entirely English-only, which is the proposed buses Bill. Many other Bills will be partly English—or English and Welsh—only. I remind the House that, notwithstanding any future certification by the Speaker, every Member of Parliament will vote on every Bill that passes through this place, and no one will be excluded.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his clarification about voting after what will be the next day's debate on the 22 pages of changes to the Standing Orders that the Government propose. Last week in the emergency debate, I asked whether the Government would propose to allow not only amendments to be tabled but more than one or two votes to be taken, so that the will of the House could be tested on them. Under the old process that was originally suggested that would have been in doubt.

Can the right hon. Gentleman be a bit clearer about which procedure we will use when we debate the Standing Orders?

**Chris Grayling:** First, I never intended to have a debate where amendments were excluded; that was never suggested or proposed by the Government. The number of votes that are called by the Speaker or Deputy Speaker is a matter for them, and it is not for me to limit the number of votes. We intend to allow amendments to be tabled to this measure, as in any other debate of this kind.

**Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con):** May I suggest a novel solution to this problem? When the Scottish National party decides to vote on matters that relate only to England and that have been devolved to Holyrood, I suggest that the Government introduce a Bill to bring those powers back from Scotland to Westminster. If the SNP wants those matters to be voted on in Westminster, surely we can help facilitate that and solve the problem once and for all.

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend makes an interesting point, and he will no doubt argue that when we come to review these and other matters related to the Scotland Bill, Scottish Members of Parliament probably do not need additional areas to be covered at Westminster, to contribute to debates here. Since they do not have, as part of their daily duties, the task of representing their constituencies in areas such as health, education and transport, they have more time to focus on other matters in the Chamber.

**Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab):** I thank the Leader of the House for extending the amount of time in which we can consider this issue. I commend him for that; he did not have to do it, but he listened to the House. Will he also listen to the House in a more measured way and inform us today that there will be no votes at all on this matter until the Procedure Committee and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee have had a chance to issue a report that all Members can read?

**Chris Grayling:** I think that the hon. Gentleman is misunderstanding the process that I have put in place. The measures that we have tabled before the House were clearly and straightforwardly set out in our manifesto as something that we intended to proceed with. I have always intended the Procedure Committee, and indeed the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, to play a role in that. I have set out a process—which I discussed with the Chairs of both those Committees—in which as we go through a 12-month period leading up to a review, both Committees look carefully at how the process is taking place and working. They will comment on that process to the House, and we will study those comments carefully as we review proceedings. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Procedure Committee intends to discuss these issues before we next meet for debate, and its initial reactions will undoubtedly be available to Members before that time.

**Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con):** Does my right hon. Friend accept that those few lines in our manifesto have now morphed into what I believe are 30 pages of changes to the Standing Orders? When he conducts his

sensible approach to a review and the delay that he is building into this matter, will he take the opportunity to consider some of the other proposals that have been made? For example, my simple amendment to the Standing Orders comprises only seven lines and was cleared by the most senior members of the Clerk's Department in the last Parliament.

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend is a distinguished lawyer and expert in these matters. I have no doubt that as we review these processes we will consider the views set out and options placed before us by Members from across the House. I certainly give that undertaking. Given the manifesto commitment and that the House will want to see how these processes work in action, it is sensible to consider the matter carefully over the next 12 months, hold a review and take stock at that time.

**Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP):** May I suggest a parallel procedure to the one recently suggested by the aggrieved Tory Back Bencher? When an amendment to the Scotland Bill is voted for by 58 out of 59 Scottish MPs but voted down by Members such as the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), that power should be immediately transferred to the Scottish Parliament. Will we reach an agreement on these things?

**Chris Grayling:** As ever, the right hon. Gentleman is ingenious in his arguments, but I simply say that we are, and remain, a United Kingdom Parliament. Matters related to devolution in Scotland are debated and voted on by the whole House of Commons. When we debate matters related to additional responsibilities for Members representing English constituencies—as we are doing today—those measures are debated by Members from the entire United Kingdom. That is right and proper, and it is the way that a United Kingdom Parliament should operate.

**Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab):** If the right hon. Gentleman believes in a United Kingdom Parliament, will he extend to Members from Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland the same rights in this Parliament that he is according to MPs from England?

**Chris Grayling:** Over the past 20 years, we in this House have done precisely that with the creation of the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Irish Assembly. The issue that we are seeking to address is the fact that, as an MP representing a Welsh constituency just over the border in north Wales, the hon. Gentleman cannot vote on education matters related to his own constituency. He can vote, however, on matters that relate to Chester just a few miles up the road. We are seeking to address that oddity.

**Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP):** The problem with that argument is that we keep hearing about the respect that was shown to the Scottish Parliament and Scottish people, but the right hon. Gentleman seems to ignore the fact that the SNP had 56 MPs elected to this Parliament on a platform of delivering home rule to Scotland. Conservative Members have vetoed every reasonable amendment that we have tabled to ensure that we deliver what the people of Scotland have demanded. Is it absurd that you are observing a veto on the people of Scotland, while we cannot vote—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I am not responsible. When you say “you” it means me, and I do not want to take that responsibility. It is down to the Leader of the House, and I am not going to let him shirk away from that.

**Chris Grayling:** I get the point that the hon. Gentleman was making. This is a simple matter. During the Scottish referendum campaign, the United Kingdom Parliament and Government made an offer to the Scottish people of additional devolution. That offer is encapsulated in the Scotland Bill, which is currently on its passage through the House. SNP Members would like more powers than are set out in the Smith commission report and the Scotland Bill. They are perfectly entitled to want that, but if it is the will of the United Kingdom Parliament not to proceed with those measures in Scotland, they will not happen. That is the way that this Parliament works.

**Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con):** We hear the word “respect”, but it is simple: my constituents think that respect goes both ways and they respect the Scottish people’s right to have a Scottish Parliament, the Welsh people’s right to have a Welsh Assembly and the same in Northern Ireland. All they want in return is respect for England and for the people of my area, whose voice is watered down by people voting on matters affecting Yorkshire and Lincolnshire that we cannot vote on in Scotland. That is all we want: respect.

**Chris Grayling:** This is a live and real issue, but it is a mark of the respect and affection in which we hold the Scottish nation, the Scottish people and Scottish Members of Parliament that we are not seeking in these proposals to exclude them from voting on measures in this place. We are not saying that there will be votes purely of English MPs and that we will leave Scottish MPs out; they will vote on every piece of legislation in the way that they do now. However, it is surely not unreasonable to say to them that, if a matter affects only the English or only the English and Welsh and will change matters in those constituencies, English and Welsh MPs should have the decisive say.

**David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con):** As somebody who is proud to be Welsh and proud to be British and has taken the oath to the Queen without my fingers crossed behind my back—

**Martin John Docherty (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)**  
*rose—*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. Sit down now. We will not have two Members standing. It was an intervention and I will not have somebody shouting from the back row. We want—

**Martin John Docherty** *rose—*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Don’t. We want an orderly debate in which everybody will have their time to speak, so what we will do is conduct it with respect and tolerance.

**David T. C. Davies:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. In putting right an obvious injustice to England, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is doing

something that will strengthen the Union. That is why it should be supported by all Unionists and why it is opposed by so many Opposition Members.

**Chris Grayling:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. I think this is purely about fairness and I find it disappointing that the Scottish National party—and not purely the SNP, because Labour appears to take the same view—which believes in fairness for the people of Scotland and in the devolution of responsibilities, which has already happened for the Scottish Parliament, seems opposed to a relatively limited measure affecting the English, which does less than some people want. It is disappointing that the belief seems to be that Scotland should get more but England should not have a small measure to counterbalance that.

**Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con):** My right hon. Friend is being too generous to Opposition Members, particularly the Scottish nationalists. After all, they have long espoused the need for devolution to England, and merely to ensure consent for procedures that impact only on England or England and Wales is the tiniest modest step in that direction. They espoused that view for years and now, opportunistically and cynically, they try to suggest that it is something else.

**Chris Grayling:** I hope that the Scottish National party, which is made up of a group of people I have grown to like and respect, will not seek to use this matter to pursue a different agenda to do with the separation of the Union. I hope that they would not say that we should not be fair to England purely to whip up concern in Scotland that would encourage support for a second referendum.

**Graham Stuart:** Further to that point, my right hon. Friend is right. We have learned to like and respect the Scottish nationalist Members since they came here, but is it not clear that this is quite an imperial project? MPs in this Chamber who represent the Scottish National party do not think or speak for themselves; they do exactly as they are told by Edinburgh.

**Chris Grayling:** In some cases, there might be some evidence of influence from Edinburgh, but I do not think that anybody would dare suggest that the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) could be told what to do in this place by anybody.

**Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP):** Does the Leader of the House accept that how this matter has been dealt with has stoked the fires of nationalism? He has admitted today that only one Bill is likely to be affected in this way. Does he really fear that the hordes from across the border will pillage his programme in the next year, so he has to rush this thing through without proper consideration?

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Gentleman talks about proper consideration and these proposals were, of course, published late last year. They have been subject to extensive statements to the House. They were in our manifesto and they are now subject to extensive debate in the House. They are a relatively modest step that, in my view, provides a balance of fairness across the Union. While we are in this place, there is inevitably a degree of rhetoric. This is an important part of saying

to the people of England that, as we devolve more powers to Scotland and to Wales, England is a part of that.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Chris Grayling:** I will make a little bit of progress, and then I will give way a few more times.

I have already made the point that we will provide a business motion to ensure that there will be a full opportunity for any amendment selected to be debated and voted on. The Deputy Leader of the House and I are consulting and will continue to consult colleagues from across the House to answer questions of detail. My door is open to hear their views. I think that I have now had meetings with all the different political groups in the House, and I will continue to be available to talk to them.

I have had a number of conversations with the Chair of the Procedure Committee about our proposals. I talked to him back in May, before the new Committee was formed, to ensure that he was aware of what I was thinking. We now have a Committee and I intend to write to it to set out the process and ask whether it will keep track of how the new rules work in practice to review their operation once Bills have reached Royal Assent under them. I know that members of the Committee will contribute to debate and discussion about these matters over the coming months; but in addition, I have been invited to address the Committee and give evidence at the start of the September sitting, which I will happily do. I will be very happy in due course to talk to the other Committees involved.

**Ms Angela Eagle:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way again; it is gracious of him. He mentioned that day two of our proceedings on this matter will be sometime in September and he has not announced when. It is clearly quite important for Members of Parliament that, when we come back for the September sitting, there is a little bit of time between the evidence he gives to the Procedure Committee, and perhaps other Committees, and our consideration of the proposals. Will he give us some reassurance that there will be enough time and that the debate will not happen very quickly as soon as the House returns?

**Chris Grayling:** I am cognisant of the hon. Lady's point. She would not expect me to announce the business in advance, but I take note of what she says. I can assure her that we will have a sensible process, and of course I will be available to hear comments from Members while the House is sitting and when it returns.

The other point raised with me, apart from the question of timetabling, was Members' ability to vote on legislation that might have implications for the block grant, the so-called Barnett consequentials. There has been some discussion about how the House makes decisions on the block grant and how Barnett consequentials work. This House approves the Government's spending requirements each year through the estimates process, and we did that last night. The Government publish our spending plans, broken down by Department. The cash grants to the devolved consolidated funds that in turn fund the spending of the devolved Administrations are included in the relevant estimate: Scotland Office, Wales Office or Northern

Ireland Office. Some of the individual departmental estimates are debated each year. The choice of these debates is a matter for the House through the Liaison Committee.

The decisions on the estimates are given statutory effect in a Bill each summer. The whole House will continue to vote on these supply and appropriation Bills. Through those means, decisions on the block grant funding to the devolved Administrations are taken. The block grant total each year is based upon a number of factors, including the calculation of Barnett consequentials, or the impact of individual spending decisions in different parts of the UK.

There are no readily calculable Barnett consequentials arising from individual Bills, because there is no direct relationship between any one piece of legislation and the overall block grant, even when the Bill results in extra spending or savings. An education Bill for England does not change the Department for Education's budget outside the estimates process.

The two processes are separate. Decisions relating to departmental spending, including the block grant and the outcome reported to the House, are taken first in spending reviews and then in the annual estimates process. It is up to Departments to operate within the limits of the Budget allocation agreed. Any costs associated with legislation they take through Parliament must be borne within a Department's overall budget.

We have listened to Members' concerns and I understand the need to clarify the position relating to expenditure, so I want to be crystal clear. In order to assist today's debate, I have republished the changes we propose to make to the Standing Orders of this House, with some small but important clarifications. They make it absolutely plain that Members from across the entire House—all Members—will approve departmental spending, which, as I have said, sets out the levels of spending for the devolved Administrations, reflecting Barnett consequentials. All MPs will vote on the legislation that confirms those decisions.

In addition, we have clarified that where legislation involves an increase in a Department's expenditure, as voted on by the whole House in the estimates process, all MPs will continue to vote on that specific decision. All aspects of public spending will continue to be voted on by the whole House.

**Mr David Davis:** I am one of those who have raised very firmly with my right hon. Friend the question of the Barnett formula. The handling of the House's procedures is as much about perceived fairness as it is about actual fairness. He is right to say that most Bills do not have large carry-over implications for funding, but occasionally they might and under such circumstances the Bill's money resolution becomes incredibly important. I make this point speculatively—I have not come to a conclusion on it myself yet—but perhaps my right hon. Friend should allow the House to debate such money resolutions so that if, for example, the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) wanted to object to a particular measure because of its money implications, he could then do so.

**Chris Grayling:** I have listened carefully to my right hon. Friend. Money resolutions will also be voted on by the whole House. There will not be a decisive English

[Chris Grayling]

say. I take note of my right hon. Friend's comment on the timing of debates. Mr Deputy Speaker, I suspect that you and your colleagues in the Chair would regard comments about a money resolution as in order in a debate on a Bill, but if that proves to be a problem I am very open to looking at whether we can find another way to ensure that money resolutions can be debated.

**Alex Salmond:** It would be helpful to the House if I took the Leader of the House back to an example of where he is wrong. If the House decides to raise tuition fees in England, that would not affect public spending in that year, but an automatic consequence of such a decision would be that direct public expenditure to universities would be lowered and loan funding would probably be raised as a result of having to compensate students. These things have an impact through Barnett consequential, so unless the Leader of the House can reverse his previous advice and tell me that a tuition fees Bill would not be included in the procedures, what he has just told the House is not correct.

**Chris Grayling:** That is not right, because a money resolution attached to a tuition fees Bill would be a matter for the whole House. The right hon. Gentleman is right to mention tuition fees, because the issue of changes to tuition fees in England does not apply in Scotland. During the years of Labour Government, the most pronounced example of Scottish votes affecting English constituencies was when Scottish votes carried an increase in tuition fees.

**Alex Salmond:** But not SNP votes.

**Chris Grayling:** There were SNP votes at the time.

**Alex Salmond:** We voted against it.

**Chris Grayling:** It is none the less the case—because we do not distinguish between Scottish MPs, even Conservative ones, and their votes—that an increase in tuition fees for English students was carried by Scottish Members of Parliament, even though the impact of that change did not apply in Scotland.

**Alex Salmond:** The Leader of the House is being generous with his time. The Scottish National party is the only political party in this House that has not voted for increasing tuition fees for English students—we voted against that. Regardless of what happens in a financial year and the money resolution, the impact of a tuition fees policy is to lower direct public spending and increase loan expenditure. That was the automatic result and aim of that tuition fee policy, which is why we voted against it and why we should still be entitled to vote against it if it is ever brought back to the House.

**Chris Grayling:** That is precisely why, should such a circumstance arise, the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will still be able to vote against it on Second Reading, Report, Third Reading and the money resolution. It is entirely reasonable to say that if English Members of Parliament face an increase in tuition fees that applies to their constituents only, they should have a decisive say on whether that increase should happen. If the Scottish Parliament chooses to raise or cut tuition fees in Scotland, that is surely a matter for Scottish Members

of Parliament in Edinburgh to decide one way or the other. The difference is that at the moment English Members of Parliament do not have the decisive say. Under these proposals, they would have the decisive say.

**Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP):** I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving way. I think he has been gracious enough to accept that throughout this process he has benefited from a range of views in this House and from a range of views within Parliament. What I cannot understand at this stage is why he does not think that, in this one nation Parliament, any proposal would not benefit from greater scrutiny by parliamentarians right across this House at Committee stage, which is the most crucial.

**Chris Grayling:** That is precisely what I have done. I have said, "Let us put this in place. Let us road test it. Let us see how it works. Let us let the Procedure Committee crawl all over it." A number of operational issues will arise from a change like this, so let us have a proper review at the end of the first Session, when we can see what has happened to Bills that move to Report. We can then understand the implications.

**Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP):** Going back to what the right hon. Gentleman said a couple of minutes ago, does he not accept that if a Bill here has the effect of reducing or removing an area of public spending, that will have an impact on the Barnett formula? It will have an effect on Barnett consequential. If he is saying that Bills by their nature do not have spending effects, is he telling us that Ministers will never argue against any amendment in future by saying that it would cause a drain on the public purse and add to public expenditure? Will he stop using that argument against amendments?

**Chris Grayling:** I have tried in recent days to identify any Bill that has a public spending impact outside the estimates process. The officials who have looked at this for me have identified no such measure. The point is that the estimates process is what sets our public spending envelopes. It is what sets the budget for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. It is what sets the departmental budget for the Department for Education. It is what consequentially sets the budget for the Scottish Government, and for Wales and Northern Ireland. All those things will remain a matter for a vote of the United Kingdom Parliament, as, indeed, every Bill will be voted on by every single Member of Parliament.

**Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con):** I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. Listening to some on the Opposition Benches, it seems that they believe the West Lothian question was a rhetorical one. This proposal is trying to find an answer to it, the genie having been let out of the bottle through the devolution settlements. Will he accept the support and congratulations of my constituents in North Dorset, because he and the Government are trying to find a fair and just way to solve a problem that has been ignored for far too long and is clearly and palpably unfair?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. May I suggest that that intervention is far too long?

**Chris Grayling:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the support he gives to the measures. I think they are measured and reasonable. If we are moving towards

greater devolution across the United Kingdom, I simply do not accept that it is sensible or reasonable to say to the English, “You have no part in that.”

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab) *rose*—

**Chris Grayling:** The right hon. Lady is no doubt going to tell me that it is unreasonable. She represents an English seat. I am sure her constituents want some fairness in all of this as well.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** I am a proud Unionist. The voices of proud Unionists on the Opposition Benches say to the Leader of the House that there is a profound risk in his proposals. The risk is, first, making a differential between Members. Further, he tells us that he has looked, with the Clerks, at what might happen and that we can all deal with that after a year. We are arguing for a careful review before this is implemented, because it sounds to me as if, for example, English voters—

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. Unfortunately, we have to have short interventions. The best thing to do is have one intervention and then come back later to make another intervention.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** I missed the important bit!

**Chris Grayling:** I got the gist, Mr Deputy Speaker. The dilemma for the right hon. Lady is this: she and her party are now fundamentally an English party with a few Welsh MPs. They have constituents who, like mine, want a balanced devolution settlement where there is a degree of fairness for England. That is what we are doing. This is a sensible package of measures that provides a balance within this place and gives a decisive vote on matters that affect only English and Welsh constituencies, but does not remove from any MP in any part of the House the right to vote on any single measure that appears before this House.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Will the Leader of the House confirm that no amendments can be made to estimates?

**Chris Grayling:** It is a matter for the Liaison Committee, which can organise a debate on any estimate if it chooses to do so. It is a matter for the entire House what it debates.

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): On the composition of Bill Committees, is the Leader of the House saying that Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland Members would not be allowed on England-only Bill Committees? What about the Chair, who is chosen by the Speaker's Panel of Chairs, if they were to come from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland? Not only do they have one vote; they have the casting vote. How would the right hon. Gentleman deal with that?

**Chris Grayling:** In my view, there is no issue with any Member chairing any Committee, since by convention a casting vote is cast in favour of the status quo. In my view, that would not change, and I see no reason to exclude any Member from either side of the House from chairing any Committee.

A question was raised about England-only Bills. We are not talking simply about England-only Bills, but about Bills that are substantially or in part applicable

only to constituents of one group of Members—either English-only or Welsh-only Members. That will be a part of the process. It is not purely a question of having one England-only Bill in this Session. A number of measures will be coming before the House that apply entirely and exclusively to the United Kingdom—local government devolution is a case in point.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): We accept the Leader of the House's point about the Chair of a Committee, but what if there were a Front Bencher on either side who was Scottish or Welsh who would not be allowed to vote in the Bill Committee?

**Chris Grayling:** We intend that only very few Committees will be England-only; almost all will remain United Kingdom Committees, as now, as will almost all the statutory instrument Committees. It will be a matter for individual political parties whom they assign to Committees.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving way; he is being generous with his time. May I help him out? In the past when this was discussed, it was suggested that it could be trialled, if it had to be trialled, on a single Bill. He tells the House that he has identified that Bill in the current programme. Instead of going forward with the full range of changes and all the infrastructure required for the Speaker's Office, why does he not try it out on this one Bill? That would be a meaningful trial.

**Chris Grayling:** I am afraid I do not think that it would be a meaningful trial at all. We have a system that will apply to England-only Bills, to England and Wales-only Bills and to partial elements of Bills. It is important to try it out for a Session on things affected and then to have a review.

**Mr Carmichael:** It will not just apply to the single Bill; it will also apply to all the certified secondary legislation. It will require significant administrative infrastructure being put in place for the Speaker's Office. If, after a year, we decide that this is not the way to go, what happens then?

**Chris Grayling:** I do not think we will decide after a year that we want to stop it altogether. We may decide to make changes to how it works or that things could be done differently, but I am not suggesting we would stop having any kind of a say for the English in 12 months. I am saying we will want to review how this works under the procedures of the House in 12 months and to take views from different sides on how it could, or whether it should, be different. I am not suggesting that in 12 months we should simply say, “Actually, we don't think there should be fairness for the English at all.”

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): First, may I thank the Leader of the House for giving Parliament more time to discuss this matter? The whole House should thank him for that. For clarification, will he say whether the changes to Standing Orders cover secondary legislation?

**Chris Grayling:** Yes, they do. Any secondary legislation certified as England or England and Wales-only would be subject to a double majority vote, but importantly

[Chris Grayling]

there will be no change to the Committee structure. We will continue to have UK Committees, but the final say on the Floor of the House would be subject to a double majority.

**Ian Blackford** *rose*—

**Chris Grayling:** Before I give way, I have a question for the hon. Gentleman. It has been the SNP's practice to stay away when a measure is England-only. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), the SNP spokesman on this, said a little while back in evidence to the McKay commission:

"We look at each bill, as we get the business for the week, we assess it for the Scottish interest. If there is none or if it's insignificant, we take no interest... We have never had the problem. 12 years since the setting up of the Scottish Parliament, we have had the self denying ordinance and found it about the most easiest thing possible to do and we do not see what the fuss is."

My question to SNP Members is this: since this only codifies in the Standing Orders of the House what they claim they already do, what is all the fuss about?

**Ian Blackford:** I am delighted to try to assist the Leader of the House in that task. There is a very simple answer, which would take away a lot of the angst. If we want fairness and English votes for English laws, the solution is very simple: bring forward legislation for an English Parliament. That is what we would consider as fair. The point that the right hon. Gentleman has to address is that we were all elected on 7 May with equal rights, so why is that—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. Let me help the House by explaining that 23 people wish to speak and the two Front Benchers need to speak, so we must have short interventions.

**Chris Grayling:** On that note, I shall seek to bring my remarks to a conclusion. I have been as generous as I can in giving way.

Let me finish with this thought. The hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) talked about equal rights, so let me remind him that in a typical day in this place, most people representing England and Wales are dealing with inquiries from constituents about the health service, education, transport and so forth, while in Scotland all those things are not the responsibility of SNP Members—they are the responsibility of their counterparts in the Scottish Parliament. We already have Members of Parliament with different jobs to do. We are simply ensuring a degree of fairness in this place.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Chris Grayling:** In the interests of fairness, I will allow two more interventions and then I shall wrap up.

**Mr Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. Does he accept that this issue is not just about votes on legislation, but about debates? Surely it would be reasonable for us, as a UK Parliament, to be able to debate issues affecting all parts of the United Kingdom, thereby removing the

restriction on debating devolved matters. This morning in Westminster Hall, SNP Members were speaking about housing supply in London.

**Chris Grayling:** That may be a current issue for one or two of them, having moved down from Scotland to be here, but my hon. Friend makes an important point. We do have an odd imbalance, yet no one on the SNP Benches has been able to explain to me—nor have those on the Labour Benches now lining themselves up against these proposals—why it is right and proper to continue with a situation in which an MP from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland can vote on education in my constituency but not in their own constituency. That seems to me to be a flaw.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab) *rose*—

**Chris Grayling:** I shall give way for the last time and then wind up.

**Mr Hanson:** I am grateful. One person he has not mentioned in detail so far is the Speaker of the House of Commons. There will be moments when controversial issues arise in relation to the certification of an England-only Bill and the parties are in dispute. What consultation has the right hon. Gentleman undertaken with the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers on this matter?

**Chris Grayling:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I am not sure whether it is appropriate to discuss in this House conversations that have been held with the Chair. Suffice it to say that consultations and discussions have taken place, as the right hon. Gentleman would expect. I have every faith in the Speaker's ability.

**Mr Charles Walker** (Broxbourne) (Con) *rose*—

**Chris Grayling:** Because my hon. Friend the Chairman of the Procedure Committee wants to intervene, I shall take two more interventions, but then I really will finish.

**Mr Walker:** I look forward to seeing my right hon. Friend in September. In advance of that meeting, the Committee will speak to the Speaker's Counsel, Parliamentary Counsel, the Clerk of the House and perhaps to former distinguished Clerks, so we shall have lots of questions to put to the Leader of the House when we see him in September.

**Chris Grayling:** I look forward to that.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Chris Grayling:** Last, but not least, I give way to the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford).

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): It is not that SNP Members do not recognise the issue for constituents living in England—we absolutely recognise it, which is why we welcomed our Parliament—but in view of all the issues that have been raised, does the right hon. Gentleman not accept that we might as well do the work and have a permanent solution rather than a hotch-potch, which is what this is? You need a Parliament for England.



**Chris Grayling:** I understand the hon. Lady's point. We have considered the issue very carefully, and we do not want to fragment this House of Commons. We put proposals in our manifesto, on which we were elected. We should and will stick by that manifesto. Ultimately, it is all about fairness. We intend to provide more powers to Scotland and more powers to Wales, and we intend to devolve to Northern Ireland powers over areas such as corporation tax. Ultimately, we need to be fair to the English, and that is what this is about.

3.49 pm

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): I rise to contribute to what has now thankfully become a general debate on the Government's proposals for what they like to call "English votes for English laws". I am pleased that they have at least seen a bit of sense in retreating from their original intention of making us vote on those complex and controversial proposals today.

Let me begin by emphasising, for the avoidance of any doubt, that the official Opposition recognise that, in the light of the ongoing deepening of devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, it is important for us to evolve a mechanism for ensuring that the views of English Members of Parliament are heard clearly on English matters. Believing in that simple aim, however, does not mean that we can support the proposals that have been put before us today, because, as currently written, they are deeply flawed. We do not think that the Government's proposals are either wise or viable. Indeed, they are likely to put the Union at risk by creating an English veto rather than a voice, possible gridlock in Parliament, and two classes of MP.

**Sir William Cash:** I think I heard the hon. Lady say that English Members should have the right to have their views heard. I did not hear anything about decisions. What is her answer to that?

**Ms Eagle:** I think the McKay commission, which was convened by the Government, made some sensible suggestions, and I am surprised that they were dismissed so easily by the Government.

**Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that this is a major constitutional issue, and that what is therefore required is a non-partisan, non party-biased approach, which, sadly, is lacking?

**Ms Eagle:** I agree with my hon. Friend that changes of this kind are much better made on a cross-party basis, in an attempt to reach consensus, than by means of the partisan, semi-secretive process with which we are now faced.

**Chris Grayling:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Eagle:** I am more than happy to give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

**Chris Grayling:** I am still waiting for an explanation of why, when my predecessor invited the hon. Lady's party to take part in the Committee discussions, it did not respond.

**Ms Eagle:** I shall come to that.

**Alex Salmond:** The hon. Lady is right in saying that these are not the McKay commission proposals, and that the Government dismissed those proposals. Has she had a chance to look at the diagram that the Leader of the House has so helpfully distributed? In box 3, in a circle that is half orange and half green, there is a letter P, which apparently refers to

"Further Ping Pong, if required".

Has the hon. Lady any idea how many of the Bills that the Leader of the House is presenting will be subjected to the ping-pong procedure under his proposals?

**Ms Eagle:** I agree with the right hon. Gentleman about the diagram. It looks more like a plate of spaghetti than a way of legislating sensibly. As for his question, how often that "ping pong to the power squared" would actually happen would depend on how much disagreement there was between the other place and this place. I think that we in the House of Commons must think very carefully about quite how complex some of these legislative processes become if there is contention.

**Graham Stuart:** Does the hon. Lady accept that, notwithstanding her valiant efforts, those of members of her party, and those of the 56 nationalist MPs who are here to discuss an English-voting subject—*[Interruption]*—it is simply an issue of consent? English MPs, or English and Welsh MPs, give consent. It may have to be written into many pages of Standing Orders, but it is as simple as consent. The hon. Lady knows that that is true.

**Ms Eagle:** I think it is a lot more complicated than that, and I think the hon. Gentleman should be a bit more wary about waving his red rag at the bull, because he is causing dissension rather than trying to achieve consensus. That is not the best way to behave when we are dealing with the Standing Orders of the House, although the hon. Gentleman appears to be enjoying himself.

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): On the subject of ping pong, am I right in thinking that an all-England Committee would send the Bill to the other place, where Members from all nations and regions would change it, and it would then come back to the entire House of Commons to be voted on. If so, what exactly would we have achieved?

**Ms Eagle:** I may have to be corrected, but my understanding of the process is that if it is an England-only ping-pong the English will have a veto on it. So there could be a majority in both the Lords and the Commons in favour of something being in a Bill, but it could be vetoed by a minority.

**Mr Hanson:** On that point, I wonder whether my hon. Friend can help me: the noble Lord Thomas of Gresford in Wrexham, who has never won an election in his life in north-east Wales, will vote on these matters in another place, while I, who have won elections on six occasions in north-east Wales, will not be able to do so.

**Ms Eagle:** My right hon. Friend, who has the unique distinction of missing out by one vote from being selected in Wallasey before I was, is a very experienced winner of elections and the point he makes is absolutely spot-on.

[Ms Angela Eagle]

What the Government are suggesting is all in direct defiance of the advice given by the McKay commission, which the Government appointed and whose advice they have inexplicably ignored for reasons they have not chosen to share with us.

**Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): Does the right hon. Lady accept that, given the nature of the devolution settlement, the fact that these matters were not dealt with in the last 20 years and the fact that there is going to be a further Wales and Scotland Act, now is the time to look at English votes for English laws?

**Ms Eagle:** I thank the hon. Lady for inexplicably promoting me to the Privy Council; perhaps she could have a word with her friend the Prime Minister and see whether she can make that happen, because she is probably very influential. What I am trying to argue is if we are going to do this to give an English voice, it has to be done in a cross-party way with consensus, not in a partisan way that is clearly designed to assist only one party in this House.

**Jonathan Lord** (Woking) (Con) *rose*—

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con) *rose*—

**Ms Eagle:** I am going to make a bit of progress; I will give way later, but I am only on page 2 of my speech. [Interruption.] It might get longer if hon. Gentlemen provoke me.

Labour Members consider that this issue should have been properly dealt with as part of a much wider process involving a constitutional convention to examine a range of issues in a more holistic way. A genuine attempt should have been made to come to a cross-party agreement between the parties represented in this place, and with wider civil society. Proceeding in this consensual way, rather than in the blatantly partisan way the Government have chosen to proceed, would have hugely increased their chances of introducing a successful and sustainable change. No such attempt has been made. The Leader of the House has already attempted to suggest that it has, but I do not mean a cobbled-together Cabinet Sub-Committee established months before a general election that failed to come to any consensus even between the governing coalition parties; I mean a genuine attempt to reach cross-party consensus, in which all points of view are heard and properly tested and a mutually agreed way forward is pursued.

**Mr Dominic Grieve** (Beaconsfield) (Con): I am not unsympathetic to the hon. Lady's desire to look at this issue in the round, but it seems to me that it is incumbent on the Labour Opposition to explain their position, because some of us have been banging on about the unworkability of the devolution settlements ever since they first went through this House. The problems we are facing today were inherent in the failure to address that at the outset. Is it not also the case that the problem we now face requires goodwill, and while I do think I accept the hon. Lady's goodwill, I am afraid I do not entirely accept any goodwill from SNP Members, who do not seem to me to actually desire to resolve this issue, rather than use it as an instrument to—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I think the hon. Lady has got the point.

**Ms Eagle:** I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for accepting my goodwill, at least. We are in a more complex position than we needed to be in because of the way in which the Government have chosen to proceed on this difficult issue. In my view, cross-party consensus leads to more sustainable and long-lasting solutions.

**Tom Pursglove:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Eagle:** No; let me finish the point I am making.

I would also say in passing that the Union has always been asymmetrical and there have always been anomalies. The issue of English votes for English laws came to the fore when Harold Wilson was Prime Minister and the nationalisation of the steel industry was scuppered by Northern Irish MPs voting against nationalisation, even though there were no steel plants in Northern Ireland. That is what first led to Harold Wilson worrying about the issue. A certain amount of asymmetrical anomaly will be inherent in any Union when 85% of it is English. We must bear that in mind constantly.

**Mr Allen:** Would my hon. Friend consider seizing this agenda by convening all the parties and all the people in civic society who want a constitutional convention, and would she consider doing it now rather than waiting until the next Labour Government are in office?

**Ms Eagle:** There is great merit in my hon. Friend's arguments. I might be able to consider doing that after the deputy leadership contest is over and I have a bit more spare time. The argument in favour of a constitutional convention, whether convened by the Government or not, becomes greater by the day.

What we have witnessed here is an unseemly headlong dash by the Government to try to rush these complex and partisan changes through the House before the summer recess. Their aim has now, thankfully, been foiled by a mixture of outrage on both sides of the House and a brewing rebellion on the Government's Back Benches. Last week's emergency Standing Order No. 24 debate demonstrated that the unease at the Government's behaviour was widespread. Indeed, they ended up in the absurd position of having to abstain on a vote supporting their own chosen process. The Leader of the House himself beat a hasty retreat, fleeing the Chamber before his Whips abandoned any pretence of trying to win the vote.

So, thankfully, today's debate has turned into a general one, and we have been issued with new draft changes to the Standing Orders to consider. Even they were late arriving, however. They were not published on Monday, as the Leader of the House promised at business questions last week; they were actually made available at lunchtime on Tuesday. I can assume only that the delay was caused by Government disarray, because the changes that have been made are minimal, and they certainly do not address the points about accounting appropriately for Barnett consequential that were worrying some Conservative Members. Nor do the Government appear to have considered changing or reconsidering any part of their plans in the face of reasonable doubts and questions. Instead, they have

turned up the volume by provoking a huge row over their proposals to wreck the Hunting Act 2004, which the Leader of the House so extraordinarily withdrew by means of a point of order yesterday.

The Leader of the House was in such a shambolic state yesterday that he could not work out whether the Government's proposals on hunting were anything to do with EVEL. Let me help him with that. The Government have a small majority, and their attempt to change the Hunting Act failed yesterday because some Tory Back Benchers agreed with us and the public that the killing of animals for pleasure had no place in a civilised society.

**Tom Pursglove:** I note what the hon. Lady said about red rags and bulls. In that spirit, does she agree that it might not have been the best idea to use terms such as "semi-secretive"? That was not exactly constructive talk, by any measure.

**Ms Eagle:** I found out about the nature of the Government's proposals at quarter past six the night before the Leader of the House made his statement to the House. That was three and a half hours after I was originally meant to see him to be confronted with the proposals. If there had been a real attempt to reach cross-party consensus and to move forward on the basis of agreement, we would not be where we are now.

**Chris Grayling:** Did the hon. Lady not read our manifesto? I read hers.

**Ms Eagle:** Yes, I did, and I even read the English manifesto, but it contained just a short sentence or two on this. It did not mention some of the most worrying detail about what the right hon. Gentleman is proposing to do.

**Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con):** It is one thing to ask the Government about detail, but we have failed to hear any detail at all from the Labour Opposition. Labour had 13 years in government to consider this matter and has had five years in opposition, but after 18 years Labour has provided no detail at all, even on the suggestion that it might get to its fabled constitutional convention.

**Ms Eagle:** There is the constitutional convention and a lot of the issues of powers also—*[Interruption.]* Because the hon. Gentleman represents the Government, and it is for them to put forward legislation in this place and for the Opposition then to deal with it. I do not know whether he knows his constitution, but that is how it is meant to be. If we had been the Government, we would be dealing with this. His party is the Government and therefore we are dealing with their proposals. That is what I am trying to do.

**Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con):** The hon. Lady is making a reasoned case, but she should think again about things being secretive. The Leader of the House has listened, we are going until 10 o'clock tonight, we are having all the summer and then we are coming back again, so what she says is unfair. On the constitutional convention, would she have said that we should not have proceeded with the Scotland Bill and should have looked at things as a whole?

**Ms Eagle:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Scotland Bill is the result of an all-party agreement made in the middle of the independence referendum by party leaders. It was called the "vow" at the time and it was led by the Prime Minister, with whom I know the hon. Gentleman has a love-hate relationship. A vow was made to the public of Scotland that that had to be delivered, so it is a bit difficult to say that we were not going to deliver it until after a constitutional convention. But the evolving devolution and the settlements evolving at the moment surely make the case for us to have a more holistic look at how we deal with a range of issues, including the fact that the other place is now 900 strong. We read today that the Prime Minister has tried to get another 100 peers appointed to the other place, while we are trying to see the size of this place shrink. A constitutional convention should be taking a serious look at a range of issues so that we can balance our governance arrangements once more.

**Wayne David:** Does my hon. Friend agree that, to be fair to them, the last Government did begin a process of consultation, establishing the McKay commission to look into the whole issue? It took a great deal of evidence, and produced an interesting and, in many ways, sound report, but this Government have chosen to put that in the bin and make a set of half-baked, partisan proposals.

**Ms Eagle:** That is part of the problem: we have never had an explanation from the Government as to why the very sensible, well-debated, well-researched views of the McKay commission have been completely disregarded.

We appear to have a Government in a hurry to offend and to govern by provoking grievance and division, which is no doubt why they laughably refer to themselves—

**Graham Stuart** *rose*—

**Ms Eagle:** I have already given way once to the hon. Gentleman and it is important that I now get on to make the rest of my speech, so that other people can contribute to our debate.

The proposals before us risk exacerbating strains on the Union. They are shoddy, and conceived in a highly partisan fashion, and therefore they are deeply flawed. They are much more aggressive in their handing over of powers to English MPs than the McKay commission decided was wise, yet the Leader of the House has not explained why he has chosen to ignore the advice and the warnings coming from a commission that the Government appointed. Wherever they have had to exercise a judgment, the Government have opted for more powerful and less nuanced powers for English MPs. They have fallen short of advocating an English Parliament, perhaps because England forms 85% of the whole Union and any English First Minister would probably be more powerful than a UK Prime Minister, but they are certainly incubating a proto-English Parliament within this supposedly Union Parliament.

**Mr Grieve:** I am interested to hear that comment. I agree with the hon. Lady that creating an English Parliament would be unworkable, and yet the message from Scottish National party members is that we should create an English Parliament. If there is already one area of meeting of minds, the Labour party must be

[Mr Grieve]

starting to work towards a solution, because I think that she is beginning to accept that something must be done about English votes for English laws.

**Ms Eagle:** In all of the three statements or speeches that I have made in the past three weeks, I have begun by conceding exactly that point. I have done it not for show but because it is what we believe.

The proposals mean that, if a Government do not command a majority in England, it is doubtful that they could actually govern. The complete lack of effective consultation with any other party outside of Government on some of the controversial aspects of these proposals makes them partisan and divisive when they should have been accomplished on a cross-party basis. When it comes to making changes of such constitutional importance and technical complexity, it is only right that they should be scrutinised effectively.

The Government's proposals fundamentally alter the constitution and the operations of this House, as well as impacting on the other place. In those circumstances, it is appropriate to set up a Joint Committee of both Houses to consider the proposals in greater depth. I call on the Leader of the House to do so.

Joint Committees of both Houses have a strong tradition of effective cross-party scrutiny of complex issues of constitutional importance, both legislative and non-legislative. For example, the highly regarded Cunningham Committee looked at the non-legislative issue of conventions between both Houses. The report was noted with approval in both Houses in 2007, and has stood the test of time and sets a clear precedent on which the Government should now proceed.

**Graham Stuart** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Eagle:** If I must.

**Graham Stuart:** The hon. Lady is being most generous, especially as she did not intend to be—to me in particular. She is focusing entirely on process, and process is an important part of this matter, but she has not given the slightest hint of a suggestion of what the Labour party thinks should be done about it, even though it was the author of the original mess many, many years ago. She needs to give us more than just process; otherwise we will doubt her good will

**Ms Eagle:** The hon. Gentleman uses his usual charm. He can take it now that I will not be giving way to him again for the rest of my speech. Part of coming to cross-party agreement is that one does not have a completely developed plan that one wishes to force on everybody else—it is called compromise. Obviously, the hon. Gentleman does not understand how that works, but that is not a surprising given his antics in the debate today.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con) *rose*—

**Ms Eagle:** No.

There was particular concern expressed during last week's emergency debate that so-called Barnett consequentialia were not properly taken into account in

the very prescriptive definition of what an “English only” Bill, or part of a Bill, actually is. It is not clear to me whether the changes to the draft Standing Orders adequately address that problem. The Government have not seen fit to address the point about cross-border effects short of Barnett consequentialia made by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) in last week's debate.

There are some dangers inherent in the Government's proposals, which they would have been wise to avoid. Badly designed proposals on English votes for English laws risk not only legislative gridlock but making England, or the UK, ungovernable in some circumstances. As the proposals are currently drafted, there are three areas that give particular cause for concern, and I wish to deal with each of them in turn.

First, the proposals create an English veto, not just a voice, with all of the complications for our constitution that that entails. Secondly, the proposals apply not only to English laws but, much more problematically, to parts of Bills, statutory instruments, regulations, commencement orders and ministerial administrative actions, which, in our current system, are often achieved by statutory instruments. Thirdly, even more controversially and entirely without any consultation outside of the Government, these proposals have been widened so that they apply to Finance Bills.

The McKay commission ruled out a veto for English MPs. The Government have gone far beyond the proposals set out by McKay and have instead created a veto rather than strengthening the English voice. Not only do the proposals grant a veto on the UK Government in the Commons, but English MPs would be able to veto Lords amendments on English matters, curtailing the Lords' ability to revise legislation.

The McKay commission recommended that the views of English MPs needed to be strengthened. In particular, it recommended the adoption of a principle that

“decisions at the United Kingdom level with a separate and distinct effect for England (or for England-and-Wales) should normally be taken only with the consent of a majority of MPs for constituencies in England (or England-and-Wales).”

That convention, along with the approach that the Opposition have suggested of considering an English Committee stage for English matters, is a much more proportionate response to the West Lothian question, and it would strengthen the voice of England.

Why, apart from to advance their own perceived partisan interests, have the Government chosen to go so much further? The proposed system for legislation is much more complex than our current system, as has already been pointed out, and it could quickly gum up the parliamentary works for a Government who lacked an English majority. It would also weaken considerably the accountability of any Government to the electorate for the delivery of their manifesto and their overall administrative record. It means that a majority of English MPs could stop a Government Bill in its tracks. The Government would then have to negotiate with them if they wanted to get the legislation through.

Secondly, the scope of the Government's proposed English veto is very much wider than that envisaged by McKay. It appears to extend to secondary legislation of all kinds, including commencement orders, regulations and regular administrative actions such as the distribution

of the English local government grant—an example that the Government have themselves chosen to highlight. The difficulty with that arrangement is that it would allow English MPs to exercise the powers of the Executive without being at all responsible for the consequences. If the Government's proposed local government grant allocation is not passed, no money at all can be distributed. This could create an opportunity for English MPs to initiate a local government shutdown of the kind that intermittently strikes the US Executive, or to demand changes in the distribution that satisfy them at the expense of other areas.

**Alex Salmond:** I wonder whether there is another possibility. I am not saying that this Bill would be referred for the proposed procedure, but let us just imagine that Heathrow was being considered. If the Government had a larger majority among English MPs, it would take a bigger rebellion on Heathrow to affect the Government's decision making. I wonder whether part of the reason why Government Front Benchers are so keen on this dog's breakfast is that it would protect them from rebellions on their own Back Benches.

**Ms Eagle:** The Government, as currently constituted, have a majority of 12, or effectively closer to 16. With only English Members of Parliament they have a majority of 105. The partisan reasons for indulging in this are clear, but I think that the British constitution is more important than any partisan proceedings of one Government that happened to exist at one point in time.

The proposals on statutory instruments effectively bring into existence a new de-facto English Executive, who appear to consist of the UK Government, but directed on some of their responsibilities by a subset of English MPs who are not meant to be in Government because they are from a party in opposition. That will create a chaotic and unprecedented situation that is hardly conducive to good or democratically accountable governance.

That position is repeated with Finance Bills. McKay was not asked to consider Finance Bills, and it is clear that the Government's proposals are not thought through. In our system, a Government who cannot get their Budget through the House are essentially no Government at all. However, if these draft Standing Order changes are made, any Government who lacked an English majority could not govern. The Scotland Bill devolves certain substantial aspects of income tax. Budgets allow income tax to be collected, and that order has to be renewed annually. Under these proposals, it appears that English MPs, if they so choose, could block the collection of income tax, which is 25% of the Government's revenue altogether. Thus the English MPs would have absolute control over English income tax, not the UK Government. Putting aside the potential for chaos that would cause, it seems to me that it is in danger of handing certain MPs power without responsibility.

To summarise, the Government's plans are much more aggressive and wider in scope than is wise or proper. They are clearly conceived for partisan political reasons. Manifesto commitments to consult the Procedure Committee have been broken so far and are likely to be fulfilled only with days to go. The proposals, as currently written, create the potential for gridlock and chaos hitherto unknown in our constitutional arrangements. They create two classes of MP, and they are reckless

with the future of the Union. I hope that the Government will not proceed with such haste but will, even at this late stage, think again and return with something more workable and less indifferent to the problems that this will inevitably cause.

4.20 pm

**Mr David Davis** (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I propose to speak very briefly as I have only one substantive point of principle to make.

I start by again commending the Leader of the House for taking on board the concerns of Members on both sides of the House and for the approach that he has taken. I have as much taste for political combat as the next man, but the tenor of this debate—I say this to my Unionist colleagues in all parts of the House—matters almost as much as the content in terms of not generating grievance and nationalist causes, shall we say, as a direct result of our attempt to stabilise our constitution.

That said, I do take issue with the Government over the approach of using Standing Orders. The simple argument made to me at the beginning was that this was to protect any change from interference by the courts. While I understand that, the same argument would have applied equally to the Bill that became the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, for example, yet that was capable of being drafted in such a way that the courts would not dare meddle in it, as they would not dare meddle in this. Whatever the legal position, the political position of our courts is that they would not interfere in something as fundamental as the balance of power between the parts of the Union. I take a very serious view of this, because it takes out of play, in a constitutional ruling, the House of Lords and the whole mechanism that we usually apply to these matters.

We are thus in the peculiar position of having a constitutional change to our House of Commons that is put in very quickly, with probably not enough consideration, and that a future Government can take out equally quickly. That is, in many ways, even more dangerous than the mechanism we have chosen.

**Graham Stuart:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Davis:** Yes, but I wanted to be brief.

**Graham Stuart:** That is one of the strengths of using Standing Orders. The very fragility of it means that, contrary to the constant use of the word "partisan" by the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), it will need to have consensus across the House. At any election, any party would be asked whether it felt that it had become the settled will and the right way to run things, and if not, legislation could indeed be passed. The Leader of the House has said that when the review is conducted in a year or so, that is one of the options that would be looked at.

**Mr Davis:** I am afraid that I could not disagree more. The simple truth is that we have made it down the centuries with an unwritten constitution that has existed because of the respect given to it on both sides of the House. That has fragmented in the past decade or two. I do not want to have a circumstance where the rules of operation adversely affect the democratic rights of our citizens. By the way, we have been talking all the time

[Mr David Davis]

about the democratic rights, or standards, of MPs and whether we have one or two classes of MP, but what matters is that we have one class of citizen. I do not want that to be subject to the vagaries of any future Government.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP)  
*rose—*

**Mr Davis:** I wanted to keep this brief, but I will of course give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Pete Wishart:** I am pleased that the right hon. Gentleman has picked up on the issue of legal challenge. The reason we are having Speaker certification as opposed to legislation is to put the matter beyond legal challenge, so there will be no opportunity for the citizens he describes to challenge decisions that are made in this House. Surely he, as someone who takes an interest in this, must think that that is thoroughly wrong.

**Mr Davis:** It is wrong, for the reasons I described. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, I take the view that Governments should be subject to the law of the land and subject to courts. I am less happy with the idea that the courts could rewrite our constitution in a way that we do not see fit.

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

**Mr Davis:** No. If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I am going to try to make some progress.

**Sir William Cash:** On this point?

**Mr Davis:** I give way. [*Interruption.*] I am easily bullied, yes.

**Sir William Cash:** The Scotland Act 1998 already has provision for judicial review in questions relating to ultra vires—where whether a function is devolved is in dispute—so the courts are already involved.

**Mr Davis:** I rest my case. Let me make some progress.

**Mr Grieve:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Davis:** I suddenly find myself in a courtroom, rather than the Chamber, but I give way.

**Mr Grieve:** I was going to make this point later, but I may as well make it now because that is the purpose of debate. I must say that I have some slight anxiety about the justiciability of measures that we take in this House. I appreciate article 9 of the Bill of Rights, but we are certainly moving into rather uncharted territory and I do not think we can rule out legal challenges to decisions on the Speaker's certificate.

**Mr Davis:** The House will take that on board.

My other point about what the Leader of the House has done so far is to commend him on at least attempting to address the problem of the Barnett consequentials. This is very important for the point on which I will finish. The problem started in 1998. I guess that the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) will remember—no one else in the House would have reason

to do so—that in 1998 I argued for fiscal autonomy for the new Scottish Parliament, for a more federal solution and for proper treatment of the West Lothian question. All those things were self-evident in 1998 as long-term problems with the devolution proposal. I must say to Opposition Front Benchers, that our points were received with a completely implacable lack of understanding, let alone a lack of sympathy, from the primary driver of that, Gordon Brown.

The problem arises from the confusion in the Scotland Act and the Scotland Bill that is currently going through the House. The 1998 Act failed to create what, in my view, would have been stable fiscal autonomy for the current Holyrood Parliament. It would have done so if it had separated out the funding streams for the Scottish Parliament's spending and the spending that emanates from this Parliament. If that had been done, we would have had very few, if any, Barnett consequentials.

We cannot of course solve everything. The right hon. Member for Gordon has quite rightly made the point about other impacts, such as in relation to tuition fees. There will be tax competition between the parts of the United Kingdom, and competition between policies of various sorts. We cannot resolve all that. We cannot necessarily give Scottish Members some sort of veto over England's right to do the best for its citizens. This is not entirely soluble, but it would have been much more soluble if we had written the Scotland Act in such a way that it created a more rational structure than what exists in our kingdom at the moment.

All of that gives us and the Leader of the House the problematic issue of how this can be done with utter fairness to all sides, because that is the test. I am afraid that the British establishment always seems to have a preference for fudge rather than clarity and for ambiguity rather than logic. We see that written through all this constitutional area, because the establishment does not want to address the problem. The establishment does not want an English First Minister who is more powerful than the UK Prime Minister. Yet if we went down a proper route of English devolution—if that is what it is—we would of course end up with an English Government who were a challenge to the UK Government.

The Leader of the House has now given us the summer to think about this. We can, I hope, deliberate about it at great length before we return in September, and I hope that he will take on board what he hears today. The only point of principle I will make to him is that the test for this is very simple. It is not whether this creates two classes of MP, but whether it creates two classes of citizen. The test is whether it deals with and removes any prospective grievance not from the Members on the SNP Benches, the Labour Benches or the Government Benches, but from the people we represent. It should take away any grievance for the English, the Scots, the Welsh and the Northern Irish, not any grievance for the Labour party, the Conservative party, the SNP or the Liberal Democrats. The test he should apply is whether it puts our citizens first.

4.29 pm

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): What a week it has been. It is hard to believe that we were all here, in practically the same places, just over a week ago considering this very issue, when the Leader

of the House was forced to come to the Chamber to explain his position in a Standing Order No. 24 debate. He quickly withdrew the proposed Standing Orders that evening and, after bravely prevaricating and heroically retreating, he is back here offering practically nothing new.

I had a bit of hope last week when the Leader of the House withdrew his initial Standing Orders. I thought that we might make some progress and was hopeful that we could come back in a reasonable frame of mind to move forward. However, I am thoroughly disappointed at the way the Leader of the House has come back here. There is basically no change to the Standing Orders. All he has done is to offer a bit of clarification about departmental spending and the estimates, which we already knew about. He has not addressed the issues that concern us, such as the Barnett consequentials and long-term planning when it comes to legislation. He has not addressed the points that my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) made about tuition fees and the long-term impact of such issues year on year.

**Antoinette Sandbach:** Last time we debated these matters in the House, the hon. Gentleman said very clearly—I believe that the Leader of the House quoted him—that we should trust the SNP not to vote on English matters. However, this week there was a statement about the changes to the Hunting Act 2004, which your leader in Scotland had identified as an English-only matter. The hon. Gentleman asked us to trust the SNP. How does that position stand now?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** The hon. Lady should speak through the Chair. She was directing her questions to me, when she wanted to address them to the hon. Gentleman.

**Pete Wishart:** I am almost grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that issue. I wondered how long I would be on my feet before someone mentioned the non-existent foxhunting debate, which was scheduled to happen but disappeared because the Government wanted to change the rules before they had the debate. What I said last week was that if something is in the Scottish interest, we will take an interest in it. We could not have garnered any more interest in foxhunting. I had hundreds if not thousands of requests from my constituents to come to the unitary UK Parliament to express their concerns on the issue. I make no apologies for saying that I would have voted proudly on that issue to represent my constituents' interests.

**Mr Grieve:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman had many expressions of interest, but I receive many expressions of interest from my constituents about matters in Scotland. I am a member of the John Muir Trust and I get frequent letters from other members of the trust who live in England, expressing their concern about the Scottish Government's actions in respect of wind farms on wild land, but I have to accept that that matter is devolved to Scotland. I say sincerely to the hon. Gentleman that I do not find his argument very credible.

**Pete Wishart:** We heard last week and we have heard in the run-up to this debate that there is massive unhappiness in this House about who is voting on whose issues. I

want to come on to our concerns and difficulties. I hear the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but we are profoundly annoyed and upset that he and all the other English Members are voting down things that have been agreed in the Scottish Parliament and that are wanted by every party in the Scottish Parliament. Scotland sent 56 of us here and we are profoundly disappointed in the right hon. and learned Gentleman for voting those things down. It seems as though there are English votes for English laws, but also English votes for Scottish laws. When it came to foxhunting, we took the view that there was concern and interest among our constituents. We are saying to Government Members, this cannot go on.

**Mr Grieve** *rose*—

**Pete Wishart:** I will not give way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman again.

The situation cannot go on whereby English Members continually and consistently vote down the express desires of Scottish Members of Parliament, with no consequences or response. That is why we have taken an interest. I want to deal with foxhunting, because I imagine that a few other comments will be made about it.

**Dr Philippa Whitford:** Our constituents have commented that during Scotland Bill debates, the Chamber has been almost empty apart from us, but we have been swamped by hundreds of Members voting against us in the evening.

**Ian C. Lucas:** I'm here all the time.

**Dr Whitford:** There have been only half a dozen people on the Government Benches during debates that are crucial for Scotland.

**Pete Wishart:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing that out. I remember coming into the Chamber and seeing no Conservative Back Benchers present during Scotland Bill debates. There was one Parliamentary Private Secretary, but no Back Benchers. That shows the interest they took in our legislation. All of a sudden, when we take an interest in something that is considered to be English-only, there is fury. The proposal is withdrawn in a hurry, to be put back once the Government have changed the rules about how they deal with such matters.

**Chris Grayling:** It is worth setting on the record for the House that I am disappointed that Labour and SNP Members clearly have not read the detail of the proposals. These proposals would not have affected the debate on hunting, so will the hon. Gentleman please stop suggesting that they would?

**Pete Wishart:** I do not think I suggested that. I accept that. Why, therefore, was the vote on foxhunting withdrawn? All of a sudden the Scottish National party indicated that it would be taking an interest in it and the proposals were withdrawn. The Government have to win the argument; they cannot just decide that because the Scottish National party has decided to do something, that is it—been and gone. The Government have to win the argument in the House and it was shameful that they withdraw the proposals. They took us all the way to the top of the hill, prompting such great interest from our constituents, and now the proposals have been withdrawn.

**Wayne David:** I am grateful to my colleague for giving way on the question who takes an interest in these matters and who is present today. Does he agree that it is notable that so few English Members are present to debate English-only laws?

**Pete Wishart:** I am looking round the Chamber and I see the usual suspects—those who take a real and deep interest in these matters—but I expected the Chamber to be full. Apparently, this was one of the most important issues during the election campaign. English votes for English laws was the issue that most upset the Conservatives' English constituents in the general election campaign, and the slogan was, "100 days to deliver English votes for English laws".

**Sir William Cash:** I always enjoy the hon. Gentleman's speeches. He has a rather compelling manner. Would he similarly object were we to propose—for example, in relation to some power that had been devolved to the Scottish Parliament—that we should insist on going to Scotland, taking part in the debates there and voting accordingly?

**Pete Wishart:** That suggests the tantalising picture of the hon. Gentleman rushing up to the barricades at the Scottish Parliament, demanding his say on devolved Scottish matters. I would pay to see that. It would be great fun, and I encourage him to think about doing just that.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): May I take my hon. Friend back to the Barnett consequential issue, as that is our key concern, which the revised Standing Orders unfortunately fail to address? This is not so much about the annual financial estimates. The real issue arises when a substantial policy change in devolved areas impacts on funding—the block grants. If Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish MPs lose the ability to vote on them, they lose the ability to influence their own block grants. That is the key issue that needs to be addressed.

**Pete Wishart:** My hon. Friend is spot on. That is our concern and the major issue that we still have with the revised Standing Orders. Decisions made in this House will affect the budgets of our nations and the public services that our constituents enjoy. For us to be locked out of the process is disgraceful. The fact that these mad plans have come back today has done nothing to satisfy our concerns.

There are still to be two classes of Members of Parliament. The Speaker will be placed in the most pernicious political position and will have to determine whether I and my hon. Friends can take part in a debate that might have massive consequences for my constituents. We still have not resolved any of the financial issues—we are not even close to doing so—and these proposals will progress without a proper debate and without proper scrutiny. It is shameful, the way that the Government have acted.

**Sir William Cash** *rose*—

**Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con) *rose*—

**Pete Wishart:** I will not give way again to the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), but I will give way to the hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), who has been patient.

**Robert Jenrick:** Like my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), I am enjoying the performance. I have constituents from Newark amateur operatic society in the Gallery, and the hon. Gentleman is giving what would no doubt be one of their finer performances. Will he acknowledge that he—or at least his party—has changed position with pretty shameless hypocrisy? Let me remind him of a comment that the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) made to a magazine in 2008:

"If you're asking me should people in England be able to run their own health service or education system, my answer is yes. They should be able to do it without the bossy interference of Scots Labour MPs."

Surely that has Barnett consequential.

**Pete Wishart:** I am delighted at the praise being heaped on me by English Conservative Members. It is not necessary, but I am grateful for it. I will come to the hon. Gentleman's point because it is important, and I will suggest a solution that I am almost certain will not satisfy him. It is called, "Doing it yourself." It is about getting a Parliament and deciding all those things.

**Antoinette Sandbach** *rose*—

**Pete Wishart:** I have already given way to the hon. Lady.

That was the most important issue for Conservative Members. Remember all the things that were said before the general election—the "jockalypse", and the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) in the pocket of my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon. They painted all those fears of mad Scottish nationalists coming down here and voting on their precious Bills, stealing their votes. That was what was presented. Then we come down here, and the first thing we do is get involved in this total and utter mess, this guddle, this disaster—I cannot even call it a dog's breakfast as that would show disrespect to our canine friends' favourite morning meal. It is such a mess and disaster. So we are where we are; we are back with this issue again and we must consider how to make some progress.

Let us get back to the fundamentals. Why are we doing this? I have detected two reasons from Conservative Members. The first is that they feel that it is unfair to have these nasty Scottish Members coming down and voting on their precious legislation—poor souls! They are only 85% of the membership of this House, and there has hardly ever been an issue where we have actually won a vote on the basis of Scottish issues. I cannot think of an example from the 14 years that I have been in the House. Poor guys. What a shame. All these Scottish Members voting on their poor legislation—I will come on to that.

The other point that I find really funny is that Conservative Members are doing this to save the Union. That is the killer. I heard several English Members on the radio today saying once again that they are doing this "to save the Union". You know me, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I am not in the Union-saving business; I am in the Union-ending business. If Conservative Members wanted to design a plan to ensure that—



**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. There are too many conversations going on besides the speaker, so let us keep them to a minimum. Members may intervene if they want to, but let us hear what Pete Wishart has to say.

**Pete Wishart:** As I said, I am in the Union-ending business. That is my job and that is what I believe in. Even I, however, could not conceive of a plan that would progress my vision against that of Conservative Members. Imagine what we have seen in the past few weeks: “Scotland stay with us. Scotland we love you. You are part of the family of nations. Don’t leave us! You are valued Members of this House.” What happens the minute we get to this place? We are given second-class status.

**Chris Grayling:** I am always very entertained by the hon. Gentleman’s performance. I imagine that he was a superb showman in his time. Will he explain one conundrum? He says that if this House votes on an English-only matter, that will also affect Scotland so Scottish MPs should be able to vote. He then says that it is okay to have an English Parliament voting on those same issues when no Scottish MPs are even present. How does that work? How is that possibly consistent?

**Pete Wishart:** It is almost difficult to try to explain ever so gently to the Leader of the House how it works. It is a solution that works across the world and it is called federalism. It is where we do our thing and English MPs do theirs. I know they are unhappy—I hear it again and again—and so we then come together in this Parliament, where we all have the same rights and same status. What is happening now is the creation of a quasi-English Parliament within the unitary Parliament of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is that solution that is totally unacceptable, gives us a second-class status and stops us being able effectively to represent our constituents. It is not on.

**Graham Stuart:** The power of the hon. Gentleman’s performance—I agree with colleagues that it is first class—is matched only, I think, by the fundamental dishonesty of the message. He knows that simply providing the simple consent of English Members of Parliament—with no Executive, no English Parliament—to measures going through this place means that his fox has been shot. He hoped for measures that would allow him genuinely to say that he and his colleagues were second-class MPs, but they will not be. They will be voting on everything, and we will simply have to give consent, too. He knows that that is right and he hates it.

**Pete Wishart:** I invite the hon. Gentleman to look at the explanation of what will happen as shown in the wonderful graphic displayed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon. This is great, isn’t it? It is like the line-up to the battle of Bannockburn—all we need is William Wallace in the middle to go over the edge. It is just ridiculous. I think it was the Conservative Chair of the Procedure Committee who identified that there are another four stages to parliamentary Bills in all this—God knows how we will get through a parliamentary Session with all the extra work that will have to be done.

We are excluded from two sections of the procedure and then we are back in and out. I am having difficulty understanding. I know that my right hon. Friend is

better at looking at these things than I am, and he may be able to come to terms with this smorgasbord of traffic lights. The illustration shows that the second-class Members on the SNP Benches will not be able to participate in the extra Grand Committee stage for England. I do not know whether the Serjeant at Arms is going to get his little sword out and stop us coming in. I am not sure how will we be barred from participating. If we were to intervene or to try to say anything, would we be named or thrown out? These are some of the absurdities that are part of this dog’s breakfast of a proposal.

**Alex Salmond:** From experience, I can assure my hon. Friend that the Chair of a Committee does not have the power to name or throw out any Member.

**Pete Wishart:** I still do not know how any of this will be enforced.

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Gentleman is not one of the new Members of his party and he will know perfectly well that any Member can turn up in any Committee of this House and speak. It is simply a question of who votes. We will be delighted to have him sitting there when the English Grand Committee sits and even to have him intervene; he will just not be able to vote.

**Pete Wishart:** That is news to me. I was under the impression that we were to be excluded from the English part of the procedure. That will be fantastic—I will invite all my hon. Friends along to the debates that we will be excluded from voting on.

That situation is simply part of the absurdity. I was impressed by the shadow Leader of the House’s speech in which she quite rightly pointed out some of the other absurdities. Some stuff strikes me as really odd. Why are the Lords not excluded? I have some five peers in my constituency, and they will now have a greater role in some of this legislation than I will have as an elected Member.

We have an issue with the House of Lords, as some hon. Members may have realised recently. I do not think that the House of Lords has ever been held in such contempt by the Scottish people. The way they imposed themselves on our democratic referendum was appalling and should not have happened. We see that place as nothing other than the repository of the donors and cronies of the UK parties, but those donors and cronies, who have never been elected, will have a say on parts of Bills that I and my hon. Friends do not. That is utterly absurd. Not only is it English iPads for English laws; it is English laws for English Lords. What we are hearing about just now includes some really weird things.

Enough is enough. Let us just get shot of this thing. We have talked about foxhunting, and I was grateful to the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) for her point. I think I explained why we have an interest in all this. We are doing what our constituents want. We have always said that we would stand up and represent them.

**Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP):** A few times in the debate, the impression has been given that we somehow do not represent our constituents on certain issues. I and my colleagues will represent our constituents on any issue they choose to write to us about or bring to

[Patrick Grady]

us. We might not be able to vote or legislate on devolved matters, but I will speak up for my constituents on any issue they choose to bring to me.

**Pete Wishart:** Absolutely—that is what people have voted for us to do. They have voted for us, in the same way as people have voted for English Members, to come down here to represent their interests, and that is exactly what we will do.

I loathe foxhunting—I think it is barbaric—and cruelty to animals wherever in the world I see it. I do not want any succour to be given to the Tories' toff friends, dusting down their red coats, getting out their silly little bugles and lustily shouting "Tally ho!" in the mirror as they prepare to savage and ravage poor, defenceless foxes in the name of sport. That appals me.

**Sammy Wilson:** I would accept the hon. Gentleman's argument if he told the House that he had responded just as quickly to his constituents' concerns about foxhunting by changing the law in Scotland before showing his righteous indignation about what happens here.

**Pete Wishart:** We are going to do that. The plan to water down foxhunting legislation in England has given us an opportunity to examine our approach and perhaps tighten it up. The hon. Gentleman is right: we should be doing that. I actually did not know that we have more lax laws than England. We are going to do all we can to ensure that they are tightened.

**Alex Salmond:** I am sorry to continue our earlier debate, but the Leader of the House said a moment ago that all Members are allowed to turn up to every Committee. That is not the case: the Scottish Grand Committee is restricted to Scottish Members of the House. It has not met for more than 10 years; none the less, that is the case. If the Leader of the House does not even know and has not mastered all these procedures, what hope is there for this total dog's breakfast?

**Pete Wishart:** I say candidly to my right hon. Friend that I do not know what hope there is. He and I served on the Scottish Grand Committee back in the early 2000s, when it met for the last time, and it was not a model of how to consider the issues under discussion.

The Government are trying to create a quasi-English Parliament within the confines of the unitary Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It seems to me that they just cannot be bothered to do the work. They cannot be bothered to go around their nation, consult and have a dialogue with the people, work with partners, build up the conversation and then have a referendum, as we did in Scotland.

I ask the Leader of the House to imagine what would happen if we did not have a Scottish Parliament and we wanted to do this. We would just say to English Members, "Get out of the way while we have our Scottish Parliament here!" It is almost laughable to suggest such a thing, but that is exactly what the Government want to do—they want to create a quasi-English Parliament in the confines of our unitary Parliament. That is not on. If they want an English Parliament, they should go and create it and then deliver it.

Conservative Members are saying that English votes for English laws was the most important issue on the doorstep but, at the same time, that there is no demand for an English Parliament, so what they want is several servings of the biggest cake in the world and to have that Parliament here by changing the rules of the House of Commons. It is not good enough to try to use our Parliament—the Parliament that belongs to every citizen in the United Kingdom—as their quasi-Parliament. I appeal to the Leader of the House to look at the issue.

It is fantastic that the proposal is about saving the Union, but the Government could not have designed better plans to drive Scotland out of the Union. Their sense of victory when they narrowly won the referendum will be short-lived if they continue to pursue this proposal.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): The hon. Gentleman has given his strong views on foxhunting, but he has still not explained why he thinks it would have been appropriate for Scottish MPs to vote on the proposed amendments.

**Pete Wishart:** We did not vote on them, because the Tories withdrew them. I do not think I could have been clearer about why we intended to vote on foxhunting. We could not have got any more interest in it from Scotland—we were absolutely flooded with requests, not just from our constituents but from English constituents.

**Antoinette Sandbach** *rose*—

**Pete Wishart:** I have already given way to the hon. Lady and I want to make progress.

The Government's attempt to politicise the role of Mr Speaker—the master of ceremonies in the House of Commons—is utterly appalling. It is shameful that Mr Speaker is going to have to make a very serious political decision as to whether or not we can participate and vote in debates. What a position to put the arbiter of our business in! I do not know of any other legislature in Europe or the world where the Speaker, the arbiter of the House, would be placed in such a pernicious situation.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): I do think the hon. Gentleman might just reflect on the fact that the Speaker already has the power to issue certificates. Those could be construed as political if he so wished, but on money resolutions there are so many different cases. Why does the hon. Gentleman not accept that that could be applied in this case as well?

**Pete Wishart:** With due respect, I do not think the hon. Gentleman actually gets what is involved for the Speaker. It will be in his power to decide whether we are going to be excluded or not. He is going to tell us when our second-class status kicks in and when it does not. That is a dreadful position to put the Speaker in. It is not like deciding amendments or deciding on money resolutions; it is deciding whether Members of Parliament can participate in the House of Commons.

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) made a very interesting point earlier: what would happen if the next Speaker were to be Scottish?

**Pete Wishart:** There's a thought and a prospect! We already know that there could never now be a Scottish Prime Minister or a Scottish Cabinet Member for any of the devolved areas, such as Health or Education. John Reid, for example, would never have been able to do his job. I do not miss that, but this is how having two classes works its way through.

**Wayne David:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree—this is my understanding—that not only will the Speaker make a certification, but he or she will not be able to give reasons for it?

**Pete Wishart:** Worse than that, the Speaker's certification will not be open to challenge. Because of parliamentary privilege, there will be no means to challenge it.

**Sir Alan Duncan** (Rutland and Melton) (Con) *indicated dissent.*

**Pete Wishart:** I see the right hon. Gentleman shaking his head. Maybe we could explore that and see what we can do, but there is no opportunity for us as parliamentarians or for our constituents to address this and try to ensure it could be challenged.

**Kirsty Blackman:** The other point is that the Speaker will be required to certify whether everything that comes through is England-only for, including amendments and anything that has been amended in the Lords and come back. That will be a hugely onerous task for the Speaker. Does my hon. Friend agree?

**Pete Wishart:** My hon. Friend has been following these issues with a very keen interest. She has already brought to attention some of the great things about this: she actually discovered, in the response from the Leader of the House to a written question, that the Scotland Bill was a piece of English-only legislation! I am grateful to her for discovering that amazing fact.

**Mr Hanson:** Does the hon. Gentleman also accept that there is no mechanism to make representations to the Speaker before he makes his decision? Those of us who have interests in England but represent seats in Wales could not influence the Speaker's decision beforehand.

**Pete Wishart:** That is another point. We can see how bad this is, placing the Speaker in such a position. Shame on this Government for placing our Speaker in such a position. Politicising the Speaker of one of the biggest and most powerful Parliaments in the world is a disgraceful thing to do. I really hope the Government rethink this.

What we have is a complete and utter shambles. The Leader of the House has managed to divide the House. There is no consensus. There is no agreement. He is imposing the Conservative will on all of us here. He is denying us full rights within this Parliament, consigning us to second class. He has done nothing to revise his plans. I appeal to him once again: take them away, and let us have a proper discussion on how we can go forward. If he is so interested in making sure that there are English votes for English laws, he should get his own Parliament. He should do the work and make sure he delivers it.

This is unacceptable. We now have a few weeks and months in which to look at this again. I appeal to the Leader of the House to get rid of this dog's breakfast and come back with something that is reasonable and sustainable.

4.58 pm

**Graham Stuart** (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate and to follow the performance of the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), which I think fully reflected the quality of the contribution of the Scottish nationalists to this debate.

English votes for English laws is a constitutional proposal of fundamental importance, necessary to deliver fairness for England and vital to safeguard the future of the United Kingdom. It is interesting to reflect that the hon. Gentleman said that he was not in the saving the Union business, he was in the ending the Union business. That might explain the impassioned way he put over so many of the arguments that he either had not researched or knew to be false. He made out that he would become a second-class MP and that his constituents would lose out, whereas it has been made clear that giving English and Welsh MPs the ability merely to consent to something will in no way diminish his right or that of other Scottish Members to vote and play their normal part at every stage other than in Committees where every last single provision of the Bill applies only to England and can pass the "has it been devolved" test. In an intervention on the hon. Gentleman, the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) said how complicated and onerous a task that would be, but it is a fairly simple question: has it been devolved to Scotland? If so, the issue is clearly outwith Scotland. We would then have to check whether it had been devolved to Wales, which, again, would not be an onerous task. It is something that the Clerks and the Speaker, who will be taking this decision on advice, do as a matter of course for every amendment and proposal.

In truth, despite all the efforts of the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), who is no longer in her place, despite the brilliant performance of the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, and despite the complexity that the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) outlined, we are simply talking about consent: this is an injection into the system to allow English MPs to give their consent. That is it. It is no diminution of the hon. Gentleman's ability to vote on Second or Third Reading, or at any other stage of a Bill. He would love it if there were proposals that he could use to make his constituents feel that the Union was no longer working, that the rug had been pulled and that the English, and the Tories in particular, were creating an unfair settlement, but the truth is the exact opposite, and he knows it.

I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman did not bother to read the proposals or whether, when he did read them, he edited them to make them what he wanted them to be, but it was clear from his speech that he did not understand the processes we are talking about. Yet there he was ferociously condemning this appalling assault on our constitution. This is the mildest possible change to the procedures of the House simply to allow for consent. It is a tiny correction of the imbalance caused by the devolution introduced by the Labour party all those years ago. It in no way undermines or affects the interests of his constituents.

[Graham Stuart]

It is interesting to note, notwithstanding the ferocity and passion displayed by SNP Members here, on the instruction of Nicola Sturgeon from Edinburgh, that poll after poll shows that the Scottish people feel very differently from the hon. Gentleman. They recognise that strengthening the English voice is a simple matter of fairness.

**Stewart McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP) *rose*—

**Graham Stuart:** Will the hon. Gentleman answer this question? In what way does injecting consent—not initiative or, as the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire said, any kind of English Executive with 85% of Members—into the system undermine his constituents’ interest in this place?

**Stewart McDonald:** I do not think the Scottish people are that out of step with what we are saying. Not only did they give us 50% of the vote at the recent election, but an opinion poll out yesterday has us on 56% ahead of next year’s Scottish Parliament elections, giving us not 69 seats, but 71. The people of Scotland sent us here with a clear mandate. English Members vetoed all the amendments we tabled. You really ought to understand the issue you are dealing with and the potential—this is why Labour Members are correct—this has to make us much more excluded from the Union.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** To be helpful, I say to the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart McDonald) that “you” is directed at the Chair. He wants to speak to the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), not to me.

**Graham Stuart:** The hon. Gentleman, who speaks as well as his colleague, the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, did can huff and he can puff, but it changes nothing. What happened was that the people who were in the break-up of the Union business got the referendum that they asked for and thought they were going to blow the Union house down—and what happened? They lost.

Thinking back to that time, they made various promises. In February, their leader issued instructions to all those signed up to complete and utter obedience to her. SNP Members here said they would not vote on foxhunting, for example. Then they immediately do a U-turn. Last week, they were claiming to be a party of principle, and the website of the Scottish National party said that SNP Members would not vote on something such as foxhunting in England. [Interruption.] It was on the website just days ago, and the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire knows it, yet it turned out differently.

I admire the political chutzpah of the SNP. Coming here with energy and spirit is doubtless what the Scottish people wanted. They wanted to have the flag shaken and they wanted to see SNP Members coming down here and being energetic. Well, they are being energetic, but what the Scottish people will not put up with is people who claim to be consistent and principled turning that principle on its head. The truth is that the Scottish people—[Interruption.] The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire and the hon. Member for Na

h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil), who is sitting behind him, might be in the break-up of the Union business, but it is not a very successful business, is it? We had the referendum—and they lost. [Interruption.] They can shout all they like, but the Scottish people will know—the truth will out, and the Scottish electorate are as smart as any in this country—that the consent of the English to matters that only affect the English is fair.

The Leader of the House was challenged to the effect that all this is coming a little too quickly, despite the fact that it was in the Conservative party manifesto, that it was promised it would be in 100 days, that the proposals came out much earlier in the year, that we have had months, years and decades to talk about the principles behind it, and that we have had the McKay commission. How did the arrogant Tory Minister respond? He said, “Fine, I will listen. Do you know what? If that is not long enough, we will have two days of debate, but we will not make them consecutive. We will put months between them. We will make sure that there is all the time anyone could want. We will debate on the first day on a general motion until 10 o’clock at night. We can go through all the issues and expose them one by one.”

I will tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, what will happen when the Scottish people listen to this debate. They will hear the hon. Member for Wallasey, who spoke for the Labour party, accusing us of being partisan—was it 10, 11 or 12 times that she said it? I lost count—for bringing in procedures that simply provide for the consent of those who represent the people on whom these proposals will impact. That is the situation.

The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire asked for more debate—and more debate came. He said that there could be Barnett consequential and financial issues. As the Leader of the House said, even with the help of the Clerks, a Bill that so fundamentally changed the estimates could not be identified. Creative as ever, the right hon. Member for Gordon tried to find examples that might have implications for later years. That is why the Leader of the House has come forward with updated proposals today to look at ensuring that any time there is a consequential of that sort for Scotland, the principle is established that every Scottish Member of Parliament has a vote.

In common with his colleagues, the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire has but a single thought—and only the cruel would say “if that”. That thought is to break up this Union. That is his only thought and it is why he stands there now. When he is corrected on a matter of fact, he does not pause. When I am corrected on a matter of fact that I have got wrong, I have doubt and fear about getting it wrong and want to make sure that I do not mislead the House. The hon. Gentleman has no such problem, because he is not involved in honest debate; he is involved in trying to break up this Union, mislead the Scottish people and make them feel that he has been turned into a second-class MP when he is nothing of the sort.

**Lady Hermon** (North Down) (Ind): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I wonder when he last visited Northern Ireland. I would say ever so gently to him that there is a growing group of people who feel that their Britishness is constantly being undermined. I invite him to temper his remarks a little, because his Government regularly boast—they did so in the Budget last week—of

being a “one nation” Government. When it comes to this Bill, however, the people I represent do not feel that they are part of a one nation Government.

**Graham Stuart:** I accept the hon. Lady’s sincerity. She may have an opportunity to speak later, and to explain more fully why that would be. However, as I have tried to explain, I feel—because of the imbalance in the constitutional settlement, which I think we all accept—a need to move.

I had hoped for something more ambitious. This is the most modest change that could have been made. It was not the leading issue on the doorstep, and I have not heard anyone suggest that it was, but there is a long-standing grievance. Many people feel that they are not getting a fair deal, and that their voice is not being sufficiently heard. On a democratic basis, they want to feel that their voice will be listened to, and that what they vote for will have an impact on matters that affect only them in England.

The Leader of the House has listened, has extended the period, and has said that, following today’s debate, he will consider further amendments if necessary. I hope that that will happen. I agree with the hon. Member for Wallasey: I want to ensure that the Union continues, and I want to ensure that these modest changes do not cut the thread that holds us all together as a nation. I take the hon. Member for Wallasey very seriously, because I know that, like me, she wants to see that happen. Unfortunately, I know that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire has entirely other ends, and is prepared to use whatever means he thinks necessary to fulfil them.

**Antoinette Sandbach:** Is it not ironic that SNP Members who asked for, and got, the devolution that they wanted—or, at least, part of it—are now dictating what kind of devolution should apply in England, the form in which we should have the right to self-determination, and the way in which we should apply our own rules to English votes for English laws?

**Graham Stuart:** My hon. Friend is quite right. We watched as national Parliaments were convened in Holyrood, Cardiff and Stormont, and progressively more powers were devolved from Westminster. Those changes reflected the settled will of the people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**Neil Gray:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Graham Stuart:** I will make some progress first, if I may.

England does not seek to overturn those powers, nor would we want to. As this process has developed, however, there has been a failure to incorporate democratic fairness for England. That is the point. The situation persists that Scottish MPs have the right to vote on issues such as health and education that affect my constituents in east Yorkshire, while I cannot do the same in respect of their constituents north of the border. As the scale of devolution has grown, that unfairness has increased, and the Bill that is currently going through the House will further exacerbate the imbalance.

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr MacNeil:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Graham Stuart:** I will make progress, if I may.

In the aftermath of the Scottish referendum result last autumn—which SNP Members find so hard to accept—and as the consequent further transfer of powers takes place, a solution must be found. The Prime Minister was right that day when he said that he would take action. There is no widespread desire for an English Parliament. I have gone around my constituency and talked to my constituents, and I find no such desire. The people of England do not want yet another Chamber, with more legislation, more politicians, more costs, and more confusion. This Parliament has stood at the apex of our democracy for 800 years.

The Government’s proposal is right to focus on delivering fairness in the House of Commons by ensuring that English issues will require the consent of English MPs. The ability of all MPs to amend and vote on legislation is maintained. One would be hard put to know that if one had listened to either the hon. Member for Wallasey or the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, but it is true. However, there will now be mechanisms to ensure that England’s specific consent is needed to pass clauses and Bills that affect only England.

I welcome the Government’s proposals wholeheartedly. They are a big step forward. In saying that, I should acknowledge that the process of determining whether or not a clause did indeed affect only England, or England and Wales, might occasionally be tested. However, I hope the convention would be that in the event of doubt, or likely controversy, the tendency would always be for the Chair to err on the side of ensuring that everyone had the vote—that it was open to all. I think such controversy would be likely to arise on very few occasions, and I would hope SNP Members would join us in seeking to cut through that Gordian knot and make sure that, as much as possible, there was that clarity and separation.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman has twice said “I would hope”. Does he not cherish this precious UK constitution more than to hope that it would work after this Bill goes through? The constituents of England might be looking for something stronger than hope.

**Graham Stuart:** I simply say to the hon. Gentleman that the vow was made, it has been brought forward here, and it is being passed through—*[Interruption.]* It is being fulfilled. I say to the hon. Gentleman that, rather than coming forward with a hard—*[Interruption.]* He can try to shout me down if he wishes, but I would simply say that this proposal is to change Standing Orders; it is a rather fragile way of making this change, and we will have a review in a year or so, and the Leader of the House has explicitly said that if legislation is required, he will look at that. The truth is that if this did not work, given the fragility of the Government majority it would take only a handful of colleagues on the Government Benches in conjunction with those on the Opposition Benches to reverse it. If it was in place today, it could be reversed tomorrow as easily as that. So, again, suggesting this is some form of sustained constitutional vandalism is entirely at odds with the truth, and I say to SNP Members, who, as I have said,

[Graham Stuart]

have but a single thought, that if they want to pursue that cause they will find it most effective with their own constituents, or indeed in this place, if they say what they know to be true and do not try to make out something is something when it is not.

**Mr MacNeil:** The hon. Gentleman says there will be confusion with an English Parliament. I am quite sure the English people could manage a Parliament of their own. After all, the French and Germans do so without any help whatever from the Scots.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned asymmetric devolution. I ask him to cast his mind back and remember that before devolution there were 72 MPs and the quid pro quo for devolution at the time was 59 Scottish MPs. He is now saying that in this incorporating Union not only do we have fewer MPs, but we have less power. We are not first-class citizens or even second-class citizens; we are fourth-class citizens based on what our rights will be in this House. The hon. Gentleman is making a huge mistake from his point of view. From our point of view, he is probably giving us a huge lever to break the Union apart, and we will only have the Union of 1603—the Union we should have—left.

**Graham Stuart:** The lacklustre support for that even from the hon. Gentleman's own disciplined Benches says a lot; that was not a worthy contribution by him. He knows full well there is no change to the role he will play. His status is not being diminished in any way. This change simply means there will be consent here. It is the tiniest step towards the very principle the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have espoused for many years. It seems that just as soon as the Government make a proposal, it is said not to be enough—if we introduce a Scottish Bill to fulfil the vow, it is not enough. Every single speech given by every single SNP Member is to express disappointment and say whatever is in front of them is not what was promised. That wears thin, and I ask the hon. Gentleman to recognise that this minimal change is not making a fundamental change to his status in the House.

SNP Members here have to recognise that the existence of MSPs to determine devolved matters in Scotland means they cannot reasonably expect to decide such matters in England without English consent. They will still be playing their role; my constituents will see Scottish MPs playing a full role in passing legislation that affects only them, but with one proviso, which is that consent is given from English MPs.

The way in which Labour Members vote on this issue is a litmus test of whether they understand the country they want to govern. The hon. Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) has shown characteristic courage in arguing that her party must accept the fairness of English votes for English laws. In recent years Labour has consistently placed itself on the wrong side of public opinion in constitutional issues, whether that be denying us all a say on the Lisbon treaty or fighting the last election on a refusal to trust the people with a referendum on a reformed European Union. I have great affection and respect for the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman), but his description of English votes for English laws as “racist”

was tasteless and untrue. It spoke to Labour's wider problem of not recognising that the people of England want to determine their own future, at least partly in the way the Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish do, not through an English Parliament, with all the expense and risks that that would involve, but simply through consent mechanisms delivered in this place.

The Opposition cannot continue to classify Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish devolution as the pure pursuit of patriots while classifying English devolution as the agenda of bigoted nationalists or, as the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) suggested, as partisan manoeuvring by Conservative Members. That, too, was beneath her. That caricature is as grotesque as it is offensive. In less emotive terms, the shadow Leader of the House has warned about the risk of creating two classes of MP, as have many on the Labour Benches. That is a similarly bogus argument. As we know, there are already multiple classes of MP: Front Benchers; Back Benchers; those representing the devolved nations, who work in tandem with Members of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh and Northern Irish Assemblies; the Speaker and his deputies; Select Committee Chairs; and Privy Counsellors.

The Government's proposals simply seek to establish the principle that English issues should be decided with the consent of the English. All MPs will still get to vote on all legislation on Second Reading and on Report. However, the Committee stages will provide an important democratic safeguard to ensure that English, or English and Welsh, MPs approve the matters that affect only their constituents.

**Mr MacNeil** *rose*—

**Graham Stuart:** That is a principle that the hon. Gentleman has espoused for many years, but he has now been told, for reasons of opportunism and a certain amount of cynicism, to change his mind. I give way to him.

**Mr MacNeil:** I notice that the legislative process in the House of Lords will not be changed, so Scottish Lords will still be able to vote on English matters. Scottish MPs—especially Labour MPs—have been voting on English matters since devolution in 1999, but these changes are being proposed only now that 56 SNP MPs have been sent here. Internationally, this will look like a partisan measure against one party. If this proposal is carried, it will be the action of this Parliament against one party: the Scottish National party.

**Graham Stuart:** The hon. Gentleman is an experienced and long-standing Member of this House, and he will know that Members of the House of Lords do not represent any particular area. It is bogus and false—as so many of the arguments from his Benches have been today—to suggest otherwise.

If our democracy is to function properly, it needs to be accountable to all the nations of the UK, and English votes for English laws is an important step towards achieving that. At a time of great constitutional change, it will ensure equity in our devolution arrangements. Almost 50 years have passed since the West Lothian question was first raised in this House by a Labour Member of Parliament, Tam Dalyell. The need to resolve

that question now is greater than it has ever been. The proposals in front of us represent a modest but important step towards providing the equity and balance that will ensure that we can remain one great United Kingdom, however much that might frustrate those who might be in the wrecking business but are not very successful at it.

5.23 pm

**Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): The hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) has spoken in a more emollient fashion than he normally does, and he has understated the consequences of the proposed changes to Standing Orders. Having considered them in detail, I believe that their constitutional significance is matched by only two sets of legislative proposals: Gladstone's home rule Bills and the devolution legislation that was introduced after 1997. The fact that constitutional change of this magnitude is being undertaken through a change to Standing Orders is simply outrageous, and the lack of consultation on these matters has been appalling. They have not been discussed in detail—far from it. They were presented about two weeks ago, their content is extremely complex, and they make unprecedented proposals relating to the role of Members of Parliament. I am not aware of any other proposal that has been carried forward to this House in which having differential voting rights for Members of Parliament in geographic Standing Committees or Grand Committees has occurred. If any Member can intervene to say where it has occurred, I would be very grateful.

**Robert Jenrick:** Gladstone, one of my predecessors as Member of Parliament for Newark, made a similar proposal to the one before us and then the Liberal Prime Minister Asquith, 100 years ago, proposed what then might have been called the “Westmeath question” in exactly the same way, through the Standing Orders of the House. Whether or not one agrees with it, it is therefore a completely bogus argument to say that this is a novel approach. This approach of using the Standing Orders of the House has existed for 150 years.

**Ian C. Lucas:** Gladstone's proposals were in home rule Bills, which were of massive constitutional significance. Furthermore, they failed and led to the break in the union that had existed between Great Britain and Ireland. As a result of the failure of that process, we had the break-up of the relationship that existed within the islands. My concern is that these proposals, as the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) said, are a threat to the Union that I love. I was born in England, I am proud to represent a Welsh seat, I have a son studying at Edinburgh University and I want the United Kingdom to continue. That is why I am bitterly opposed to these proposals.

The proposals are of not only enormous constitutional significance, but massive practical significance to my constituents. I am sorry to say that they also draw the Speaker into the centre of political debate. The Speaker will have to determine very controversial, practical matters that will require detailed knowledge of constituencies across the United Kingdom.

**Antoinette Sandbach:** But of course, that idea of legislative consent is dealt with by Presiding Officers in

the devolved Assemblies all the time and was the very system the hon. Gentleman voted for when he voted the devolution Bills through.

**Ian C. Lucas:** It is not the same system—it is an entirely different one. These proposals are, for the Speaker, unprecedented because they require detailed knowledge of constituencies that the Speaker cannot be expected to have.

**Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I want to follow up on the point made by the hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) about his “Westmeath question”. That of course has been solved, with Members from Westmeath now in the Dáil Éireann, where they should be, and nobody in this House would now roll that back. Ultimately, this is all leading to the same place—to independence for Scotland.

**Ian C. Lucas:** As ever, my position is different from that of the hon. Gentleman.

One practical example from my parliamentary experience addresses the issue of the decisions made by the Speaker. The last Labour Government introduced legislation to establish foundation hospitals, and these applied only in England. Health in Wales is devolved to the National Assembly, but hospitals such as those in Chester and in Gobowen in north Shropshire provide services to patients from Wales. Indeed, they depend on those patients, paid for by the Welsh Government, for their viability. From 1997 to 2001, I was a non-executive director of the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital in Gobowen, approximately one third of whose patients come from north and mid-Wales. It depended for its financial viability on those patients continuing to come. Those patients depended upon MPs making representations in this place to Ministers to ensure that they were represented as patients on the boards of foundation hospitals in the same way as patients from England were.

Although health is a devolved issue—I say this with particular reference to north Wales—it is essential that people in north Wales that Members of Parliament are able to speak up on their behalf, draw to the attention of Ministers the fact that the issue existed and secure a change in legislation. No Speaker at the beginning of the legislative process—before any of these matters are discussed—will be aware of the issue. There will be no reason for the Speaker to recognise that it is not an England-only issue.

**Graham Stuart:** Hospitals and schools in Wales that are used by English people are controlled entirely through the devolution settlement and determined by those in Wales. That is as it should be. There may be voices created for those coming over. We could have whole vast sections of tourism dependent entirely on English tourists, but that does not stop the Welsh Assembly deciding the policies that apply. Exactly the same mirror should apply. Something that affects only English hospitals should be determined with the consent—only the consent—of the English.

**Ian C. Lucas:** I do not really understand the intervention, but what I say to the hon. Gentleman is that I am not proposing that we treat MPs in England and Wales

[*Ian C. Lucas*]

differently—this Government are. I am not entitled to make representations or speak on health issues in Wales, which is exactly the same as the hon. Gentleman. Assembly Members speak on such matters, because this Parliament set in place a National Assembly for Wales. It made that decision and it was agreed to, in a referendum, by the people of Wales. Entirely the same option is available to this or any other Government.

**Mr Grieve:** Forgive me but I find it difficult to follow the hon. Gentleman's argument. There is nothing in these proposals that will prevent him from continuing to make representations to any English health authority or to any English Minister on his constituents' behalf—absolutely nothing.

**Ian C. Lucas:** What they will prevent me from doing is putting down amendments in Committee.

**The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** No, they will not.

**Ian C. Lucas:** They will. They will prevent me from putting down amendments in Committee and voting in the Legislative Grand Committee (England). That is entirely the proposal. It will exclude me from the Legislative Grand Committee. It is limiting my right to speak on behalf of my constituents.

**Mr David Jones:** The hon. Gentleman will know that, for the purpose of deciding whether the new procedures apply, the Speaker will have to certify it. In certifying it, he will have to take account of whether the issue is wholly devolved to Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland and whether it relates exclusively to a particular part of the jurisdiction. In the example that the hon. Gentleman cited, would it not be the case that the Speaker should be concluding that it does not relate exclusively to England?

**Ian C. Lucas:** I agree with that, but how will the Speaker know? These proposals contain no procedure for me to make representations to the Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker is a very wise woman, but she does not know Wrexham as well as I do. She will not know about the arrangements for health services. These Standing Orders that this Government are bringing forward do not allow me to make those representations.

**Mr Jones:** I agree, and is that not the point of the debate that we are having and of the consultation that we are going through? Therefore, does he agree that what is needed is a mechanism to be put in place to ensure that representations can be made, for example, by the hon. Gentleman?

**Ian C. Lucas:** I agree. It is therefore good that the Leader of the House did listen and did not press these Standing Orders as he wished to do in the first instance. This position is self-evident. Anyone who looks at the facts and knows north-east Wales accepts that that is the case. The difficulty was made clearer to me last Saturday when I received at home in Wrexham, through my letterbox, a ballot paper from the Liverpool Heart and Chest Hospital for an election to the north Wales constituency of the hospital. How can any decision relating to that hospital possibly be English-only, whether

it relates to its finances or structure? Health is a devolved matter in Wales, but issues relating to that hospital do involve MPs from Wales. They should be able to represent their constituents in this place, and the proposed Standing Orders threaten that.

**Antoinette Sandbach:** My constituents in Cheshire have no say on the health service in Wales, even though they might belong to a GP practice over the border. They cannot table amendments to Welsh legislation, but the hon. Gentleman can table amendments to legislation here. Under these proposals, only English MPs will be able to vote on English-only matters, but he will not be prevented from standing up, making representations or tabling amendments.

**Ian C. Lucas:** That is the case because this Parliament approved devolution and had a referendum. England, if it so wished, could proceed to have an English Parliament or regional Assemblies. This conundrum has a simple answer, but it is not one that the Conservative party wants to accept.

**Graham Stuart:** The hon. Gentleman has set out his case cogently, but it is not right. He says that he will not be able to make representations, but he will be. It would be really good if he could acknowledge that. He will be playing a full part. He says that he will not be able to table amendment, but he will be. It is just that if the matter is English-only he will not be able to vote on it. His case is absolutely bankrupt.

**Ian C. Lucas:** In the Committee I will not be able to move the amendment, because I will not be a member of the Committee, and I will not be able to vote on the amendment. Members from England will have twice as many votes as I will, even though our constituents go to the same hospitals—as is the case with the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson). It is outrageous.

**Wayne David:** My hon. Friend has made a series of powerful and practical points about what the proposals might mean in practice. Does he agree that the NHS in England is so large, compared with the NHS in Wales, that it has a huge influence on Wales, which Wales does not have on England?

**Ian C. Lucas:** That is certainly the case.

**Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab):** Does my hon. Friend agree that even though there is a simplicity—and simplicity can be very nice—to some of the arguments being put forward in favour the proposal, one area where it really falls down is on the issue of Barnett consequential? Something can look as English as cricket from Lords on a Sunday afternoon, but when one examines the impact with the Barnett consequentials, one realises why the proposed procedure is flawed.

**Ian C. Lucas:** Indeed.

The proposed Standing Orders need to be changed so that representations can be made to the Speaker by Members on whether a Bill is an England-only Bill or an England-and-Wales-only Bill. Also, legislation to be certified by the Speaker is defined by reference to the powers of the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly, but some powers are devolved to the Scottish Parliament and not to the



Welsh Assembly or the Northern Ireland Assembly. That means that in criminal justice, for example, the Government could bring forward an England-and-Wales-only Bill, excluding MPs from Scotland, even though the Scottish Parliament has responsibility for justice matters, and could legislate using the new procedures. However, the proposed Standing Orders make no provision for a similar power for MPs from Wales, despite the fact that Assembly Members have no powers in the area of criminal justice. For example, if Parliament wished to legislate on the issue of using the Welsh language in courts in Wales, there is no procedure in these Standing Orders to allow that matter to be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee, to give MPs from Wales a double vote, or to enable the double counting voting procedure to apply to MPs from Wales.

**Antoinette Sandbach:** It is an English and Welsh matter.

**Ian C. Lucas:** It is not an English and Welsh matter—it is a Welsh matter, and it should be determined by MPs from Wales.

In those circumstances, it is right and proper that MPs from Wales should have exactly the same double counting procedure as MPs from England, because then legislation on the issue could be carried only with the consent of MPs from Wales. That would be entirely fair and entirely appropriate. However, these Standing Orders do not contain any procedure to allow that to happen. How can this be right? On a non-devolved issue—a Welsh-only issue, in my submission—Welsh MPs should have the same power to deal with it as English MPs have on English-only issues.

**Antoinette Sandbach:** The hon. Gentleman's example is somewhat disingenuous, because Welsh language issues are devolved to and dealt with by the Assembly, whereas no criminal justice issues are devolved, and therefore that is dealt with as an English and Welsh matter.

**Ian C. Lucas:** Criminal justice matters are not devolved.

If such a position were conceded by the Government, then because, unfortunately for the Government, most MPs in Wales are Labour, a Welsh criminal justice Bill dealing with this issue could pass through Parliament only if we had double voting for MPs from Wales with the consent of the Opposition. The implications of that are enormous.

**Dr Thérèse Coffey:** I think the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) is making is that because the Welsh language with regard to the Welsh courts is a devolved matter, it is likely that the UK Government would be unable to legislate on it unless we had the consent of the Welsh Assembly.

**Ian C. Lucas:** That is an ingenious but wrong argument, because criminal justice matters are matters for this House.

I am giving just one example. I could give more, but I do not want to be here all day. I have read these Standing Orders—I have even highlighted them—and I can go through them and produce other examples.

**Wayne David:** Another relatively small example—people might think it is such—shows the complexity of the situation we are talking about. In the run-up to the first police and crime commissioner elections, a mistake was made in Westminster because the election ballot papers were not bilingual. The legislation to correct that had to come from Westminster because it was an electoral matter, and it was done belatedly. Westminster clearly has the power to legislate on some Welsh language matters.

**Ian C. Lucas:** I was talking about the implications of giving Welsh MPs—dare I say it?—the same rights as MPs from England. Let us suppose, for example, that a future UK Labour Government dependent on Scottish and Welsh votes for an overall majority wished to lower tuition fees in England, and this was vetoed in a Committee comprising English Members only. After the Committee, the Education Secretary would have to defend in the House a policy with which he disagreed. In effect, he would be the Education Secretary for England, but England could have a Conservative majority. A Labour Minister cannot be responsible to a Conservative majority, so the logical solution would be to have a Conservative Education Secretary. However, there cannot be two Governments at the same time, one for devolved matters and the other for non-devolved matters. A Government have to be collectively responsible for all their policies, not just a selection of them. That is the type of situation that the Standing Orders will create.

The Standing Orders will, in practice, increase the Conservative majority on English devolved matters from 12 to 105 at a stroke. When Labour set up the Welsh Assembly, there were no Conservative MPs in Wales at all. With a majority of more than 150 in the House of Commons, the Labour party introduced an additional member voting system in Wales to ensure that there was a balanced representation within the National Assembly for Wales. The hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) would not have been elected to the National Assembly for Wales because she kept losing under the first-past-the-post system.

**Antoinette Sandbach:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Ian C. Lucas:** No, I will not. I will finish this point. I have given way to her too often already. I am speaking for Wales—we know she is speaking for England—and for the United Kingdom, too.

**Antoinette Sandbach:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Ian C. Lucas:** No, I will finish this point.

The Labour Government provided that power because we thought it was right and proper to have balanced representation in Scotland and Wales on the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales. We thought that that was fair. What does the Conservative party want to do? The measure is a partisan one because it increases the Conservative majority in Committee. Effectively, it gives English MPs, the majority of whom are Conservative, double votes. It makes no concession to the Labour party, the Opposition, or to smaller parties within England, which will not have any representation on the Legislative Grand Committee (England). It entrenches and strengthens the position of

[*Ian C. Lucas*]

the Conservative party in England; it does not make any concessions to a broad-based Chamber such as those that were made to the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales.

**Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): I applaud the hon. Gentleman for speaking up for the United Kingdom, which he has just mentioned. He is talking about fairness, so will he answer this question? My South Leicestershire constituents told me in the lead-up to the election that they have a problem with the current Labour form of devolution settlement. What is his response to my constituents who are unhappy with the imbalance, but want to safeguard the United Kingdom, as he does, against the wishes of the Scottish National party?

**Ian C. Lucas:** My answer is: “Don’t support these proposals whatever you do.” I believe passionately in the United Kingdom, and I want to have a fair system that gives adequate representation to citizens in England, just as there is such representation in Scotland and Wales. In Scotland and Wales, we had referendums to establish the institutions, and it is entirely appropriate to have a far-reaching, straightforward discussion about how England is represented and how such difficult issues can be addressed.

**Alberto Costa:** The fact is that, at this election, the Conservative party put English votes for English laws in its manifesto, and my constituents voted for that, as did many of the constituents of Conservative Members. Given that we both value our United Kingdom, I again say to him that this measure at least safeguards the United Kingdom and establishes the fairness that we need against the threat posed by separatist Members of Parliament.

**Ian C. Lucas:** I do not believe that these measures will safeguard the United Kingdom, and I do not believe that they are the same proposals that the Conservative party placed before the electorate. That is why I oppose them so vehemently.

**Mr Grieve:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Ian C. Lucas:** I will not give way because I have taken up enough time.

I do not believe that constitutional issues of this magnitude should be addressed by Standing Orders, because they go to the heart of the future of the United Kingdom. This United Kingdom is in peril. It frightened me last week at Prime Minister’s questions when the Prime Minister quoted a nationalist in support of his proposals on EVEL.

We have to stand against these amendments to Standing Orders because, contrary to what the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness said, they are not minimal. I hope that I have shown that they will have profound practical implications for my constituents and profound constitutional implications for this place. They go to the heart of the equality of Members in this Chamber,

because they will restrict the voting rights of individual Members of Parliament on Committees in a way that has not been done before.

**Mr David Jones:** The hon. Gentleman will know that I have a certain amount of sympathy for some of the points that he is making, but is he not over-egging the pudding? We have a proposal to change Standing Orders, which the Leader of the House has said will be reviewed in 12 months. The hon. Gentleman has suggested that there is an attempt to entrench Conservative power in this House. Nothing could be further from the truth. He knows that if there were a change of Government, it would be extremely easy to change those Standing Orders, so he really should not over-egg it.

**Ian C. Lucas:** I am not over-egging the pudding because the proposal would establish the unprecedented principle that MPs in this place can be treated differently. That is a far-reaching step and one that we should resist on behalf of our constituents in north Wales, whichever party we belong to—I do not think that our good friends from Plaid Cymru are with us, again. This issue is of huge importance to my constituency and to Parliament, and we should resist these dangerous Standing Orders at every possible stage.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Most of the Back-Bench contributions have lasted almost half an hour. A large number of Members want to speak, so I ask Members to keep to about 10 minutes. I do not want to impose a time limit, especially not on the maiden speeches, so if speeches are kept to 10 minutes and interventions are kept to an absolute minimum, we will get there. I call Derek Thomas for his maiden speech.

5.53 pm

**Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): I was intending to take an hour, if that is okay, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I want to inject Cornwall into this debate, because so far it has been left unmentioned. I stand here as the Member of Parliament for the most south-westerly constituency of the new south-west powerhouse. Although the south-west powerhouse might not yet be a formally recognised entity in this place, there is no denying the shared sense of unity, purpose and determination in this group of all but one of the south-west’s MPs. It is my hope that together we can get a fairer deal for our schools, a better deal for healthcare services and a better deal for policing. Together, we can be a strong voice and champion for farmers and fishermen in the beautiful south-west. Our ambition is untethered and I suggest that the world watches this space.

As an MP of the new intake, I have taken my time and listened to the many maiden speeches that have gone before mine. I have noted that pretty much every Member claims to represent the most beautiful constituency in Great Britain. However, it remains the case that west Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly are the most beautiful part of the UK. If we were to take a vote on that in the House, I am sure that you would be saying, “The Ayes have it, the Ayes have it,” Madam Deputy Speaker.

I can assure hon. Members on both sides of the House that my constituents fully support English votes for English laws, so I am pleased to be able to make my maiden speech during this debate. Hon. Members can imagine what a privilege it was for me to be a parliamentary candidate in the place where I grew up, the area where I have always worked; to be the candidate of the part of the UK where my children were born and go to school, and where my wife and I share so many friends. As I travel the length and breadth of west Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, I cannot quite digest the fact that I am no longer simply a limited-value candidate, but the Member of Parliament for one of the most precious and special parts of the greatest nation on this earth. I feel the great honour and privilege of this role, and I recognise that I am elected as a servant of the good people of the St Ives constituency.

I want to use this opportunity to pay credit to my predecessor, Andrew George. For 18 years, he represented the St Ives constituency with loyalty and a high sense of duty. There is no question but that he shared a clear and unwavering commitment to St Ives, and I am in no doubt that he will continue to do so. I wish him every success in his new role in the Cornwall Community Land Trust.

As new MPs, we are encouraged to take a look at the maiden speeches of MPs who have gone before. As someone who always does exactly what I am told—at this point I am seeking to invest some credit with the Whips Office—I did that. I was pleased yet saddened to read the maiden speech of Sir John Nott, a former St Ives MP and a friend of mine, who to this day can be seen visiting his local farmers market in my constituency on a Saturday morning. In 1966, Sir John said:

“I am afraid that men’s stomachs cannot be filled with the view, nor can they be filled with history. The fact is that we in West Cornwall have about the lowest incomes of the whole of the country. The average wage, which is difficult to calculate in Cornwall, is somewhere in the region of £12 a week, against a national average of £19.”—[*Official Report*, 4 May 1966; Vol. 727, c. 1701.]

I am saddened because, having looked at the figures today, I know that the situation remains unchanged. The average pay that someone in my constituency can expect to earn is £390, compared to £500 a week in the wider south-west and £520 if they were to earn the UK average. So for me, the most important thing I can do is to work to address this gap.

There are great schools in west Cornwall and on the Isles of Scilly. We live in a very safe part of the British Isles with good healthcare services. Where would people find a better place to set up home and raise a family? We have a lot going for us in the far south-west, yet our youngsters leave and our workforce struggle to find the skilled well-paid jobs they need to afford to live there. I for one will no longer accept that we must remain a low-wage economy, so I will do whatever I can to help businesses to grow and create new jobs.

Better transport infrastructure, advances in technology, shorter rail journey times, good broadband and mobile phone services, more apprenticeships and training that meets the demands of employers—these are all areas where we are progressing, but much more must be done. I want to see better use of local expertise and private wealth to support our small businesses and entrepreneurs. I want us to exploit export markets. All round the world, there are Cornish societies and communities

who love to buy our products. My plan is to ensure that my successor has no need to refer to the wage gap when the time comes for him or her to give their maiden speech. It is an ambitious plan, but there is every reason to succeed.

Furthermore, I see two other priorities for my constituency: to provide the housing we need and bring health and social care together in meaningful integration. I am embarrassed to admit that in west Cornwall there are enough empty redundant houses, enough brownfield sites and enough parcels of land that have planning permission to meet the need for housing for local people. Some fresh thinking is needed to provide these homes and I see this as an urgent priority.

A great amount of work is being done to ensure that people in Cornwall and on the Isles of Scilly can get the healthcare they need and will not remain in hospital longer than is absolutely necessary. However, to achieve this, we have to recruit many more care and support workers, not to mention the healthcare professionals needed in our hospitals and general practices. In a western society such as ours, it is quite wrong that someone who requires palliative care must wait six weeks at home, without any care worker assigned, as was the case in my constituency recently. My fervent hope is that, as we integrate services, such occurrences will be parked firmly in the history books, never to be revisited.

I, along with far too many others, have paid little attention to mental health. I intend to right that wrong and to work hard to ensure that if someone has a mental illness, they receive the help they need, when they need it and as close to home as possible.

My priorities are clear: I am in the business of skills, jobs, housing and health, and I am determined to see positive progress in those areas. I do not ask for much, but I do ask for the support of the House and this Government—and your fine offices, Madam Deputy Speaker—to help me deliver for the good people of west Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly that which they rightly deserve.

6 pm

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate, particularly to follow the maiden speech by the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas). In a debate that in many ways is about what it is to be part of the United Kingdom, it is fitting that the Member who represents the most southerly constituency in this House should be followed by the Member who represents the most northerly. The hon. Gentleman demonstrated a fine affection for his community, and I wish him well in his time here. I noted his description of himself as somebody who does “exactly what he is told”. I was Chief Whip for the Liberal Democrat party, which included his predecessor in the last Parliament, and nobody would ever have levelled that accusation at him. I hope that in time the hon. Gentleman will understand that sometimes the people who will tell him what to do will be those at home in St Ives, and on such occasions we must listen to those who are telling us what to do.

Let me start by accentuating a few positives. I join those who have commended the Leader of the House for turning today’s debate into a general debate. That is

[*Mr Alistair Carmichael*]

of enormous assistance to the House because it is already apparent from today's proceedings and last week's debate under Standing Order No. 24 that an enormous amount in these proposals still requires debate in the House.

I commend the shadow Leader of the House for seeking to proceed by building consensus. It seems to me that in neither of the debates so far have we heard anybody deny that there is a problem that requires a solution. In that context, it must surely be possible—if we are all acting in good will—to find a compromise and build a consensus that will allow us to go forward together. I am afraid, however, that we are not there yet, and the revised proposals from the Leader of the House bring us precious little closer to building that consensus than we were last week.

I commend the words of the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) who spoke on behalf of the Scottish National party, and the House should listen in particular to two things that he said. First, he said that the Government are seeking to shoehorn an English Parliament into the United Kingdom House of Commons. That is a dangerous enterprise on which to embark, not least because it betrays a lot about the attitude of Government Members to this place. This cannot be regarded as a proxy English Parliament. If the people of England are to have a Parliament—I hope that they will have one, or some series of Parliaments or assemblies, or whatever—surely this should remain the United Kingdom Parliament and that principle should be inviolate.

The hon. Gentleman said that he was not in the business of saving the Union, and there will be little dissent about that. Let me tell the House—I hope it is accepted—that I am in the business of saving the Union, which is why I look on these proposals with genuine terror. These proposals and the language that they have already introduced to the debate are a genuine risk to the continuation of the United Kingdom. We have already heard in the debate today that it is “our issues and our votes” as opposed to “their issues and their votes”. That is the logical conclusion of a nationalist political analysis, but for a United Kingdom Parliament, it is a dangerous road down which to go.

**Alberto Costa:** Again, I make a similar point. My constituents in South Leicestershire repeatedly told me in the lead up to the general election that they were unhappy with the status quo but that they did not want an English Parliament. They wanted simple fairness in the system. Will the right hon. Gentleman at least accept that these proposals go some way towards establishing fairness for the constituents of England?

**Mr Carmichael:** I will come to what the proposals do and what we can possibly do through the use of Standing Orders in a minute. As for this business that there is an unfairness but we only want to address it on our terms, the ship has sailed, I am afraid. We embarked on a process of devolution in 1999 that set up a Scottish Parliament, a Welsh Assembly and, later, a Northern Ireland Assembly. More has been devolved to them and devolution has been good for Scotland, Wales and

Northern Ireland. I want to see devolution for England, too, but it is about an awful lot more than simply what is on offer here.

The proposal is a curious beast that offers devolution within Parliament but not within the Executive. It does nothing to address the lack of proportionality in the representation of people in England and nothing about the virtual disfranchisement of 4 million people who voted for the UK Independence party, for whatever reason. It does nothing about the gross centralisation of power in England. The hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) should be talking to his constituents about all those things. If he does, in the same way as we did over a long time in Scotland, I think—

**Graham Stuart:** He represents them. Unbelievable.

**Mr Carmichael:** I listened with courtesy to the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) and I ask that he does the same for me.

If the hon. Member for South Leicestershire does the same as we did in Scotland to build consensus, his people will realise in time that what is being offered here is pretty small beer and that they deserve something better.

**Alberto Costa:** I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time. The truth is that he represents a constituency in Scotland, and I am also very familiar with the Scottish political environment, as he knows, but I represent a constituency in England and there is no appetite among my constituents for an English Parliament. I respect that his party has been a long-standing advocate of a federal United Kingdom, but these proposals merely go some way to meet the imbalance of Labour's devolution and our devolved arrangements, which are clearly unbalanced and unfair. All that my constituents are seeking is a modicum of fairness, which is all that these policies establish.

**Mr Carmichael:** I do not doubt the good faith of the hon. Gentleman's intervention, but essentially, if he stops and analyses it, he will realise that he is advancing an argument for English nationalism. The answer to Scottish nationalism is not English nationalism. In my view as a Liberal, it is federalism or Unionism, if he prefers to use different vocabulary. Ultimately, if he continues down this road he risks putting a further stress on the Union. As the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire said quite candidly, from one point of view he could welcome the proposals because they advance the case for separating Scotland from the rest of England.

The hon. Member for South Leicestershire must realise that if we are to maintain and preserve the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom, proper constitutional reform across the whole of England is now absolutely necessary. As the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) said from the Opposition Front Bench, we need a constitutional convention to build consensus, so that people in England can decide what they want. I do not know whether that will be in English Parliament, a series of assemblies or whatever else, but that debate has to be had.

I wish there were an easy way to build consensus, but there is not and I say to the hon. Member for South Leicestershire that, because of the sentiments he is hearing on the doorstep, that must be dealt with as a matter of urgency. For him to pretend to his constituents, as he apparently does, that this complex problem has a simple solution does nobody any favours and ultimately puts the Union of the United Kingdom at risk. This House risks tying itself up in knots by using Standing Orders to achieve a complex and sophisticated piece of constitutional architecture. As has been said, a Joint Committee would be a sensible way to build consensus.

My biggest concern as a Scottish MP is the way in which the proposal would affect spending decisions. I am afraid that the Leader of the House came dangerously close to indulging in sophistry when he said that they would be dealt with purely through estimates votes and that legislation would have no affect on that. I am struck by two things. First, it is long overdue that this House took a much more forensic approach towards estimates, because I think we are the only Parliament in the world that allows estimates to go through on the nod. Departmental budgets are approved with little scrutiny by the House. Secondly, any legislation passed this year will inevitably impact on estimates next year and the year after. The proposition that it is somehow possible to divorce spending from legislation does not stand up to scrutiny.

What are the people of England being offered by Conservative Members? Essentially, they are being told that they will have a veto on legislation, but that Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Members will also be able to engage a veto on money and Ways and Means resolutions. This is a constitutional muddle, and that gives more force to the idea that we should be proceeding with more caution.

I reiterate the point I made in the previous debate that, if these vetoes are going to be in play, the Government need to look again at the operation of the Sewel convention and legislative consent motions for the Scottish Parliament. If English Members are to have a veto on legislation, Scotland ought to have one as well. There is still time to make that change—the Scotland Bill is still going through this House—and I hope that, when she replies, the Deputy Leader of the House will confirm that serious consideration is being given to it.

I am mindful of your strictures, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I want to raise one final point: the position Mr Speaker will be put in if we proceed with the proposal. My concern should be shared by everyone in the House. I do not envy Mr Speaker the position in which he will find himself. He will require the wisdom of Solomon if he is to make the necessary adjudications, and he will certainly need a lot of legal advice, which I suppose would be one of the upsides of the process.

It would be useful to know the view of the Clerks, Parliamentary Counsel and Speaker's Counsel before we proceed. It seems to me that a whole body of legal advice will be required, not just for primary legislation, but for secondary legislation. The issue of most concern, however, is that when Mr Speaker makes an adjudication on a controversial case—perhaps one on which there is some doubt about the financial consequences—he will be forbidden from giving his reasons for doing so. We already know what will happen. On the day when he makes an adjudication, the aggrieved party, the one that

is disappointed, is always going to be bouncing up. There will be points of order, applications for Adjournment debates and all the rest of it. The Speaker will be in a position where he or she has no option other than just to say, "That is my ruling and I am not going to give you any reason for it."

**Sir William Cash:** The idea of giving reasons for a Speaker certificate is simply absurd. If reasons were given, everything would be handed over to the courts. That would nullify completely the sovereignty of Parliament and its organisation of its own arrangements. I really do think that the right hon. Gentleman ought to take that into account.

**Mr Carmichael:** I do not think anybody should have anything to fear from justiciability. Essentially, we are getting to the point where it is inevitable that we will have a written constitution and that brings with it the concept of justiciability. Mature legislatures across the world have this and manage to cope with it. There are historic reasons why we in this House are so suspicious of it. For the Scottish Parliament, it is already a reality and it is something we manage to cope with remarkably well.

I am mindful of the fact that I have taken slightly longer, but these are issues of great significance. I appreciate the listening mode we have had from the Leader of the House and the Deputy Leader of the House, but we need more. We need proper consideration. They should take these proposals away, come back with a Green Paper and let the Select Committees do their job. Let us build a consensus, so that the legitimate grievances that have been spoken of are given a solution that they ultimately deserve. This is not it.

6.16 pm

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): I am very pleased to be called in this important debate. May I too say how pleased I was to be present for the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas)? It was an excellent speech, which showed his passion for and commitment to his constituency. His constituents are very lucky to have him.

The 1880 edition of "Encyclopaedia Britannica" famously contained an entry reading, "For Wales, see England." Looking at the title of this debate, I wonder who prepared it. It seems to me that it should read, "English and Welsh votes for English and Welsh laws."

I would like to commend my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. He is entirely right to seek to address the West Lothian question. This is an issue that this House—in fact, the whole nation—has been aware of for many years. It was certainly an issue that was well known before devolution. Notwithstanding that, the then Labour Government decided to proceed to create devolution settlements for both Scotland and Wales without seeking to make arrangements that would accommodate the West Lothian question. So here we are, some 16 years later, trying to find a way of reverse-engineering the whole process.

This is clearly a problem, one that is now beginning to cause real resentment. Whatever one's views about foxhunting, I have to tell the House that I have some Welsh upland farmers who are really bemused as to why the governing party of Scotland should suddenly show a previously unevinced interest in their pest control

[Mr David Jones]

methods when the issue of hunting with dogs is a devolved issue in Scotland. These are issues that cause resentment.

**Alberto Costa:** My right hon. Friend should not be surprised at all. This is all part and parcel of the Scottish National party strategy, which is to foster grievance upon the nations of the United Kingdom. There will be more to come.

**Mr Jones:** That may be the case, but my constituents in upland north Wales are still bemused as to why it is happening. It needs to be addressed. I commend my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for trying to address an issue that has been put off for far too long.

I believe that the method of addressing the problem, through a change in Standing Orders, has been handled sensibly. My right hon. Friend has told us that it will be reviewed after 12 months. As my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) pointed out, a change in Standing Orders is a fragile and tentative means of addressing the issue. We are going through an extensive consultation at the moment, and again I commend my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for listening to the concerns expressed on both sides of the House. It is right to give the process the benefit of the doubt and to road-test it and see where we are in 12 months' time.

That said, there are issues I want to address. The principal one concerns the test applied to determine whether the new procedures should apply to a particular legislative proposal. This is a matter of certification by the Speaker, who will be required to carry out a double test. He will be asked to consider whether the issue is devolved to Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales and to determine whether it relates exclusively to England or to England and Wales. I have sympathy with the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas), who pointed out that approximately one third of patients at the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt hospital in Shropshire came from Wales. This issue is repeated in various other areas. For example, economic development is devolved to Wales, but north-east Wales is very much part of the north-west economic area, so arguments will arise about whether, under the new proposals, north Wales MPs should be excluded from proposals relating to the economic development of the north-west.

The issue that causes most concern, however, is that of health, which is why the hon. Member for Wrexham lighted upon it. North Wales is almost entirely dependent on north-west England for specialist services, as is a good part of north Wales for general hospital services. For example, the constituency of the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) is served by the Countess of Chester hospital, the local general hospital. I remember a few years ago an issue occurred in my own constituency. The Welsh Assembly Government decided that all elective neurosurgery should be dealt with on an "in-Wales basis", as they called it, meaning that patients from Colwyn Bay would be required to go to Swansea or Cardiff for treatment, which was a nonsense. At the time—and to this day, thank goodness—north Wales patients travelled to the Walton centre in Liverpool, an internationally renowned centre of excellence and the local neurosurgery hospital for north Wales, which has

Welsh-speaking staff to accommodate Welsh patients. The Speaker, when deciding whether to issue a certification, could not possibly decide that a measure relating to health in north-west England related exclusively to England, because of the heavy dependence of the people of north Wales upon those services.

**Mr Hanson:** While I remain sceptical about the whole process, would a solution not be for the Speaker, when he is minded to certify a proposal, to allow a period of grace—say 14 days—in which to receive representations from Members on both sides of the House?

**Mr Jones:** I was coming to exactly that point. As I said in an intervention on the hon. Member for Wrexham, a mechanism has to be devised so that in areas of doubt, of which there will be many, the Speaker can apprise himself of Members' views and take any wider evidence he requires to make that determination. It seems to me that there would be nothing to preclude him from doing so on the basis of the draft Standing Orders as they stand. My suggestion to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is that an amendment to the draft Standing Orders should be made in order to accommodate that very procedure.

**Wayne David:** The right hon. Gentleman makes an extremely important point, and I can well understand the validity of his case. However, he suggests an interpretation of the draft Standing Orders which means that the Speaker may be asked to make a subjective decision. I suggest that that is fraught with difficulties.

**Mr Jones:** As I just said, it seems to me that a further amendment should be made to the draft Standing Orders to accommodate that.

I am conscious of your strictures about time, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I want to say to my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that I raised this issue as long ago as 16 December 2014 with my right hon. Friend's predecessor, William Hague, who said in reply to my question:

"In respect of a small number of cross-border issues involving a strong structural dependence—health care in Wales is one such instance—there is a strong case for a wide definition of what constitutes an English matter, so that others can be involved."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 2014; Vol. 589, c. 1276-67.]

I ask the Government Front-Bench team to consider that. It seems to me that a sensible amendment could be made to the draft Standing Orders as they are now, in order to accommodate this issue of structural dependence, which is not properly addressed at the moment. As an instrument, the Standing Orders are somewhat blunt as drafted, and need to be refined.

6.26 pm

**Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): I shall make a few practical points about the proposals and explain how they may adversely affect a border area such as the one I represent. I say "border", but to all intents and purposes, the border is not there for that area between north-east Wales and north-west England. Every day, thousands of people leave north Wales to work in England and thousands cross the border the other way. Companies such as Airbus employ 7,000

people, 60% living in Wales and 40% in England. Likewise, many people living in north Wales work at the large plants in north-west England, particularly at Vauxhall in Ellesmere Port. We are a distinct region spanning north-east Wales and north-west England. The Mersey Dee Alliance has done a lot of work promoting this area, and politicians of all political parties have worked well to get our area recognised as a distinct region and to secure positive outcomes for it.

The Government like to tell us that English votes for English laws is a clear-cut issue, but it is not—and we have heard today many reasons why it is not. Residents of Alyn and Deeside use healthcare services both sides of the border. Our children's hospital is the Alder Hey, which happens to be in Liverpool, and our heart hospital is based there, too. We use cancer services at Christie's and Clatterbridge. So why should I or other Members representing north Wales be prevented from participating in decisions that will affect the people who elect us to serve them?

**Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): My hon. Friend is raising important points about the complexities and practicalities in north Wales. Does he appreciate that it is the same for south Wales constituents? As many as 12,000 people commute from Newport and Monmouthshire to England every day for work, and they travel over the Severn bridges, whose tolling responsibilities lie wholly with the Department for Transport. Does my hon. Friend agree that Wales has a particularly dense border, making it an acute problem for us when 48% of people live within 25 miles of the border?

**Mark Tami:** I agree. My hon. Friend and I have talked about this many times. I may be based in north Wales and she in south Wales, but there are many similarities.

Countess of Chester hospital was built to serve the needs of the people of Chester and Deeside, so it is not an England-only hospital. A third of its patients come from Wales. The previous Member of Parliament for City of Chester used to stand up in the Chamber and tell us about the thousands of Welsh patients who were fleeing across the border to use his hospital, but the truth was that it was their hospital as well. It was built to serve the people of Deeside as much as the people of Chester.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas) referred to an arrangement whereby the governors of Countess of Chester, and other hospitals, would be elected from Wrexham and from Flintshire. Like my hon. Friend, I am a member of the Countess of Chester NHS foundation trust. I receive ballot papers that enable me to elect governors who, obviously, will do their best to represent the people of Flintshire and Wrexham. However, in my capacity as the Member of Parliament, I am to be deprived of the right to take part in that process.

The Government are approaching this issue from entirely the wrong direction. We should not be aiming to create two tiers of Members of Parliament; we should be concentrating on securing proper devolution for England, whatever that may be. It may involve an English Parliament, or it may involve some other arrangement.

**Mr David Jones:** The hon. Gentleman speaks of devolution for England. That might or might not be a good thing, but if a proposal for devolution were put to the people of England in a referendum and they rejected it—as people in the north-east rejected it a few years ago—would not the same problem arise?

**Mark Tami:** I accept that that was the result then. The right hon. Gentleman's party was strongly opposed to devolution at that time, but it has had a bit of a turn of face, and is now promoting it. Indeed, a number of people who were very much against devolution have gone down the road to Damascus and changed their opinion, and I am pleased they have.

**Mr Grieve:** I think that the hon. Gentleman may have misunderstood one of the issues. I want to keep the United Kingdom together, so I am prepared to work within the development settlements that have been achieved, and to try to build on them. England, however, has been a unitary state since the ninth century, and I have to tell him that my constituents have no interest whatsoever in the idea of regional devolution. They do want more accountability at local government level, but that is an entirely different matter.

**Mark Tami:** There is no model that will fit every situation. The Mayor of London and the London Assembly, for instance, may not be able to legislate, but they have far-reaching powers in respect of transport and policing. I note that the Government are not intent on restricting the right of London MPs to vote on issues that affect other parts of England. The Government are considering devolving powers to city regions. At some time in the future, will we say that MPs in those regions are prevented from taking a view on other parts of England? I do not think that the Government are saying that now, but where does it start and where does it end?

A number of Members have asked what constitutes an English-only issue. No one really knows. It will be up to you to decide, Mr Speaker, and good luck to you, Sir. There is clearly a flaw in the proposals, in that there does not appear to be a system allowing us to make representations on whether Wales or Scotland, for instance, should be included in the process.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Does my hon. Friend think it likely that the Government will announce that a Bill is English-only before the Speaker has even had a chance to look at it? Might there be some conflict, or confusion, in the eyes of the public?

**Mark Tami:** I do, and the Leader of the House said earlier today that he has already looked at this, and there are already Bills coming forward that he seems to have decided will be English-only Bills. I thought this was a matter for the Speaker to decide, but clearly the Leader of the House has decided what those Bills will be.

I fear that, rather than solve the problem of English votes, we will merely fan the flames of nationalism. The Government need to make their mind up: do we want to keep the United Kingdom together with a united and equal Parliament, or not? We are at that crossroads.

6.36 pm

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): First, I want to deal with one or two absurd concepts that have been put forward, and I am going to speak quite bluntly in this debate because I think an enormous amount of fog has been generated and people are swirling around inside the fog without facing up to the realities of what we are talking about.

The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) and others—including Nicola Sturgeon only yesterday—have repeatedly said, “We don’t want two classes of Members of Parliament and two classes of citizens.” That is complete and total rubbish. There is no such thing as two classes of Members of Parliament. A devolution Act was passed in 1998, in which I took a very active part, and it contained a whole series of devolved functions, some of which have not even been mentioned in this debate because everyone just talks about health and education. There is a whole list of those functions, and then there are the reserved matters.

This is an over-simplified debate. The UK Parliament with the agreement—not the connivance, but the agreement—of Scottish Members of Parliament who were in this House, who were Labour Members at the time, came to an arrangement that was part of an Act passed by the United Kingdom Parliament as part of the United Kingdom Union, and it did not create two classes. It has got within it two separate functions. Any extended powers under the deal made at the time of the Scottish referendum will extend them by agreement. I personally think some of them go way beyond what was necessary, but that is another story. It is clear, however, that when somebody goes into an MSP’s surgery in Edinburgh in relation to a matter that has been devolved to the Scottish Parliament, they expect to get answers and action in respect of those devolved functions. They certainly do not expect the same in respect of what are clearly English matters, however, and vice versa.

As I said to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, the Scottish people would be outraged if we went up to Scotland and camped outside the Parliament there and said, “We insist that we come along and legislate on matters that have been devolved to Scotland.” They would think that was an outrage and I would agree with them, but that is exactly what SNP Members are attempting to do with respect to us. We in the United Kingdom have an absolute right, as a result of an Act of the United Kingdom Parliament to which Scottish MPs at the time were not complicit but were in complete agreement, that there would be devolved functions. The SNP simply cannot have its cake and eat it.

There is another factor. We are paying for a lot of this—let us be blunt about it. [*Interruption.*] Oh yes we are. The Barnett formula, which many of us will go along with—[*Interruption.*] Listen to me carefully: the Barnett formula, which many of us—I am not saying everybody—will go along with, is why, as things currently stand, every single person in Scotland gets £1,600 more than people in England and Wales. Even Lord Barnett—who, sadly, died the other day—said the whole thing needed to be completely revised.

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I think the hon. Gentleman might be somewhat confused. Does he not understand that there is a difference between devolving the authority to legislate to a different body,

such as the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly, and trying to change this Parliament so that it could fulfil a similar function? If he was talking about devolving powers over English laws to a different body, say an English Parliament, we would have no objection to that. Instead, he is trying to turn this Chamber into two things: a United Kingdom Parliament and an English Parliament. That is a shoddy compromise that will make us second-class Members of this House.

**Sir William Cash:** May I speak quite bluntly? As it happens, I have great affection for Members of the Scottish National party. They know what they are fighting for and what they want, and it is called independence. Let us not be fooled, however. The hon. Gentleman has put his finger on it. The plain fact is that SNP Members do not like being outvoted in the United Kingdom Parliament. That is what this boils down to.

The hon. Gentleman has touched on what “devolution” actually means. He may or may not agree with this, but the greatest constitutional experts, Bradley and Ewing, define it as follows:

“Devolution is not a term of art in constitutional law. Unlike federalism,”—

on which the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire constantly harps—

“the nature of devolution within the United Kingdom depends not on a written constitution, but on the legislation authorising the devolution and on the practice that develops on the use of the new structure for decision-making.”

They go on to say that

“devolution has been defined as involving ‘the delegation of central government powers without the relinquishment of sovereignty’”.

That is what the greatest experts say. If SNP Members go off and speak to their constitutional law experts in Scotland, they will find that they do not disagree. Mr Ewing comes from Scotland anyway.

**Wayne David:** The hon. Gentleman’s quote is constitutionally and historically correct, but does he agree that a central tenet of established constitutional practice is that all Members of Parliament should be equal? These proposals will drive a coach and horses through that by creating inequality among Members.

**Sir William Cash:** I shall not cite the obvious George Orwell quote that comes to mind about all animals being equal, because that might be thought to be rather disrespectful. However, the bottom line is that the hon. Gentleman is just not right. When we create different functions, voters expect the Member of Parliament who represents them to be accountable for those functions. This is not a great mystery or great science. It is a simple question of where the lines are drawn. They were drawn by the United Kingdom Parliament and that is where the matter stands.

I want to remind Members about the Scotland Act 1998, although not many who were in Parliament at the time are still here—

**Mr Grieve:** I was here.

**Sir William Cash:** My right hon. and learned Friend was indeed here.



I tabled an amendment on the West Lothian question during the passage of the Bill in 1998, but it was pushed off the Order Paper. The bottom line is that it was disregarded by the Labour Government and, I have to say, by my own party. It simply proposed an amendment to the Standing Orders to deal with this obvious problem. The problem existed in 1998, and it is still here now. We are still talking about it and running round in circles without recognising that this is a question of fairness. I am astonished by this. As I have said, I very much enjoy the company of the Scottish nationalists in this Chamber, and the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire makes some very entertaining and theatrical speeches, but he talks about federalism one minute and about independence the next. He mixes the two up. We know that he wants independence and we give him credit for that, but he is not going to get it.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving us the definition of devolution, which of course we understand because we live and breathe it every day. We are grateful none the less for the definition. I would like to remind him that Scottish taxpayers paid more tax per head to the UK Treasury in every one of the last 34 years. I would also like to remind him that the opportunity to devolve powers in relation to English laws comes by virtue of having an English Parliament. I suggest that he is perhaps trying to have his cake and eat it at the same time. There are financial consequences for the people of Scotland of legislation that will be discussed here and that you will term as “English only”, and that is why—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. These interventions are, in equal measure, stimulating and a tad over long. I am referring not simply to the hon. Lady, but to a number of others and we must stop a trend developing, much as it is displeasing to interrupt the hon. Lady, whose flow I always enjoy.

**Sir William Cash:** As I say, I enjoy debating with SNP Members because they always come to the point as they see it, just as I come to the point on the European issue as I see it—I will continue to do so. I do not hold it against them for wanting independence, just as I want to get out of the European Union, but there is a bottom line here. I am now going to deal with some of the points the hon. Lady has made because this is very important in practical terms—I refer to the proportionality of the Scottish question to the United Kingdom as a whole. I hope that this does not create a great—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman prides himself on many things, including a most impressive memory. I am sure he will recall the Deputy Speaker advising colleagues of the merits of trying to stick to 10 minutes. Now that the hon. Gentleman has reached 11 minutes, I am sure he will assure me that he is not too far from his peroration, because quite a lot of other Members wish to contribute and we wish to hear them.

**Sir William Cash:** Yes, indeed. I would not in any way want to disregard or disrespect anything that was said from the Chair at any time—that goes without saying. Doing what has to be done in relation to these matters that have been doing on for 400 years in the space of 10 minutes is quite a big ask, but I will do my best.

I want to make a point and I hope it does not create a great furore among SNP Members. It is worth considering that the 1.6 million voters in Scotland who wanted independence, on a turnout of 84%, represent only 2.5% of the population of the United Kingdom as a whole. That is point No. 1. Point No. 2 is that of the United Kingdom’s total population of 64.1 million, England represents 53.9 million, Wales represents 3.1 million, Northern Ireland represents 1.8 million and Scotland represents 5.3 million. The bottom line is that the proportions in respect of the total Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs tax receipts are: England 85.3%, Wales 3.5%, Northern Ireland 2.6% and Scotland 9%. That raises a question of proportionality.

I am going to bring my remarks to a conclusion, because of your subtle but none the less perfectly understandable intervention, Mr Speaker. The real question that lies at the heart of this is almost impossible to resolve, because independence is sought by the SNP, in all candour. That is understandable from its Members’ point of view, if that is what they want and if that is what they feel they have been elected to deliver. Conservative Members believe in the Union and in fairness for the English voter in relation to exclusively English matters. All I can say is: never the twain will meet. That is the real problem in this House and in this debate. Ultimately, the question raised about health and education on both sides of the border can be resolved only by the Scots dealing with health and education for their electorate, and by us dealing with it for ours—and with the other matters that go with it.

There are many other things that I would like to say but in the short time now available I have only one further thing to say. I said earlier that the consequences of the referendum result would be that the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) would come down like Parnell did in relation to what happened in the context of the Irish vote in the 1880s, and that is turning out to be only too true. I produced a very short amendment that would give the Speaker, by way of a certificate, the right to determine these matters very simply, in seven lines. Undoubtedly, Mr Speaker would be faced with a barrage of points of order for the first three months every time he simply said, “This is English, and that’s Scots.” The bottom line is that, after three months, Members would give up, because Mr Speaker would not allow them to continue. That is one of the essences of coming to this United Kingdom Parliament, otherwise one might ask—even if I am not going to ask it myself—what is the point of coming here?

6.50 pm

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): As a Unionist, I find this a sad and alarming debate. I come from a part of the United Kingdom where Unionism is not just a constitutional choice. Indeed, for many people, over the past number of decades, it was a matter of life and death. Many of them laid down their lives to be Unionist. Although it is not the Government’s intention, the way in which this debate, discussion and decision has been conducted is fanning the flames of nationalism. We have heard it here today. Second-class MPs, fourth-class MPs are to be excluded. It is all hyperbole. The truth is that when something is rushed through without consultation and when shortcuts are made, it adds grist to the argument that people from other parts of the United Kingdom are being excluded.

[*Sammy Wilson*]

I know that we have a problem, but it is not an immediate one. If one looks at the evidence, one can see that in the previous Parliament 14 Bills were either English or English and Welsh only. Not one of them can the Government say was changed so dramatically by outside interference from non-English MPs. Not one of them caused huge problems or warranted this action.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): I agree that these things need to be carefully considered in detail. Like me, is the hon. Gentleman concerned and surprised that the Government have completely dismissed the findings of the McKay commission?

**Sammy Wilson:** I am, which is why I think the Government should take more time over this. Historically, there is not a problem. Indeed, the Leader of the House told us today that there is not even a problem for the immediate future. The only Bill that he believes will be an English-only Bill is the buses Bill. Does he really believe that the constitutional and parliamentary Picts and Celts from north of the border led by Robertson the Bruce will somehow draw out their claymores and dirks and shred his legislation? Does he really believe that that is the threat he faces? There is no immediate threat, so why do we need this ill-thought out, ill-conceived and rushed piece of legislation—it is not even legislation—which will enable Members to conjure up grievances.

I cannot attribute a motive for this fancy footwork, and for these shortcuts. I cannot understand why the Government have rushed this through. The hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) talked about how concerned his constituents were, when he talked to them on their doorsteps, about English-only legislation and the way in which it might be interfered with. As there is no immediate threat, why can we not have proper discussion, proper consultation and a plan for the future that finds some consensus?

**Alberto Costa:** The talk we have heard from the Opposition is that our policy might be fanning the flames of English nationalism. Actually, it does the very opposite precisely because my constituents in South Leicestershire, and the constituents of hon. Friends, have been saying that they simply want fairness. They are not seeking an English Parliament. All they want is a simple resolution to a problem that the Labour party created in 1998, and that is what we are providing for the people of England.

**Sammy Wilson:** If that is the case, and if all that the hon. Gentleman's constituents want is a simple resolution of the issue, surely the best way to achieve that without unnecessarily fanning the flames of nationalism is to do exactly what the Opposition spokesperson said and take an approach that will lead us to consensus.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): One of the reasons I think the Government are playing games with this and trying to rush it through is that the UK Independence party is driving them forward, but we have not seen that yet.

**Sammy Wilson:** I do not know what the motive is, but I do know what the outcome will be: it will be damaging to the Union. As a convinced Unionist, I do not want to see that happen.

We heard assurances from the Leader of the House today that Members would have every opportunity to debate legislation that might affect their constituents, but what is English-only legislation, and what kind of legislation will carry Barnett consequential? I remember in a previous role as Finance Minister in Northern Ireland having discussions with the Treasury about legislation that seemed to have no financial consequences for Northern Ireland. It was about the Olympics and spending in London. When I looked at it, however, I saw that it did have financial consequences for Northern Ireland, and the Treasury had to admit that there were Barnett consequential—not that I got any money out of the Treasury, but at least it had to admit it.

Let me give another example. Education policy here in England might be regarded as English-only legislation, but changes in exam structures have consequences right across the United Kingdom, and many students from Northern Ireland apply to English universities. Dramatic changes in the exam structure here will have consequences in Northern Ireland, and we often have to reflect such changes. However, the current proposals would not allow us the opportunity to have an input.

**Sir William Cash:** As the hon. Gentleman well knows, I am extremely sympathetic to all matters relating to Northern Ireland, but I just want to ask him one question. It is completely mind-boggling to imagine how anybody will make their way through 30 pages of proposed changes to Standing Orders, so is he attracted to my proposal, which would simply do it by order of the Speaker and in seven lines, which would at least bring clarity?

**Sammy Wilson:** The role of the Speaker has already been discussed. I fully appreciate the work that the Speaker does and do not wish to cast any aspersions about that, but I think that we would be putting him under huge pressure. We would be expecting him to make a decision for which he would not have to give any explanation, and about which Members would have no opportunity to make representations. That puts a huge onus on the Speaker. Such decisions would not be the end of the matter, because every time he made a decision there would be opposition to it. It would be an open sore, or a scab to be picked at. It would be another opportunity to cry foul, with claims that Members have been excluded. Not only would that be unfair on the Speaker, but it would perpetuate the grievance that many people would feel.

**Graham Stuart:** The hon. Gentleman started his speech by going on about how little impact the proposal would have, suggesting that only the buses Bill would be affected in this Session, but then he moved on to say that it fans the flames of separatism. He cannot have it both ways. It is a relatively modest measure for giving consent. He is the one fanning the flames of separatism. No matter what we do in this place, the Scottish nationalists will claim that it is an appalling assault. I am surprised that a Unionist like him would fall for their guff.

**Sammy Wilson:** If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would know what I said, but I think he has already made up his mind on this. I said that every time the Speaker had to make a decision—he might have to do so only once in the Parliament, whether it is one year or four years down the track—the same argument would be made that there had not been an opportunity to make proper representations to him and that people had been hard done by.

7 pm

*Proceedings interrupted (Standing Order No. 9(3)).*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 15(2)(b)),*

That, at this day's sitting, the general debate on English votes for English laws, in the name of the Prime Minister, may be proceeded with, though opposed, until ten o'clock.—(*Simon Kirby.*)

*Question agreed to.*

*Proceedings resumed.*

**Sammy Wilson:** We have some experience of the double veto in Northern Ireland. Indeed, we have an impasse in Northern Ireland at the moment over welfare reform because of a voting arrangement that allows one party, or one side of the house, to have a veto on legislation where cross-community support is required. The arrangement whereby we need to have a majority of the House, and a majority of English or English and Welsh MPs only, will create that situation here. I can tell the House that it will lead to impasse, to conflict, to bad government, and to decisions being even more difficult to make.

There are reserved matters that stay here in Westminster, one of which is parading. Parading is specific to Northern Ireland, but there is no arrangement in the Government's proposals for Northern Ireland MPs to have an exclusive say on what would happen on parading issues and changes within the Parades Commission. The decision would be made by all MPs. If we are to have an English-only veto, why do we not have a Northern Ireland-only veto? Then we might move on to other aspects and we would get into a political quagmire. That is why I believe that these proposals are bad and need to be reconsidered. We have been right to raise these issues with the Government, and the Government should rethink them.

7.2 pm

**Mr Dominic Grieve** (Beaconsfield) (Con): It is a pleasure to be able to participate in this debate. It is a particular pleasure to do so at a rather later stage, because that obliges one to sit on the Benches and listen to the speeches, which I have found very illuminating.

What we have heard in the debate is an extraordinary celebration of the Union of the United Kingdom. We did not just hear it in the contributions of the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) or my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas), whose maiden speech I was delighted to hear, or, for that matter, in those of Labour MPs from Welsh constituencies. The most compelling argument for the Union of the United Kingdom came from the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart). His argument against these proposals was that it is, in effect, impossible

to dissociate decisions of any kind taken in this House from knock-on consequences north of the border. He is right. Ultimately, every decision that is taken by an Assembly or Parliament in the United Kingdom has a knock-on effect elsewhere, outside the area of its jurisdiction.

During my years as Attorney General, it was apparent to me how relevant that point is. For example, crime is an entirely cross-border issue. Criminals move freely between Liverpool and Glasgow, and indeed every other part of our United Kingdom. One of the tasks I had as Attorney General was to work closely with the Lord Advocate—an association, I might add, entirely dependent on good will and almost nothing else—in order to make sure that in tackling crime, the interests of the United Kingdom, not just those of England, England and Wales or Scotland, were properly addressed.

I have to say to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire that while I understood the thrust of his arguments, they came as a little bit of a surprise, considering that for the past 18 years this House, with his enthusiastic participation, has been progressively deconstructing the United Kingdom and making such co-operation harder and harder to achieve.

The whole reason why we are having this debate is, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) so rightly said, that our constituents in England are increasingly irked by what they see as a lack of comity, which is the direct consequence of the way in which we have decided to operate devolution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) is absolutely right. A lot of these issues were trotted out in the 1998 devolution debates. I spent hours on the Benches in this House teasing out these points with Donald Dewar. We pointed out to the then Labour Government that they were not taking—to use a word that has buzzed around today, but which I have never liked—the holistic approach. They kept on talking about holistics, but no one was prepared to think through the overall consequences of the massive constitutional changes we were initiating.

In particular, this country has an unwritten constitution that is ultimately entirely dependent on sovereignty residing in this place. It is extremely simple and extremely subtle, but it breaks down extremely quickly once power starts to be diffused elsewhere.

**Peter Grant:** Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not understand that he has put his finger on one of the most fundamental differences between our nations? In my nation, the sovereignty of Parliament and the sovereignty of the monarch do not exist; the people are and always will be sovereign in Scotland.

**Mr Grieve:** No. I am afraid that distinction exists only in the mind of the hon. Gentleman. If I may say so, that is entirely illustrative of the sort of myth that illuminates the lives of Scottish nationalists, but has no relation to reality whatsoever. The Queen is the servant, through her coronation oath, of the citizens of this country, and we in this Parliament—and, indeed, Ministers—do our best to serve the Queen in the fulfilment of her oath. That serves the people just as adequately as any of the other rationalisations that the hon. Gentleman may have, so I will not hear any more of that, thank you very much.

**Sir William Cash:** I have already referred to the fact that I tried to resolve the West Lothian question by proposing amendments to Standing Orders. In 1998, I also proposed that the whole matter should be referred to a referendum in the whole of the United Kingdom, because we were all affected by it. Half the Conservative Members walked past the Whips to support me on that, but the Government would not of course accept it.

**Mr Grieve:** My hon. Friend makes a very important point. I will come back to it, but I will now move on because I do not want to take up too much time.

To move from the general point to the particular one, I accept that what we are debating strikes me as imperfect, but I am afraid I happen to think that a lot of things we have done recently in respect of devolution are imperfect as well. I emphasise that I differ from my party on the vow, not because I think it is wrong to give more devolution to Scotland—there is a powerful argument for saying that Scotland should have more devolution than we are giving it—but because the process we have embarked on appears to me to be essentially incoherent. It is like a car driving along a road and lurching one way and then the other in a series of spins. I do not think that that is a productive way to operate in the long term, but we are where we are.

The proposed Standing Orders are essentially very modest—they really are. I am very pleased that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House listened about extending the period of debate and that the Procedure Committee will have an opportunity to look at them, but they are modest. They constitute about as small a shield to English susceptibilities as it is possible to devise. In my view, they will not in any significant way diminish the role of MPs as a collective group in this House.

**Wayne David:** What was the right hon. and learned Gentleman's considered view of Sir William McKay's proposals?

**Mr Grieve:** The McKay proposals were good, but they preceded the vow. Once we got to the point of further devolution, they started to look rather inadequate. That is precisely the problem.

Although these measures are not perfect, they meet my constituents' needs. I have one major anxiety, which has been highlighted before, and it is over the process of certification by the Speaker. If we are moving down this road, it would be better to proceed by way of primary legislation, followed by a change to Standing Orders. There is a question over whether these measures are justiciable. I am perfectly familiar with article 9 of the Bill of Rights, but that does not mean that somebody will not have a go at doing it. In a Parliament where we are increasingly passing power out, to emphasise constantly our sovereignty and expect nobody to scrutinise the different arrangements that we are bringing about seems, in the long term, unrealistic.

That brings me to my final point. My view is that these measures can only be temporary. I am aware that there are other Members across the House who take the view that if we are to preserve the Union of the United Kingdom, we will have to take a much longer, harder and, I hope, more consensual—although that is often difficult to achieve—look at the way in which we conduct our affairs. As I put my Unionism absolutely at the

forefront of my political life—I believe that is what my constituents want, too—I am prepared to consider major constitutional change, including moves towards a written constitution. In my judgment, that is probably the only way to provide a framework in which the highly complex and different needs of different parts of the United Kingdom can be addressed. That is not a popular theme because it touches on Parliament's sovereignty, it certainly touches on article 9 of the Bill of Rights, and I do not for the life of me see how it could ever be done without making the constitution capable, ultimately, of being interpreted by a court. That raises equal problems, but I do not think that they are ones that, in the long term, can be ducked.

I believe that people in the United Kingdom—the evidence of this is overwhelming from the Scottish referendum last year—wish to operate and live together. My right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) was so right when he said that it is none of our business to put our personal needs, Parliament's needs, the Scottish Parliament's needs, the Welsh Assembly's needs or, for that matter, the Northern Ireland Assembly's needs before the needs of our citizens. We are here to respond to their concerns.

One thing that underpins my Unionism—this has become harder and harder to stick to over the years, but I have done so—is the belief that the interests of people in Wick, Dundee, Glasgow, Edinburgh and the hometown where my family originated, Hawick, must be every bit as relevant to me as those of my own constituents in Beaconsfield, and must continue to be so even if, as I pointed out earlier, I can no longer intervene on their behalf in the way that I did in the past. Once the Scottish National party starts to consider that, it will appreciate why some of its arguments against the proposals this evening show it in a rather poor light. It is the pot calling the kettle black in respect of comity within the United Kingdom.

The only solution is for those of us who have some good will in this matter—that includes SNP Members if they wish to exercise that good will—to participate together to create a new structure that will be lasting and enduring for the whole country.

7.14 pm

**Anne McLaughlin** (Glasgow North East) (SNP): I was not supposed to be here, Mr Speaker. Every account of polling predictions said that Glasgow North East was the least winnable seat for the SNP, yet here I am standing before you, not just as the MP for Glasgow North East, but as the one who broke the BBC's swingometer. I have the curious distinction of being able to present myself to the House as the biggest swinger in UK political history. [*Laughter.*] Lest hon. Members think I say this to be boastful, let me be clear: that 39.3% swing happened only because I had the most incredible campaign team behind me, some of whom are in the Gallery today—a team that grew from the original Provan57 team, so called after we secured 57%, the second highest yes vote in Scotland, in the independence referendum last September.

There are many pretty pockets in Glasgow North East, such as Hogganfield loch, the tenements of Dennistoun and many fine parks basking in sunshine one day of the year, but I would not expect to see much

of my constituency in a Visit Scotland brochure. Sadly, residents of my constituency are never very far from a derelict building or waste ground, the best and worst example of both beauty and dereliction being the Winter Gardens in Springburn park. It seems to me that the Scottish Parliament's Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 was written with my constituency in mind, and I look forward to working with those communities as they empower themselves and transform the constituency.

What we do have in abundance in my constituency is resilient people. From projects that have risen from the despair, such as LoveMilton to Ruchazie Poverty Action Group, St Roch's football club, which I should mention not only gives free community space to all community groups in its area, but gave me a free season ticket—*[Interruption]*—that was my declaration—to the Everlasting Arms food bank based in the street in which I live in Dennistoun, an African church feeding local people.

Although we have little by way of splendid mountains, we have a gargantuan industrial heritage to be proud of. Springburn was once the greatest centre of railway manufacturing in the whole of Europe. We have a political history that makes Glasgow North East irresistible to someone like myself. William Wallace was captured in Robroyston, from where he was brought to Westminster Hall, tried, found guilty of treason and hanged, drawn and quartered. It was not possible to quarter James Wilson, John Baird and Andrew Hardie, known collectively as the 1820 martyrs, who rest in Sighthill cemetery. A furious crowd made that impossible after they were hanged for leading the uprising for social justice and workers' rights in that year.

Today, I pay tribute to the memories of the 1820 martyrs, who ought to be afforded the same courtesy and remembrance as the Tolpuddle martyrs rightly are, but they are not, possibly because their mantra, "Scotland free or a desert" gives away the fact that they also campaigned for Scotland's independence. My hon. Friends are constantly inviting other Members to visit their constituencies. I invite anyone who believes in what the 1820 martyrs fought for and is ashamed of the fate that befell them to visit their final resting place in Sighthill, and I will be delighted to accompany any visitor.

Despite having lived in Glasgow all my adult life, I grew up in Greenock and Port Glasgow—shipbuilding towns—and I vividly remember second year at Port Glasgow high school. Every Monday morning more and more of my friends would return from their weekend to report that their parents had lost their jobs. My adolescence was spent with Margaret Thatcher in charge. It was bad enough being a teenager without having to witness my town and its world-class industries fall apart at the seams. I will never forget the feeling of powerlessness in my area, the fear that my friends felt and the despair of their parents. And I remember hearing rhetoric from politicians and the media about people not wanting to work, about unemployment being a lifestyle choice, something disgracefully repeated in this House last week by the Chancellor in his attempts to justify his attacks on working people who have nothing.

I knew because I was there that it was not a lifestyle choice, that in fact worklessness was sapping the life from people. I realised then that it was in somebody's interests for people with little to believe that those with less were a threat to them. I opened my eyes and they have been wide open ever since. At one point in school,

I was practically the only person in class whose parents were working, because mine worked in a sadly growing industry—they were psychiatric nurses.

Let us not pretend that this Government's recent decisions will not lead to an increase in people suffering poor mental health; they will. I suspect that my predecessor, Willie Bain, held much the same opinion as I do on that. He was, after all, a Labour Member who campaigned over his six years in this House on youth unemployment and spoke up in support of people who found themselves long-term unemployed. He was a strong advocate of the living wage. We no doubt shared many political aims but disagreed on how to get there. I wish him well.

I come from good political stock. My late father, Bobby McLaughlin, was an independence-supporting republican who curiously served for 12 years in the British armed forces. It turned out that that was more canny than curious when it was revealed that he only joined voluntarily because otherwise he would have had to do national service and receive a third less in his wage packet.

My late maternal grandparents, Stuart and Sarah Purdie, were founding members of Greenock SNP. He was a strong trade unionist and led many a walkout. I know that he would want me to send a message of support—as I do today—to the 70 striking homelessness caseworkers in Glasgow City Council who are now in their 16th week.

My paternal grandfather, John McLaughlin, was a labourer who was blacklisted for being a member of the Communist party. Unable to find work, he taught himself to read and write, and he spent his days fighting and writing for the rights of people who were unable to fight for themselves.

My late brother Stephen dabbled in many left-wing and even anarchist groups while living in London. He often encouraged me to stand for Westminster, probably so that he could see more of me. My mother—who thankfully is still with us—simply taught me that I was as good as anybody else. No better, no worse, but as good as—there is a lesson there for Scotland.

I think that I must have been destined to be a politician because I certainly did not set out to be one. I wanted to be an actress, and I spent three years at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. I was aiming not for the Green Benches of Westminster but for those in the Rovers Return on "Coronation Street". Sometimes I still wonder which has the better actors.

I often think of those 1820 martyrs, and I wonder what they would see today if they could rise from their resting place in Sighthill. They would see that 23.2% of the people in Glasgow North East exist on welfare benefits—more than twice the UK average—and that we have the 10th highest rate of unemployment in the whole United Kingdom. They would see child poverty lying at a disgraceful 38%, and in some areas even higher—again, more than double the UK average. Do my constituents deserve that? They would see that most of the power to tackle that poverty still lies here in Westminster, and last week they would have seen a Tory Chancellor twisting the knife deeper still into people who are already on their knees. They would have seen the MP who represents those people sitting in this Chamber wondering what on earth she was doing here as the policies that her country had roundly rejected were steamrollered through.

[Anne McLaughlin]

I am an adaptable person. I can fight my instinct to clap if I have to, sitting here in the SNP quarter of the Chamber. I can adjust to the rather strange animal noises, and I am sure that one day I will get used to my London perm—my hair is straight when I leave the house, but as soon as I step out it becomes a 1980s perm. I can even just about cope with the occasional yah-boo, tit-for-tat style politics in this House, but I will never adjust to hearing Members cheer on a Chancellor as he announces that he is taking away the lifelines of many of my constituents. Sink or swim. That was the message from last week's Budget. I thought about my constituents watching from home and about family members and friends who I care deeply about. I imagined their pain, and I could not hold back the tears knowing that I was almost powerless to help them. I was not the only one on these Benches in tears.

I want people at home to know that, when they feel pain, we on the SNP Benches are feeling that pain with them. I may no longer be experiencing what they are experiencing, but I have been there and I remember it. When they are in distress, we are distressed with them. I want people to know that we are on their side and will always fight for them tooth and nail in this place.

When I talk of my constituents, I mean every single one of them, wherever they came from, however they got here. In Glasgow North East, we have a significant immigrant population, from Irish to Pakistani, from Indian and Sri Lankan to African. I am delighted to represent such an ethnically diverse area. My partner, Graham Campbell, is an English-Scottish-Jamaican socialist who led Africans for an Independent Scotland during the referendum. Scotland's referendum engaged everyone.

Last week, I sat through the Immigration Minister's summing up in a debate in Westminster Hall and, in the 10 minutes allocated, not a single second was used to say anything positive about immigrants. In my time in this place, I shall share many stories that will not just pay lip service to immigrants but demonstrate exactly why it is so important for us to welcome people from other countries and cultures.

Today, we are speaking about EVEL. I want to share some of my thoughts, which, while not exactly evil, are not entirely positive either. I have heard much from Government Members who have asked why, as we have our Scottish Parliament, England should not have the same. I agree, but do those Members understand what we in Scotland had to do to get our Parliament? We had to campaign for years. We had to persuade this place; we had to persuade the other place, and in both places there was intense scrutiny of the legislation, amendments and debates. Most importantly, we had to persuade those who we consider to be sovereign and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) has just said, that means the people of Scotland. How can it be in order for what some Members seem to think is the equivalent in England to come about merely as a change to the Standing Orders of this House? The entire Parliament, not to mention the people of England, should have the right to consider and amend any legislation relating to it.

I will be constructive in this place, but I will not do anything goes against the interests of my constituents or the interests of Scotland. That said, my political

interests are far reaching. I am delighted to be my party's spokesperson on civil liberties—I often say civil disobedience, but I do not really mean it. I will work to support people whose lives have been affected by addictions and mental health problems. I will fight racism and any attack on equality. I will fight for the most vulnerable people in this world, including those incarcerated at Dungavel and Yarl's Wood. I will support calls for reparations for those countries that suffered most from our involvement in the slave trade—namely, the Caribbean countries.

Locally, I will offer practical support in two ways. My office will employ a funding officer to support those voluntary groups providing lifelines for local people to access funding and a welfare rights specialist to defend people with no money from welfare cuts and shocking benefits sanctions. I pledge to devote my time in this place to making a real and practical difference to real people.

7.27 pm

**Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin), who will clearly be a strong voice for her constituents. Like her, in my maiden speech I emphasised the character and resilience of my constituents. We have that in common. The contributions that our constituents make to civil society are extremely important, and I am glad that she raised those matters in her maiden speech as that is an experience that many of us across the House share.

Once again, I rise to speak on English votes for English laws, which I raised in my maiden speech. It was with some surprise that I listened to the shadow Leader of the House talk about the need for a constitutional convention, because, of course, when the devolution Bills were debated, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) has so ably pointed out, these matters were raised time and again. It is clear that in 13 years or more in government, the Opposition had more than ample time to set up that constitutional convention and failed to do so. It seems to me that they are making those calls too late. I am afraid that my constituents, like those of many other Government Members who have spoken, have waited long enough. They have had to sit back and watch the inherent unfairness in the system. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) has so ably said, we need to concentrate on making sure that just as there should not be two classes of MP, there should not be two classes of citizen.

The difficulty is that my constituents very much feel that they are second-class citizens. As so many other Members have said of them, they do not want an English Assembly. It is extraordinary that the SNP has come here and suggested to me, as my constituents' representative, that my constituents should not be allowed to choose how they wish their devolution to be expressed. The SNP might want them to have an English Parliament, but it is not appropriate for them to be dictated to about a form of democracy or how they want it to be exercised.

My constituents were asked about this at the election. We stood on a manifesto that included a commitment to English voters, and my constituents made it very clear that they did not want a separate English Assembly.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): The hon. Lady was a Member of the Welsh Assembly, so she knows that there is a dynamic relationship between Members of Parliament and Assembly Members and that devolution is about the conversation between this House and a sovereign body in the devolved place. To say that an MP can represent themselves and two minds is nonsense, is it not?

**Antoinette Sandbach:** I simply do not understand the hon. Lady's argument. I used to represent an area in Wales and would like to take this opportunity to put the record straight. The hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas) suggested that I had lost numerous first-past-the-post elections to the Assembly, but in fact I lost only one—by 500 votes—and was then elected in 2011, in the second election after that. I know that the hon. Gentleman himself lost the election in North Shropshire before he was elected in Wrexham.

On the point made by the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), my constituents in Wales had a number of elected representatives to whom they could go, namely Assembly Members and MPs, and they would often go to MPs to raise matters that were devolved to the Assembly. My constituents in England, however, have made it clear that they want a single person to represent them, namely their MP. The electorate have voted on it and have made their democratic will clear through the Members of Parliament they have elected to this House.

There is an inherent injustice in MPs from Wales, who cannot vote on education, health, certain transport matters, housing and the Welsh language in the constituencies that they represent, being able to have an influence over and a vote on those matters here. That will not change under the proposals. When this House deals with legislation that has a devolved element, the Welsh Assembly will be able to give consent to this place under a legislative consent motion. When the majority of 150 Labour MPs trooped through the Lobbies, the hon. Lady's party knew very well that it was setting up a system that the hon. Member for Wrexham described in a Westminster Hall debate as unequal and unfair.

This small step is a modest one, as has been said by many other Members, and it will be reviewed in 12 months' time. It is right, after 20 years of inaction following the devolution Acts and numerous amendments, that at this time, in this House, there is an opportunity for those of us who represent English seats to fight to ensure that the small matter of consent, which applies in all other devolved Administrations, applies here.

**Peter Grant:** Does the hon. Lady agree, on behalf of the people she used to represent in Wales, that it would be utterly unacceptable for the people of Wales to vote to remain in the European Union and then be dragged out simply because a majority in the bigger neighbour voted that way?

**Antoinette Sandbach:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, foreign affairs is not a devolved issue. That is a United Kingdom decision. It will be decided on, I am glad to say, by all the citizens of the United Kingdom. It is the Conservative party that is making sure that every single citizen in the United Kingdom will get a vote on that issue.

On the Barnett consequentials, I am very grateful to the Leader of the House for listening to the debate under Standing Order No. 24. It is clear that consideration has been given to the potential for Barnett consequentials. That is reflected in the changes to the proposed Standing Orders. Scottish citizens voted for a devolution settlement that reflected their wishes: they wanted a Scottish Parliament. English citizens have voted for a different settlement and do not want to have a separate English Parliament. They want matters to be dealt with in this House in a way that is fair and gives them some equality.

**Callum McCaig** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): The aspirations of the various peoples of these islands are being articulated in this debate. We are to believe that the English people want a way for their views to be represented. According to Conservative Members, that has been done through the recent election. Can we not accept that the same thing happened in Scotland? There is an overwhelming desire for enhanced devolution, and we in Scotland are not getting that. We are getting locked out in key areas of this place.

**Antoinette Sandbach:** The hon. Gentleman ought to reflect that his constituents have seen at least two, if not three, Scotland Acts pass through this Parliament that have devolved decision making down to the level of the Scottish Parliament. That has not happened for those in England, who wish to see a greater balance and fairness in the system. This measure is a small step towards achieving that. They do not want an English Parliament.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) talked about the London Assembly. The difference is that the London Assembly does not have legislative powers. The difference is the decision making on legislation. The right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) is well aware that he cannot vote in this place on matters relating to transport, housing, the Welsh language, education or health in Wales unless the Welsh Assembly gives its consent.

**Martin John Docherty:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Antoinette Sandbach:** I am sorry. I wish to make some progress.

I ask for parity of treatment between my constituents in my English constituency and the people I represented in Wales. I do not accept it when Labour Members stand up in this House and make an argument about second-class MPs. The reality is that without this change we have second-class citizens in England who do not have the protection given to those in Wales and Scotland. It is time for that fundamental injustice to be put right. I very much support the moves made by the Leader of the House.

7.39 pm

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin). She might not know this, but like her I wanted to be in "Coronation Street". Of the three other people on my drama course at university, one ended up presenting "Blue Peter", one has won an Oscar and one wrote "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom"; and I ended up here. She can decide who was the most successful. She made a strong maiden speech, however, and I was pleased with her tribute to my colleague, Willie Bain, who served her constituency well.

[Mr David Hanson]

I am also pleased to follow the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach). I have lost her seat and she has lost mine, so I think we are equal. We border each other, however, and it is crucial to this debate how that border is affected and how I, as a Welsh Member, serve my constituents.

I have been very lucky; I have been here for 23 years, and every year I have walked through that door into this Chamber, I have done so as an equal Member of the House—equal to everybody elected to this House on a universal franchise after the people have put a cross by my name and my party's name and thereby elected an MP who can speak on any issue before the House. I did that—dare I say it?—when the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) was Secretary of State for Wales and made decisions in this House affecting my constituents without a majority in the area I represented. I was here when the noble Lord Hunt served as Secretary of State for Wales and made decisions in my area without his party having a majority in that area.

I have also served as a Northern Ireland Minister—this supports the arguments made by the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson)—as a Welsh Member in a UK House of Commons dealing with devolved issues in Northern Ireland when the Assembly was suspended. I did so as an equal Member because I happened to believe in the United Kingdom. When Members walk through that door into the Chamber, they do so as equal Members.

I object to the proposal because it strikes at the heart of this Parliament and a United Kingdom in this Parliament. It also strikes at the heart of what my constituents send me here to do. I think that I should decide what I say in the Chamber on behalf of the people who have elected me and that I should be accountable for that to those people, yet, under these proposals, I will be able to speak but not vote in Committee on crucial issues that affect my constituents. Why does that matter? It matters because the Government proposals will give a veto to English MPs on issues before the House. It will veto my being able to table amendments that I can vote on in this House, and it will veto my serving as a Minister dealing with UK matters on devolved issues. As was said earlier, that would have meant the likes of John Reid not being able to serve as Secretary of State for Health, having been chosen by a UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, and elected to the United Kingdom Parliament to serve under a Prime Minister representing a seat in Scotland. He would have been unable to vote in a Committee of the whole House on matters that his Government had bought before the House. That creates a second-class tier of MP.

This matters in my constituency for reasons that the hon. Member for Eddisbury has mentioned. We are close to the border with England. By dint of previous Governments' decisions, things that happen in England matter to my constituents. My constituency is served by Glan Clwyd hospital in north Wales and the Countess of Chester hospital in Chester, England. The latter currently services 66,514 out-patient attendances from constituents who have a Welsh postcode. It also services 14,185 finished admission episodes and 14,404 accident and emergency attendances by Welsh citizens, which are paid for by Welsh Assembly Government funding to

that hospital. Under the Government's proposals, if legislative proposals were made about that hospital, I could not table an amendment that I could vote on here. If I cannot do that, who can?

**Antoinette Sandbach:** I have absolutely no doubt why attendances have gone up at the Countess of Chester. The Labour-controlled Welsh Assembly proposed to close the maternity unit at Glan Clwyd, which will have had very severe knock-on effects for Countess of Chester hospital. Indeed, the hospital said that it would not be able to cope with the consequences of that decision. The problem was that my constituents had no way of influencing the decision in the Welsh Assembly or the right hon. Gentleman's policies in that regard.

**Mr Hanson:** The hon. Lady might like to take up that issue with her right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones), who I think shares my view. Let me quote from the annual report of the Countess of Chester hospital:

“We are the main Trust serving Western Cheshire and provide services to approximately 30% of the population covered by the Betsi Cadwaladr University Local Health Board in Wales. Welsh patients represent approximately one fifth of the workload of the Trust.”

**Dr Thérèse Coffey:** The right hon. Gentleman would be able to table amendments in Committee. I accept that he would not be able to move them, but he would be able to table amendments on Report, as well.

**Mr Hanson:** The Minister makes the point: I cannot vote on tabled amendments that I have moved in Committee, which I can do now. I can walk through that Door to do so now, and I have done for 23 years, being accountable only to my constituents and my colleagues in the Whips Office. I have been accountable to my constituents and my party. I can do this now, but the Deputy Leader of the House is taking away from me a right, which my constituents voted for on 7 May, to speak on any matter in this House. It is important that the Deputy Leader of the House understands that argument, although I am grateful to her for meeting a delegation of North Wales Members and me yesterday.

What matters in Cheshire matters to me—not only in respect of hospital services, but of employment, when my constituents work there, and transport. Is HS2 an England-only matter, for example? The train service will go to Crewe, which will link to north Wales, so it matters to my constituents. The key point is how these matters are to be decided. Who decides what is an “English-only” matter? The draft Standing Orders say:

“The Speaker shall, before second reading”.

What opportunity do I have to put it to the Speaker that there are real issues in my constituency that make it right for me to table amendments and vote on them? What representations can I make on those issues?

**Mr David Jones:** The right hon. Gentleman will know that I share many of the concerns he is expressing. He asks what influence he can have over the process. It seems to me that a dual test is set out on the draft Standing Order. One test is that a matter should relate “exclusively to England”. To follow his example of the hospital scenario, that clearly does not relate exclusively to England, because it serves a large number of Welsh



patients. Does he not agree that what we really need is to build a mechanism into the statutory instrument to clarify that point?

**Mr Hanson:** I do agree. At the moment, the draft Standing Order states:

“A clause or schedule which relates exclusively to England is within devolved legislative competence if...it would be within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament”

or of

“the National Assembly for Wales”.

Mr Speaker could be faced with the dilemma of saying, “This is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales” because it involves health, when both the right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) and I have a clear interest in it. It is important to have some understanding of how we might be able to influence Mr Speaker by putting representations to him before those decisions are made.

What really annoys me, Mr Deputy Speaker—if I may say so between us, in confidence, in the Chamber today—is the fact that the noble Lord Roberts of Conwy, who has fought five elections in north Wales and not won a single one, and the noble Lord Thomas of Gresford, who has also fought five elections and not won a single one in north Wales, will be able to table amendments in the other place and speak on matters that I, the elected Member, will be unable to speak on.

**Martin John Docherty:** The right hon. Gentleman has taken the words right out of my mouth. The former Member of Parliament for Dumbarton and, subsequently, for West Dunbartonshire, which it became, is now Lord McFall. He sits in the other House, which is unaccountable because its members are not elected. Unlike the right hon. Gentleman, however, he will be able to walk through the Lobby in the other House and vote on these issues.

As the right hon. Gentleman has also pointed out, and as I made clear in the House last week, the position of what is currently the independent Chair of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will become untenable.

**Mr Hanson:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. On this issue, at least, we share a perspective.

As I have said, I have fought my constituency seven times, and I have won my constituency six times. Lord Thomas of Gresford has lost five elections, as has Lord Roberts of Conwy, yet they will be able to table amendments, speak, vote and contribute, but I shall be barred by this Chamber from doing so. In no circumstances can that be deemed fair and proper. When my constituents put a cross by my name—or, indeed, by the name of any other candidate—they are propelling one of us into this Chamber to argue their case. It is entirely out of order for unelected Lords to have a power that we in the House of Commons do not have.

I oppose these proposals, but I will, if I may, extend the hand of friendship to the right hon. Member for Clwyd West in saying that, as the Deputy Leader of the House knows, measures could be taken to give us an opportunity, at least, to provide more traction in regard to these issues. I hope that she will bring back amendments to that effect. I still believe that we should have one House of Commons in which all of us can speak on

every matter, but ultimately I must be a pragmatist as well, and I think that if there are pragmatic solutions, we should consider them as well as opposing the principle.

7.52 pm

**Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP):** I echo the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) in saying that it is a pleasure to follow the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin). She spoke in very moving terms, and she left us in no doubt about her pride in her pedigree, the purpose that she brings here on behalf of her constituents, her pursuit of justice, and her passion for rights and democracy. Moreover, she brought humour to her case as well as honour to her cause.

The 28 pages of Standing Orders that are before us constitute a confusing answer to a confused question, which arises from the muddled constitutional dispensation that is the United Kingdom. In many ways, this resembles the EU referendum debate. What we are witnessing is the Chamber trying to grapple with the English question. In this instance, it is English votes for English laws; in other contexts, it relates to the European Union. After years of struggle and failure on the Irish question, and then the Scottish question, we are now dealing with the English question. As the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) often says, people in England now seem to believe that they are the last colony of the empire.

**Mrs Moon:** I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. The issue here is not the English question, but the Conservative question. It has nothing at all to do with England, and everything to do with the Conservative party and its desire to steal power.

**Mark Durkan:** I fully accept that this is the Conservative party’s way of trying to grapple with what it perceives to be the English question.

A number of points have been made about these proposals, which have been scrambled together by the Leader of the House. Last year, the Government and other parties in the House told us how solemn and important the vow was, but the Bill does not seem to reflect the vow. As far as I can see, it is riddled with contradictions and anomalies. I do not have an inside track, but I join those who wonder “How now, brown vow?” How is it that when those questions are still up in the air and we do not have answers, we have this fast pursuit—this scramble—on English votes for English laws?

A former Justice Secretary and Lord Chancellor has, now that he is Leader of the House, taken to political joyriding simply because he could take a vehicle for his own use and indulge himself and think he was going to show off to his peers. He thought he could take a key constitutional vehicle and purloin it for his own purpose, and with speed and noise he revved people up to say, “Ah, here it is: English votes for English laws. Here’s the big deal.” The people who were applauding and cheering that last week are now telling us tonight, “These are only minor and incidental. Why are you worrying and fretting; little will come from this?”

These are of course the same people who next year—we are told this will all be reviewed next year—will tell us this mishmash has turned out to be somewhere between

[Mark Durkan]

a fig leaf and a figment in terms of resolving the English question and satisfying those with concerns about that. They will end up saying, “It hasn’t made enough of a difference on enough votes or Bills.” Alternatively, they will make it their business to try to show it can make a huge difference. That is why I am not sure that many Members on the Government Benches have fully read the Standing Orders.

I am not opposed to some aspects of what is in these Standing Orders. I actually think there are some interesting new devices in terms of scrutiny of legislation and some of the possible additional stages—giving Members the power to hold Bills in check while they are uncertain about parts of them, and forcing reconsideration. I like the idea of those reconsideration stages, but I do not know why they should apply only to England-only legislation. That is the sort of qualitative consideration we should be building in for proper consideration in this House. I am less interested in English votes for English laws and more interested in better votes on better laws. That means improving procedures in this House. That is what we should be looking at: wholesale procedural improvement in this House.

Then there are the arguments that say, “There aren’t really such things as Barnett consequentials; there are no consequences.” The fact is that there are, however. The hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) referred earlier to his time as Minister of Finance in Northern Ireland. I know from my time that we had arguments about Barnett consequentials, some of them arising directly from legislative and other measures that passed in this House. That then did change the shape of spending here, and that in turn changed the shape of the Barnett package—although sometimes not enough, because we must not pretend it is entirely the Treasury that decides on its own whims what goes into the Barnett formula and what does and does not count. Let us not pretend that there are no consequences.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Last week I and some other Members mentioned these Barnett consequentials and expressed our concern about that. The Government deserve some credit for the fact that they have listened to the points we made and the Leader of the House has amended his Standing Orders to ensure, as I understand it, that proposals relating to the Barnett consequentials have been withdrawn. I see the Leader of the House has just come back into the Chamber and I would like to publicly pay tribute to him for having handled this issue in a model way and listened to representations.

**Mark Durkan:** I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman that the Leader of the House has handled this in a model way. This and the whole issue of the foxhunting vote are examples of premature miscalculations that have then been followed by embarrassing withdrawals.

Let us look at the detail. The Leader of the House tried to tell us earlier that there is no such thing as Barnett consequentials. He tried to say there is no question of Barnett consequentials arising for any piece of legislation in this House and that that issue only arises at the estimates stage of proceedings. That is errant nonsense, because we constantly hear from Ministers

that amendments cannot be accepted because they have spending consequences and an impact on the public purse.

Let us also recognise that the proposals will have an impact not only on Members here but on the people we represent. The hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) said earlier that, under the new procedures, all of us would vote on these measures at different stages, but we will not be voting on them at the stage that counts—the actual decision time. We are told that we should be content, but I think we are somehow going to find ourselves in Dermot O’Leary or Ant and Dec land, where we will be told, “You may be charged, but your vote will not count.”

That is exactly the position that we and our constituents will be in if, for example, there is a repeat of anything similar to the tuition fees legislation. I sat on the Bill Committee for that Education Bill and I was able to eliminate myself from large chunks of the Committee’s proceedings, which dealt with England-only matters to do with education authorities and so on. However, there were aspects of the Bill relating to qualifications that had direct implications for Northern Ireland, and the decisions on tuition fees had serious implications for students from Northern Ireland coming to colleges here. The Bill also had direct policy and spending implications for the devolved Executive. Decisions made here will condition the choices for others.

So, no matter how strong we believe the devolution package to be in our regions, let us not pretend that this situation does not involve unequal legislative airspace. Some of the legislation passed in this House ends up being formative and normative for the standards expected of the devolved Administrations. At times, those Administrations have to conform with decisions that they would not readily have taken themselves. Sometimes, that is prefigured into the Barnett formula and the spending assumptions, which creates its own difficulties.

There is no sign that the Leader of the House has listened to any of the questions that have been raised. We asked what would happen if there were a bit of a twilight zone surrounding what was or was not devolved? On paper, for example, welfare is a devolved legislative power for the Stormont Assembly, but it is clear that it is a karaoke legislative power. The Treasury basically tells the Assembly, “Unless you pass the legislation in the way we want, we will tax your block grant. We will take money back off the Barnett formula.” This happens even though the Treasury should have other ways of policing that situation. None of those questions has been answered about what would happen in certain situations or impasses. Serious questions have also been raised about the odd language that is being used in the Scotland Bill. There is an element of dual control over some aspects of welfare in Scotland, so it is not clear when measures will be seen as England-only provisions.

What are we meant to do as we move from one Grand Committee to another? The suggestion from McKay was that there could be a single Grand Committee, but now, a bit like King Louie in “The Jungle Book”, it is a case not of “Have a Grand Committee!” but of “Have two Grand Committees! Have three Grand Committees!” We now have proposals that could give us three different Grand Committees. We are also told that there will be stages of voting, and that some of us will be excluded from some of them. It is not quite clear what will happen. Perhaps we will not have to leave the

room, but we will be expected to avert our eyes while votes are taken and decisions made. This does not make any sense whatever.

Furthermore, this will involve elected Members being told that there is something sinister, subversive and wrong about their having a view and an input on some issues in this Parliament while the unelected Members of the House of Lords, who are free to come from anywhere in the United Kingdom—or even outside it, if they are tax exiles who are registered elsewhere for tax purposes—will have the power to determine all the legislation. The Government are absolutely shameless about that. We heard tonight about English self-determination. The Conservatives are putting ermine into English self-determination.

8.3 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate. I wish I could say in all honesty that I had been looking forward to listening to all the views that have been put forward today. I hope that the House will be persuaded by the concerns that have been expressed by those on the Opposition Benches and that Members will not be reassured by the comments from across the Chamber. I have great respect for everyone in the House, and I do not seek controversy or try to fall out with people, but this is a debate that seeks to divide us, as has been illustrated by the comments that have been made so far.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) on her contribution to the debate. It is always nice to hear the maiden speeches, as a Member travels through the highways and byways of their constituency and we learn a wee bit about it. That is always a pleasure that I have, and I know other Members have as well, and I wish the hon. Lady well in this House.

I hope I will leave this House in no doubt about the importance of ensuring that the changes introducing English votes for English laws are not passed by this great establishment—an establishment that represents each of the four regions of the United Kingdom and I hope will continue to do so. I fear, however, that if EVEL were to be passed by the Commons, this institution that binds us all together and enhances the integrity of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will cease to represent each and every one of us, as we currently are—together. It would lead to a number of problems, with an extremely fractious House being just one of them. We have seen examples of that tonight—everybody seems to have an opinion and does not care what anybody else in the House thinks, and that disappoints me. This is going too far, too fast.

As I am sure I have mentioned on a number of occasions, and as is well known, I am unashamedly a Unionist. I passionately believe in this great institution in which we stand and in which I have the pleasure and privilege to be the Member for Strangford. I fervently believe in the integrity of the UK and I ardently believe that we are better together. At no other time have I feared so much for the future of the Union as I did last year and as I do in this debate today. Last year, the Union seemed to be at breaking point, but thankfully the Scottish people voted in the September 2014 referendum to stay within the Union. I know that my colleagues sitting to my left have a different opinion about that,

but at that time the opinion was very clear and the Scottish people, along with others in Northern Ireland, Wales and England, rejoiced at that decision, because it is true that we are better together. They put their trust in Westminster, but I have no doubt that by passing EVEL Westminster would be portrayed as ensuring second-class citizenship for the rest of us who make up this great country—and where is the trust in that?

As my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) said, this EVEL debate stokes the fires of division and everyone seems to be retreating into their own trenches and into their own opinions.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** The hon. Gentleman knows that I share many of his views. I admire his Unionism and I am as strong a Unionist as he is. Would he give credit to some Conservative Members who have at least ensured that this is not a total exclusion, but a sort of double veto? We have made some changes. May I assure him that whatever the SNP does to provoke English Members, for instance on hunting and on other issues, I for one will put the Union first? Many of us do not want this compromise to be changed; we do not want this to be a more extreme measure and we are listening to what he is saying.

**Jim Shannon:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. We agree on many things, but unfortunately I suspect that we will not agree on this. That will not stop us being friends outside this Chamber and fighting the battles on many other issues on which we very much agree.

Many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards), have talked about the Barnett consequential, how that issue affects us, how decisions on that will be made and how those decisions would then have a financial impact on us. My hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim also referred to the impact on the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker of having to make difficult decisions that could lead to further complications. It would almost be a domino effect, with one thing hitting another, and it going on and on. Those are real concerns. We are all here to contribute towards this and to make our comments, and I hope that the Government will look at what they are putting forward, and stall or delay.

EVEL concerns me because it fractures relations in the House, but I also struggle to see the logic behind it. It seems simple enough in principle, but in reality it is quite the opposite. The implementation lacks clarity and so far we have not heard much that is clear from the Government. I say that with respect to them, because I cannot see where the logic is in this. It is interesting to remember what the Prime Minister has said in the past, which is that England must never be “overruled” again. If he wants EVEL to pass, surely the same principles must be extended to each constituent part of the UK. If Westminster is legislating on a reserved matter for just one part of the UK—be it Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland—why should the MPs from those corners of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland not have exactly the same veto rights that my English colleagues will have under English votes for English laws? I know that the Conservatives, who form the biggest party here, might try to argue that the English should have more say, but creating a two or a three-tier Parliament will not improve our constitution, and that

[*Jim Shannon*]

is the underlying fact of it all. It will cause more harm than good. I remind Members of the oft-quoted phrase, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” That is how I see it. I see something that is okay.

One colleague said that, last year, 14 pieces of legislation affected English MPs only, but that other Members in the House had a chance to participate in them. Those laws still went through, so I do not understand why we need to push through this change. Clearly, there was not an issue in the last year of the previous Parliament.

I have sat on a number of Bill Committees that have considered matters relating to health. I sat with the Opposition and voted along with them on—I suspect—every one of the amendments that they tabled. About 10 or 12 clauses were applicable to Northern Ireland. Some Bills had more such clauses than others, but we still voted on all the issues because we felt that we had to protect those in Northern Ireland. Again, I say that we need to consider the full implications of this matter.

May I now transport the Members who are still in the Chamber to another great place—I say that with tongue in cheek—the European Parliament in Strasbourg. We are neither members of the eurozone—thank the Lord for that—nor adherents to the Schengen agreement. If members of the eurozone had to pay out £1 billion to help bail out Greece, there would have been implications. Do Members who support the proposed EVEL Standing Orders think that the European Parliament should be entitled to change its Standing Orders so that UK MEPs can no longer vote on things to do with Schengen or the euro, because that is exactly the same principle at work? I ask Eurosceptics on the Government Benches whether they have fully considered their anti-European stance, with which I agree in many cases. There again we have those double standards. They think they can take that stance on Europe and not worry about it. We cannot have one rule for one, and something entirely different for another. That is simply not fair, and yet we try to base our society on that principle. We often boast that we in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland are great promoters of fair play.

Most fundamentally and most concerning is that English votes for English laws gives English MPs a veto over English matters that the devolution settlement gives to neither the devolved bodies nor to the non-English MPs in their respective parts of the country. In other words, EVEL will allow English MPs to stop things happening in England in a way that MPs from the other regions of the UK cannot in their parts of the country. Parliament remains supreme over all three devolved bodies—and rightly so—but that inescapably means that English Members—all 85% of them in this place—remain supreme. They can tell us what to do in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. They can tell Stormont, Holyrood and Cardiff what they can do, but we will no longer be able to add our voices to what they can do in England. That is the theme. What is good for the goose is good for the gander—either we are all in it together or we are not. It really is as simple as that. As the Prime Minister has reminded us so many times before, we really are better together.

I speak as a proud Unionist of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I implore everyone in this House to consider the implications of this proposal

and to stall and change English votes for English laws. What we have seen tonight—the division and the adversarial opinions and attitudes—suggests that EVEL will be disastrous for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

8.14 pm

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to speak on what is perhaps the most important democratic issue facing this House, the United Kingdom and this generation. The concept of English votes for English laws is, on the surface, uncontroversial, but what is proposed is English votes for English laws and English votes for Scottish laws—and English votes for Scottish lords. We will take no lessons from Government Members on a democratic deficit.

The debate last week showed that these shambolic proposals have not been thought through; they have been worked out on the back of an envelope. The answer to English votes for English laws is an English Parliament. There can be no democratic shortcuts. The proposals initially drawn up by the Government simply do not stand up to scrutiny, which makes it all the more important that proper scrutiny is undertaken.

According to the Library, of the approximately 3,800 Divisions between 26 June 2001 and 26 March 2015, only 0.7% would have concluded differently had the votes of Scottish MPs been discounted. One must then ask what is the reason for the urgency, for the indecent haste behind the move, even taking into account the pause until September.

The UK Government have published a list of 20 Bills passed in the previous Parliament that they said did not apply to Scotland. However, after careful analysis by the First Minister of Scotland, 13 of them were found to be relevant to Scotland. That is why her request for talks on English votes for English laws must be treated with respect.

We in the SNP quarter of the House are deeply concerned about what can only be described, and what can only appear, as an abuse of process behind the move. To implement such a profound and divisive measure, rushed through with the aforementioned indecent haste, and without proper scrutiny, by suspending the Standing Orders of the House, closing down debate via an English Grand Committee—incidentally, it will have powers that a Scottish Grand Committee does not have—and with the use of iPads for a separate layer of voting, would all be laughable were it not so serious and if it did not fly in the face of the democratic procedures we all hold so dear.

**Martin John Docherty:** Has my hon. Friend noted the lack of attendance on the Government Benches, despite the seriousness of the matter before us? If English votes for English laws were so important to Government Members, those Benches would be full.

**Patricia Gibson:** I heartily concur with my hon. Friend. I hope that people in Scotland watching the debate on the Parliament channel will draw the inevitable conclusion.

Let us be clear that changes to Standing Orders almost always go through Committee scrutiny first, usually in the Procedure Committee. My right hon.

Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) has noted in a point of order that were such changes to be made without scrutiny,

“any majority Government could change Standing Orders to restrict the voting rights of any Member without so much as a by-your-leave.”—[*Official Report*, 27 May 2015; Vol. 596, c. 65.]

Mr Speaker, who was in the Chair at the time, replied that it was “an extremely important point”.

Let me give some more context. We know that changes to Scotland’s block grant are made in line with UK spending changes on the basis of population percentages. The funding policy states that

“the system of devolved finance is subject to overall UK macroeconomic and fiscal policy.”

The system of devolved finance is, in fact, fully contingent on English finance. It is also a one-way street; Scottish Bills do not affect England, but English Bills may very well affect Scotland. Government Members have consistently refused to recognise that throughout this debate.

The former Member for Richmond (Yorks), William Hague, acknowledged as much when he said:

“we recognise that the level of spending on health and local government in England is a legitimate matter for all MPs, as there are consequential effects on spending for the rest of the UK”.

The McKay commission pointed out that the Health and Social Care Act 2012 largely applied to England but had appreciable effects on commitments to public spending in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, even though health and social care is a devolved matter. It concluded:

“Any reforms undertaken to respond to English concerns must therefore be mindful of possible impacts outside England and seek to mitigate such impacts.”

In addition to Barnett consequentials, other, more general financial consequences can arise. For instance, if earned income was redefined, Scottish income tax revenues would be affected. There is a perennial question that I have not heard any Conservative Member answer: we still cannot get a logical definition of what qualifies as an England-only or an England and Wales-only Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) was told in response to a letter to the Leader of the House that the Scotland Bill would qualify as an England-only Bill. That demonstrates how ludicrous this whole debate is. How insulting to Scotland is that?

**Dr Thérèse Coffey:** The hon. Lady will recognise that the Government realised there was a problem with that and it has been corrected. I believe that the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) has a letter to that effect.

**Patricia Gibson:** I thank the hon. Lady, but that merely demonstrates the indecent haste with which this whole enterprise has been cobbled together.

**Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP):** My hon. Friend will also recall that in the previous list of Bills, it was discovered that some of them, as well as applying to Scotland, needed a legislative consent motion, yet they were still being put forward as England-only Bills.

**Patricia Gibson:** Again, that highlights the indecent haste involved in this proposal. The back-of-a-fag-packet calculation with which it has been presented to the

House is an insult to Scotland and to every nation in this family of nations with devolved Parliaments. Who would decide what was an England-only or an England and Wales-only Bill? It seems, as we have heard, that ultimately the Speaker—in secret and with no accountability—will decide.

**Mark Durkan:** Paragraph 6 of Standing Order 83J says that in making that decision

“the Speaker shall treat any clause or schedule whose only effects are minor or consequential effects”—

not minor, consequential effects but minor or consequential effects—

“outside the area in question as relating exclusively to that area.”

So as long as it has consequences, big or small, the Speaker has to rule it out.

**Patricia Gibson:** The hon. Gentleman takes the words out of my mouth, because I was about to say that the only criteria that will be applied will exclude the consideration of “minor or consequential effects” on other parts of the UK.

If English votes for English laws are the answer, I beg to know what is the question. What question are the Government really trying to answer with proposals that clearly do not stack up? Is it, “How do we keep the pesky Scots in their place?” Are they saying, “We are so fed up with Scotland we want to drive them out of the Union.”? If so, they are doing an excellent job. People in Scotland are, by turns, angry and bewildered about this measure. What happened to love-bombing the Scots? What happened to our status as a valued and equal partner? What happened to the mantra, “Scots should be leading the UK, not leaving the UK”? That was my favourite. Even Scots who are loyal to and value this Union are now questioning the Conservatives’ commitment to preserving it.

Let us not forget the hypocrisy we are witnessing. While EVEL is being pursued, we are in the absurd situation that every amendment tabled by Scottish MPs to strengthen the Scotland Bill has been voted down by the Tories, with their one MP out of 59 MPs. If the Government press ahead with this anti-democratic move and seek to make second-class MPs of those who represent Scottish constituencies, it will only convince even more Scots that the place of Scotland in this Union is simply not valued. It will convince even more Scots that those elected to speak for them are treated with contempt and dismissed as unimportant. Be prepared for a backlash from Scotland: the people of Scotland will simply not tolerate this riding roughshod over their democratic rights. I urge the Government and I urge the House to think, think and think again.

8.25 pm

**Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this important debate on English votes for English laws, which—purely in the interests of brevity rather than hilarity—I will refer to throughout as EVEL.

I want to make it absolutely clear that I do not oppose the devolution of decisions that affect only the people of England and their elected representatives, provided the people of England wish such a power to be devolved. However, what is being proposed is exclusion

[*Kirsty Blackman*]

rather than devolution. It is totally and entirely different from the Scottish situation. Rather than devolving power from this place to another legislative body—I would be happy to support that—the voices of Scottish MPs will be excluded on certain issues. That is likely to draw criticism not just from those in Scotland and Wales, whose MPs are disfranchised by this EVEL proposal, but by progressive individuals living in England who are delighted that this Parliament finally has a voice expressing their opinions.

In May, I was elected to the UK Parliament as an MP. As was pointed out by the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson), who is no longer in his place, I was elected in exactly the same way as MPs who represent English constituencies. In fact, I was elected with a larger share of the vote than 80% of English MPs. In this House, however, it is not the percentage of votes one receives that determines our place; it is the nation in which those votes were cast. This House prides itself on its democratic history, including the principle that however many votes a Member receives or whichever nation they represent, our vote counts the same as that of all the others when we troop through the Lobby. EVEL means that this will no longer be the case.

As an aside, I want to point out the lack of consistency in these EVEL proposals. As hon. Members have already said, during the last parliamentary Session one Bill was classed as Scotland-only. There appears to be no proposal to create a similar change in the rules to allow Scottish MPs to have a veto over legislation that does not concern or affect other parts of the UK but is reserved to this House. It is not difficult to imagine what would have happened to amendments to the Scotland Bill if a double majority had been required.

This major constitutional change is being made by amending the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. It is not a change in legislation: the UK Government propose simply to change the rules on debates and processes in the Chamber. As has been mentioned, these have been called back-of-the-fag-packet calculations. In fact, I think the sentence about “minor or consequential” points is justly badly drafted. The point relates to something else entirely—whether something is English or English and Welsh-only—but it is difficult to tell what it is supposed to mean. I would appreciate it if the Leader of the House looked at that sentence.

Thankfully, the Government have to a certain extent taken some Opposition concerns into account—in particular, about the haste of the process—and I hope that at least one Select Committee will be able to scrutinise the proposals before our next debate on this matter.

From the majority of the speeches of Conservative Members, we can see that there is a fundamental lack of understanding about the devolution settlement in Scotland and the ability of Westminster to influence our budgets. There is no recognition from the majority of Conservatives that decisions taken in England for England have a consequential effect on the people of Scotland and the budgets of the Holyrood Parliament.

The clarification that the estimates procedure will be exempted from EVEL is welcome, but it does not go far enough. In fact, it is probably smoke and mirrors. It is right that Scottish MPs should be able to vote on

matters that have an impact on the Scottish Parliament’s budget. There is no opportunity to amend proposals during the estimates process—only an opportunity to vote for or against them—so Scottish MPs must have a say during initial decisions on legislation that will have a knock-on impact on overall departmental budgets and therefore a consequential impact on the Scottish budget.

**Mr Grieve:** I understand the point that the hon. Lady is making, but her argument is effectively that everything we debate here is relevant. The problem is that it is also the case that everything debated in the Scottish Parliament is relevant. The differentials in tuition fees and the different approaches to criminal justice are relevant, yet we do not have the opportunity to have any input. She has to bear it in mind that it is the reality of the United Kingdom that virtually every decision taken in each of the Parliaments and Assemblies around the country has a knock-on effect outside the immediate borders of that nation.

**Kirsty Blackman:** The way that the financial settlement works means that what happens in this place has a knock-on impact on how much the Scottish Parliament has to spend, but what happens in the Scottish Parliament does not have a knock-on impact on how much the Government have to spend in this place.

If, for example, the UK Government decided to pass legislation to privatise vast swathes of the NHS, which I am sure they would not do, the overall departmental spend for health would be reduced during the estimates process. However, the legislation that privatised the NHS would be considered under EVEL and there would be an EVEL veto. The resulting estimates, which the Leader of the House has confirmed cannot be amended, are generally not debated at length. That matter would be hugely relevant to Scottish MPs and the Scottish people. It would not just be a minor or tiny consequential thing, but would have a massive impact on the Scottish budget. It would therefore be very relevant and we must be included. That is one of the problems with the proposal.

**Chris Grayling:** With due respect to the hon. Lady, I remind her that were such a Bill to exist—and it certainly will not under this Government—it would have a money resolution that she would be able to vote on. Can she name a single measure on which she would be excluded from a vote to decide whether it should become law?

**Kirsty Blackman:** The point is that we could be excluded. The Government are trying to write it into the Standing Orders that we can be excluded from such things.

**Chris Grayling:** No, we are not.

**Kirsty Blackman:** Well, if there had been more clarity on how these proposals would work and more discussion in advance of their being made—

**Chris Grayling** *rose*—

**Kirsty Blackman:** I give way to the Leader of the House once more.

**Chris Grayling:** I think it might be helpful to say again that not a single Bill will pass through this Parliament under these proposals on which the hon. Lady and her colleagues will be excluded from voting.

**Kirsty Blackman:** By the nature of this place, we will have a succession of Governments in future years who could put forward any legislation that they like, and Scottish MPs could be excluded from it.

**Ms Ahmed-Sheikh:** Is it not the case that the proposals would allow MPs from Scottish constituencies to agree increases to the Scottish budget, but not to amend proposals that would lead to cuts in the Scottish budget?

**Kirsty Blackman:** That is the case. As I say, the proposals are badly thought out.

As has been said, because the decisions about which matters are EVEL will be made by the Speaker, there will be no possibility of legal challenge. Therefore, Scotland is being disfranchised and excluded from the possibility of proper recourse. Some Government Members have professed the view that the reduction of legal scrutiny is a good thing. I do not think it is, and I very much doubt that my constituents would think so. The job of the Speaker in this matter will be highly technical, complicated and time consuming. I understand that at various stages in the process, the Speaker will be required to certify whether proposed legislation is to be considered under EVEL. The Speaker will, in fact, have to certify individual amendments throughout the process. Is that a good use of the Speaker's time?

The hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas) raised an issue to do with the Committee stage. If an issue is certified as EVEL by the Speaker, it will be subject to a Committee stage. The Committee will be composed of only English MPs, with the parties being represented in proportion to their relative numbers in this place. The Leader of the House gave the example of bus ticketing. What will happen if bus ticketing is discussed in Committee and an amendment is tabled saying that the proposals should apply to buses in Aberdeen? During the Committee stage, those of us who have been excluded from the process are not able to come in. If, at Committee stage, an amendment is introduced that widens the range of the Bill and the places it applies to—I use bus ticketing as an example—those of us who have been excluded from the Committee stage cannot be brought back in until the next stage of the discussion.

As Scottish MPs with a legitimate, clear and real interest in the amendment, in my example, we would not be able to debate the amendment as it proceeded through Committee. In the proposed Standing Orders there is no requirement for consultation with the Scottish Parliament or even with the Clerks of the Scottish Parliament. In the case of the Sewell convention, there is discussion with the Scottish Parliament. In the case of money resolutions, which require certification by the Speaker, there is a lengthy guidance note for the Speaker. There does not seem to be any provision for that in the example that I used.

As much as I respect the Speaker, the office of Speaker and the Clerks in this place, it is clear that people in the Scottish Parliament and the Clerks there would be more knowledgeable about the effects on the Scottish people than those who are here. The hon. Member for Wrexham made the same point in relation to Wales. These are major concerns. We need to ensure that there is proper scrutiny of and consultation on the proposals before the Speaker certifies them.

If, as the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa), among others, says, people in his constituency voted for EVEL in the form that has been laid before us today, why did it occupy a third of a page on page 70 of the Conservative manifesto, instead of being up front and centre stage?

Despite our asking numerous questions in advance of the announcement by the Leader of the House, we were not provided with any satisfactory answers. If, as seems to be the case, attempts are being made to rewrite the record to tell us that the proposals were public knowledge and everybody knew about them, and the constituents of the hon. Member for South Leicestershire voted for him on the basis of this knowledge, why were responses not provided to us when we asked how the process would work? I do not understand.

It is clear that this EVEL proposal completely fails to answer the West Lothian question and, in fact, causes more confusion. My favoured resolution would be for Scotland to be independent, but in the absence of independence, the UK Government need to produce a proposal in legislation rather than in the Standing Orders of this House, thus allowing for proper accountability and scrutiny.

As a number of people have said, this EVEL proposal advances the cause of nationalism and increases the appetite for independence among my constituents and the people of Scotland. None the less, I stand in opposition to the proposals, as it is wrong to remove the ability of Scottish Members to play a full part in this House on matters that have an impact on the lives of my constituents and of people across Scotland.

8.38 pm

**Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): The debate has been divisive and fractious. Before I fracture the House further, I want to praise the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) for two reasons. First, I suspect there are few in this House who, during a fractious and divisive debate, could incorporate karaoke, Ant and Dec, and King Louie from "The Jungle Book" in his speech. Secondly, he recognised, in fairness to the Leader of the House, that there are aspects of the proposal that might have merit, and that parts of the changes to Standing Orders could prove fruitful for the administration of this House. But the way in which this debate has been conducted will do nothing to convince those of us on the Unionist Benches that there is something in it for us.

Considering the focus and some of the less than parliamentary exchanges from the Government Benches to the Opposition Benches, one would think it was all about the Scottish National party. But when SNP Members speak out against the proposals and we too have concerns and everyone I have heard from the Labour Benches has concerns, somebody within the Government ranks needs to sit back and think, "Hang on a second. This is not something that is just irking 56 folk from the north. This should be considered properly and fully." I acknowledge that we have delayed, and we have had another debate today, which was useful. I urge the Leader of the House to consider that such a fundamental change to the operation of this Parliament will require more than a change to the Standing Orders. I hope that whenever such issues are raised, he will take the opportunity to respond thoughtfully, either now or when he has his chance at the end of the debate.

[Gavin Robinson]

I have heard continually this afternoon and evening that there is no such thing as two tiers of MP, but currently there is. Four Members of Parliament from Northern Ireland continue to use the Palace of Westminster and its offices. They draw moneys from it, yet they refuse to come to the Chamber and debate the issues of the day. When the Conservative party put in its 2010 manifesto that it would bring the issue of two tiers of MPs to an end, we were grateful. After the election, it blamed the Liberals for being unable to deliver on its manifesto commitment, but that is a clear example of having two tiers of MP elected to this House. If the Government want to convince us that they are not interested in maintaining such a position, they should bring that arrangement to an end.

We need an equilibrium across the Chamber that means that one man equals one vote, but that should not include someone elected to this place who refuses to take their seat yet takes all the money and benefits of representation, and the support that people have given them. If the Government can create such an equilibrium they will convince me and my colleagues that they are interested in not having two tiers of MP. There currently are two tiers, however, and the Government allow that to continue.

I hope that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, as well as Mr Speaker, Mr Hoyle and Ms Engel, are reassured that many people in this debate are concerned about you and about the position in which the office of Speaker will be placed. That is a genuine concern. I have heard some Members say that no Member of the House will have an opportunity to give their view about whether, under the proposals, a matter should be certified. Will the Leader of the House outline whether that is the case? If a piece of legislation or statutory instrument goes to the Speaker for certification, will the Government mark it as something likely to be considered under the Standing Orders of EVEL? Will there be a mark, conversation or indication that the Government believe that a certain piece of legislation is for English-only votes and that the Speaker should consider it in that way, or will there be no indication at all? I suspect the former position and that the Government will indicate that the Speaker will be requested to certify a piece of legislation. If that is correct, it is appropriate for other Members of the House to be given the opportunity to challenge that position.

In an earlier intervention I asked the Leader of the House what the situation would be for Members who will benefit from the breadth and depth of experience and understanding across the Chamber, and what involvement they would have in Committee. There was no response, but I was grateful to learn subsequently—about two hours later in an exchange with the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart)—that Members will be able to attend Committee but not vote on those issues. I am clear that such serious constitutional change requires a constitutional convention, but I must say that I was disappointed by a range of comments from across the Chamber today.

**Alex Salmond:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Gavin Robinson:** I might be disappointed by this comment too—we will see.

**Alex Salmond:** Not in the slightest. I find the comments made earlier by the Leader of the House difficult to reconcile with the document produced yesterday. I will not go into the detail of the document, because it will take forever, but at one point, under the title, “How will it work for Bills?”, it states:

“Any bills that the Speaker has certified as England-only in their entirety will be considered by only English MPs at Committee Stage.”

It does not sound to me like the hon. Gentleman will be invited to consider it with them.

**Gavin Robinson:** That is exactly why I have asked the Leader of the House to explain the situation. He is welcome to resolve it now if he wants, or he could do so later.

**Chris Grayling:** I reiterate that the rules that apply to every Committee of this House as regards who can participate and who cannot, and when Members can turn up and take part and when they cannot, will not change.

**Gavin Robinson:** I must say that I was disappointed by some of the exchanges, particularly those involving the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart)—I am sorry that he is not here to hear me say this, because I would like to say it to him and perhaps to benefit from some interventions from him—and the hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa).

I heard the hon. Member for South Leicestershire try to convince the House that this was a burning issue on the doorsteps. I will take the enthusiasm of his position at face value, but I am a little miffed if English votes for English laws was the biggest issue raised during a parliamentary election. The hon. Gentleman also said that there was no appetite for an English Parliament in those discussions. I must say that he spent an awful long time talking about these complex constitutional issues at individual doors; I think he might have canvassed about four homes over the course of the parliamentary election period. If it is true that there is no appetite for an English Parliament among English voters, it is also true that there is no need for this change to Standing Orders.

In my view, the Conservative Government are pushing forward with a proposal that they thought they would need to rely on in either a minority Government or a coalition Government. England makes up 85% of this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We have heard that. The Government say that the people of England were asking for this at the election, but the people of England got the Government they wanted while the people of the United Kingdom did not. Nobody across the United Kingdom had the opportunity to consider this issue. Other areas of the United Kingdom, whether that means Scotland, Wales or my home of Northern Ireland, did not express a view that they wanted this from their Government.

The measure is not needed. With 85% of this United Kingdom in England, their votes are already here. When we consider this issue over the course of history since the second world war, we realise that only once in 1964 and for a couple of years from 1974 would it ever have been an issue. It is not. The Government are proposing a solution for a problem that I do not believe they are faced with. In doing so, they are creating not



just many more issues and problems in this House but more opportunities for those who do not believe that we are all in it together.

**Mr Grieve:** I am listening carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has to say. I can see that he can make an argument against the change to Standing Orders. As I said in my own speech, I can see why that might be troubling. However, the background issue of how we organise ourselves within the United Kingdom and the structures we should have that respect the individual component parts and do justice to English identity is not going away, and I do not think that it is artificial.

**Gavin Robinson:** I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his intervention. I was impressed and encouraged by some of the remarks that were made.

I started my speech this evening by asking the Leader of the House to convince me that I should not be fearful of this proposal, to show me that he does not believe in two tiers of MPs by removing the second tier that we already have, and to go some way to convince me as a Northern Ireland Unionist that if votes come up that are reserved because of particular Northern Ireland issues—parading was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson)—Northern Ireland will be able to have its own say. That could be an extension of the principle, but it is the same principle. If the Government were prepared to give me the same opportunity that they are seeking for themselves, I might be prepared to consider the issue further.

Scotland's representatives will make exactly the same request: will there be Scottish votes for Scottish laws that are reserved to this House? The London Assembly has also been mentioned. Non-London MPs have the opportunity to vote on London issues, but London MPs cannot vote on issues that have been devolved to the administrative Assembly. Where does the principle end? I would like a response to those issues.

**Mark Durkan:** The one bit of reassurance that the hon. Gentleman has been offered by the Leader of the House relates to participation in Committee stage. However, if we look at the Heath Robinson model that accompanies the proposals, we will see that, in a little box and marked with an asterisk, it says:

“England-only Committee stage for England-only bills”,

which is contrary to the assurance given by the Leader of the House.

**Gavin Robinson:** I realise that I am pushing on for time, but I would be happy to allow the Leader of the House to intervene yet again, should he wish to clarify that issue, because as the debate trundles along, concerns continue to rise.

**Chris Grayling:** I reiterate that this House's Committee arrangements enable Members who are not formally part of a Committee none the less to participate in its proceedings. There is no change.

**Gavin Robinson:** I am sure the Leader of the House will take the opportunity to withdraw the paper that has been made available to us by the Cabinet Office, amend it, remove the proscription that the consideration stage

will be for English Members only, and indicate clearly and explicitly that all Members will have the opportunity to engage.

**Chris Grayling:** I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is new to this House, but if a Member is not formally a voting member of a Committee there are plenty of opportunities to participate in its proceedings. That will not change. [*Interruption.*] The right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) intervenes from a sedentary position. The reason the paper does not say there is a change to the Standing Orders is that the situation will not change.

**Gavin Robinson:** I will not take any further interventions. Yes, I am a new Member of this House, but I can read a document quite clearly. Having indicated to the Leader of the House that I am prepared to be convinced on this issue, I must say that he will not succeed with condescension. I do not have much more to say, only to maintain my position that if I get the reasonable responses and assurances I seek, if the current two-tier MP system is removed, and if Government Members are prepared to work with those of us who have genuine concerns, I am happy to work with them, but that sort of condescension will not help.

8.52 pm

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): The proposal under discussion represents the worst of all worlds for Scotland and it leaves my constituents disadvantaged in this House. I cannot properly represent my constituents' interests here if I cannot debate and vote on all issues that affect the funding available to the Scottish Government through the block grant.

These hastily revised proposals are half-baked at best. Although the Leader of the House now recognises the fundamental flaw in last week's proposals and has now accepted that spending on English issues has a knock-on impact on the Scottish budget, this week's plan still fails to address the central issue. If Bills in this House are going to have an impact on the Scottish budget, MPs from Scotland should be fully involved in their passage through this House. The proposals introduced by the Leader of the House do not fully address that point and he needs to think again once more.

In the days before the referendum the Prime Minister called the UK a “family of nations”, but surely all family members should be represented around the table when decisions are being made. What his Government are proposing is that Scotland should have a pocket-money Parliament, where MPs from England and Wales decide on Scotland's budget by proxy, with MPs on this side of the House locked out of the process.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) has said, at the same time as the Government are introducing this fundamentally flawed scheme, MPs representing constituencies outside Scotland have voted against each and every amendment proposed by MPs from Scotland to the Scotland Bill. Oh, the irony!

This House will remember that previous Tory Governments have spoken of the need to get back to basics. This Government need to remember the three Rs: recognise the result of the general election in Scotland; respect the views of the people of Scotland

[*Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh*]

who sent 56 MPs here with a clear mandate for change; and reconsider the ridiculous position we now find ourselves in.

If the people of England want their own Parliament, those MPs from English constituencies should bring forward proposals to establish one. The measures we have before us, however, are to change the rules of the UK Parliament to give Members from English constituencies greater powers over Scotland's budget than MPs from Scotland. This is not the greatest democracy in the world that the Prime Minister described in his speech before the independence referendum last year; it is barely democratic at all.

Will the Leader of the House give the House one single example of a national Parliament in which some Members are debarred from voting on issues that have a financial impact on their constituents? I support English democracy, as I support Scottish democracy, but you cannot instil one by undermining the other, and that is what is happening here. If MPs from England want similar responsibility over matters in England, as Members of the Scottish Parliament have over matters in Scotland, that is their right, but to get to that position, we should adopt a similar process.

The development of Scottish devolution involved a national debate, followed by a White Paper published by the UK Government. The people of Scotland voted on the issue in a referendum and the Government proceeded with legislation, subject to full parliamentary scrutiny before agreeing that legislation. The Parliament was established and a cross-party group was formed to agree proposals for the operation of that Parliament. It is not everything I want for the Scottish Parliament, but this process was fair. The Government should bring forward a Bill on these matters for this House to consider. We must be allowed to debate and vote on these issues in a proper and democratic manner. In contrast, the Tory Government are just making it up as they go along and it shows, Madam Deputy Speaker, it shows.

As things stand, the Government are attempting to rewrite the UK's constitution in a matter of months through amending the Standing Orders of this House. The Government are even attempting to circumvent scrutiny by failing to live up to their manifesto promise to consult the House of Commons Procedure Committee prior to seeking approval from the whole House to the proposed Standing Order changes. The Leader of the House brought forward his proposal only a couple of weeks ago and already we have seen emergency statements, followed by redrafted proposals and hastily redrawn parliamentary timetables. He is not leading the House, he is being dragged along in its wake. Perhaps the Leader of the House was expecting the same type of feeble Opposition offered by our Scottish predecessors. Well, times have changed. No Minister, no Government can take Scotland for granted anymore.

When he was first elected, the Prime Minister said that he wanted to instigate an agenda of respect between different parts of the UK. He said:

"This agenda is about parliaments working together, of governing with respect, both because I believe Scotland deserves that respect and because I want to try and win Scotland's respect as the prime minister of the United Kingdom."

If only these plans embodied the respect that those words envisaged. They most certainly do not.

Just as the Secretary of State for Scotland, at Scottish questions this morning, appeared to confirm the answer to every single question he was asked in relation to the Scotland Bill by saying he was entering a period of mass reflection, I ask the Leader of the House, in respect of English votes for English laws, to follow suit. I know it has been a difficult few weeks for the Government—a very difficult few weeks—so I suggest he uses the recess to reflect and come back with amended proposals for this House.

8.58 pm

**Graham Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): I want to just make a couple of brief points on the notion of EVEL, particularly in relation to gambling and other issues that highlight the fallibilities of the concept the Government are bringing forward.

Gambling is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland, but it is not a devolved matter in Scotland, and even under the Scotland Bill it will be only somewhat devolved. At the minute, Great British Members vote on gambling issues, but Northern Ireland has its separate devolved responsibilities at Stormont. How will that fit with EVEL? How will we devise a system in which the Scots, English and Welsh vote on matters reserved for Northern Ireland? This is a dog's breakfast. There is nothing in the proposals about how matters solely devolved to Northern Ireland, such as gambling, will be dealt with in the House.

**Jim Shannon:** A short time ago, certain legislative proposals on gambling passed through here that had some impact on Northern Ireland. I tabled an amendment that the Labour party supported, but which the Conservatives voted against. It went to the House of Lords, however, and came back amended in the way we wanted. Those proposals affected Northern Ireland, but were passed in this place, so there is some legislation passed here that affects Northern Ireland.

**Graham Jones:** I appreciate the detail that the hon. Gentleman brings to the debate. For Northern Ireland, some matters relating to gambling and other issues are reserved and others are devolved. That is also the case in Scotland. He has highlighted the fact that it is not even as simple as I have suggested. We have a Great Britain situation and a Northern Ireland situation that both seem unresolved. As he suggested, elements of gambling are devolved and elements are reserved. How will that affect voting in this place? How will it affect the parliamentary system? In Scotland, this is a reserved UK matter, so its Members are entitled to vote on these issues.

Where are Great British votes for Great British laws? That is a part of all this. It is ridiculous, it is a dog's breakfast. As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) has pointed out, we cannot even have Great British votes for Great British laws, because some elements of gambling are devolved to Northern Ireland and others are not. I use the example of gambling, but there are many other examples. What assessment have the Government made of areas that are solely devolved to Northern Ireland and areas that are partially devolved, and how will that fit with this proposal? It is absolute nonsense.

We are going to be sat in here not knowing who can vote on what. We are going to have English-only Committees. Are the Northern Irish MPs going to be allowed in? The Government do not seem to know what they are doing. How will this work with ping-pong when proposals come back from the Lords and we have to have a double majority? Will these wonderful iPads in the Lobby have a double majority function for Northern Ireland, so that they have one vote, but the Scottish MPs can vote twice? Is that how it works? This is really a mess.

What about the Smith commission proposals and the Government's proposals in the Scotland Bill? We now plan to partially devolve to Scotland some of the gambling matters that are currently reserved, such as fixed odds betting terminals—it is an issue that I am interested in and is what alerted me to this matter. What happens when, following the Scotland Bill, we pack off some of the devolved responsibilities on gambling to Scotland and then bring some legislative proposals on gambling before the House? How will it work, when Northern Irish MPs do not know whether they are voting on some of the gambling elements, or whether they should have a double majority, or whether they should not be on the Committee, or whether they should be on the Committee, and when there is no procedure for setting up the Committee?

Then we have the Scots over there on their Benches. Some matters have been devolved to Scotland, but some matters are reserved. We have Scots who should be on the Committee, but should not be on the Committee, and who should be voting, but should not be voting. Then we have the Irish. This is a complete and utter shambles, and I do not think the Government have an answer. There is nothing in the literature to show what would happen where some matters are reserved for Northern Ireland and others are partially reserved for Northern Ireland, which makes it even more complicated. How is this going to work?

As we devolve more downstream to Scotland, or whichever way to Northern Ireland, we will just be faced with a plethora of problems. Will someone please explain to me how this will work with gambling legislation and where we are going to end up? Why have we not had Great British votes for Great British legislation? Why has this not been mentioned. We do have a Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and some matters are Great British and some have been devolved to Northern Ireland. I ask the Leader of the House once again what assessment he has made of legislation that is devolved, or partially devolved, to Northern Ireland and of how it will impact on the decisions and processes in this place? What will be the impact after the Scotland Bill on, for example, the issue of gambling, when some of the gambling responsibilities that are currently reserved are devolved up to Edinburgh? It is a real mess.

What happens when we get to an English-only Committee and somebody—clearly an English MP—tables an amendment that has Barnett consequentials? What happens when Scottish, Irish or Welsh MPs cannot speak on a matter that has Barnett consequentials? It is absolutely ridiculous; it is farcical. Those people will not be able to speak for themselves; they cannot turn up to the Public Bill Committee and speak because that is not within the procedures of this House.

The Leader of the House has no answers to these questions. He should have looked into these matters before bringing this debate forward. Perhaps the reason why we are allowed a debate but not a vote is that he does not know what he is doing. *[Interruption.]* Clearly, he does not know what he is doing because he has deferred the matter. Perhaps he can look into some of these issues before we next consider them. I will give way to him so that he can explain what happens when a Barnett consequential comes before an English-only Committee? I will give way to the Leader of the House if he has an answer. Does he want to step up and answer the question? No, he does not have an answer.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. The Leader of the House has not indicated that he wants to respond to the hon. Gentleman's question, so it would be better if the hon. Gentleman continued with his own speech.

**Graham Jones:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. What happened is on the record in *Hansard*—silence from the Government; they have no answers. I gave the Leader of the House the opportunity.

**Dr Thérèse Coffey:** I can say that Barnett consequentials do not impact on direct pieces of legislation, but I will explain more in my winding-up speech.

**Graham Jones:** I did not catch the first part of the answer. Will the Minister repeat it more clearly?

**Dr Coffey:** I said that I will explain further in my speech, but individual pieces of legislation do not have direct Barnett consequentials, as they are matters of the spending envelope. I shall explain more fully later.

**Graham Jones:** It would be nice to have that information. It is not present at the minute, but I am glad that the Minister is at least having a look at it. Perhaps the explanation she gives will be unsatisfactory. She may have just made some notes and intends to put it in her speech just because someone has raised it, reinforcing the fact that this is a complete mess. Amendments that have consequentials might go before English-only Committee. What happens then? I leave that with the Minister and will be interested to hear what she has to say.

Finally, the Government do not seem to appreciate that if we end up in a situation where there is an English Conservative majority but a Unionist Labour majority, legislation could be stifled. The Government may say that there is a resolution to the problem or that that is how this place operates in our democracy. The Minister should be mindful of the fact that if the problems are not resolved, regions such as mine in the north of England will quickly get fed up with voting for a Labour Government, getting a Labour Government but not being able to pass Labour legislation because it is blocked by English Conservative MPs.

**Mr Grieve:** The one merit or demerit of the proposal is that the Standing Orders are voted on by everybody. If the circumstances described by the hon. Gentleman arose, I have no doubt that the Labour Government would change the Standing Orders.

**Graham Jones:** That may be so. I would like to know whether there will be any safeguards in place to prevent such a change from occurring. People in the north of England will get fed up if they vote for a Labour Government and do not get the issues of concern to them resolved in this place because they are blocked by a majority of English Members. It could be said that that is democracy. I can accept that, but unfortunately, we will then be seeing the fragmentation of England—let alone the fragmentation of the United Kingdom—which is what these proposals are bringing about.

9.9 pm

**Alex Salmond** (Gordon) (SNP): The hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) has just described this as a mess. One of my favourite films is “Reservoir Dogs”; this, unquestionably, is a breakfast of dogs. When he questioned the Leader of the House and, indeed, invited him to intervene, I was convinced that he was phoning a friend. He had his phone at the ready, looking for an answer.

**Graham Jones:** Does the right hon. Gentleman agree—this is for *Hansard* to put on the record—that the Leader of the House looked vacant?

**Alex Salmond:** I could not possibly say that the Leader of the House looked vacant. What I will say is that the Leader of the House has shown a remarkable proclivity to flee the field during the past week of debates on this subject.

Last week, there was a rout in a vote, and of course we all came in to make our points of order. Normally, on such occasions, Members roust the Government by making points of order, and then the Leader of the House stands at the Dispatch Box and comes up with some explanation of what has happened. On that occasion, the Leader of the House did not come up with an explanation because he was not here. Now he is not here again, and it is very unfortunate that he is not here again—although I am sure that there is a good reason for it—because I was going to compliment the young hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) on not allowing himself to be patronised by him.

The Leader of the House said that the hon. Gentleman did not have parliamentary experience and that, when he knew more about the procedures of the House, he would understand these things. The hon. Member for Belfast East rightly drew attention to the explanatory notes—a misnomer, if ever I have seen one—that were distributed to us all yesterday and read out exactly what was in them. Let me just do that again. The explanatory notes say:

“Any bills that the Speaker has certified as England-only in their entirety will be considered by only English MPs at Committee Stage.”

It should be noted that they do not say, “will be considered by any Member of the House, but voted on only by English MPs”.

I had been in the House for 14 years before the Leader of the House was first elected—if we are going in for patronisation—so let us have a little bit of history. I was looking at my iPad earlier. Incidentally, if these ridiculous proposals are passed, iPads will become much more necessary, in the Division Lobbies as well as the Chamber.

**Graham Jones:** Would not those iPads require a fairly complex template in the case of certain pieces of legislation, because of the number of options relating to double majorities and who is voting for what? I hope that the staff are given training.

**Alex Salmond:** Given the level of intelligence that features in the explanatory notes, I hope that the same people who were responsible for them will not be working out the programme for the iPads. I certainly hope that it will not be the Leader of the House.

I was about to engage in a little bit of history to demonstrate what happens if things are not written down properly and if people do not understand who has rights in this place and who has not. Because I wanted to get the year right, I searched on my iPad for a debate entitled “Conduct of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan”—the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan being a young Member, like the young hon. Member for Belfast East, who wanted to make sure that he asserted his rights in this place. Unfortunately, however, I could not identify the year in question, because such matters arose so often in those hairy days of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

I am not entirely certain when the debate occurred, but I believe that the year was 1989, when the then Conservative Government, in their wisdom, set up a Standing Committee to consider Scottish education. The Standing Committee contained a majority of English Members of Parliament and not one single Scottish National party Member of Parliament. I nominated myself for membership, but the House decided that I should not be allowed to serve, so I just turned up anyway.

According to the formulation that the Leader of the House offered us earlier, I should have been welcomed into the bosom of the Committee—although not, of course, allowed to vote—but unfortunately I was not. Mr Michael Martin was in the Chair, and Mr Martin instructed me to leave the Committee. I decided that I could not follow Mr Martin’s instruction, so Mr Martin then ordered me from the Committee. I raised a point of order, pointing out that he did not have the powers to order me from the Committee. Mr Martin, as the Committee Chairman, then brought to the House for debate “Conduct of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan”, in an attempt to secure from the Education Committee the power to exclude me from the Standing Committee. That happened in a Standing Committee of this House of Commons, I think in 1989. So the Leader of the House, in his absence, will understand why I do not accept the blithe assurances that every Member will be welcome on the Committee but with only English Members voting. I rather agree with the hon. Member for Belfast East that we would like to see that written down, rather than have the explanatory notes which say exactly the opposite.

Turning to the recent history of the House, I served on the Scottish Grand Committee when, if I remember correctly, both English and Scottish Members were members. Then it was decided not to have English Members on the Grand Committee. I checked with the Clerks earlier, and I am certain that the current position in the Standing Orders is that only Scottish Members are allowed to serve on the SGC. Members may not recognise that, and that would hardly be surprising because the SGC has, I think, not met since 2003.

**Pete Wishart:** Yes, 2003.

**Alex Salmond:** My hon. Friend, who knows about all these things and has served on almost as many Grand Committees as I have, is undoubtedly correct. That Grand Committee has changed its complexion a number of times, and when it became Scottish Members only, members were not allowed to vote to stop or veto legislation; they could consider legislation on Second Reading and then the legislation came to the full House. In effect, it was roughly what the McKay commission recommended as the answer, although there is actually no answer to the West Lothian question.

My old friend Tam Dalyell posed the West Lothian question precisely because he believed from his study of constitutional history that the only answers to it were either Unionism, which he supported, or independence for Scotland, which I supported. Tam Dalyell did not, and still does not as far as I know, believe there is an answer to the question he proposed, nor, as he would be the first to say, was he the first person to raise that question.

The question was raised in the 19th century. Gladstone considered a similar proposal. I was going to say that it was exactly the same proposal, but the proposal Gladstone considered was much more sensible than the one before us today. None the less, he rejected it, and did so on two grounds. He thought it would be difficult to have a situation where Members of Parliament were going in and out of various votes depending on how they were defined, and he thought it would be too much for the Chair to bear—"for the shoulders of any one man to bear", if I remember the quote correctly—for the Speaker to have to certify which votes were which and which hon. Members were allowed to vote on which Committees. They say there is nothing new under the sun. All this has been considered before and there is actually a reason why William Gladstone did not come up with this dog's breakfast before us today.

**Mr Hanson:** That was also because Gladstone lived in Wales and represented a seat in England.

**Alex Salmond:** There are two reasons why William Gladstone did not come up with the dog's breakfast before us.

**Wayne David:** I think, from memory, that the quote was, "It is beyond the wit of man."

**Alex Salmond:** I thought that there was a bit of shoulder in there, but none the less I will accept the hon. Gentleman's correction, which is well meant.

So these things have been considered before. First, given my experience in the House, to accept the blithe assurances that everything will be all right on the day of the Committee would be extremely foolish, and I am glad the hon. Member for Belfast East does not accept them, and rightly so. Secondly, these matters have been considered, and Tam Dalyell is correct: there are two absolute answers to this question. There is also a third, which my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) has proposed and which is that we could have a federal situation under which we define what the federal Parliament does and what each national Parliament does. That would work as well,

although the predominance of England as a nation within these islands makes federalism difficult, but none the less it could work in constitutional terms. What will not work is what is on the Order Paper.

We are told this is the burning issue—the great issue—facing English Members of Parliament, and not just English Members: we are told that the people across the nation of England talk about little else in the pubs, in football grounds or in their living rooms. They are all talking about EVEL, so we are instructed. We are also told this is the great issue Conservative Members have to face so early in this Session. Yet when we come to debate it—let us congratulate the Leader of the House on making the concession of having a debate—what happens? I have come into this debate a number of times through the day and—I shall try to put this as kindly as possible—the Government Benches have not exactly been overflowing with Conservative Members.

In fact, all the speeches in the past couple of hours have come from this side because of the paucity of Conservative Members in the Chamber. The explanation for that paucity could be that the state of arrogance that has set in among Conservative Members is such that the debate does not really matter to them because the result will go their way at the end of the day. They will see it all right in September and they will get their way, so why should they turn up today? An alternative explanation could be that this matter is not the great issue of state that we were assured necessitated the proposals before us.

I want to spend just a second illustrating the full enormity and absurdity of the document that has been distributed to hon. Members. The contents of the paragraphs is bad enough. I have read the one headed "What about Finance bills" a number of times and I am none the wiser. However, I suppose that all the information is crystallised in the remarkable diagram on page 5, which is entitled "Outline of model". This is meant to make everything clear and to help hon. Members understand the purity of the process. It has been pointed out that a further four stages could be added to the passage of Bills through this House. There is the potential for legislation to become frozen in aspic and totally stalemated. There is also the potential for ping-pong. That can happen between here and the House of Lords anyway, but the proposals seem to offer many more opportunities for ping or pong. The fact that we need a diagram that looks more like the Duke of Wellington's formation at the battle of Waterloo than a serious coherent proposal for a legislative process should tell us that what is being proposed has not been fully thought through.

There was a reason why William Gladstone did not believe there was an effective answer to the Irish question in relation to the proceedings of this House, back in the 19th century. There was a reason why Tam Dalyell did not think there was an effective answer to the West Lothian question, short of having a unitary Parliament or independence for Scotland. There is also a reason why Bill McKay's committee did not propose a veto for English MPs, and it is that such proposals will be injurious to the rights of hon. Members and, indeed, to the people they represent. That point was made earlier, and it is absolutely correct. These proposals will create different classes of Members of Parliament with different rights before the House. They will also put the Speaker

[Alex Salmond]

in the invidious position of having to certify Bills in a way that will deprive certain Members of the rights that other hon. Members have.

I think that I know how the Deputy Leader of the House of Commons will sum up the debate, because she has given certain information to other hon. Members earlier. She is going to rest her case on the security that the financial estimates are within an envelope and are decided in accordance with the Budget resolutions. She will also say that that determines the Barnett consequential, regardless of what happens. As First Minister of Scotland, I can tell her that that is not the case. A range of things can happen that will alter the Barnett consequentials. Movements between departmental expenditure in the UK can alter them, because the consequential is different for each Department.

We have heard constant reference to the example of tuition fees for England and Wales. If that issue were voted on, the vote would not impact on that year's financial envelope. A decision was made to raise the top-up fees for English students at English universities, and it was voted through by Scottish Labour MPs—to their great shame—in January 2004, if I remember correctly. The proposal was opposed by the SNP, the only party that has consistently opposed tuition fee increases for English students in England, but the vote was carried by a majority of six.

The argument put to us by the Conservative party and by the Labour rebels back in 2004 was that, if the Blair proposal went forward on tuition fees, it meant, as surely as night followed day, that direct expenditure on education and universities in England would decline and loan spending—loan allowances for students—would increase to enable them to pay the fees. There was not a direct Barnett consequential in that year within the financial envelope, but a policy decision that had been made affected the finances of the Scottish Parliament—of course it did; the logic is inescapable.

I am therefore glad to see the Leader of the House returning to his place. I hope that when he reads *Hansard* he does not think I have been too ungracious towards him. [Interruption.] He says surely not, but I was just reflecting that I thought it was unwise for him to attempt this patronisation of the hon. Member for Belfast East, because a number of examples from before the Leader of the House was a Member of this House tell us exactly why his proposals are inadequate. No Leader of the House should come here with a document that is clearly inadequate and blithely tell hon. Members to accept assurances that he cannot possibly give if he has not written them down on paper. The spatchcock nature of these proposals illustrates why if the Conservative party, without any great support from its Back Benchers and without any coherent argument, wanted to bring this forward, it should have done so as legislation to be properly scrutinised, not as this codswallop. We have been presented with it last week and re-presented with it this week, and unless the Leader of the House mends his ways and changes his tone and his direction, no doubt we will be re-presented with it in September. I do think that he will rue the day he ever got involved in this total, absolute nonsense.

9.26 pm

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): It has been an excellent debate, in which I believe 23 Members have taken part. I want to start by paying tribute to the two Members making their maiden speeches: the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas), who spoke passionately about the area in which he has lived all his life and now represents with great pride; and the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin), who gave us an excellent speech, bringing to life her constituency and recognising the inspiration running from the 1820 martyrs to where she is now and where she is going in representing her constituents.

As the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) said, to deal with 400 years in a 10-minute speech is difficult, given that this issue has been a challenge for a long time; he recognises the complexity of what we are dealing with. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), in a very good speech, drew attention to his real concerns about the way in which this debate can fracture relations in this House. I have been listening to the debate and I am afraid that it has been fractious at times. That is not a good thing. It is not a good way to make progress on a matter of such importance, not only to people within this House but to those without this House. Members representing six parties have spoken in this debate against the proposals and the method of the proposals that have been laid before the House tonight. Only one party, the Government party, has spoken in favour of them. If we are trying to progress in a cross-party way, the Government need to take a pause and think about that before they plough on.

The contribution from the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) was a very good one. He said that the tenor of the debate matters as much as the content, and those are very wise words. He said that this is a “problematic issue” and that we need to proceed with “utter fairness to all sides”. He welcomes, as we all do, the opportunity for some space, which the Leader of the House has now given us, but he says that it is important that if proposals go forward, they do so in a way that does not create “two classes of citizen” and does not create a grievance anywhere. Sadly, in this debate we have heard a lot of potential grievance. The words of the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden need to be considered as we go forward.

There was an interesting exchange when the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) intervened on the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart). She said that many people in Northern Ireland feel that their Britishness is being undermined and that this legislation is in danger of undermining the one nation Government that the Tories say they want to be. Those are wise words from a wise woman who fully understands the nature of division and discord, and where it can lead if it is not handled properly. Her words need to be carefully considered.

The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) spoke with great authority when he said that we must not pretend that a complex problem can be subject to simple solutions. He called for proper consideration of the legitimate grievances. I hope that the Government were listening to his words, too. My hon. Friends the Members for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas) and for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) forensically drew attention to the impact that these matters can have

across borders. They said that as legislation goes through, matters can emerge that affect more than England. It is not clear how the Government will deal with that. My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham used his own experience to give us a very good analysis of how, during the legislative process, things can impact more widely. That experience, particularly in relation to health, needs thinking about and reflecting on.

The hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) said that this was a sad and alarming debate. He drew Members' attention to the fact that discussions that he has had in the past around the Olympic project had Barnett consequential effects. That will apply to other matters, too, so the proposals should be considered properly. My hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) said that what we were presented with today was a confusing answer to a confused question, and he wondered why the Leader of the House was going ahead with this political joyriding. He, too, drew attention to the problem of what he described as "karaoke legislation"—legislation that goes through this House that does not immediately have an impact anywhere else, but, because of the way that other parts of this United Kingdom operate, does in fact have a consequential effect.

The hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) asked whether MPs from Scotland will be fully involved in Bills that have a financial impact on Scotland. That has not been properly answered to date. My hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) repeatedly pointed out that this matter is a dog's breakfast. The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) talked about shambolic proposals. The hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) described how MPs from outside England will be excluded from the debate. Those are genuine concerns. *[Interruption.]* The Leader of the House says from a sedentary position that I am saying things that I know are not true. Let me reference again the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden, who said that the manner of the debate matters as much as the content. Obviously the content is unclear, as the exchange between the Leader of the House and the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) has just shown.

The hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) described the debate as divisive and fractious. He called for a constitutional convention to try to get this matter right in a proper way.

**Neil Gray:** The hon. Gentleman talks about this debate being divisive and fractious. Does he not agree that the very reason it has been divisive and fractious is that this proposal is divisive and fractious?

**Nic Dakin:** As I see it, the problem is that the Government are going forward in a way that excludes rather than includes people. I hope that they reflect on that. To be fair, the Leader of the House has done that throughout this process over the past couple of weeks, albeit kicking and screaming at certain times, but he needs to try to get this right because the consequences of not doing so could be quite terrible for our nation.

In a thoughtful contribution, my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) drew attention to the fact that he is in danger of becoming a second-class MP as a result of these proposals. He asked what opportunity he will have to make representations to the

Speaker. The role of the Speaker and the certification process concerned a number of Members who spoke. My right hon. Friend also noted the way in which the unelected lords would be able to table and vote on amendments, while Members of this House would not.

The right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) was equally anxious about that point. In a thoughtful and helpful contribution, he drew attention to the difficulties in the certification process for the Speaker. He also said that we are in the middle of a process and that this will not be a final settlement.

We heard another thoughtful and helpful contribution from the right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones). He pointed to the two tests of certification: is the issue devolved, and is it an issue that relates exclusively to Wales, for example? He said that a mechanism would need to be devised to allow the Speaker to apprise himself of the views of Members as part of the decision making. The role of the Speaker, the process of certification and how the Speaker will be aware of what is happening in particular areas are crucial points that have been raised throughout the debate.

The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), in a suitably animated and passionate contribution, struck a note of irony when he turned to those on the Government Benches and said, "They are doing this to save the Union." The Chamber erupted into ironic cheers, because that is not what will happen if we continue down that route.

With deepening devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, it is right that we look at changes in Westminster to strengthen England's voice when it comes to English-only matters. We have made that clear all along and throughout this debate, and I make it clear again from the Dispatch Box now. In the previous Parliament the Government commissioned Sir William McKay to look at the issue. He recommended a balanced set of proposals to strengthen the voice of England on English-only matters while warning against creating two classes of MP.

We should look at Sir William's proposal for an English or English and Welsh Committee stage, because it is right that English MPs should have a key role in considering such legislation. If it is done in the right way, that could be a sensible reform that would strengthen England's voice without creating two classes of MP. However, the Government are ignoring Sir William's warnings and are effectively proposing to give English MPs a veto over legislation, thus creating two classes of MP and risking at best legislative gridlock, and at most the creation of an English Parliament by the back door.

When the Prime Minister stood on the steps of No. 10 Downing Street on the morning of the Scottish referendum result, he chose to act not as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, or even as the leader of the Conservative and Unionist party, but as the leader of a primarily English Conservative party. By invoking English votes for English laws on that day of all days, he decided to take risks with the long-term future of the Union in the interests of temporary party advantage.

That continued into the general election, when the Conservative party, which ironically supported the Scottish nationalists to get budgets through Holyrood, used the spectre of a post-election arrangement between the SNP and Labour to frighten voters. It was a highly

[*Nic Dakin*]

effectively short-term strategy, as the Labour party struggled to reassure voters that it would not happen, despite all the evidence of past behaviour indicating that it would not.

But this is a high-risk Conservative strategy, and it risks the Union. The risky strategy has continued since the election in this headlong rush to bring these measures forward. It is not surprising that things have descended into chaos, with the Leader of the House appearing to make things up as he goes along. Having initially sprung a statement on the House indicating a very fast process, he was forced to retreat in a Standing Order No. 24 debate, when Government MPs stayed out of the Lobby and he left the Chamber before the result was announced. At last week's business questions he promised a two-day debate, the first day of which was scheduled for today after the timetabled statutory instrument on foxhunting. He made a commitment to bring forward revised Standing Orders on Monday this week so that right hon. and hon. Members could give full consideration to the revised changes before today's debate. He failed to deliver on that commitment, and the paperwork was not available in the Vote Office until midday yesterday. Yesterday, he changed the business again, dropping the item on foxhunting through a point of order in which he gave no compelling explanation for the change.

Frankly, it is legitimate, however much we may not like it, for the Scottish National party to pursue its objective of independence. It is not reasonable, however, for the Conservative and so-called Unionist party to play fast and loose with the Union for short-term political advantage. That is reckless and risks the Prime Minister's legacy being the break-up of the Union. If he carries on as he is, he will go down in history as the Prime Minister who failed to keep Scotland in the Union, so it is the true Unionist parties—Labour and the Liberal Democrats—that are having to make the arguments for getting right an English voice in this Parliament on matters of concern. Ironically, and to their credit, SNP Members are also arguing that this be done in a right and proper way.

That is why we are asking the Government to learn from their mistakes and proceed in a genuinely cross-party way that allows all interests to be properly examined. We need to go back to the McKay commission report, commissioned by this Government, which properly and thoroughly examined the issue. That should be our starting point. As this issue has far-reaching implications for the way in which this Parliament operates, it is well worth seriously considering taking things forward through a Joint Committee of the Commons and Lords. That would be a proper way to proceed with a constitutional issue of such significance.

If we take as our reference point what was in the Conservative manifesto, we see that there has been a failure to carry out its commitment to get the views of the Procedure Committee before bringing measures forward for consideration by the whole House, which would have been a sensible way of proceeding. Instead, the initial statement came before the Committee had sorted out its membership. The good news, though, is that the Committee is now in place and met yesterday under the excellent chairmanship of the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker). It is going to have a timely look at the Government's proposals from a procedural perspective,

taking evidence as appropriate. It would be helpful if the Deputy Leader of the House confirmed that the Government will not bring forward the second day of this debate until after the Committee has completed its deliberations.

9.42 pm

**The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** It is a pleasure to reply to this debate, and particularly to hear two maiden speeches. The first was by my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas), who showed that he will be a powerful champion for south-west Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. I enjoyed holidays in Mousehole as a child. I now recognise in my own constituency some of the challenges he identified in his, particularly the pay gap in some of the industries there. I am sure he will work hard to rectify that.

We also heard an excellent maiden speech by the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin), who mentioned the resilience of the people she represents and the proud history of those who have served them, as well as the people who got her into this place. I am sure that she will go down as the biggest swinger in town, but it will be for her dramatic effect as well as for her result. I was very impressed by her late brother's encouragement to run for Parliament. That has been justified, and I am sure he would have been very proud of her today.

I am grateful to hon. Members on both sides of the House for their considered contributions, and I will try to address as many points as I can. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and I continue to be happy to hear the views of colleagues outside the Chamber too. I am grateful to the all-of-two Members who attended the drop-in sessions, and for the meeting I had with MPs from north Wales to discuss matters in further detail.

Certain themes arose in hon. Members' contributions, including the solution of an English Parliament, a constitutional convention, whether we should have legislation, the McKay commission, and the process we are going through and its timing. Some Members felt that this is a non-issue, saying that it is partisan and would lead to gridlock. There were important discussions about Speaker certification, spending consequential, and, of course, the impact on the Union. I will address those points in turn.

It is fair to say that Conservative Members do not believe that there is a need for an English Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) was annoyed that people who do not represent English constituencies felt that was the solution to the issue we face today, and I agree with her. Indeed, when the English Democrats have stood in elections, they have not managed to get any MPs elected, so there is not much appetite for that among English constituents.

I know that the constitutional convention has been discussed widely. It was voted down in Committee when it was tabled as an amendment to the Scotland Bill. Again, I am not sure that we need to have one to address this issue. I am concerned that it would be a handbrake on some of the devolution agreed to in the vow before the Scottish referendum. Other people have talked about things such as a written constitution, but we do not believe that that is necessary at this time.

**Alex Salmond:** Will the Minister give way?



**Dr Coffey:** I want to get through my speech and perhaps take interventions a bit later if that is okay.

Legislation has been mentioned. We genuinely have concerns, as do the Clerks of the House, about whether this risks being justiciable. That said, several representations have been made in debates. The Government are not ruling it out, but we do not believe that it would be the right vehicle to do this. That might be something for the Procedure Committee to look at. If it does not necessarily do so in its short investigation, it is more likely to do so during the one that will take the 12 months before we review the process, as we have agreed to do.

**Alex Salmond** *rose*—

**Dr Coffey:** I will give way briefly.

**Alex Salmond:** On the subject of reflection, and in the interests of the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) and me, the explanatory notes distributed yesterday state:

“Any bills that the Speaker has certified as England-only in their entirety will be considered by only English MPs at committee stage.”

Given what the Leader of the House told us earlier, does the Deputy Leader of the House want to make a drafting amendment to that claim?

**Dr Coffey:** I will come to that point during my speech, and I hope that my response will satisfy the right hon. Gentleman.

The McKay commission was established, and the Government replied to it in their Command Paper issued in December 2014. The Conservative party laid out a range of options, which we subsequently put in our manifesto. We are now debating a simplified version of option 3. The key principles of McKay referred to two things. When he reported in 2013, his main conclusion was that decisions

“with a separate and distinct effect for England (or for England-and-Wales) should normally be taken only with the consent of a majority of MPs for constituencies in England (or England and Wales).”

That is from paragraph 12 of the executive summary of the report, which concluded:

“This principle should be adopted by a resolution of the House of Commons and the generalised principle endorsed.”

We believe that that is fulfilled by these Standing Orders. The McKay commission gave a variety of options.

**Ian C. Lucas:** Will the Minister give way?

**Dr Coffey:** I will not if that is okay, because I am trying to respond to the points made in the debate. [*Interruption.*] It is not an unfair quote; it is from paragraph 12.

I just want to be clear because I am a little confused by what the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) said. He seemed to accept the principle of an England-only Committee or an England and Wales-only Committee, despite having agreed earlier with the right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson) that that would exclude him from something, so I am a little confused about that.

**Ian C. Lucas:** Will the Minister give way?

**Dr Coffey:** I will not give way at this stage.

**Ian C. Lucas** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. The hon. Lady has said that she will not give way. It has been a long debate, and the hon. Gentleman could have intervened at some earlier time.

**Alex Salmond:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Minister is claiming support from the McKay commission for her arguments. Is it possible for the House to ascertain from the McKay commission whether or not that is the case, because many of us believe that it is not the case?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** As the right hon. Gentleman knows, that is a matter for debate. There is clearly disagreement in the House. That disagreement will have to stand.

**Dr Coffey:** I am simply quoting directly from the report.

My understanding is that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), as part of his oral evidence, recognised that if all Scottish MPs chose not to participate on English-only matters, the commission was not necessary. He said that given that that does not happen all the time—admittedly, that was under a different electoral scenario—there is

“a procedure and a process which is part of the rules of how we engage in issues which are English-only”.

He felt that the commission needed to answer that.

It has been claimed that this is a rushed process, that it is a non-issue and that these are partisan proposals, but the thrust of the proposals has been in our manifesto for the last three elections. The journey started with McKay, it continued with the Command Paper and the proposals were in our manifesto. Since coming back to the House, we have listened, reflected and given extra time for debate. There will be at least two months between the initial tabling of our proposals on 2 July and the decision by this House. In comparison, the Smith commission, although convened in September, started on 22 October and managed to conclude its significant piece of work within six weeks. That is the basis of the Scotland Bill in which the UK Parliament is transferring powers to the Scottish Parliament.

This is not a non-issue; it is an issue for several of my electors. We are ultimately addressing a question of fairness. It is claimed that the proposals are partisan, but it so happens that every Government elected since 1997—back when the Labour party used to win elections—have had a majority of English MPs, although in 2005 Labour received fewer votes in England than the Conservatives. We are trying to address an issue of fairness. I know that the Library papers say that only a few Divisions have happened where this would have been an issue, but we are still trying to address that issue.

There is no need for there to be gridlock. If it is evident that explicit consent will not be granted in the Legislative Grand Committee after Report stage, it would be a perfectly rational expectation that the Government would listen to the voices of those MPs for England or England and Wales, and would not try to impose something against their will in respect of those devolved matters.

I will turn to the subject of Speaker certification.

**Ms Angela Eagle:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Dr Coffey:** I still have quite a lot to get through, but I will give way on the gridlock issue.

**Ms Eagle:** If the distribution of English local government grants is not voted for, no money can be distributed. The Government's proposals will allow an English minority, who may be in opposition, to prevent a Government from distributing money to local government. How is that a recipe for anything other than gridlock?

**Dr Coffey:** We believe that it is a fair response to say that when the matter is providing finances for English councils, the majority of English MPs should agree to how that is done. I recognise that the hon. Lady may not like that, but when she was in government, it so happened that her party had a majority of English MPs.

Turning to Speaker certification, a lot of people have mentioned the burden—

**Graham Jones:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Dr Coffey:** I will not give way.

On Speaker certification, which the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) referred to in his contribution, the Speaker already certifies money Bills and selects amendments. I am sure that, as he does now, he will take advice on what should be a technical decision.

The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire said at the McKay commission on behalf of the SNP:

“We look at each bill, as we get the business for the week, we assess it for the Scottish interest. If there is none or if it's insignificant, we take no interest... We have never had the problem. 12 years since the setting up of the Scottish Parliament, we have had the self denying ordinance and found it about the most easiest thing possible to do and we do not see what the fuss is.”

I recognise the cross-border issues that have been raised by hon. Members from north Wales. We met yesterday and we debated the issues the other week. There has been a request to amend Standing Orders to set out the timing of decisions and the ability to make representations. Those parts of the process are not detailed in Standing Orders for other certification processes, but I understand why hon. Members raise this point. I understand that such things happen in practice and they may be in “Erskine May”. I am not sure that it would be appropriate to put them in Standing Orders, but it is up to hon. Members to make their suggestions.

**Mark Durkan:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Dr Coffey:** Not at the moment, because I am making progress in responding to the debate.

The position on reasons is in line with that for similar decisions the Speaker makes. That will preserve the authority and impartiality of the Chair.

**Mark Durkan:** Will the Deputy Leader of the House give way on that point?

**Dr Coffey:** Of course I will give way on that point.

**Mark Durkan:** The hon. Lady will remember that when the Fixed-term Parliaments Bill was being discussed in the last Parliament there were proposals for the Speaker to make determinations about what would or would not be a confidence motion that could or could

not effectively terminate the Parliament, and it was argued by Conservatives that the Speaker should not be put in the position of making a politically sensitive determination.

**Dr Coffey:** I think the Speaker is more than well equipped and will certainly have the advice available to do that.

Let us turn to the spending consequentials. As a result of discussions and debate, we have listened and tabled Standing Orders that we believe clarify the situation. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said earlier, we have done this to give comfort to all Members. Spending is voted on through the estimates and, yes, in answer to the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), amendments can be made to the estimates, though only to lower spending because Crown Ministers have the right of financial initiative. Estimates are given effect by law, by the Supply and Appropriation Bill, both of which we have all voted on in the past 24 hours.

The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) referred to income tax definition. Aspects of income tax which have not been devolved, whether they are reliefs or the definition of taxable income, would continue to be UK matters. It is the rates and the thresholds that are in the process of being devolved.

On Bills and Barnett consequentials, many individual pieces of legislation lead to some changes in funding, but that does not necessarily mean that the funding for that UK Government Department changes. It does not follow that it has a directly identifiable impact on the block grant to the devolved Administrations, so efficiencies in one area could be redirected to front-line services, without Barnett consequentials. That is why Barnett consequentials are calculated on changes to overall departmental spending at spending reviews, and that is why we end up voting on them through the estimates voting process.

The right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) referred to tuition fees. I think he was probably referring to the resource accounting and budgeting charge—the RAB charge. That is a non-cash item so it does not affect the spending power of the Scottish Government.

**Alex Salmond:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Dr Coffey:** I will not give way any more as I am trying to address the other points. [*Interruption.*] We have another day of debate, as has been said.

The hon. Member for Wrexham wanted to talk about Welsh votes going further. We are talking about matters that have been devolved, not matters that are still reserved in this Parliament. The hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), who is not in his place, referred to parades. Again, those are still a reserved matter, not a devolved matter. He also spoke about the Olympics funding. The Olympics funding was excluded from Barnett calculations because it was deemed nationally important for the entire United Kingdom. The joint ministerial council subsequently reached agreement to allocate some additional funding. Funding then went through estimates and, as the hon. Member for East Antrim mentioned, he was the Finance Minister at the time.

**Ian C. Lucas:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Dr Coffey:** The Lords are peers of the United Kingdom and a sovereign House, so they should determine their own Standing Orders. They are not elected to represent constituencies. There are no peers of Scotland or of Wales.

There was quite a lot of reference to the Scotland Bill. I remind hon. Members that it is a constitutional Bill through which we are transferring powers from this UK Parliament and this UK Government to the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government. That is why it is appropriate for everybody to vote on that.

A list of Bills was mentioned. Amendments were made on Report stage of the Modern Slavery Bill, which could perhaps have been made in the Scottish Parliament separately. That triggered the need for the legislative consent motion, but they were not included at the time of the introduction of the Bill.

Strengthening the Union is probably the most important point. I know that SNP members respect the fact that their fellow countrymen and women voted to stay as part of the Union. The Government's proposals seek to strike a careful balance. They are a modest step but we will give a clear and distinctive voice to the representatives of English and Welsh constituents on issues that are devolved, and preserve the right of MPs across the House to play a role in shaping that legislation. The Government continue to listen to the views of the House and we look forward to returning to this after the summer recess. We hope to implement an important change to give voice to England and to strengthen the Union, I hope with cross-party support. From some of the things that have been said today, it is clear that the Labour party needs to make up its mind on the issue. It does not seem to want to do that, but we will vote for these proposals with great confidence in the autumn.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the matter of English votes for English laws.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** We now come to motion No. 4 on the Order Paper.

**Bill Wiggin** (North Herefordshire) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have noticed that the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) has been missed off the list of names in motion No. 4 on the Order Paper. I believe that to be an accidental clerical error, but I understand that he cannot be part of the Committee, despite being elected by his party and having been passed by the Committee of Selection. Could you use your good offices to ensure that he is able to get the papers necessary for the European Scrutiny Committee to meet on Tuesday so that he can have done his homework?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I understand the hon. Gentleman's annoyance at there being a mistake on the Order Paper. As Mr Speaker would always say, there should not be a mistake on the Order Paper, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer), and both Committees, will receive an apology for that mistake. The solution to the matter is for a further motion to be submitted, which I understand is on the Order Paper for tomorrow. Therefore, the matter can be raised again tomorrow, and the hon. Gentleman duly added to the Committee.

## Business without Debate

### EUROPEAN SCRUTINY

*Ordered,*

That Sir William Cash, Geraint Davies, Richard Drax, Peter Grant, Damian Green, Nia Griffith, Kate Hoey, Kelvin Hopkins, Calum Kerr, Craig Mackinlay, Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg, Alec Shelbrooke, Kelly Tolhurst, Mr Andrew Turner and Heather Wheeler be members of the European Scrutiny Committee.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

## London's Licensed Taxi Trade

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That the House do now adjourn.—(*Charlie Elphicke.*)

10.2 pm

**Mr Charles Walker** (Broxbourne) (Con): It is a great honour to have secured this debate. I am also delighted to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I know that in your capacity as Member of Parliament for Epping Forest you have done a great deal for the licensed taxi trade, and particularly the black cab licensed taxi trade. Indeed, you and I have worked closely together on this matter over a number of years, and we will continue to do so.

The much-loved London black cab is not an overnight sensation. Hackney coaches first appeared in London during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, and Captain John Baily, a veteran of Sir Walter Raleigh's expeditions, is thought to have established the first Hackney rank by the Maypole on the Strand—a site from which four coaches worked. The first laws governing what is now known as the taxi trade were introduced nearly four centuries ago, with London's cab trade being continuously licensed since 1694. Control is now in the hands of Transport for London. The practice of displaying an identification number goes back to 1654 and despite a number of modifications, the principle of that practice remains consistent to this day—isn't tradition a wonderful thing?

At the age of 45, James Howe, an experienced cabbie, was chosen to drive London's first motor taxicab. He enjoyed a long association with both horse-drawn and motor cabs and, in 1933, at the age of 75, he was awarded a special badge commemorating a career that began when he earned his licence in 1884. You and I love the concept of hands across history, Madam Deputy Speaker, and at least two Members of this House were alive at the time that James Howe received his long-service medal. Is that not a wonderful thought?

The fitting of taximeters was made compulsory in 1907 and the inventor of these meters was a German noble called Baron von Thurn und Taxis. A taximeter is by definition what makes a cab a taxicab, and taximeters in London calculate the fare payable as a combination of time and distance. I thought that it would be useful in my opening remarks to set the scene for the House.

Transport for London licenses taxis and their drivers under the Metropolitan Public Carriage Act 1869 and the London Cab Order 1934, so there is not a lot of modernity there. The minicab trade in London is licensed by regulations made under the Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998, which is very recent history. I thank Addison Lee for the useful briefing it provided me on the regulation of its private hire business and those of its competitors.

As we know in this place, all licensed London black cab drivers are required to do the knowledge. We see those amazing men, and now women, beetling around London on their scooters with a clipboard in front of them, learning all these wonderful routes around our wonderful capital city. That is a gruelling three, four or five-year exercise undertaken by aspirant black cab drivers, most of them while holding down a full-time job. They show extreme dedication. It is an extremely gruelling process, with drop-out rates between 70% and

75% on average, and those that pass the test have covered approximately 20,000 miles worth of routes. These men and women are the best of the very best that London has to offer. Having passed the knowledge, a newly qualified driver needs to buy or lease a cab. The cost of new taxis is quite high, often in excess of £42,000, so that is a major investment.

No vehicle over 15 years of age is licensed and the Mayor is keen to see that number reduced to 10 years, as he wants to promote a clean air environment in our capital city. The Mayor has a duty to ensure that he only grants licences to those people who are "fit and proper" to drive a taxi. Drivers are required to be insured and CRB checked and to have a financial standing check. How many of us in this place could cope with the level of scrutiny needed for a financial standing check? My word!

All London taxis—this is very important—are wheelchair accessible and have been required to be so since January 2000. That 100% accessibility compares with only 3% of private hire vehicles. Importantly, licensed black cabs are the only taxi service permitted to pick up passengers without advance booking and the only service permitted to use a meter, with Transport for London setting the level of fares that can be charged. Of course, there are problems. If there were not, we would not be here this evening. This is not a totally good news story.

In its recent review of taxi and private hire vehicle licensing, the Law Commission called for the retention of the two-tier licensing system, and I strongly endorse that.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I sought his permission to intervene before the debate. My introduction to the London taxi was when I became a Member. Taxi drivers in London—I am sure that they are the same across the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—have an opinion on all the things that are happening in the world. It is obvious to me from conversations with the London taxi drivers that they are very concerned about the changes to licensing. Does the hon. Gentleman share my concerns on their behalf and agree that a full consultation must take place with the Licensed Taxi Drivers Association to find a way forward that can bring them on board?

**Mr Walker:** The hon. Gentleman makes a precise intervention. The Law Commission also called for significant changes to the legal distinction between taxis and private hire vehicles on the grounds that the current system relies too heavily on an imprecise concept of "plying for hire", which is not defined in statute and has become the subject of a body of case law that is not wholly consistent. In that lies a multitude of problems.

**Victoria Borwick** (Kensington) (Con): I declare a slight interest, as my husband was running the company that made the taxis when they became fully accessible to the disabled. I have spoken before about my concern for the disabled, so may I ask first whether my hon. Friend agrees that only fully accessible taxis should be allowed to ply for hire on the streets of London? Does he also agree that all vehicles should be subject to the same stringent standards and regulations as our gold standard taxi fleet?

**Mr Walker:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Disability access is fundamental to the licensed taxi trade and marks it out, which is to be celebrated and promoted.

The Law Commission recommends a single consolidated legislative framework throughout England and Wales, including London. As I have said, many of the regulations governing the licensed taxi trade—the black cab trade—are well over 100 years old, and even the most recent regulations covering private hire vehicles are 17 years old.

The Law Commission is pressing—this goes to the heart of my hon. Friend's intervention—for the introduction of common national minimum standards for vehicles, drivers and dispatchers, and those standards would be determined by the Secretary of State. In essence, the shorthand of the Law Commission's report is that the current system is a mess and is being abused.

This debate is underpinned by an absolute and inescapable truth, namely that if we want a regulated black cab and private hire vehicle trade that is both sustainable and commercially viable, we have got to enforce the regulations we create. If we do not enforce them, we create a virtual free-for-all where the unregulated and the unscrupulous prosper at the expense of those whose professional livelihood depends on them following the rules. London is an example of what that free-for-all looks like, with illegal taxi ranks, unlicensed vehicles, unlicensed drivers, uninsured drivers and illegal touting for business. That does not reflect well on our great city.

The Mayor is trying to do something about it. He deals with 1,200 new minicab licences a month. I spoke to him this evening and he told me that there were 450 just last week. This is an overwhelming challenge. His Transport for London compliance team and the Metropolitan Police Service cab enforcement unit have few of the powers they need to make a real difference, such as powers of arrest and the power to seize and destroy vehicles.

Throughout the first 21 days of TfL's ongoing crackdown, it has advised 2,625 private hire vehicle drivers to move on and keep the roads clear; reported 151 for not having a badge; reported a further 999 for not wearing their badge; issued 439 parking tickets; reported 15 private hire vehicle drivers for plying for hire; and reported 210 for parking on taxi ranks.

Those are impressive numbers, but I am afraid they are not backed up by impressive sanctions. For example, the 151 drivers reported for not having a badge were prevented from working for the remainder of the evening. Did they stop? I doubt it. Are the sanctions I have just listed a deterrent to illegality? Of course not. In New York just a few weeks ago, they seized 500 Uber vehicles for breaking the law, but that does not happen in London.

Into this maelstrom of collective regulatory failure rides Uber. Of course, a lot of PR nonsense is being talked about Uber and its "disruptive" technology changing the face of travel in London. Disruptive technology sounds glamorous and exciting, and if I had a choice I would always prefer to have my activities identified as being disruptive, as opposed to borderline illegal. In reality, all Uber is doing is equipping another fleet of barely regulated and unqualified drivers to ply their trade in the capital, with little or no thought given to how the drivers it enables conduct themselves.

To be fair, who can blame Uber's savvy business leaders for recognising lax to non-existent regulatory enforcement and then exploiting it? What is the downside? There is none, because the rules are not enforced, but they should be because they say that only licensed black cabs can operate a meter. "To hell with that," says Uber: "We'll operate a meter but cunningly, like Baldrick, not call it a meter." The rules say that private hire firms must have physical premises. "We'll ignore that rule, too," says Uber. The rules say cars for private hire must be pre-booked via an office. "No, that's one not for us either," says Uber. The rules say that private hire firms must have systems in place to protect customer and driver data. "So what?" says Uber, "Who's going to check up on that?"

I want to be clear. I want to derive reassurance from a licensed and regulated black cab taxi trade. Of course it is not a perfect trade, but it is a very good one. I want to know that when my children are out in London they will always have the option of easily finding a black cab to take them home or back to the place they are staying. I want to know that they will pay the price on the meter, not a meter price artificially inflated through surge pricing, as Uber drivers did during the 2014 Sydney hostage crisis and in London by 300% during last week's Tube strike—thank you, Uber, thank you for nothing.

I want to know that my children are being driven by a professional with four years of training, because my children's safety is important to me. I want to know that my children are being driven by someone who is CRB checked and insured. I want to know that London will become, and remain, increasingly disability friendly, so that people in wheelchairs are not left on street corners waiting for the 3% or less of private hire vehicles that can take a wheelchair.

I accept that there may be others who do not hold to these values. So let me be clear: if they want a free-for-all, let us have a genuine free-for-all. Let us release black cab drivers and Addison Lee drivers, for example, from the cost and burden of regulation. Let us allow them to drive any cheap piece of rubbish they can lay their hands on. Who cares if London is no longer home to a fleet of disability-enabled taxis? Surely that is a small price to pay for the benefit of Uber's "disruptive" technology? Let us scale back CRB checks and any other safety requirements. It is the passenger's tough luck if things go wrong—my children, perhaps, should have made a wiser choice. Why should fares not be left to the discretion of the driver? Only the fools will pay the higher rates and that is their punishment for being stupid, weak, old or frail. What does it matter if London's reputation starts to suffer internationally? There are plenty of suckers out there who will not be deterred. Let me be clear: that is not the London I want to live in, but unless we take regulatory enforcement seriously, I fear it is the one we are going to get.

Finally, I say this: if we want a regulated environment that creates costs to entry and considerable costs of operation, but with the benefit of significant safeguards and high levels of service, we have to allow those that we regulate the space in which to make a return on their investment of time and capital. For 400 years, London has recognised the need to have properly regulated and licensed taxi services. I suggest that our illustrious predecessors were not fools in this matter. London cannot have it both ways. It can try, but it will end in tears.

10.18 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker) on securing this debate on London's licensed taxi trade, which he presented in his usual passionate way. I know that many taxi drivers reside in his constituency, as indeed they do in yours, Madam Deputy Speaker. By the way, before we get any further, may I make it clear that I will be travelling home tonight on two wheels? The only carbon dioxide I will be producing will have come from my own lungs.

Before I respond to the points raised by my hon. Friend, it is perhaps worth taking the opportunity to set out the Government's position on regulating the taxi and private hire vehicle industry. The Government are responsible for creating the legislative framework within which local licensing authorities license taxis and private hire vehicles. In London, responsibility for licensing rests with Transport for London. It is Transport for London's responsibility to decide who is a suitable person to hold a taxi or private hire vehicle driver's licence, or a private hire operator's licence.

**Jim Shannon:** Just last Thursday, in the middle of the tube strike, I took a taxi from here to Paddington. The taxi driver informed me that on eBay it is possible to purchase a driver's licence and permit without any regulation. The hon. Member for Broxbourne said the same in his speech. Is the Minister aware of this and, if so, what steps can be taken to stop it?

**Mr Goodwill:** That would be illegal. Criminal record checks, and all the other checks that need to be made before somebody can ply their trade as a private hire driver, need to be carried out, so that would certainly be an illegal transaction.

It is the job of Transport for London to ensure that all its licensees comply with the rules and regulations that govern their industry. I understand my hon. Friend's desire to raise these concerns on the Floor of the House, but as licensing is the responsibility of TfL, while I might be able to address his points, it is within TfL's remit to act if necessary.

The taxi industry has played a key role in keeping London moving for many years and has a fine heritage. The addition of the private hire sector has helped to ensure that this form of transport is available to all, particularly supporting those who cannot rely on other public transport services. TfL licenses some 22,200 taxis and 66,200 private hire vehicles making 300,000 trips every day. These vehicles make a vital contribution to London's economy and help to keep the city moving 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The availability of both taxis and private hire vehicles offers the travelling public real choice. They can either instantly hire a taxi on the street or at a taxi rank, or they can pre-book a taxi or private hire vehicle. When pre-booking, passengers can make an informed choice based on factors such as price, availability and quality.

**Victoria Borwick:** The Minister makes an important point about quantity. We are talking about the free flow of London traffic, and although we have seen this explosion in the number of private hire vehicles, it cannot be said to contribute to the smooth running of

London or to reducing pollution levels in London. When considering legislation or regulation, I hope he might consider whether we need all these private hire vehicles. Are they not just polluting and clogging up our streets? As he said, he is fortunate to be healthy enough to ride a bicycle, for which I commend him, but he will be breathing in the fumes of all these private hire vehicles.

**Mr Goodwill:** Some local authorities limit the number of licences they issue, but that is not the case in London. My hon. Friend makes a valid point about how the number of vehicles circulating looking for trade can increase congestion and pollution—and let us not go into the issue of bicycle rickshaws.

London's tax service is recognised as one of the best in the world, with high vehicle standards, including disabled access and skilled drivers. By learning the world-famous "knowledge" of London, London taxi drivers earn the unique right to ply for hire on the streets of the capital. Private hire vehicles offer a different service, also with high standards, but allowing the customer to choose who they travel with. This combination of taxi and private hire ensures that the needs of as many Londoners as possible can be met. Indeed, while it is easy to flag down a taxi in central London, one would have to wait a long time for a black cab to drive by in some of the suburbs.

The traditional London taxi, or black cab, has become an icon of the city, but time does not stand still and the market is changing. New technologies are providing new ways of engaging taxis and private hire vehicles, and the industry must adapt. Smartphone booking apps are now available for both taxis and private hire vehicles, offering passengers real choice, including faster pick-ups and options for sharing, which can reduce the cost for travellers.

With change, however, come challenges, and TfL, along with other licensing authorities in the country, is faced with the challenge of accommodating 21st century technology in 19th century legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne might be aware that TfL has recently completed a consultation on the regulations that govern private hire vehicles in the capital. This was in response to the developments in the industry I have described, including advances in technology and changes to how people engage and use private hire vehicles. The outcome of the consultation will be known later this year, and some of TfL's proposals might address some of his constituents' specific concerns. I hope they do.

I am aware of the major challenges to established businesses being presented by Uber and other new entrants to the market. I can understand the concern of my hon. Friend's taxi-driving constituents. Like many people, I was made aware of Uber, following the taxi drivers' protest on 11 June 2014—unfortunately providing priceless publicity for Uber. Indeed, some used Uber for the first time during that protest.

Uber London Ltd has been licensed by Transport for London as a private hire vehicle operator in London since 2012. The company has now applied for and been granted licences in 25 other licensing authorities in England. In order to be granted a licence, Uber must meet the same standards as any other privatised vehicle operator in the local authority area. Therefore 26 different authorities have decided that Uber is a fit and proper company.

I know that the London taxi trade fundamentally disagrees with the view of Transport for London on how Uber calculates a fare. Many members of the taxi trade consider Uber's smartphone app to be essentially a taxi meter. Taxi meters are, of course, forbidden in London's private hire vehicles. My hon. Friend may be aware that Transport for London has recognised that the law in respect of this issue is unclear and has applied to the High Court for a declaration. We must now let the court make its decision as the next step in the process.

My hon. Friend may be aware that last year the London Assembly transport committee began an investigation into taxi and private hire services in London. This scrutiny resulted in the transport committee making a number of recommendations to the Mayor and Transport for London on steps they could take to improve taxi and private hire services in London.

The committee was in some cases critical of the role of the taxi and private hire section of Transport for London and I understand that members of both London's taxi and private hire vehicle trades gave evidence to this committee as to their dissatisfaction with Transport for London's actions as the licensing authority. This committee is responsible for questioning and scrutinising the actions of the Mayor, and it is not for the Government to comment on local licensing matters or the actions of the Committee.

My hon. Friend will be aware that in 2012 the Department for Transport asked the Law Commission to conduct a review of taxi and private hire vehicle legislation. This was against the backdrop of the Government's red tape challenge and legislation dating back to the early years of Queen Victoria's reign and the age of horse-drawn Hackney carriages. As we have heard, the advent of the cab was very much earlier. Since that time, there has been additional legislation to allow for the regulation of private hire vehicles, but the law remains complex and outdated.

The Law Commission undertook a very comprehensive review and last year published its final report, which contained recommendations for a modern and simplified structure. The Law Commission's report provided not only crucial analysis of the problems posed by the current law, but solutions designed to make a difference to both the travelling public and those who work in the industry. Updated and simplified legislation will provide

a modern and simple framework, which will in turn ensure public safety and provide the trade with certainty, therefore making growth and competition easier. The Government are currently considering the Law Commission's recommendations, and we will respond in due course.

It has to be said that the traditional London taxi is not the greenest or the most sophisticated vehicle on the road. Indeed, in April this year, the Office for Low Emission Vehicles announced the launch of a £45 million fund to support the roll-out of ultra-low emission taxis across the United Kingdom. This included setting aside £25 million specifically for the Greater London area to help taxi drivers cover the cost of upgrading to a greener vehicle. The Mayor of London has pledged an additional £40 million, which creates a £65 million fund to encourage the development of the cleanest and greenest taxi fleet in the world.

At the same time, Geely, the company that owns the iconic London Taxi Company, announced plans for a new £250 million state-of-the-art facility to produce the next generation of low-emission London taxis in Ansty, near Coventry. Geely was awarded £17 million from the Government's regional growth fund to build the facility, which will create 1,000 new jobs and ensure that the London taxi continues to be designed, developed and made in the United Kingdom.

Those measures demonstrate the Government's support for the taxi trade throughout the country, and mean that the London taxi trade will play a leading role as we meet our climate change obligations.

The Government are aware of the changing landscape of the taxi and private hire vehicle industry, and of the impact that new means of engaging services are having on traditional business models. The Government also support innovation in all sectors of business, including new ways of running businesses, the use of technology, and the sharing economy. There is room in this industry for small and large businesses alike, but, whatever their size, all new market entrants must operate within the legislative framework, ensuring safety and security for the travelling public.

*Question put and agreed to.*

10.30 pm

*House adjourned.*





# Westminster Hall

Wednesday 15 July 2015

[MR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE *in the Chair*]

## Housing Supply (London)

9.30 am

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered housing supply in London.

In the 1937 novel “Coming Up for Air” by George Orwell, the narrator tells us that his neighbours all think they have bought their own homes, and remarks, “they don’t, the building society does”.

Although it was an inter-war satire of social mores in the suburbs, many Londoners now in precarious employment and accommodation would welcome the possibility of being beholden to the building society—they may even kill to have a mortgage. As was written in the paper the other day:

“Increasingly...owning your house is the preserve of the rich. Home ownership levels in England are plummeting just as new homes are shrinking”.

That was not in the *Morning Star* or the *Socialist Worker*; it was in *The Sunday Times* property section. This debate is supposed to be on the housing supply in London, but it would be no exaggeration to say that it is on the housing crisis in London, as that is what we now face.

I will base my observations on having been the MP for Ealing Central and Acton since May and having lived in Ealing since 1972. The seat is mixed in terms of tenure and nature, and spans urban and suburban densities. There are multiple issues relating to housing in London: the first-time buyer market and the resulting so-called generation rent; the numbers of young people living in shared houses, or even with their parents, right up to their 30s; the ability of councils to build houses with proceeds from sales; the disastrous new right-to-buy policy; the axing of Labour’s decent homes standards; the changing definition of affordability; and the dwindling number of key workers in the capital.

Housing is a vital issue everywhere, but in London the scale and gravity of the crisis—acknowledged by the commitments to build more houses in all parties’ manifestos—is particularly pronounced. Meanwhile, in popular mythology, everyone in London is living on caviar, quaffing champagne and Pimm’s, and the streets are paved with gold. According to Land Registry figures, London continued to see the highest price rises in the country. In March, prices rose by 11.3% to an average of more than £462,000. The rise was 5.3% nationally, with the average property price a much more modest £178,000. So London is different.

For my constituents, the average property price is now £535,319—17 times their average annual take-home pay of £31,000, according to the National Housing Federation. We also have the dubious distinction of being the constituency with the third highest number of private renters and of having the highest private rents in a marginal constituency, according to Shelter’s pre-election report. Among other things, that report found that 0% of housing

in my constituency is affordable for a typical young couple, that it takes 28 years to save for a deposit and that private rents went up by 14.2% in one year. It is no wonder that only 50% of London’s households are owner-occupied, compared with a national average of 64%.

The average age of an unaided first-time buyer in London is now 37, so my first question for the Minister is: what does he predict it will be by the end of his party’s term in office? Will we soon be “Turning Japanese”? In that country, people bequeath mortgages from generation to generation.

**Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing what is an important debate for all those across London who are concerned about this No. 1 issue. Will she be speaking about some of Ealing’s significant housing regeneration schemes, which are making people in other parts of London very jealous?

**Dr Huq:** Yes, I will come on to some of the more noteworthy schemes in the constituency—just hang on in there and I will get to that.

I do not want to brand all private landlords as neo-Rachman rogues. According to the post-2015 election Register of Members’ Financial Interests, 142 MPs declared rental income under the category for land and property in the UK and elsewhere, in which annual rental income that exceeds £10,000 must be declared. That is 22% of MPs—just over one in five. There must be some decent ones among them.

It seems illogical that nine out of every 10 pounds spent on housing in this country goes on housing benefit, including for properties that went into private hands under the right to buy and are now rented back to councils as emergency accommodation to combat homelessness, which we have seen manifested in mushrooming night shelters, soup kitchens and food banks across the capital. Although red tape is often condemned and flexibility championed, I am proud—despite Labour losing the election—to have stood on a platform of reining in the violent price rises that lead to instability for tenants. We also need minimum standards, not only for tenants but for the letting agencies that can charge sky-high fees, in the hundreds of pounds—I have never understood what for; a couple of references, if that.

Renting is no longer just a transitory stage for people in their 20s; it is the new normal, and it is becoming routine for people further up the age scale, including many professionals in my constituency. A new staffer started with me the other day. He is in his 20s and on good money, but he is sharing 12 to a house, with a shared sitting room and kitchen. At that stage of life, “Who Stole My Cheese?” should not be a way of life, and there are older people than him in the same situation.

I am now in my 40s and first bought, pre-boom, in the 90s, but it seems that people a bit younger than me or who were not as quick to buy have missed the boat. That includes people with kids. I see them every day on the school run, and they are quivering at the prospect of the landlord selling off the property any minute, meaning that they will have to move on and find new schooling for their kids. For the people who did not buy, it seems that the generations before have benefited from rising equity and pulled the ladder up behind them.

[*Dr Huq*]

In his new book, “Injustice”, Professor Danny Dorling says that in 2015, the combined value of houses and flats in the London boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster is worth more than the entire annual product of Denmark, the world’s 35th largest economy. That is a stark reminder of how London is different, and that applies to the suburbs too. The road where I grew up was not built for rich people. Opposite us lived Mr and Mrs Cotter—this was the ’70s: we did not know people’s first names—a postman and a dinner lady with two kids. Yesterday, I googled our old postcode, W5 1JH. No properties were for sale there, but all the homes on the neighbouring Greystoke estate, which are largely semis, were worth slightly plus or minus £1 million. There is no way that a postie and a dinner lady could afford to live in that road now—indeed, no public sector worker could afford any house in any part of my constituency on the open market.

The other day, I met our local chief superintendent, who told me that 60% of Met officers now live outside the M25, far removed from the communities they serve. Every school I visit locally tells me that it can get young teachers in to train, but as soon as they want to settle and put down roots, they are lost to Slough or beyond, because housing in west London is too prohibitively costly for them to stay.

The current Mayor of London, the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), is notable by his absence—where is he when you need him? I have had my brushes with him, it must be said, but it was he who claimed that not only property prices but benefit changes in this city were causing “Kosovo-style social cleansing”. Those are not my words; they are his. What steps is the Minister taking to reverse the trend of a growing proportion of London’s key workforce, be they in public services or other employment, being left behind and pushed out?

In an attempt to bring down the housing benefit bill, last week’s Budget effected a raid on housing associations and registered social landlords, whose properties look set to be sold off and whose revenues will be raided, stopping them from building more houses. The little social housing that we have will dwindle, and the policy is being funded by the sale of the so-called most expensive social housing properties in those boroughs. Were that to happen, it would lead to the total decimation of all housing stock in most of zone 1.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware that my borough of Islington has a good record of building new council houses to a high standard? We have just completed an excellent development on Caledonian Road of 25 first-rate flats. If the Government’s policy goes through, they will all be sold and not one person on the housing waiting list or in housing need will get them. They will just be sold on to the private market and rented out privately. Does she agree that that is a scandal?

**Dr Huq:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. It sounds like good things are being done in Islington, but they are being stifled by central Government. If only everywhere could be like Islington. With his leadership bid, maybe we could roll out the Islington model more widely.

A residential research report from JLL states that a fifth of women and a third of men aged from 20 to 34 are still living in their parent’s homes in London. They have been termed “the boomerang generation”, and there is academic research showing that this is causing redefined roles between adults and identities and intergenerational conflict, because it creates a dependence model. Before becoming an MP, I was a lecturer at Kingston University, and a lot of people among the student body there were not even boomeranging away from the parental home to boomerang back to it. The combination of tuition fees and the economic slowdown means that they do not even leave to pursue their education in the first place, so we are starting to resemble France, where people tend to stay local for university. Lord Kerslake has stated that

“Londoners are missing out on opportunities: delaying having families, being forced to rent for longer and many are locked out of home ownership completely.”

Housing is not just about bricks and mortar; it is about resilient, ideally mixed communities, and its affordability is key to unlocking this city’s full potential.

I was asked earlier about developments in my constituency. On the eastern edge is Old Oak, the super-development zone that we are promised, with 24,000 dwellings coming on stream, but most of these properties will be out of reach for most of my constituents. Can the Minister say what is being done to change the definition of affordability from the current Mayor of London’s reckoning of it as a whopping 80% of market rate?

The word “crisis” tends to be one of the most overused in politics, but right here, right now in this city, it is justified. It is not hyperbole; it is reality. London’s population is set to expand to 10 million in the next 15 years. The suburbs were once seen as the solution to our social ills—combining the convenience of city working with the values of a rural idyll; positioned between concrete jungle and village green—but even these districts at the edge of our city are now suffering with out-of-control house prices, and they are spawning these unsafe beds in sheds. The saying was meant to be that an Englishman’s home is his castle, not his shed—leaving aside the implied sexism of that phrase.

Only a massive house building programme can solve the problem, and that is something that, I will admit, successive Governments have failed to undertake. The coalition Administration concentrated on developer-led, private homes, rather than social housing and mixed communities. The cuts to tax relief for landlords in the Budget sounded laudable, but what happened to the promised neo-garden city movement? I do not hear so much about that anymore.

We need to ensure that we do not lose people to Slough, Milton Keynes and Luton. We need to reverse the brain drain away to other global cities, which will see this city hollowed out by all the Old Oaks of this world and other developments in my constituency. Indeed, there is one by the railway tracks at Ealing Broadway—Dickens Yard—where new two-bedroom flats cost £1.2 million. Needless to say, the lights are always off, because absentee purchasers snap them up as investment vehicles rather than as a roof above their head. I imagine that the Minister will say, “It’s all devolved in London,” but will he agree to include in his next housing Bill a power to let councils ban overseas and off-plan sales, to ensure that first-time buyers in London at least have a chance?

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Is my hon. Friend aware that much of this overseas purchasing involves dodgy money from Russian oligarchs and elsewhere, and that house prices in our city are being pushed up by criminal money and criminal enterprise? Is it not time for the Government to clamp down on Russian oligarchs, or are they too dependent on funding from connected people?

**Dr Huq:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Those dodgy people do need to be clamped down on. It would be a nightmare if London became just a playground for oligarchs, which is the way things are going.

The start of a new term in Parliament marks a natural punctuation point for new thinking. Will the Minister look towards alternative solutions such as co-operative housing? In 1997, Tony Blair stated that the main issue was “Education, education, education.” In 2015, it must surely be “Housing, housing, housing.” According to Ipsos MORI, 28% of Londoners rate housing as their main concern, compared with 13% nationally. This is a timely debate, and I look forward to hearing contributions from my fellow Members, as well as from the Minister.

9.46 am

**Stephen Hammond** (Wimbledon) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) for securing today’s important debate. She was right to make the point that all parties stressed in their manifestos the need for extra housing. That need is clear in London, the population of which is growing faster than anywhere else in the country and at the fastest rate in history. The official 1939 population peak of 8.6 million was surpassed earlier this year. The projection for 2020 is 9 million, but Members present, most of whom represent London constituencies, will recognise that a huge number of people are missed when data are collected; the figure is perhaps rather closer to 9 million, if not larger, already. It is therefore right to concentrate on housing in London.

It is also right, as the hon. Lady said, that general elections mark a punctuation point, allowing us to consider what we should be doing in the future. They also provide a chance to ensure that we recognise exactly what is being done already. Some of the likely developments have already been set out, and that will continue under this Government in London because we were elected.

The housing strategy, as set out by the Mayor of London, must undoubtedly consider not only the private sector, but other sectors across the market. It is also clear that, under this Mayor, more houses, particularly in the social and affordable housing markets, have been built than ever before—[*Interruption.*] It is all very well to shout “rubbish” from a sedentary position; some Members may not want to hear the facts. Under the mayoral programme, which set out to build 100,000 affordable homes over two mayoral terms, 94,000 affordable homes have been delivered since the Mayor was elected. He is on course to deliver 15,000 more over the next two years.

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Mayor of London’s definition of affordable housing is such that it is beyond the pockets of most of the people represented on these Benches?

**Stephen Hammond:** I do not accept that. The market has various sections, and affordable homes are clearly aimed at a particular section. The strategy that the Mayor claimed to be able to deliver is being delivered. He is investing £1.25 billion in the supply in London, which will lead to another 42,000 homes being provided between now and the end of 2018. Such allocations of money will support the delivery of homes on the scale announced for the next two years.

No one is suggesting that we do not need to build more houses, and in all areas of the market, but we need to be clear about what is already being done. The affordable homes scheme is delivering more affordable homes in London than ever before. Furthermore, the Mayor’s First Steps strategy, a single brand for shared ownership products throughout London, is clearly part of an ambition to deliver a number of homes in the capital, doubling by 2025 and helping about 250,000 Londoners into home ownership. That will make a significant impact on affordable home ownership, ensuring that 36,000 more affordable homes in London will be coming through, and have been built in the past five years.

The biggest issue in London is the cost of a home and how that cost starts: with the basic cost of land. One of the major promises that the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Mayor, the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), set out in February this year was the London land commission. Members on both sides should be standing up to welcome the fact that we are bringing into use public-sector land that is not being used operationally.

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): It is fantastic to have a land commission bringing public land into use, but not if such land continues to be sold off to the highest bidder. Scotland Yard has been sold off for penthouses. Can the hon. Gentleman understand the outrage in London when no affordable homes are built?

**Stephen Hammond:** I would have listened more carefully to the right hon. Gentleman’s comments had he not said that no affordable homes were being built—that is simply not true. As I have already laid out, 15,000 will be built this year in London. Clearly, the Mayor is delivering.

The sources of land and the value to the public sector—how the land and different elements of it are used—will vary, but the London land commission has an opportunity to bring land into use for home ownership of all types throughout London. Significant tranches of land are involved. Transport for London, for example, has 568 designated sites where non-operational land could be brought into use; 98 of those are ready to be rolled out pretty much immediately, according to the TfL development director, Mr Craig.

We should not squander the opportunity, which is significant. Such land has involved work in London’s east end and the Royal Docks; we have already mentioned Old Oak Common. We should also consider the potential that the Mayor has given in the money allocated—not only to land, but to the new housing zones, which are an initiative to accelerate housing developments in areas of high potential. Last year London boroughs were invited to participate in a programme, and I am delighted that my borough will be seeking to participate. The programme

[Stephen Hammond]

is likely to deliver a significant number of homes across the borders of my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh). Those will not only be affordable homes, but homes in the social rented sector as well as in the private sector.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is good of the hon. Gentleman to read out the Mayor's brief, but that is just utter fantasy. The hon. Gentleman mentioned Old Oak Common and TfL, but the largest TfL site is in my constituency and no social rented homes are going in those places. The limits for income have just been put up to £85,000. That is not building for Londoners; it is building for oligarchs.

**Stephen Hammond:** I am not just reading out the Mayor's brief; I have a panoply of things in front of me. Opposition Members will undoubtedly read out the Labour party prepared brief in a moment. I am happy for anyone to inspect my things—no brief talks about the TfL numbers, because I personally researched them. I know that those numbers are there and that they are possible. A number of sites of varying size can be brought back into all sorts of home ownership. Some of that will be affordable housing and some social renting—*[Interruption.]* As my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) rightly points out from a sedentary position, when it comes to Old Oak Common, we cannot yet be sure—the potential is there for at least 24,000 homes, but the mix is not yet certain.

Clearly, there is a housing supply problem in London—*[Interruption.]* It is not right to say that the Government are doing nothing; the Government are doing a huge number of things, supporting the Mayor in London. Labour Members might not like this, but the reality is that in the Labour party's 13 years of office, almost no council houses were built; in the past five years of the coalition Government, twice as many were built. *[Interruption.]* It is no good Labour Members shaking their heads: the numbers are there—that is absolutely true. Despite Labour cries, it is Conservative Members and their Government, with the support of a Conservative London Mayor, who are taking the action to deliver the housing that Londoners need.

9.56 am

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): I am grateful, Mr Chope, to have the opportunity to speak, although I will not speak for too long as many colleagues want to get in. I will concentrate on a few points that would change the situation for many people.

Right from the beginning, we must say that there is a big difference of opinion about what is affordable. Frankly, it is not acceptable for the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) to use the word “affordable” and not accept what has already been said: that 80% of market value is not affordable for Londoners, who have average earnings of £32,000 a year when the average property in London costs £470,000. It is also not acceptable for the hon. Gentleman not to understand and to say nothing in his contribution about the concept of council or social rents. Most Londoners find themselves in an overheated market, so they want to see affordable social or council rents. That is the dispute.

Other difficult issues face the city. There is deep concern about another word used by politicians that is coming to mean very little—“viability”. It is used too often by developers and local authorities, including Labour ones—this is not a partisan point—to say that the proportion of affordable homes on a development will be low, and that is using Boris's definition of affordable. That is why two weeks ago I rejected a plan in my constituency to turn a police station into flats, given that only 14% of them were to be affordable. That is not acceptable when public land is involved.

The hon. Member for Wimbledon shouts about the land commission, but he needs to understand that it means nothing if it amounts to the selling off of public land, to which taxpayers have contributed over so many years, to the highest bidder and moving it from public to private ownership. That is not acceptable. It must be fought and stood up to in this city.

**Stephen Hammond:** What is equally not acceptable is to mischaracterise the situation. A huge number of Londoners want to get on the housing ladder, and some of the housing now being provided represents exactly that sort of opportunity. We are not talking only about social rents and affordable housing; some of the opportunities enable young Londoners to get on to the housing ladder.

**Mr Lammy:** Do the maths: the average house costs £470,000 and the average salary is £32,000. With loans at three and a half times a person's salary, many Londoners will not be able to get on the ladder. People are therefore looking for a Government and a Mayor who have something to say about social housing. What this Government are saying about social housing is, “We are going to extend the right to buy even further and take even more property off the ladder.”

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Before my right hon. Friend gets fully into the issue of social housing, he must be aware of the problems of the permitted development rule, by which any industrial or office premises can be converted into private sector housing with no need for planning permission and therefore no control whatever over the kind of property put there. That is yet another example of missed opportunities: good quality council housing could have been provided but instead there is very expensive, upmarket private rented stuff.

**Mr Lammy:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. We need homes, but not at the expense of business and industry in this city. Of course, these are developments of homes with no infrastructure or support. Office space and facilities are dwindling in the city of London. Again, the hon. Member for Wimbledon had nothing to say about that.

There are some things that need to happen. We need a redefinition of affordability. We should make the plans that developers put forward for public land transparent and open. All of the accounts of viability on public land should be available to the public, so that they can interrogate whether the proportion of affordable homes is in fact fair.

We also need a degree of rent stabilisation. The vast majority of people moving into homes in London this year are not buying their own homes, but are in the private

rented sector. Rents are soaring—in the past two years they have gone up by 20% in the London borough of Haringey and 40% in the London borough of Richmond. Given those soaring rents, does the Mayor have anything to say about the private rented sector? No. He has nothing to say at all. He has nothing to say about the licensing of landlords. A mother came to see me two weeks ago. She was fleeing domestic violence, and was sleeping in a friend's hallway with her three children. That is what is happening in London's private rented sector.

Where is the plan for the licensing of landlords and what do the Government have to say about overheated rents? If Angela Merkel can run on rent stabilisation in her country and Mike Bloomberg can run on rent control in New York, why is this brand of conservatism so extreme and so set against that?

**Mr Burrowes:** I will give the right hon. Gentleman one example. What about the London Housing Bank using loans of up to £200 million to ensure that there is affordable rental accommodation? That is an example of a one nation Conservative Mayor tackling the issue of affordable rents.

**Mr Lammy:** I am afraid we have come back to the original debate about what is in fact affordable. Too many people are not seeing that affordability.

I suggest that we create a new vehicle—a Homes for London agency. The Government are set against any borrowing, but it is important to understand that a large part of the problem in London has been caused by the entire withdrawal of public grant to build homes in the city, amounting to £4 billion lost from this Government. That has to be replaced somehow. A new agency in London with a triple A rating could go to the bond markets and raise money against gilts, as Transport for London does. That would get us to a £10 billion fund—we will need a fund of that size if we are to make a difference. It is not about Government borrowing but a vehicle in London that can do something.

We need some kind of bond system to raise significant money for building social and council homes. We need to redefine affordability. We need rent stabilisation—every major city in the world understands that overheated rents lead to chaos and overcrowding; in some cities, such as Paris, they have led to riots. It is also important to hear what is being said in communities about estate regeneration.

**Ms Abbott:** When my right hon. Friend talks about rent stabilisation, does he mean rent control, and does he see there being a difference?

**Mr Lammy:** I am against setting up a 1970s-style bureaucracy to impose rent control. I am for a rent cap, linked to interest rates, to ensure that our more excessive landlords are not able to drive up rents in the way that we are currently seeing. That model would require much less bureaucracy. It seems to work, in continental Europe in particular, and we should adopt it. It is the one that our party had in our manifesto at the last election, and I thought we had landed in the right place.

Finally, there is the issue of brownfield land—this relates to what my hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) said about permitted development. If we stick to the idea that all our solutions can be built

solely on brownfield land, we will end up driving out business and industry, and building solely upwards. I suspect that absolutely no one in this Chamber lives on the 22nd floor of a development, particularly if they have kids. In the 1960s and 1970s, we built things all over London that people simply do not want to live in. There is a real danger that we will do that again. We need some mechanism for green belt review.

A lot of the green belt is not green; it is car parks, quarries and waste land. Using just 3.6% of the green belt would let us build 1 million homes. In the London area, having the outer boroughs make a contribution with redesignation would get us much further along in this journey. The vast majority of housing being built is small—in fact, tiny—two-bedroom flats. That does not help the families in real need in this city.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Christopher Chope (in the Chair):** Order. I intend to start the wind-ups at 10.30 am, so I appeal to Members collectively to exercise some self-regulation.

10.7 am

**Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I welcome the debate secured by the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq).

All Members present, representing areas of London both north and south, agree that housing is the No. 1 issue and one we need to debate more. I do not want to take up too much time, because I do not want to interfere with what has been, in many ways, a Labour London mayoral hustings. Although Labour nationally and in London should be doing a lot of soul searching, there also needs to be some honesty. There has been none yet in the leadership hustings, so perhaps there will be some in the Labour mayoral hustings.

We have heard the usual pejoratives about the rich coming over here and taking up all the London property, as well as the usual mantras about rent caps and controlling the market. We have also heard—with a shudder, certainly in my constituency—an attack on the green belt. People will be rushing to their local plans to make sure that there is proper protection for their local area. We must make sure that those decisions are made locally.

Let us have an honest debate. Let us recognise that there has been a 30-year failure by Governments to provide sufficient housing in London, and that there is blame on all sides. Let us also recognise that the Mayor and the Government have made great strides. Despite coming through a great recession, we are now able to seek to realise our ambition of doubling house building. We do not need a mayoral briefing, or any other briefing; we can look at the National House Building Council statistics: in 2014 there was a 10% increase in new housing registrations, at 28,733, up from what had been a record figure in 2013 of 26,230. We can all look around our constituencies and say that a lot more is needed, but there has been progress, which should be welcomed.

Also to be welcomed is the ambition to build 22,000 new homes. We have not seen anything like that since the 1930s. I am proud to be a Conservative and a Member of a one nation party and Government. We have a great

[Mr David Burrowes]

history of leading revolution in house building. Together with the Conservative Mayor, we are starting to get there.

This debate is about affordable housing in all its forms, but it is also about rents. We have not yet mentioned the Mayor's strategy, which is about ensuring that we build purpose-built rental property to have an affordable rental market. I referred to the housing bank, which provides £200 million of loans. Affordable rental properties are an important element of the market.

We also need to recognise that many of our constituents cannot get on to the housing ladder because they cannot afford it. Young professionals cannot get on to the ladder. We need to build affordable housing.

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the definition of "affordable" housing is a material consideration that makes a difference to the meaning of the word?

**Mr Burrowes:** It does. I will talk about Enfield shortly, where some of the affordable housing that is being built is genuinely affordable. Meridian Water, which is alongside the constituency of the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), will provide 5,000 new homes and is a huge opportunity to provide genuinely affordable housing as part of a mix. There needs to be a mix. We also need to focus on shared ownership to help people to get on to the ladder. We need to do more to encourage the First Steps programme, which my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) mentioned; as he said, that should double in scale. Shared ownership is important and should be a priority. We should call on housing associations to encourage shared ownership of their housing stock, rather than seeing it as an add-on or a subsidy for the rental market.

I did not hear the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton say anything positive about regeneration, even though there has been significant regeneration in her constituency. This week, a £55 million regeneration project was announced. On my patch in Enfield, Meridian Water is a huge opportunity to build 5,000 homes and create thousands of jobs; crucially it is linked to the transport infrastructure changes that are needed to transform the Lee Valley area. That is important.

The 20 housing zones are producing life-changing opportunities. We need more, and across London we should welcome them. London leaders do welcome them, but the Opposition seem not to.

**Dr Huq:** When new housing starts at £1.2 million, how does the hon. Gentleman square that with the fact that there are 13,000 people on the council waiting list in Ealing borough; there are only 700-plus properties whose leases turn over each year; and there are 250,000 people on the waiting lists in London. The stuff being built is not appropriate to those people.

**Mr Burrowes:** I agree, and the challenges in Enfield are similar to those in Ealing. I will not put my head in the sand and say all is rosy out there; I want to challenge the Government on some aspects. The plan for the redevelopment of the Ladderswood Way estate, which was put together by a Conservative administration and

is now being carried forward under the Labour-run council in conjunction with the Mayor and the Government, will create 500 homes by 2018. Crucially, it needs transportation links, but opportunities are literally coming down the tracks—Crossrail 2 will be important for the New Southgate area. Opportunities are being harnessed, not least by the London Land Commission, to draw together everybody who is interested in public land and get them work together in more co-ordinated way, which has not happened previously. All those things are important.

The London Land Commission was launched on Monday, so these are significant times. We need additional investment, and I look forward to continued support being announced in the autumn statement. City Hall, central Government and London boroughs are coming together to lock in surplus public land for housing, but we need cross-party support. Sir Steve Bullock, the Mayor of Lewisham said,

"It is vital that our overall strategy to tackle the housing crisis delivers an increase in affordable homes for ordinary Londoners." That is important, and we should all welcome it.

The hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton asked about garden cities. In London, it is about garden suburbs. In Barking, the local development plan includes building 11,000 homes and five schools and providing 65,000 square metres for employers and community space. That is to be welcomed.

Right to buy will be coming through in the housing Bill. I support the principle of right to buy—people should have the opportunity to own their house—but the reality is that the majority of high-value council houses are in London, so the eyes of the rest of the country will be on whether the right-to-buy scheme is being subsidised through London housing. We need to challenge the Minister on this. My constituents would not want the receipts from properties rightly bought by tenants of housing associations to go north of the M25.

**Keir Starmer** (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): May I inject a bit of reality on that point? In my constituency, there are 4,800 children living in overcrowded conditions on the housing register. I have had half a dozen advice surgeries since I was elected and half the people who have come to see me are concerned about serious overcrowding. The proposed right-to-buy extension will affect them disproportionately. Some 37% of housing in Camden will fall within the higher value bracket and thus will be sold off at the very time that people in Camden absolutely need it. It is going to make the housing crisis worse, not better.

**Mr Burrowes:** I understand the hon. and learned Gentleman's concerns. It will work if we increase the number of homes, and the way to do that is to ensure, in the spirit of localism and devolution, that London gets the receipts of the sales. If, as I suggest, we build two houses for every one sold, we would deal with the concerns about overcrowding and waiting lists in the hon. and learned Gentleman's constituency and mine.

There is another issue on which London councils need to work better. Particularly in Ealing and Enfield, people are coming up from inner-city boroughs and are being placed temporarily in cheap accommodation. There are not only the costs of the accommodation, but social care costs. Children in care have an associated budget,

but children in need have lots of associated costs. London councils need to work much better strategically to ensure that Enfield is not picking up the bill for residents of other boroughs. We need to work much better on that to ensure that Enfield, which does not have a properly fair funding formula and settlement, does not have to deal with that impact.

There are lots of other mayoral candidates and others who want to speak, so I will not go on for much longer. I will conclude by saying that we are a one nation party with a great history, not least on building housing.

**Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Burrowes:** I will not. There are too many candidates who want to speak.

The litmus test of a one nation party and Government is how we deal with the housing crisis. In London, we need to ensure that we continue to build more housing than ever before for the benefit of all Londoners.

10.18 am

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): The length of the speech of the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) proves the failure of self-regulation in the House of Commons and, indeed, anywhere else. I will genuinely attempt to be as brief as possible.

There is an enormous housing crisis in London, and it is getting worse. Someone walking around the streets of London on any night will see the number of people now sleeping rough, without benefits and begging. Every day, people are being evicted from the private rental sector to make way for somebody else moving in on a still-higher rent. There is something brutal and unnecessary about the way in which many people in this city have to live.

The abject failure of Government policy to address the issues of housing in London is making the situation worse and worse. Nothing that the Government have proposed since they were re-elected in May is going to do anything to alleviate the crisis facing large numbers of people in London.

First, there is the idea of cutting most local authority tenants' rent by 1%. I have no particular problem with that, but I hope that the housing revenue account will be compensated accordingly by central Government; otherwise, it will lead to an investment problem in the future. Then there is the bizarre idea, which I suspect is a Trojan horse for changing the whole local government rent regulation system, of charging market rents for those earning not very high incomes—median incomes. I was talking last night to a well qualified and experienced social worker in a London borough who is worried about applying for promotion, because success would put his salary up, which would more than double his rent. A salary increase of more than £10,000 a year would leave him worse off. That is a ludicrous situation. Council tenants should pay a council rent that they can afford.

**Ms Abbott:** Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the aspects of putting up council rents for people who earn a little more is that the earnings will be household earnings, which means that the rent for two people on an average salary in London will go up? Is not putting up rents in that way a tax on aspiration?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** My hon. Friend is right. I hope that the Government will think this through and not introduce the regulation. It is unworkable and will lead to a lot of perverse results, unless it is a Trojan horse for something else, as I suggested, putting all council rents on to a completely market level. I suspect that that is in the beady eye of at least some in the Conservative party.

The second area of concern is the private rented sector. More or less a third of the population of my borough live in that sector, often in poor conditions. Most are on six-month assured shorthold tenancies; they have no control over the rent and, in reality, no protection against eviction. We must address the question of the quality and regulation of the private rented sector.

**Tulip Siddiq:** Of my constituents in Hampstead and Kilburn, 33% rent privately. Bearing that in mind, does my hon. Friend agree that we should think about a national register of accredited landlords, to weed out the abuse in the system and the revenge evictions that still happen, even though they are technically banned?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The quality of management of much of the private rented sector is appalling, and the lack of regulation of letting agencies leads to many shocking cases. It is often the most vulnerable people who are victims of what happens in that sector.

The hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate was complaining about the number of people moving in to his borough from other boroughs. Indeed, people from my borough go there—they get moved there because the council has nowhere to put them in Islington. They want to come back. Often they live in poor conditions. The hon. Gentleman is right up to a point that the practice meets a need of the borough; however, it also creates a problem for the children involved. If he goes to any inner-London tube station in the morning, he will see children who travel quite long distances to attend primary school, because their family want to return to the borough they come from and hope desperately to get a council place there to move into. It is a reasonable aspiration, and one obviously hopes for success.

My final point is about sales of council properties. With a £100,000 discount, a vast amount of money is being given to the people who are lucky enough to get a council place. If a tenant of council property buys it and remains there, that does not make much difference to the overall social make-up, the housing stock or anything else; but when they decide to move on, the homes are never sold to people on the housing waiting list. They cannot be. More than a third of the council properties recently sold in my borough have ended up in the private rented sector, often for very high rents. There is something ludicrous about a council rent of £100 to £110 a week being charged for a flat when an identical flat next door is rented for £400 or £500 a week, with most of it being paid for through the housing benefit bill. If this Government deserve a prize it is for subsidising the private rental system in this country.

We need a serious, sensible form of regulation of the costs of housing and particularly the private rented sector. Average rents in Britain are more than double the average for the rest of Europe—in London particularly. We must address the issue, or this city will become even more divided. In 10 or 20 years it will resemble Manhattan. There will be a smallish number of people remaining in

[Jeremy Corbyn]

council and housing association properties in central London, and those will be the only social rented places available. The rest of the residents will be wealthy enough to buy, or to pay very high rents to live here. All the workforce will travel long distances on trains and buses to keep the city going. We should ask the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry about its concerns for the future London labour market, and we should look at the problems. We are destroying this city by our failure to build enough social housing, regulate what we have and plan for the future, other than by allowing funny money to flow in to buy up large amounts of land and property, which is often left empty and used only as a cash machine.

10.25 am

**Sadiq Khan** (Tooting) (Lab): There are 14 Labour MPs wanting to speak in the debate, so it is disappointing that two Tory Back Benchers spent 25 minutes this morning filibustering on an issue that is important to many of us.

There is a housing crisis. Not enough homes are being built, and those that are being built are not of the right sort. There are not enough homes with a genuinely affordable rent—a social rent linked to earnings rather than market value. There are not enough homes being built for which people can pay a London living rent. There are not enough family homes being built, and there are too many being sold off-plan to people in Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia. I have nothing against those countries and the people who live there, but we cannot allow our homes to be used as gold bricks by foreign investors and to sit empty.

It is a con when people talk about the market value of properties. The Mayor has a definition of 80% of market value as affordable. The Valuation Agency's private rental market statistics show that the market rent for a four-bedroom private property is £2,500; for a three-bedroom property it is £1,695; for a two-bedroom property it is £1,400; and for a one-bedroom property it is £1,155. We can see why there is a housing crisis in London, which some people do not want us to talk about in Parliament.

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): On that point, does my right hon. Friend agree that that definition of affordable housing makes no sense, given that, in a borough such as mine, only a household with an income of £102,000 could reach the threshold of housing costs as no more than 40% of income? That would exclude the overwhelming majority of people in any housing need.

**Sadiq Khan:** My hon. Friend is right, and that is why there is a crisis. In the King's Cross scheme, which my hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) will know about, one-bedroom properties are selling at £985,000. The price for a two-bedroom property there is £1.7 million. In Heygate in Elephant Park, a studio flat will cost £569,000 and a two-bedroom property will cost £800,000. It is possible to get a penthouse at a discount, at £2.1 million. We now have a city where developments have "poor doors". There is a door for people who can afford market value and there are poor doors for those who cannot.

Freedom of information tribunals have shown that developers in Heygate, the Greenwich peninsula and Earls Court have taken advantage of the viability con, which means that they can say it is not viable to build affordable homes. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington North talked about Islington, which now has a new scheme that will be open and transparent. Developers will have to publish their viability assessments for schemes. I do not care whether we use the term "rent control", "rent cap" or "rent stabilisation". We need to sort out the rental market in London. More than half the disposable income of those who rent—a quarter of Londoners—goes on rent. That is unacceptable and is a reason why last year more than 60,000 Londoners aged between 30 and 39 left London. We have a brain drain from London caused by the housing crisis.

To compound that, we have—even in the words of the two filibustering Tory Members who spoke in the debate—a housing supply crisis in London. What is their answer? It is to sell off housing association properties and force councils to sell off their most expensive properties. That will lead to a situation in which good councils such as Islington and Camden must sell the new properties that they have built. Social cleansing is taking place in London; we are copying Paris and New York for the wrong reasons.

If the Government are going to force councils and housing associations to sell properties, all that we need is that they should require them to build one before they sell one, like for like in the same area, unless there are exceptional reasons not to. Then London will not become a city for the rich only, with outer London for those who cannot afford to live in inner London. Conservative Members who have spoken may think that a modern London of that kind is acceptable, but those of us who have made the effort to come to this 9.30 am debate, but did not get the chance to speak because of the disgraceful filibustering, want change.

**Mr Christopher Chope** (in the Chair): Order. On several occasions, the right hon. Gentleman has tested my patience by using the expression "filibustering". Nobody in this Chamber has been filibustering and if they had been, I would have brought them to order. I think it is very disappointing that, having relied on self-regulation, that seems manifestly to have failed and I have not been able to call as many Members present whom I would have wished to. However, we now have to move on to the wind-ups, because under the rules laid down by Mr Speaker we have a maximum of 10 minutes for the SNP spokesman. I call Dr Whiteford.

**Andy Slaughter:** On a point of order, Mr Chope. As Chair, you are of course entirely within your rights not to impose a time limit. However, because Members, particularly on the Government side, have not shown any restraint, and given that this is the most important issue for London Labour Members and that we have come here to try and contribute, I wonder whether the Front Benchers would concede a little time to us, so that we can at least make some contribution. That would seem a fair way to proceed.

**Mr Christopher Chope** (in the Chair): I am going to call Dr Whiteford.



10.31 am

**Dr Eilidh Whiteford** (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Chope. I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) on securing the debate, which I have listened to carefully. I genuinely regret that more London MPs have not been called to speak, because I know that the contributions they have to make are worthy.

What I have heard today leaves me in no doubt about the seriousness of the housing problems facing people in this city and the failure of successive Governments to really grasp the nettle, particularly with regard to affordable housing in London. Although I represent a seat in the north-east of Scotland, I am not a casual observer of what is going on here, because, like all Members from outside London, I spend my working week here. I live in this city when Parliament is in session and I need to find a place to stay too. Even from the very privileged position that MPs have, the distortions and excesses of property prices in London and in the private rented sector in central London are more than evident.

**Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Is the hon. Lady aware that part of the reason for people being squeezed out is the amount of buy-to-let landlords there are now, and that it is easier to become a buy-to-let landlord than it is to become a first-time owner-occupier? Is she also aware that by getting rid of tax relief on buy-to-let mortgages, the Government could raise £6 billion, which would be the equivalent of funding housing associations to provide 100,000 properties in our city?

**Dr Whiteford:** I am very pleased that the hon. Lady has managed to get those important points on the record, because they are pertinent to this debate and have not really come to the fore yet.

Prices are way beyond the purse of even quite well-paid people in London, and that is just not sustainable. The fundamental and interlinked issues at the heart of this are supply and affordability. A fundamental shortage of housing has pushed rents out of control, the consequences of which have been well rehearsed. The right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) made a key point by saying that someone on an average salary of around £30,000 a year cannot even dream of owning a house that costs nearly half a million pounds.

**Dawn Butler** (Brent Central) (Lab): The average house price in Brent is £384,000, which is 19 times my constituents' average take-home pay of £19,937. Rent can be 78% of a constituent's income. That contributes to the housing crisis in London. Does the hon. Lady agree?

**Dr Whiteford:** I absolutely agree, and I am pleased that the hon. Lady has been able to make her point, albeit quite late in the debate. It highlights the fact that the Help to Buy schemes introduced by the Government will not even touch this problem, because even with those schemes, people are completely out of reach of the market. That takes us back to the point made earlier. It is easier now for someone to have a house in London that they do not live in than it is to have one that they do. In fact, they could probably live off the proceeds of the house in London, if they could get a foothold in the market. We need a housing mix that

includes affordable homes not only for the people who have historically lived in the area, but for those who work here in normally paid jobs, whether in the private or public sector.

As hon. Members know, housing is a devolved matter in Scotland. We have property hotspots too and inflated property prices in some parts of the country. We have also experienced a shortage of supply of affordable homes, over getting on for 30 years, and we have inherited a legacy of depleted public housing stock—

**Mr Christopher Chope (in the Chair):** Order. This debate is about housing supply in London. I hope that the hon. Lady will keep her remarks confined to that issue.

**Dr Whiteford:** I absolutely will, Mr Chope, but I think it is very important for us to understand that some of the ways we have tackled the underlying problems in Scotland might have lessons that are well worth sharing in other parts of the country. The way we have tried to tackle them is very simple: we have tried to build more houses, and our completion rates across all sectors—both private and public—have been much higher. The fundamental problem here is that we are not building enough affordable homes for people. The completion rates in Scotland across the private and the public sectors have been much higher. It is worth making that point because in London the situation is completely out of control and there are very real challenges for any Government in trying to put that right.

A key point raised today, as touched on by the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), is the issue of selling off housing association stock. It seems to me to be utterly insane. I cannot believe that any Government, with any sanity, would even attempt to do that, because if there is already a shortage of affordable housing, my goodness, why on earth would we sell off what we have? Hon. Members have made it clear during this debate that the money for which people will essentially be getting a free house could be so much better invested.

Earlier this week, I met the National Housing Federation, which was clear that it could build four houses for the giveaway that one tenant gets. Let us make absolutely no mistake about what will happen to those houses in a very short space of time: they will be sold off to tenants and, within a few years, they will end up back in the private rented sector at exorbitant rents. People will not be able to live in the houses if they are on decent salaries, and if they are on lower salaries, they will be pushing up the benefits bill yet further by having to be supported in their housing costs. The proposal does not address the underlying shortage because it does not build more houses and that money is simply not being reinvested. I wonder how many MPs are renting, in the private sector, homes that were once local authority or housing association homes that have been hived off into the private sector and are now being let at market rents that only MPs and other very privileged people can afford.

The Budget last week was terrible for housing. The point has been made about the changes to social rents. Of course, there are pros and cons to that, but one of the big problems is that it will disincentivise investment by housing association providers here in London. The National Housing Federation said in its initial analysis that it expected 27,000 fewer houses to be built because

[*Dr Eilidh Whiteford*]

of the changes announced last week. That seems to be compounding the problem, not addressing it. We also need to look at whether people will be disincentivised from investing at all. The NHF told me that it already knows of one housing association that has cancelled a planned house building project on the back of last week's Budget.

I cannot but agree with Shelter, which said that last Wednesday was

"a bad budget day for housing and those struggling with housing costs...Only if you invest in affordable homes by rebalancing investment and having a housing strategy that recognises house building, rents, benefits, and homelessness are part of the same problem, can you permanently bring down the welfare bill. If you just slash and burn benefits in the hope people in genuine need will miraculously find well paid jobs, cheaper homes or fewer children, you're unlikely to succeed in anything but making more people homeless."

I do not think that problem is more acute in any part of the UK than here in London, where people are often working in low-paid, service-level jobs, but are having to make long commutes into work because housing is now increasingly out of reach.

We know that if we invest in affordable housing, we can tackle the problem at its roots—that we can tackle not just the symptoms of the problem, but the underlying problem. The UK Government need to boost their funding for affordable housing throughout the UK, but I urge them to be much more ambitious. I noted Government Members' scepticism towards the points made about selling off the housing stock, but we have heard very little about actually building new houses, and the Government's ambitions for that are woeful. They need to be building 100,000 houses every year because of the lack of supply, and London is at the heart of that. Londoners would benefit from that, and those in average-wage or low-paid jobs would gain a great deal from it, but investment in housing would transform the lives of many people throughout the UK, and that work has to start here.

10.40 am

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Mr Chope. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) on securing this important debate. I share her strong concerns about the urgent and growing housing crisis in our capital city. She gave an excellent review of the problems with housing in London.

It is worth putting on the record how brilliant it is to see so many Labour London MPs here for the debate, representing their constituencies. Despite the very limited time available, we managed to hear from my right hon. Friends the Members for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) and for Tooting (Sadiq Khan), my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) and my hon. Friends the Members for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), for Westminster North (Ms Buck), for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) and for Brent Central (Dawn Butler).

I congratulate all those colleagues on getting in key points despite limited time. Interestingly, they showed clearly how the policies coming from the Government and the Mayor of London are simply not delivering the housing that their constituents need. They raised important issues about the supply of homes, the quality of homes and delivering genuinely affordable homes. They pointed to increasing homelessness, increasing rents and the subsidy going to the private rented sector that is distorting the market, alongside the acute shortage of land in the capital and policies that will deliver additional land. That was in great contrast to what was said by Government Members, who seemed to be living in a world of housing delivery that has escaped most of us on the Opposition side of the Chamber.

Housing supply is the crux of the crisis. It is estimated that the need for additional housing in England is for up to 300,000 new units a year, or three times the current supply levels. House building has fallen to the lowest level in peacetime since the 1920s. New property listings have declined for four months in a row and have failed to show any meaningful growth for two and a half years.

London is at the heart of the supply shortage. London house prices have increased by 43% in the past five years, primarily as a result of the acute shortage. The average house price in London in 2013 was £475,000, an increase of a staggering £41,000 compared with the previous year. We are looking at a broken market that can be fixed only by bold measures to improve housing supply, particularly in London. As many hon. Members outlined, house price rises in London have outstripped wage inflation and prices have hit an affordability ceiling, with last year's figures showing the salary to house price ratio at 14 times average wages.

Shortages are pushing up prices not only in London but in surrounding areas as the commuter belt gets wider and wider; that point was made excellently by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington North. To get affordable housing, people are having to move further and further out, often losing their connection with the borough that they want to live in and meaning that children are dislocated. The Government have not addressed that very important issue.

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for raising the point about families having to move further and further away. That is not only a problem for those families because of the social pressures that they face; it also places additional pressure on outer London boroughs, which have their own problems because of a shortage of housing and pressures on the small amount of affordable and private rented housing available. We have the additional pressure of families moving from central London.

**Dr Blackman-Woods:** I thank my hon. Friend for making an excellent point.

The cost of renting in the home counties has risen by 5.4% in the past six months, with an estimated 47% of tenancies consisting of corporate commuters, so there is an impact on the outer boroughs and on surrounding areas as well. The poorest and most vulnerable have been hit particularly hard by skyrocketing prices as the crisis has deepened. As hon. Members have said, that is increasing the number of homeless people on the streets

of London. The figures are shocking: 7,581 people slept rough in London at some point during 2014-15; that represents a 16% rise on the previous year. There is also a huge impact on the number of people claiming housing benefit.

Analysis published by the National Housing Federation earlier this year forecasts that a 21-year-old Londoner will have to wait on average until the age of 52 before they can afford to get a foot on the property ladder if the current price increases continue. More and more people are relying on the bank of mum and dad in order to take out a mortgage. That is increasing inequality in the city.

Worryingly, the CBI has warned that the lack of housing supply is having a massive detrimental impact on social mobility. If the only young people who can afford to live in London are those whose parents already have a home there and can remortgage it or afford to help them with rent or mortgage costs, the recruitment pool is restricted to the children of more affluent members of society. That is not a sensible policy at any level, including economically.

Even the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) acknowledges the need

“to double housebuilding and provide a million more homes by 2025.”

It is just a pity that he is not actually doing anything to deliver on that in London. In fact, as a great many of my hon. Friends pointed out, he is calling in planning applications in order to reduce the number of affordable housing units delivered. Again, that is in contrast to Labour councils in London, which are doing what they can—Islington is a very good example—to deliver more council houses.

The Minister has not answered a question that has been put to him on a number of occasions, which is that, given this policy—[*Interruption.*] No, outside this debate, but he has another opportunity today to answer the question. Because the Government are requiring or going to require councils to sell off their highest-level stock, will he insist that Islington sells the council houses that it is currently building before they are even occupied by council tenants? That very serious question needs to be addressed.

In the last couple of minutes of my speech, I shall turn my attention to some of the things that I think the Government need to do. First—this point was echoed by many hon. Members—we need a coherent and comprehensive policy to increase housing supply in London that will deliver genuinely affordable houses in communities that people want to live in, with the associated infrastructure and services that are necessary. They do not want to be surrounded by buildings that are empty because the homes have been sold to overseas investors.

**Andy Slaughter:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. From her previous comments, is it not clear that the Government are not only not taking the action that she proposes, but actively making the situation worse? Forcing the sale of a third of council properties means that the only affordable source of accommodation is being run down and will not be available for people in housing need.

**Dr Blackman-Woods:** Indeed, and it is to addressing that housing need that the Minister must turn his attention.

10.50 am

**The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis):**

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) on securing the debate. We recognise that there is a huge demand for housing in London and there is a real challenge for the Government and the Mayor, who has set himself a significant challenge to meet the needs of the growing population in this hugely important world city. London is an economically important and vibrant place to live and work, and it is crucial that we ensure that the housing market works well.

It has been interesting this morning to listen to a mixture of mayoral and leadership hustings, as well to quotes from George Orwell. I assume that the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton, who quoted one of my favourite authors, will therefore want to support things such as right to buy and the starter homes package, despite the opposition of her Front-Bench team. She has outlined her desire to see more home ownership, which is something that both schemes will deliver.

We have introduced a range of measures to get Britain and—working with and supporting the Mayor—London building again, to fix the broken housing market and help hard-working people to get the home that they want.

**Stephen Hammond:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the Mayor’s task has been made even more difficult by the fact that he inherited a situation in 2010 in which housing stocks were at their lowest level since the 1920s? Council house building was less than half what it has been during the coalition period.

**Brandon Lewis:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. I find it ironic, to use parliamentary language, that the Labour party makes the case for house building while seeming to forget that they left us with the lowest level of house building since, I believe, 1923, as well as a reduction in the number of social homes. The coalition Conservative-led Government built more council-owned homes than were built during the entire 13 years of Labour.

**Dawn Butler:** Will the Minister give way?

**Brandon Lewis:** I will not give way at the moment, because of the time restraint.

Since 2010, we have been able to deliver more than 260,000 affordable homes in England, including more than 67,000 in London alone. We have exceeded the target that we set ourselves for the period to 2015, and we will not stop there. We will ensure that we deliver another 275,000 affordable homes by the end of this Parliament. That is the fastest rate of affordable house building in more than 20 years, and it will benefit communities across our country.

The constituency of the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton will benefit hugely from the resulting housing regeneration. Early work has shown that Old Oak Common alone could result in the development up to 7,650 affordable homes, and we recognise that high earners in social housing should pay their fair share. That is why last week’s Budget, which some hon. Members who have spoken today have clearly not yet read, not only included our commitment to protect social tenants in England from rising housing costs by reducing their

[Brandon Lewis]

rents by 1% a year for four years, but will ensure that high earners who live in social housing are not being unfairly subsidised at the taxpayer's expense.

**Helen Hayes:** Although the announcement of the 1% reduction in social rents will be welcomed by tenants, it will leave a £16 million hole in Southwark Council's housing revenue account. Can the Minister give us an assurance that that money will be replenished by the Government to enable Southwark Council's continued investment in affordable housing?

**Brandon Lewis:** I would like to see Southwark Council go further in developing more homes and using some of the £21 billion of reserves that councils have built up over the last few years. We are determined to make sure that tenants get a fair deal, particularly where social housing costs have increased at almost double the rate of the private rented sector over the last few years. We are committed to supporting the aspiration of ordinary hard-working people who want to own a home of their own. That is why we will deliver 200,000 starter homes over the course of this Parliament, at a 20% discount on market value.

**Andy Slaughter** *rose*—

**Ruth Cadbury** *rose*—

**Brandon Lewis:** I will not give way at the moment.

A Help to Buy ISA will help those saving for a deposit to have a better chance of owning their own home. The Help to Buy schemes have already supported a total of 210,000 households since 2010 with the measures we have taken. We intend to go further. We will do more to help people reach that aspiration of owning their own home. We will work to deliver that for 1.3 million housing association tenants, supporting their desire to own their own home and making sure that at the same time we are boosting the housing supply in this country.

Hon. Members mentioned private sector rates in England as a whole, which have been rising at less than inflation during recent years. We need to make sure that good standards are met, and we are taking steps to improve quality and choice in the sector. That is why we have established a fund to deliver a further 10,000 new homes. We will continue to improve the sector's professionalism and to make it even more attractive to investors, to deliver more homes. We have taken action to tackle bad landlords so that they either improve or, preferably, leave the sector. That is why I support what the Mayor of London is doing with the London rental standard. We have published the "How to rent" guide and the "Renting a safe home" guide to help tenants better to understand their rights and responsibilities.

Opposition Members have talked about different forms of rent control and tried to argue that they are not rent control as any of us see it. If it looks like rent control and it smells like rent control, as the electorate made clear in the general election this year it is rent control—something that the Labour shadow Secretary of State has already said does not work and will not work. Experiences elsewhere have proven that, and we will not do it.

We are also facilitating new ways of regenerating inner-city estates, as we have seen at City Mills in Hackney. We are looking to kick-start more work to deliver more homes. We believe that we can deliver more homes on brownfield land without adopting the plan of the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) to build across our treasured green belt. We expect to bring more than 134,000 more homes up to the decent homes standard, including around 55,000 homes in London alone. We will be investing a further £160 million to ensure that by April 2016, no more 10% of stock in each local authority does not meet that standard, and £145 million has been allocated to London.

We have, as hon. Members have pointed out, brought forward permitted development rights to get better use of existing buildings, particularly unused office space. There have been 25,700 permissions for home extensions and office-to-residential conversions to date.

**Dr Huq:** Will the Minister give way?

**Brandon Lewis:** Not at the moment.

That is 25,000 more homes for people in London who need them, and I am disappointed that Opposition Members seem to want to prevent Londoners from accessing those homes. That is part of a radical package of planning measures that the Chancellor announced at the Budget last week, including extending the Mayor's powers to ensure that further work can be done strategically in London to deliver the housing that we all want.

Our new measures will help London to build up, in addition to other building, rather than building out and touching on the green belt that Opposition Members seem so keen to deliver on. We want to deliver more homes for Londoners while protecting that important countryside, which is what residents want. Alongside our planning measures, we will invest £1.3 billion up to 2020 to unlock and accelerate development on large housing sites that are struggling to move forward. We have released enough public sector land to deliver more than 100,000 homes, and we will deliver another 150,000 during this Parliament. Our Get Britain Building investment fund of £500 million will support almost another 10,000 homes.

We are working with the Greater London Authority to support regeneration in Brent Cross to deliver another 7,500 homes, and we are providing £7 million of revenue funding to the GLA over this Parliament to support the delivery of the Croydon growth zone, which will enable the creation of another 4,000 homes and 10,000 jobs. We are engaging locally led development in the form of garden cities. There are several already across the country, including Ebbsfleet, near London.

I look forward to the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton encouraging areas such as hers to deliver more, and we will work with them to do that. We are determined to make the best use of brownfield land to unlock and accelerate housing schemes and deliver homes across our country. The GLA alone aims to deliver 50,000 over the next few years, and we will support the Mayor to do that.

The housing market in our capital is expanding and improving. One thing that we all agree on is the fact that London needs new homes. We do not dispute that. That is why we are committed to improving the housing

market in London by working with the Mayor to respond to the capital's particular housing challenges and helping ordinary Londoners to achieve their aspiration of home ownership. When the Opposition talk about the policies that failed them up to the general election, I gently suggest to them that they should think again.

10.59 am

**Dr Huq:** The Minister did not answer any of the series of specific questions that I asked him, although he gave us a good catalogue of things from whatever he was reading out—it seemed to be some sort of Mayor's brief. He was asked: does he think that the definition of affordable housing as 80% of market rate is correct, and does he think that there is scope for changing it, because it is simply not affordable for my constituents? It was put to him that the average age of a first-time buyer, unaided, in London is 37—is that right, and what does he predict it will be by the time this Administration leave office? I also put it to him that he could look at alternative models of housing. Would he investigate, for example, co-operative housing solutions? I also asked about key workers, the people who keep this city going: the police, teachers, public servants—

**Mr Christopher Chope (in the Chair):** Order.  
*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## UK Steel Industry

11 am

**Tom Blenkinsop** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of the UK steel industry.

I am grateful for the opportunity to introduce this important debate, and I am grateful to hon. Members for attending. I welcome the Minister to her new role. She has already surpassed her predecessor, the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock), by attending this debate. She should not worry because I will be positive and compliment her, and hopefully she will compliment the all-party group on steel and metal-related industries by providing good answers to our questions.

The steel industry is a vital strategic foundation for the UK. Steel is fundamental to strategic sectors such as automotive, construction and energy. Being infinitely recyclable, steel is perfectly suited to sustainability. Like those of many hon. Members here, my constituency has a great and proud history rooted in the production of steel and associated products, and I hope that steel will play a strong role in the future of my area and my country.

The manufacturing of steel products makes a significant contribution to the British economy. Exports of British steel were worth £4.9 billion in 2013 and contributed £2.4 billion to the UK's balance of trade. The sector's overall contribution to the UK economy is worth some £9.5 billion a year. It underpins many other economic activities and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. The industry provides jobs for thousands of people and supports domestic businesses and employment in the supply chain, with associated knock-on benefits for the national economy generated by tax revenues.

During the previous Parliament, the Government said that they would take swift and robust action by introducing compensation payments in relation to the EU emissions trading scheme in 2013, carbon price support in 2014 and making a commitment to commence payments in relation to renewables levies later this year and next year, but the industry faces a number of urgent and critical challenges today if it is to succeed tomorrow. The need for major ongoing investment will continue, and a meaningful partnership between the industry and the Government is required to overcome those challenges.

The changing nature of the economy means that the UK now imports more of the steel it consumes, largely in the shape of finished goods. In 1970, 90% of the steel consumed in the UK came from domestic production; that share is now less than 20%, with consumption broadly the same. That has compelled the UK metals sector to become increasingly export focused, which exposes us to shifting wider demand patterns and movement in exchange risks, as we have seen recently. Meanwhile, the UK remains open to imported steel material from as far away as China.

The UK steel sector continues to suffer an ongoing economic crisis. The service sector-led economic recovery has left steel-consuming sectors, such as construction, between 5% and 10% below 2007 levels; and recovering activity in such sectors has been less steel-intensive. UK steel demand in 2015 is forecast to be 75% of pre-recession

[Tom Blenkinsop]

levels, compared with 94% in Germany and 180% in China. Such demand levels are a real problem for a capital-intensive business such as steel.

High levels of steel imports are another challenge faced by the industry. Members of the APPG, of which I am chair, are increasingly concerned about the dramatic increase in UK steel imports, most notably from China. Steel imports from China have doubled in the first four months of 2015 compared with the same period last year.

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should adopt the charter for sustainable British steel and bring that standard into their procurement practices? That would help to tackle some of the import problems that he outlines.

**Tom Blenkinsop:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, which both the APPG and EEF, the manufacturers' organisation, have been making for some time. I hope the Minister will respond on that.

Compared with the same period last year, some products are registering truly staggering increases in imports of between 1,000% and 3,000%. The primary cause of those increases is the slowdown in Chinese construction activity, which has prompted certain Chinese producers to seek new markets in which to dump excess production. Those producers have come to the UK because they are already accredited under the British accreditation scheme to sell in far eastern markets such as Hong Kong and Singapore, which use the same accreditation scheme.

The APPG is committed to free trade, but what we are currently experiencing with some steel products cannot be considered free trade. The Government need to take a more proactive approach in such cases—some would say that they need to adopt industrial activism—and I welcome the news that, in last week's European Commission anti-dumping committee, the Government voted in favour of maintaining anti-dumping duties on wire rod. The Minister heard my colleagues on that issue and took action. In a short period of time, she has been an infinitely better Minister than her predecessor. I will keep praising her in the hope that we get even better answers as the debate continues.

Loss of sales of the magnitude we are seeing now is unsustainable in the longer term for the one remaining British producer of rebar, Celsa, which is based in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty). The argument is not about creating barriers but about ensuring a level playing field not only in this case but in future anti-dumping cases, such as those on reinforcing steel bar, grain-oriented electrical steels and cold-rolled steels, which are all at various stages of investigation by the European Commission anti-dumping committee.

The steel industry is not all doom and gloom. An industry that remains innovative in which people continue to invest will create direct jobs, skills and broader regional economic growth. The steel industry has the potential to enjoy a long, sustainable, innovative and productive future. Earlier this month, for example, BOC, the biggest industrial gas company in the UK, signed a

15-year agreement to supply industrial gases to Sahaviriya Steel Industries UK, a major integrated iron and steel manufacturing facility based on Teesside in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) at the Teesside Cast Products site. The agreement is one of the largest gas contracts ever awarded in the UK. There has since been a turnaround, and the agreement represents a huge vote of confidence in the long-term sustainability of steelmaking on Teesside and the wider UK.

Another example, again from Teesside, is the cluster of energy-intensive industries in the Tees valley that recently set out a bold plan for the UK to lead the world in combining a growing industrial base with substantial reductions in carbon emissions. What is planned will be Europe's first industrial carbon capture and storage network. CCS is a group of proven technologies that can capture, transport and permanently store up to 90% of carbon dioxide emissions produced by burning fossil fuels, thereby preventing them from entering the atmosphere. To date, the focus in the UK has been on commercialising CCS for electricity generation. Teesside Collective is an important departure; its premise is that a range of industries will be able to capture their emissions, plug them into a shared pipeline network and send them for permanent storage under the North sea. CCS is significant for the steel industry, as an energy-intensive industry, because the EU emissions trading system is likely to remain the primary driver of reducing industrial emissions up to 2030. Following the agreement of a new EU climate change package in 2014, sectors within the EU ETS will collectively need to reduce emissions by 43% between 2005 and 2030. Such reductions may be hard to achieve for sectors such as steel, but that type of programme offers a high-tech solution.

Projects such as the Teesside Collective may be crucial for the long-term future of the steel industry, and I welcome the support that the project has received from the Department of Energy and Climate Change. It is vital that the Government are proactive in supporting the steel industry. Such support does not have to consist of intervention similar to that in Italy, where the largest steelworks is in the process of being nationalised—incidentally, it is one of the worst-polluting steelworks in the EU. Government support could take the form of policies such as competitive energy prices and business rates. Following the review that ended in June, a swift, positive response is now required.

**Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): My hon. Friend has talked a lot about energy prices, which are a problem. If energy costs move against a plant, it does not matter how efficient the plant is; it will be difficult for it to compete against foreign competition.

**Tom Blenkinsop:** My hon. Friend is correct.

**Stephen Kinnoch** (Aberavon) (Lab): My hon. Friend mentioned business rates. As we know, the lack of investment in machinery and technology is a major reason for the United Kingdom's productivity crisis. The steelworks at Port Talbot in my constituency invested £185 million in a new blast furnace, which led to a £400,000 increase in business rates. Does he agree that we need to have a business rates holiday until the review is completed at the end of 2015? It is urgent that we increase competitiveness and productivity.

**Tom Blenkinsop:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question. He makes an excellent point. To encourage further investment, which we have seen in Port Talbot and across the steel industry in certain areas, we need a response from Government about business rates, so that there is no deterrent to further plant and infrastructure investment by the private sector.

Further integration into industrial policy and essential long-term national infrastructure subjects that are actually followed through would give companies the green light to invest. At present, too many infrastructure projects fail to incorporate British-made products into their design. Government can promote procurement strategies that support domestic manufacturers, encouraging innovation and job creation by signing up to the UK Steel charter for sustainable British steel.

My final points relate to the people involved in the UK steel industry. At the end of May, we stood on the brink of the first national strike in the steel industry for over 30 years. That action, which included a 24-hour stoppage, was threatened after Tata Steel decided to axe the final salary benefits of the British Steel pension scheme. It was only avoided following an 11th-hour deal between unions and Tata Steel after Government advisers and the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service were called in. Under the modified scheme, steelworkers who are given approval to retire at 60 instead of 65 years of age will receive new ex-gratia payments from October 2020. Today, the ballot of union members over whether to accept changes to their pension scheme closed, and employees at the Tata Steel works in Scunthorpe and other places are expected to deliver a massive vote of confidence for the proposed changes to the British Steel pension scheme. That demonstrates how constructive and positive industrial relations can be. We want to maintain that and we have maintained it for over three decades. I hope the Minister takes that point back to her ministerial colleagues, especially in light of today's news.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab):** To reinforce the point that my hon. Friend makes extremely well about the history of pragmatism in the industry, is it not symbolic that we were on the verge of the first national steel strike since 1980 and the one before that was about half a century earlier? The industry has a good history of positive industrial relations that can be continued into the future.

**Tom Blenkinsop:** My hon. Friend is correct. The employees in the industry know that things could be shifted at any moment. In a globalised economy where capital can move in seconds, there is an understanding and a traditional trade union ability to get round the table and negotiate. Michael Leahy, the former general secretary of Community, always said that we believe in the force of argument not the argument of force. However, when an employer, or indeed a Government, tries to deny the democratic rights of employees in the workplace, it has to be taken into account. I hope the Minister will take that point back to her ministerial colleagues.

I mention pensions because when we are debating issues such as energy prices, productivity, emissions targets and so on, it is easy to forget that many of the communities we represent have been built from the hard work of steelworkers over generations. In the previous Parliament, I, alongside hon. Members here, pledged to

stand up for steel, and that includes defending its workers, who have contributed a huge amount of their lives and expect a decent pension at the end. I do not think that is too much to ask.

The APPG members here have asked to meet the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, and I believe that the vice-chair of the group, the hon. Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove), repeated that request in Business, Innovation and Skills questions. We would love to meet the Minister, if an audience with the APPG would be acceptable to her. We have also written to the Select Committees on Business, Innovation and Skills, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) chairs, and on Energy and Climate Change, as well as Treasury Select Committee, asking them to investigate matters.

**Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab):** I thank my hon. Friend, the chair of the APPG, for sending the Select Committee that letter. The Committee has not discussed it yet, but may I say on the record that I believe that the steel industry is vital to the future of manufacturing and the prosperity of this country? We must do all we can to ensure that it is innovative, competitive and viable for the long term. I will certainly push that point in the Committee.

**Tom Blenkinsop:** I thank my hon. Friend for that response.

We know that companies in the steel industry have already put in place future budgets for the compensation mechanism that will come through as a result of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's previous commitments to a compensation mechanism. We need clarity and evidence to show that the Government are acting upon it. We also need the Select Committees to look into business rates, EU ETS decarbonisation, and the future of the industry in relation to skills. We have a workforce who are predominantly in their late 40s and early 50s. The issue might not be the lack of capital; it might be the age profile of the workforce. We need to take that on board and be serious about it.

We also need to look at the time it takes to train someone, whether in the processing or on the craft side. For example, I recently talked to Roy Rickhuss, the general secretary of Community, which is my trade union, and he said that it takes nearly three years to train a waterman who works in a blast furnace. That is probably the most important job in the plant: he is the guy who keeps the molten iron away from the water. Anyone who has ever witnessed a breakout, which is an unfortunate and serious event, knows how dangerous it can be. That job takes two to three years to train for. We need industrial activism, which does not just go to companies as urgent investment and does not just have public funding that supports that investment, but that looks at how we ensure that there is a succession plan for skills in the industry.

11.15 am

**The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I congratulate the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) on securing the debate. If there was a criticism to make, it would be that it is unfortunate that

[Anna Soubry]

it is only a 30-minute debate. If anyone is interested in my views on this, I think it ought to be a 90-minute debate, and I would have it in the main Chamber.

It is important that we discuss the problems and difficulties that face our steel industry. I am particularly interested in looking at solutions. I want people to come forward with ideas about how we solve the many problems that we know our steel industry faces. There is no debate; we absolutely agree about the value of having a good, strong British steel industry for all the reasons the hon. Gentleman identifies.

It is right to say that we agree on the problems. We know that we have huge overproduction across the world and that that has been a real challenge for the British steel industry. We also know that there has been a marked reduction in demand. We can discuss and debate why that might be, but the harsh reality is that that reduction has taken place. I am confident, given the economic success that we have had, that demand will rise in this country. Unfortunately our economic success has not been reflected across the globe, but there will be an upturn, which is why it is important to keep steady. It will come good, even though we have overproduction, because demand will rise.

We also agree that we have a problem with the cost of energy. The steel industry is a very high consumer of electricity. We have overly high electricity prices for our industries, particularly the electricity-intensive industries, that are so heavily reliant. We call them EIIs in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and the hon. Gentleman and others will be familiar with them. The cost of electricity is a serious problem for our steel industry. We must look at that, but when we do so we must understand that someone would have to pick up the bill if we were to make a move on costs to EIIs, and that may not be an attractive proposition. However, I completely understand the burden the current electricity pricing system places on EIIs—I get it.

The other matter, which was raised by the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), is business rates. I know that concerns the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) as well, because he was nodding with great vigour from a sedentary position, and rightly so. It is a problem. It is hugely ironic, as the hon. Member for Aberavon said, that in Port Talbot people invest huge amounts of money and bizarrely get clobbered for doing the right thing by the huge rise in business rates on the other side. Sheffield Forgemasters International in Sheffield is paying £1 million a year in business rates.

As we all know, the difficulty is that if we were to do something about business rates for our steel industry, people would ask: why not do so for all the other industries? They would all be queuing up. We are reviewing business rates. We want to listen to everyone, which is why I am happy to work with the new Chair of the Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills—I congratulate the hon. Member for Hartlepool on his election. We know we must do something about business rates. I want us to take a radical approach.

**Mr Iain Wright:** Those who were Members of the last Parliament will know that the new Minister is a breath of fresh air when it comes to passion for and commitment to the steel industry. In the last Parliament, the Government

were working with industry to publish a UK metals strategy. Can she update the House on that work? Is the strategy ready for publication and consideration by the House?

**Anna Soubry:** I have some words on that. I have abandoned my speech, which will get me into terrible trouble with my officials, but I will read the next bit out rather than ad lib, because then I know it will be right.

I am pleased that the metals sector, including the steel industry, is developing a new national metals strategy. That has been facilitated through the Metals Forum, a grouping of 12 trade associations, including UK Steel, with which BIS has regular dialogue. The publication of the strategy will bring metals into line with other important foundation sectors, such as electronics and chemicals, which have led and developed their own strategies. We have been pleased to be able to fund some of the work, both for the strategy itself and for the initial scoping study, and we have seen some of the output that has emerged, which is of high quality. The public document is nearing completion and is likely to be published in early autumn. We expect it to provide a framework for our work with this sector in the future.

Hopefully that answers the hon. Gentleman's question. It may not give the detail, but that document will be published in early autumn. I will just put on the record that I am, of course, more than happy to meet the groups that have established to discuss how we can help our steel industry.

Mr Chope, how long have I got? Am I to go to 11.30 am, or are other Members able to make speeches? I think the answer is no. I am thinking of the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), who is on the Opposition Front Bench. Does she get a speech?

**Mr Christopher Chope (in the Chair):** No.

**Anna Soubry:** I am sorry about that. I will happily take interventions, but the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland will want to sum up in any event.

**Andy McDonald:** I do not know whether the Minister intends to cover this point, but I will ask her now: should the UK Government follow the lead of the Welsh Assembly by endorsing the charter for sustainable steel?

**Anna Soubry:** The short answer is that I need to make more inquiries about that issue, and of course I will write to the hon. Gentleman about it.

Yesterday I met Karl Köhler, the chief executive officer of Tata Steel. It is absolutely clear that his company will face huge challenges in the future; he has been very up front about that, and I understand that. My attitude—which hopefully was demonstrated last week, as has already been identified—is that this Government will and must do all we can to help the sustainability of the steel industry.

That is why I was so keen that we vote as we did about the threat of certain Chinese imports of certain steel products where there is good evidence that—unfortunately—China has been dumping. It is right that the EU should take the measures we are taking. I was so keen that we vote in favour of those measures that when the vote from the UK delegate was cast in favour of what



many will say is a protectionist measure, although I do not have a problem with it, apparently it was necessary to go back to make sure, because it was the first time that it had happened and people were so shocked by it. I hope that the message goes out to all involved in the steel industry that I take this matter incredibly seriously.

The steel industry is a very important part of our manufacturing sector, it is important to our country and we have to do everything we can for it. However, the challenges are enormous and we should be under no illusions about that, and of course it is not only Tata but all the other steel companies that face real difficulties.

I will return to my speech—in fact, I will start it, or rather jump into the middle of it. The best way that the Government can support UK steel companies is through a successful economy and successful steel-using industries. That is why I take the view that we should stick with the plan that we started under the last Government. We will continue with it. Our ambition is to create the right business environment for free enterprise and to remove barriers to productivity and growth within sectors, including by deregulation, promoting fair competition and simplifying the business landscape. The Government work closely with the steel industry on a large number of issues, and that will continue.

**Nia Griffith** (Llanelli) (Lab): Yesterday in the main Chamber, I thanked the Minister for her work on the anti-dumping measures. On supply chains for Government projects, we know that it is possible without breaking EU rules to, let us say, make it a bit easier for our supply chains to get the work. What will she do to get the Government to encourage and help the supply chains to make the necessary bids for the expected Government projects?

**Anna Soubry:** The hon. Lady makes a very good point and I thank her. I will certainly go back to my officials about that issue and discuss what can be done. Obviously, I would wildly encourage anyone within the supply chains to buy British-made steel; that is incredibly important for all the obvious reasons and because the steel is of such high quality.

In his opening remarks, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland talked about the skilled workforce. It may be that we have to revisit that issue, to ensure that apprenticeships are encouraged and that younger people are brought into the industry. However, the workforce in the steel industry are highly skilled.

Of course, there are certain niche sectors of the steel industry where we do particularly well and we rightly have a worldwide reputation. However, I will come back to the hon. Lady. Perhaps I will write to her about what more we can do, because the state aid rules are a real problem for us.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): I am obviously very grateful, as are all members of the all-party group, to Ministers for their willingness to talk to us and engage on the issues that we are discussing. However, I would be interested to know a little about the up-to-date thinking on carbon taxation and the support available to businesses that are tackling that big problem.

**Anna Soubry:** I think I have made my own views very clear. I am hugely aware of the difficulties that the problem causes, because it is undoubtedly the case that our electricity costs are some of the highest in the whole of Europe, if not the world, so we have to look at them. However, we cannot simply get rid of these things; everything comes with a cost, the burden of which may have to be borne by somebody else somewhere along the line. Nevertheless, we are actively looking at that issue.

**Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I really appreciate the Minister's openness, her willingness to engage with us on this issue and her positivity towards the UK steel industry, but on the point that my colleague the hon. Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove) raised, one of the most immediate and positive solutions that the Government could adopt, which would send a good message to the steel industry, is to commit to implementing the outstanding parts of the energy-intensive industries compensation scheme. Can the Government confirm when they will deliver that compensation scheme, which has already been promised and announced, and will they consider bringing forward compensation for the renewables obligation?

**Anna Soubry:** As I say, we are having a debate between different Departments, as the hon. Lady might imagine. I thank her for her contribution and I hope that we can solve what is undoubtedly a problem, but even if we were to do the right thing with the cost of electricity, that would not solve all the problems for the steel industry; the cost of electricity is just one of the problems. I want people to come forward with solutions to help me in my job, to ensure that we do everything we can to help our steel industry and to grow it in certain areas, because, as I said, we do extremely well in many niche markets.

As I said earlier, yesterday I met Dr Karl Köhler, the chief executive officer of Tata Steel. I am looking forward to meeting Luis Sanz of Celsa, which is obviously another big player in this industry, and last month I had the pleasure of meeting Gareth Stace of UK Steel, who did not hold back in giving his assessment and some parts of his wish-list. As hon. Members know, and as I have already alluded to, EU state aid rules limit the direct help that can be offered to steel companies. Research and development, environmental protection and some training can be supported, but we cannot provide operational aid; I think that we are all aware of that. Nevertheless, we work within those strictures to provide all the support that we can reasonably provide to ensure a competitive future for the UK steel industry.

Mr Chope, we really ought to have 90 minutes to debate this issue. I will reiterate that I am more than happy to meet hon. Members and discuss it further, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland on securing this debate today, which he will now sum up, and let us hope that we get a longer debate on this issue next time.

**Mr Christopher Chope** (in the Chair): Exceptionally, I will allow the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland to speak again.

11.29 am

**Tom Blenkinsop:** Thank you, Mr Chope. I really appreciate it.

[Tom Blenkinsop]

I thank the Minister for her very positive and warm words about the industry. In the short period of time that she has been in situ, she has demonstrated that she is a far better Minister with responsibility for steel than her predecessor. With her support and advocacy within the chambers of Whitehall, we can get even more positive results.

I will end by talking about the compensation mechanism. That was a specific promise given by the Chancellor. We need to see information and evidence about that. I would like to work with the other members of the all-party group and the Minister in any meetings that we are able to have, whether they are with the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills or indeed with Treasury Ministers, so that we can get past the difficulties between Departments that the right hon. Lady referred to.

Nevertheless, I warmly welcome the Minister's words today and I hope that we can build a working relationship in the future.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.30 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Regional Support for the Arts

[ANDREW ROSINDELL *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair):** The Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy recommended the use of regular digital public discussion forums to inform debates held in Westminster Hall. A digital debate has taken place on Twitter, ahead of this debate on regional support for the arts. For that reason, Mr Speaker has agreed that for this debate members of the public can use handheld electronic devices in the Public Gallery. Photos, however, must not be taken.

**Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered regional support for the arts.

It is a pleasure to open this debate, Mr Rosindell, particularly as you are in the Chair. As you rightly said, this afternoon's debate follows the second ever parliamentary digital debate, which began on social media yesterday. Appropriately, the debate enabled Twitter followers from regional arts organisations, and enthusiasts throughout the country, to discuss the arts outside London in our great regional cities and market towns, and in the countryside. They discussed how we can fairly distribute what Government funding there is throughout the British Isles, whether from the Arts Council, the lottery, or direct grants from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, to ensure greater equity and access to the arts. They also debated how to redress the parlous financial position of some local museums, theatres, heritage sites and cultural groups, which some of those participating in that Twitter debate raised with us. The House of Commons authorities inform me that 250 people took part in that debate, which reached 1.2 million Twitter accounts.

**The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey):** Will my hon. Friend say what hashtag was used for the debate, so that those of us participating in today's debate can look at some of the tweets?

**Robert Jenrick:** It is #artsfunding. That was not my decision; it was set by the House of Commons. I thank everyone who took part in that debate for their contributions. I will mention as many of the points raised as I can.

The point that came across clearly was that arts organisations have never been under greater pressure to change than they are today. Whether we like it or not, state funding for museums, galleries, and perhaps for the wider arts as well, is in serious and probably perpetual decline. The imperative to continue reducing the deficit, the ambition to achieve a budget surplus in the years ahead and the prioritisation, rightly, of health, education, defence and international development, all of which I personally support, suggest that arts funding from central Government will continue to decline in this Parliament—and would have done whichever political party won the general election. We will find out by how much in the months to come.

This is a major change from just a decade ago. Then, arts organisations across the country were able to rely on steady financial support from Government and were,

to some extent at least—although no doubt it did not feel like this at the time—shielded from having to ask the more uncomfortable questions about how they operated and how to distribute resources equitably across the country.

**John Nicolson** (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I distance myself from that comment, which is factually incorrect. Arts funding from the Scottish Government has increased, because we think that the arts are important.

**Robert Jenrick:** I thank the hon. Gentleman. I was, I guess, referring to England and Wales, but the hon. Gentleman's presence is much appreciated and he has provided an important clarification.

I emphasise my earlier remark about difficulties in the regions and particularly the importance of London, which came across clearly in the Twitter debate. The relationship between London and the rest of the United Kingdom with regard to the arts is one of positive interdependence; there was no tit for tat in our debate yesterday between London and the rest of the country.

Last year, three of the world's 10 most visited museums were in London and the number of visitors to each is increasing. The British Museum welcomed almost 7 million visitors. Even those of us representing constituencies far from London, whose constituents perhaps only visit the capital a few times a year at best, can agree that that is a tremendous achievement—one no doubt connected to this Government's decision to retain the decision of a previous Government to maintain free access to the national collections. At about £50 million, that is a substantial contribution of public funds, yet one can see its benefits: in England, visitors to the national museums have risen from just over 7 million in 2000-01, when free entry was introduced, to around 20 million today. As one individual mentioned in our Twitter debate, many of those are foreign tourists. In the present financial climate, one could seriously question why we do not charge foreign nationals, and perhaps non-European Union nationals, as required, and ring-fence that money specifically to spend in the regions of the United Kingdom.

There is no point in having free entry to some of our greatest museums if people cannot get to them in the first place. The national collections are relatively safe, be they in Edinburgh, Liverpool, Cardiff or London, but the same is not true of the rest of England and Wales—certainly not outside the major regional cities. There is no point knowing that there are great, free museums elsewhere in the country if those close to home charge and are struggling to maintain the quality that they want.

There is an irony for those of us who are regularly in London, whether living or working here as Members of Parliament, because we enjoy the capital's rich cultural life, often for free. Meanwhile, my constituents in rural Nottinghamshire have incomparably more modest access, and usually for a charge. My children and I can enjoy trips to the Science museum or other wonderful family-friendly institutions when in London, but when we are home in Newark—a town with significant deprivation and an average income of £19,500 per annum—we pay £20 to visit our superb new National Civil War Centre, £30 to see the Magna Carta at Lincoln and £40 for a visit to Belvoir Castle, our nearest major stately home. Those figures are for family visits.

My constituents are not as hard done by as many in the country. Of course, we have Nottingham close by—a city with a vibrant, growing cultural life, whether at the Nottingham Playhouse, Nottingham Contemporary and Nottingham Castle or in the arts supported by Nottingham University; like other universities, that is becoming an increasingly important promoter and facilitator of cultural life, which we should encourage. But the point remains: my constituents have to pay for, and inevitably and invariably have to travel to access, much if not all of the culture they want to see.

A report last year found that total funding from the Arts Council and DCMS was 15 times higher per head of population in London than in the regions. Lords Putnam and Bragg produced the shocking figures showing that Londoners benefited from £69 spending per head, compared with £4.50 in the rest of England. One could do an even starker calculation, comparing those living in great regional cities such as Manchester, Birmingham or Leeds to smaller cities, market towns and the countryside, including my constituency.

There has been progress. By next year, the Arts Council will have shifted the balance of funding to the national organisations that it supports, so that just over 50% will be located outside London. That is progress. The chief executive of the Arts Council made the welcome announcement a month ago that the amount of lottery funding to bodies outside London would increase from 70% to 75% by the end of 2018. The Arts Council has launched a £32.5 million fund to support arts production, talent and leadership outside London. There have been incentives such as the theatre tax relief, which was welcomed by my local theatre in Nottingham. That relief will help support touring theatre companies. Some of our national institutions, such as the National Gallery and the British Museum, are pioneering regional tours of great works of art, although those are very expensive to put on. The British Museum's annual report for last year showed the enormous amount of mentoring that it does for curators and those leading regional museums and galleries.

Let us be honest, though: those efforts are comparatively modest. They do not go nearly far enough and are not happening fast enough to redistribute cash and talent. There is a widening gulf between the capital and the great regional cultural centres and the rest, and that pattern is reinforced by private philanthropy. According to the charity Arts and Business, 82% of the £660 million donated in 2012 went to London-based organisations, and that is before the Olympics and the BBC are included. My neighbouring MP, my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer), recently held a debate in this place on the gaping disparity between the BBC's investment in culture and the creative industries in the midlands and London.

The proportion of Arts Council money spent outside London has been falling for decades, even though every survey concludes what we all know: the average Londoner is no more likely to enjoy the arts than his country cousin. The effect of those trends has been to choke off access to the arts for those in the regions, and especially those in smaller cities and towns and rural areas. It is estimated that two thirds of the country lives outside the readily affordable range of national organisations and museums, and that zone is surely shrinking for those on the lowest incomes, as transport costs rise and rural and local bus routes continue to decline.

[Robert Jenrick]

At the same time, there has been a huge squeeze on local access to a wide range of artistic and cultural experiences—particularly, as was made clear in our Twitter debate, by those provided and supported by local authorities. Many local authorities under financial strain have continued to support their local ecosystem of artistic and cultural organisations, and they deserve great praise. Sometimes that support is simple and low-cost, such as with Newark and Sherwood Council's provision of free rehearsal space to orchestras and community groups. However, as the recent Select Committee report noted, some councils—including some of the most prominent, such as Westminster City Council—do considerably less, and we should be pushing them to do more.

One could take up the point made by the Select Committee that the provision of culture is not a statutory duty for local authorities. As with library provision in some parts of the country, we must see quality provision and not a tick-box approach to satisfy the law. We have to persuade councils that the arts are essential to the success of their communities, but the problem exists and we need to recognise it: more than half of the local authority museums responding to a recent survey by the Museums Association said that their incomes had fallen very significantly and that their confidence was very low.

Why does the disparity matter? It matters if we believe in a one nation approach—the Prime Minister has spoken eloquently on this—where opportunity is available to all and all our brightest talents are shared with those in the greatest need. It also matters if we believe in rebalancing the United Kingdom and reigniting the fire that drives our regional cities and towns, as the Chancellor has laid out powerfully in the Budget and elsewhere. When we speak of a northern powerhouse, the language evokes the strength of great Victorian cities, all of which invested heavily in museums, theatres and civic architecture. The reality is that there will be no return to Victorian-style vibrant cities in the midlands or the north unless there is a momentous shift in their image and how they are viewed, and that is driven by culture and the arts.

My constituents see their best and brightest employees—and, in particular, their children—vanish to the bright lights of London. Many of us in this House have done exactly the same thing. An English, Welsh or, indeed, Scottish provincial revival must set as its goal turning provincial cities and towns into cultural magnets in which young and old alike want to live and work and in which entrepreneurs want to set up their businesses.

We need a major change in our support for the arts if we are to give those places the attraction and glamour of London or of the many other vibrant places, such as Oxford, Brighton or Cambridge—they are, it has to be said, predominantly in the south-east—that our brightest people are drawn to; often those people never return to their roots, however fond they may be of them. The issue is not about Arts Council funding to the regions rising from 49% to 53%, but about something of a far greater magnitude happening far quicker. We need to move away from the mindset that London's national museums and performing companies may travel more and the ultimate belief that they can visit the nation or the nation can visit them, but that they are not part of the nation itself.

**Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a well-balanced and polite speech, but perhaps we should put some sharpness into the debate. Does he agree that it is completely unacceptable that the Arts Council spends £1 out of every £2 in London? Even with the lottery-funded support for the arts, £1 in every £3 is spent in London. That is not only unfair, but damages access to the arts for people in regional cities, such as Manchester, and their economies. Does he agree that that imbalance is intolerable?

**Robert Jenrick:** The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I agree that it is intolerable; it has been for a long time. If there is a growing consensus that we want to redistribute and realign ourselves, to increase the strength and economic vibrancy of our regional cities, then the issue has come of age.

My final point is that regardless of how we distribute the available cash, if we are moving into an era of diminishing Government support for the arts—I do not think this is a party political point—we need to step back and assess how our organisations can adapt and thrive in that new climate. Is it not time for a new strategy for the arts in the regions and for our national institutions? One has only to look to the United States to see some institutions that have survived and thrived with diminished state support. Museums forced to rely on wider public support are inevitably better at outreach, education and community engagement. As the *Financial Times* noted the other day, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's YouTube channel has had more than 15 million views. The National Gallery's channel has had just 600,000 views. American institutions are dramatically better at and more proactive in fundraising, and their Government provide better incentives to give.

Some US institutions embrace more controversial means of operating, such as de-accessioning works of art that will never go on public display, that are duplicates of those already on display or that are of little merit to the public. Those decisions are difficult and mistakes can be made. We have seen some unfortunate examples in the UK recently that have given the idea a bad name, but we need to challenge our institutions to consider such opportunities responsibly, as some other great institutions do, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Government could consider through a review how we might use some of the funding opportunities used by others.

I have spoken to UK museums that would give up their dependence on subsidy and set themselves free from the shackles of the state—believing it easier to raise money from private philanthropy if they did—were the state to do something radical, such as guarantee a bond or gilts to provide them with income or endowments. I return to the example of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which issued a \$250 million bond in January to fund future development. It was given a triple A rating by Moody's.

The point is that we have a 19th-century view of how to run museums and galleries that just about worked when the state supported them reasonably generously. If those days are over, perhaps we should consider radical options so as to be on the front foot, rather than allowing the institutions to diminish slowly.

The scale of the challenge requires a new approach and strategy for the arts, rather as it did when Jennie Lee produced her original White Paper as the first Arts

Minister, but with different, often uncomfortable answers in the 21st century. There are three central questions for this Parliament. First, how can we ensure that the value of the arts in general, whether in London or beyond, is recognised by the Government in future spending decisions and seen as an integral part of our strategy for sustained economic growth, particularly in the regions?

Secondly, with the funding that is or will be available, how can we dramatically and swiftly correct the imbalance between London and the regions to create a one nation cultural policy that places at the heart of what we do access to the arts for economic development, education and wellbeing? Lastly, how can we support, assist and incentivise arts organisations to move with confidence into an era when central Government support is likely to be increasingly limited, but the public appetite for and value of their work, and therefore the opportunities, are growing exponentially?

2.50 pm

**Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell.

I have always been a strong supporter of the arts. I believe that rounded communities are important for proper education. I support local theatre, and I was delighted to see that there is a parliamentary choir, which I joined and am enjoying very much. I therefore thank the hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) for securing this debate.

My constituency, Workington in west Cumbria, has a proud history of arts, music and culture. There are a number of excellent organisations in the area that are supported by many dedicated volunteers, to whom I pay tribute today. For example, the Carnegie theatre in Workington was built and opened its doors at the turn of the last century; it holds a special place in the hearts of local people. The Kirkgate Centre in Cockermouth is a unique theatre and arts venue. Run by Kirkgate Arts, it was set up specifically to tackle the social disadvantage that comes from lack of access to arts and community services.

One thing we are good at in west Cumbria is getting arts out into local communities, which is a really important aspect of regional arts funding. Kirkgate Arts delivers “Arts Out West”, west Cumbria’s rural touring arts programme, which brings arts events to local village halls. I have benefited from its visits to my own village on many occasions. Rosehill theatre’s “Rosehill on the Road” programme takes arts into schools, and it recently did a fantastic piece of work collaborating with local schools to bring an opera to the Carnegie theatre. It was just tremendous. People say that opera is not for everyone, but I defy them not to go to see such a production.

Continuing to provide that sort of access to the arts is a real challenge, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) said. Local arts providers constantly face an uphill struggle for the funding they need. The Carnegie theatre was run by my local council, Allerdale Borough Council, but it has just been passed on to a trust so that it can access funds that the council could no longer provide because of cuts. We need to ensure that our arts facilities in the regions can develop to their full potential and secure long-term stability. That is becoming more and more difficult.

The Kirkgate Centre has great ambitions to broaden its cultural programme so that local communities can benefit even more from the wide range of high-quality performances and events it puts on. It would be much more likely to be able to deliver those ambitions if arts funding were not so disproportionately divided across the country. If there were less of a regional imbalance, areas such as mine would no longer miss out. We need to ensure that access to music and theatre is not just for people who live in big cities; I do not have a big city in my constituency. Everyone needs access to the arts, wherever they live.

Over the past few years, successive Governments, as well as the Arts Council, have acknowledged the serious imbalance in arts funding, but nothing has been done to alleviate it, the argument being that significant new funds would need to be found. As the hon. Member for Newark said, the latest figures on the funds distributed by the Arts Council show an enormous benefit to London per head of population compared with what goes to the regions. That is even further distorted because most of the regional funding goes to cities such as Manchester, not to rural communities like mine.

I am delighted that the new chief executive of the Arts Council, Darren Henley, understands the situation and has said that it should not be allowed to continue. He has pledged a significant shift in how the Arts Council invests its lottery revenue further out into the regions. Nevertheless, I fear that the areas further from the centre, such as west Cumbria, will continue to miss out, because if regional funding is provided, it gets sucked into the bigger cities within a region and does not make it out to more rural areas. We need to ensure that that does not happen.

Cumbria is often overlooked—it is a bit out on a limb, particularly west Cumbria. When he looks at the distribution of funding to the regions, I urge the Minister to work with the Arts Council to consider how we can make sure that all areas of the country are taken into account.

2.56 pm

*Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.*

3.10 pm

*On resuming—*

**Sue Hayman:** As I was saying, west Cumbria needs continued access to funding, and I hope we can work to deliver that. I like to think really big for my constituency, so there is something I would like the Minister to consider. Right now, major collections in London are left undisplayed: for example, Turner’s watercolours are just stacked away, and if someone wants to see them they actually have to request permission. Why do we not consider moving some of those undisplayed works, which could be national collections, out of London and into the regions to improve cultural awareness, create jobs, increase tourism and, most of all, ensure cultural accessibility?

**John Nicolson:** Is the hon. Lady aware that a significant percentage of the Government’s secret, undisplayed art collection has gone missing? It is one of the great scandals of the Government—not of the Conservative party in particular, but of the state in general—that we do not know the location of many of those works of art. It is an extraordinary thing.

**Sue Hayman:** I was aware that people do not know exactly where all the pieces of art that are catalogued are. I hope that my idea would help to prevent such things from happening in the future. It may even enable the Government to discover some of the lost artefacts.

Leeds, Newcastle and Manchester have all benefited from art being moved out of the capital into the regions, so why not move some to west Cumbria? The west coast of Cumbria will soon benefit from major infrastructure developments, as I am sure the Minister is aware, and with that will come investment in my constituency. Why not use some of that investment to bring about project such as I describe, which would create a lasting cultural legacy for the area? Will the Minister consider discussing my idea with the museums and galleries to see whether we can consider such a proposal for west Cumbria and perhaps for other areas around the country?

**Mr Vaizey:** Yes.

**Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair):** I call Lady Victoria Borwick.

3.13 pm

**Victoria Borwick (Kensington) (Con):** Victoria Borwick will do. It is a delight to welcome you to the Chair for this debate, Mr Rosindell.

I am speaking today as the MP for Kensington, where we have a great number of fantastic museums. I appreciate the sentiments expressed by some of my colleagues earlier, but it is only fair that I should remind people that we have the fantastic Science museum—many Members will have beaten a path to the door to twirl the knobs, press the buttons and enjoy the secrets of the Science museum, particularly given that we want to encourage more teaching of science, engineering and mathematics. We have, of course, Dippy the dinosaur in the Natural History museum, along with a fantastic range of wonderful educational exhibits, which bring natural wonders to the world. Indeed, I believe David Attenborough said the other day when talking to Barack Obama that he had never met a child who was not fascinated by natural history when things were brought to life in that way.

We also have the glories of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the other Kensington museums, along with Kensington palace. In fact, more than 12 million visitors came to the museums in Kensington and Chelsea as a whole last year, so I very much echo the sentiments expressed about how important this industry is to London, not only for teaching our young people about the great and wonderful history and resources that we have, but for being a worldwide centre of attraction whose goal is to bring more people to London. The UK's cultural sector will continue to flourish only if we treat it as that.

The relationship between London and the rest of the UK on the arts is one of positive interdependence. In a way, we could say that we are selling Britain as a whole when we showcase our international and national museums. People went on the great European tours in the past and brought back fantastic collections of wonderful things. It is fantastic that we should be able to show them not only to our children, but to those who visit from around the world.

That is important, as investment in a single place reaps benefits across the country. As a global city, we rely on our creative relationship with the regions to maintain our mutually beneficial relationship. As hon. Members know, our museums do tour—that is an important point—but we also need to ensure the right level of interdependency, so that people who come to London should also have the opportunity to travel further afield. However, it could be argued—depending on how the maths are done—that if funding is calculated by visit, arts funding for London is lower than for other regions.

Therefore, I want to continue to maintain London's importance as a centre of culture, and not only in our museums and our arts. Speaking, if I may, as the president of the British Antique Dealers Association, I also want to draw attention to all of London's arts, antiques and creative industries. It is a global hub: we import and export, mostly through London, but there are more than 7,000 art and antique dealers throughout the country, offering employment to thousands. As part of our overall sector, it is important that we should all work together, but obviously it is up to me as the MP for Kensington to encourage everybody to continue to visit the wonderful museums that we have on our doorstep.

3.17 pm

**John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP):** It is a pleasure to speak as the Scottish National party spokesperson on culture, media and sport. I thank the hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) for kicking the debate off—I am not sure that is exactly the right expression, but—

**Mr Vaizey:** “For so eloquently introducing the debate”.

**John Nicolson:** Thank you. You are too kind, sir.

I thank the hon. Member for Newark for initiating this fascinating debate. We have seen a flowering of arts in Scotland since the restoration of the Scottish Parliament, and we find ourselves in a much healthier position than much of England. The truth is—as several in the debate have said—that there is a sharp contrast between the position in London and the position in much of England, which is poorly served by the Department and by Arts Council England. As the Minister will know, the arts in London are funded to the tune of £69 per head, but for the rest of England the figure is £4.58 per head—a truly shocking disparity. That might be great for metropolitan Members on the Tory Front Bench, but it is not so great for the rest of England.

Creative Scotland and Arts Council England fund the arts with grants from their respective Governments, so let me give hon. Members some financial facts. Creative Scotland spends £91.2 million; the Arts Council spends £615 million. Scotland comprises only 8% of the population, so we punch well above our weight, spending nearly 15% of the total UK tally. Next year's Scottish Government draft budget on culture is up £150 million on this year, whereas in England the Arts Council's budget has fallen by one third since 2010. In this financial year, Scottish local authorities put £631 million—5.3% of revenue expenditure—into culture. In England, local authorities spend only 2.3%. In fact, the English local authorities are being crushed because of their ever-decreasing budgets. Westminster City Council and Somerset County Council have axed their arts budgets completely.

Arts of course, as everyone knows, are a window into a nation's soul. It was Alasdair Gray who wrote:

"People who care nothing for their country's stories and songs...are like people without a past—without a memory—they are half people".

On that basis, I am delighted to say that Scots are whole people, because the Scottish household survey shows that 91% of Scots took part in cultural activities in the past year and that Scottish public opinion is overwhelmingly behind public funding of the arts. A Creative Scotland survey found that 92% of the population support the proposition that it is

"right that there should be public funding of arts and cultural activities".

With public support, the Scottish Government have enhanced spending to provide stability for the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Scottish Ballet, Scottish Opera and the National Theatre of Scotland, and to guarantee free access to our national collections. But alas, DCMS cuts have resulted in 11% real-terms reductions to English National Opera and 15% reductions for Opera North.

In Scotland, with more than 200 cultural festivals a year, a national youth arts strategy for investing in the future and the glorious Edinburgh festival, we feel that we are in a strong position and are going from strength to strength. The arts are at the core of national life for many. However, arts and arts funding are of course not just about a national feel-good factor; there are practical benefits too. Creative Scotland found that the arts and creative industries in Scotland generate 130,000 jobs. That is in a country of only 5 million people, with a £12.5 billion turnover. That is huge.

I do not want to labour the point, but I will conclude by saying that we in Scotland are very much at odds with the Conservative Government's sadly rather philistine approach to the arts at every level. For philosophical and cultural reasons, and for practical reasons in terms of generating jobs and money, we intend to carry on investing in the arts. They are too crucial not to.

3.22 pm

**Susan Elan Jones** (Clwyd South) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I thank the hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) for securing what has been an excellent debate. He made the point that although it is not a question of London versus the rest, there are important issues about how the arts are funded outside London and the metropolitan areas. He spoke with passion about the need for a provincial revival in the arts, and mentioned the great new Labour innovation of free access to museums. He even mentioned Jennie Lee, which of course was music to many people's ears. It was a very good speech.

I congratulate my very musical hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman). There are not too many Members who walk through the Division Lobbies with copies of "Zadok the Priest" and suchlike. She spoke interestingly about the dedication of volunteers and about the Carnegie theatre in her constituency. A number of us will have examples of Carnegie-type philanthropy in our constituencies, and that is an interesting model for the encouragement of more philanthropy outside metropolitan areas. My hon. Friend's speech was excellent, with many great ideas for west Cumbria.

The hon. Member for Kensington (Victoria Borwick) made a strong speech in support of the museums in her constituency and understandably put the case for London. We should of course have arts for all, not just the few. We are all proud of our outstanding London institutions, but the debate has highlighted the need for proper funding for the regions, too—the simple principle that everyone in the United Kingdom should be able to experience and participate in excellent cultural and artistic activities. We can all think of examples, and I would not want to forget the Rhos male voice choir's tremendous victory on Saturday in the Llangollen international musical eisteddfod in my constituency, coming as it did on the back of three national eisteddfod victories. Incidentally, those victories were all secured while I was their Member of Parliament, although I suspect that that had nothing to do with it.

Sometimes we may feel that not only have the Government ignored and neglected the arts community; they have done nothing for the arts in regions that have suffered from Arts Council budget cuts and from the sustained squeeze on local authority funding. The Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, which the Culture Secretary chaired, recognised that

"London has long received a disproportionate share of arts funding".

Arts Council budgets and direct spending from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport go disproportionately to London, so arts outside the capital, in the regions and nations of the UK, need more support. The challenge is to rebalance without damaging the cultural super-cluster of London. Our vibrant arts institutions in London must thrive, but more needs to be done to improve provision across the country.

What are the sources, then, of arts funding? The biggest subsidisers of art are the artists themselves, who often work for little or nothing, for love of the art. Apart from that, the sources are national and local government, sales and philanthropy. The figure for giving to the arts by individual philanthropists that goes to London-based organisations is variously quoted as around 82% to 90%. When the Government started cutting arts budgets, they set up the Catalyst Arts programme to strengthen the sector's fundraising experience. The rather forlorn hope was that increased private giving would compensate for the cuts. I think we all know that it has not. Unfortunately for the regions, funding from that programme has gone disproportionately to London.

I want to talk now about national funding. In October 2013, a group of regional arts professionals produced a report called "Rebalancing Our Cultural Capital", which detailed the distribution of DCMS, Arts Council England and lottery money between London and the rest of the country. It said that Londoners got £70 per head each year in funding from DCMS and through Arts Council England, and the rest of the country got only £4.60 per head. That is a ratio of 14:1. Arts Council England announced its funding distribution for the period 2015 to 2018, and the balance for funded organisations—national portfolio organisations—will be 53% outside London and 47% in London. That is only a 2% shift since the period 2012 to 2015.

Lottery funding for the arts is spent 70% outside London and 30% in London. In his first speech, Darren Henley, the chief executive of Arts Council England, announced that he aimed to increase the 70% figure to

[Susan Elan Jones]

75% by the end of 2018. That is all welcome, but it feels like small beer. Nevertheless, the Arts Council has woken up to the problem and is slowly changing. It should be congratulated on doing so in the face of what could be considered neglect and a little forgetfulness, to say the least—if not ignorance—on the part of the current Government.

As to the lottery, there should be more transparency about where its tickets are bought. I know that some people feel that tickets bought in poor areas are subsidising arts in rich areas. In reality, that suspicion will be dispelled only by the disinfectant of sunlight. We need more transparency, without treading on commercial sensitivity and harming business. It is perfectly possible to do that, and it is the right thing to do.

Direct funding from the DCMS often goes disproportionately to institutions in London. The National Gallery, the British Museum, the Tate and so on are hugely important to our country, and they are one of the things that make London the great cultural super-cluster that it is today. The city attracts millions of tourists, and those places are fantastic and preserve the cultural inheritance of our wider country. Thanks to Labour's introduction of free entry to museums in 2001, that inheritance is open to everyone. Visitor numbers at some museums have rocketed up by more than 250%. We are justifiably proud of that as a nation. Nevertheless, the money goes disproportionately to London. That can even lead to the absurd situation of Conservative councils in the capital spending nothing—literally nothing—on the arts, while enjoying museums and galleries paid for by the nation.

All that means that in many areas of the country the only public funding for the arts comes from local authorities. The junior Minister present is often very polite in what he says, but even he sometimes blames the neglect of regional arts on local councils. Why does he not talk to his colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government, let alone the councils themselves? Why has he not offered help to local councils making these difficult decisions? Why have Government cuts to local government fallen so disproportionately on the most deprived in our country? I know he will have a lot to say about that in his summing up.

I am sure that the Minister will talk about a few million pounds for pet projects here or there. In fact, we have grown used to the cultural baubles that get thrown into the autumn statements and Budgets. The problem is that the Chancellor sometimes likes to give with one hand while taking far more with the other. He likes to give money for cherry-picked projects while cutting local authority and Arts Council funding. Sometimes he likes to choose who gets the arts funding and who does not, sidelining the Arts Council and local people. That is clearly a problem.

We know that the junior Minister does his best—he gets to a fair number of gallery openings and other events—but sometimes one wonders whether he is ignored by the rest of his Government, with Education Secretary notoriously warning that for children to study arts subjects could

“hold them back for the rest of their lives”.

She is giving a speech at the Creative Industries Federation event tomorrow morning, and I suspect that she has a bit to apologise for. Indeed, we wondered whether she was scared in some way of her Government's record. There is currently no formal requirement for arts and culture education in schools, which is deeply concerning. A number of schemes introduced by the Labour Government to improve access have been cut, which has led to the number of primary school children taking part in music, for example, dropping from 55% in 2010 to 36% in 2013.

If we go back in history, we remember the story—it is one of my favourites—of the young George Frideric Handel going into his attic to learn to play the clavichord, because his father did not want him to become a musician. The young Handel managed to learn and do rather well—it came, I suppose, from being a musical prodigy—but most of us are not musical prodigies. Children need to experience and participate in culture and creativity to foster the next generation of creatives, audiences and citizens. However, the Conservatives' narrowing of the curriculum has led to state school pupils taking fewer art and design subjects. We need Government action, because the alternative is to presume that everyone is a Handel-style prodigy.

This ripples up the rest of the chain, harming the whole of the workforce and the economy. There were only 1,000 apprenticeship starts in the creative industries in 2013-14—the lowest of all sectors, despite it being one of the fastest growing in our economy. For this Government do not govern in the interests of the whole nation; they are not really “one nation”. What many of us fear is a society where some people have access to culture and others do not—that is deeply damaging—and where some areas have world-class museums while contributing little or nothing and others have nothing but the Chancellor's whim. That is not only unfair; it is holding us back. It is holding back the fastest growing part of our economy, limiting the well-paid, rewarding jobs of the future and diminishing our voice on the world stage. I urge this Minister and the Government of which he is a part to live up to the rhetoric and do more to provide regional support for the arts.

3.34 pm

**The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey):** It is a great pleasure to appear under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. Obviously you do not have a chance to participate in the debate, otherwise we could have heard your words of wisdom on the cultural assets of Romford—I gather that the Brookside theatre there is successful. I would also have wanted to hear more from you about the Offset music festival, which I am sure you attend regularly. It has included bands such as the London art punks Wire and Gang of Four, which many of us will remember from our childhoods. It is a pleasure to know that they are still playing.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) for initiating this important debate. What unites us across party barriers is that there are those of us who are passionate about the arts. I am delighted that my hon. Friend is a member of my own party, but I am also delighted to spend time and associate with members of all parties who care about the arts, because we should band together. It should not be left



to one, small junior Minister to fight the case for the arts; we should all, from all parties, work together to fight for the arts, regardless of the colour of the party. Indeed, we do not debate the arts often enough in this place. I remember only one official Opposition debate on the arts in the previous Parliament—as a new Opposition emerges, perhaps we will see more official Opposition debates in the main Chamber in the years to come—and only one or two in this hallowed Chamber.

We had some valuable contributions from the new Member—a Lady Member indeed, because that is her title—my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Victoria Borwick). She represents some of our finest national museums, so it is right and proper for her to be in the Chamber. She made an excellent speech. The hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) sings in her local choir and her daughter helps out at the local arts centre. She, too, has displayed her passion for the arts. I will come on to her proposal in the body of my speech.

As usual, there were excellent speeches from the official spokespersons, the hon. Members for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson) and for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones). I hate to sound as though I am appearing in “Groundhog Day”, but we had a debate yesterday when I accused the hon. Lady of a mild case of chutzpah, and I will make the same accusation again during the course of my remarks.

I was excited to discover that this was one of the first digital debates. I do not know whether it is the very first or whether there have been others. It passed me by that this was a digital debate, and no one told me about a vigorous debate on Twitter yesterday, in which I would have happily participated. However, I obviously reviewed yesterday’s tweets and very illuminating they were. One of the great advantages of a Twitter debate is that people live tweet it as we speak, so should I fail to take note of some of the pertinent points made, I can follow them up on Twitter—in particular the points of @MarDixon, who has been live tweeting the debate from the Public Gallery. So far I have only featured in a discussion about whether I should be given a hug or be on her Christmas card list. No doubt I will feature prominently now that I am on my feet and able to make the points that I wish to make.

Over the past five years, arts funding has been an important issue. I am pleased that we in this Government have done our best to protect funding for the arts, because we are passionate about and strong supporters of the arts. We have had to reduce the grant in aid available to the Arts Council, because we had to make tough decisions as a result of the state of the economy left by the previous Labour Government and our need to tackle the deficit, but I hasten to say that we have tried to make the savings where we can and in an intelligent and thoughtful way. For example, we have reduced the central costs of the Arts Council and we had to stop some programmes, such as Creative Partnerships, which were initiated by the previous Labour Government and foisted on the Arts Council. My focus has always been to ensure that we have secured as far as possible the grant in aid available to arts organisations from the Arts Council. On the whole, we have succeeded in doing so.

What is never mentioned, but should be, is that our first decision as a new Government was to rebalance lottery funding to restore the cuts that the previous Labour Government had imposed on heritage and the

arts, taking them from a 16% funding share to a 20% one—a significant uplift—and so making something like £150 million a year available to the arts and a similar sum to heritage. National lottery funding goes to arts institutions in Scotland as well, which will be relevant to the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire, as it has helped to lay the foundations of the success he talked about. We have also tried to protect the national funding of museums and secured much lower funding reductions than some other Government Departments, thanks to the advocacy of successive passionate Secretaries of State. I posit that the casual, lazy, characterisation of swingeing art cuts is seen to be very far from the truth when the figures are analysed.

The trouble we face when debating the arts is summed up by that famous phrase, “Lies, damned lies and statistics”. It is possible to put the statistics in such a way that it looks like all the funding goes to London, but that is far from the truth. Take, for example, our national museums, which take up roughly 50% of the overall spending envelope for the arts. We look at the postcode of the Victoria and Albert museum and of the Natural History museum, and think that all that funding is going to a very small part of London, ably represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington. But the Tate, for example, is also in St Ives and in Liverpool; the Royal Armouries, a national museum, is in Leeds. We have the national museums in Liverpool; the Museum of Science and Industry is in Manchester, the National Media museum is in Bradford and the National Railway museum is in York. The V&A is opening a new space in Dundee, in one of the most exciting current architectural projects, as well as one of the most exciting new spaces opening for the arts. Many of our national museums have physical spaces outside London; many also have strong partnerships with museums outside London. Only recently, for example, the V&A was instrumental in helping us to save the important Wedgwood collection just outside Stoke.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newark introduced the debate very ably. I campaigned for him in Newark and am glad he was elected and then re-elected. He has extensive experience in this field, having worked at Christie’s. In the short time he has been in this place—I hope this does not sound patronising—he has made a massive impact in terms of the international work of our arts institutions in protecting antiquities abroad, particularly in war-torn regions such as Iraq, where he has been instrumental in moving Government policy on towards greater funding for cultural protection. His tone and remarks today have shown he will be an important voice in arts policy before his inevitable promotion to Minister—although for selfish reasons, I hope he is not made Culture Minister.

Our national museums clearly play a role throughout the whole UK. There is the debate about regional funding and whether too much Arts Council money goes to organisations based in London and not enough to those based outside it. Again, I do not wish in any way to belittle that debate, but rather I want to rebalance it. Approximately half the arts organisations based in London—that is, those with a London postcode—that get Arts Council grants work, tour and exhibit outside London. The most recent example that comes to my mind, because I met them in Ipswich, is the Talawa theatre company, a black theatre company that does

[Mr Edward Vaizey]

fantastic work. Its headquarters is in London, but it tours. We need to get away from the idea that because an organisation has a London postcode, all its work will be in London.

Simply holding this debate could give the impression of a barren wasteland outside London. Nothing could be further from the truth. If we visit any major city or town in England, we will see a vibrant arts scene. I was recently in Sheffield, where I visited the Crucible and Museums Sheffield, two fantastic organisations working very closely together. In Yorkshire, there is the Yorkshire sculpture park; in Bristol and Birmingham, there are vibrant arts organisations. In the last debate we had on the arts in this Chamber, a lot of colleagues lined up to express their criticisms of Government policy, yet inevitably all their speeches extolled the virtues of the cultural organisations in their constituencies. The arts scene outside London is extraordinarily vibrant, and long may it remain so.

None the less, the Arts Council, quite rightly, is focusing on rebalancing its funding. Darren Henley is the chief executive of the Arts Council—as @MarDixon has tweeted during the debate, his ears must be burning. He made his first speech in the role in Hull—an important fact, as Hull is the city of culture in 2017. We have maintained the successful cities of culture programme begun during the last Labour Government by one of the four people now contending for the Labour leadership. Although I do not think that any of the four will be any good, it would be nice if the Labour party was led by a former Culture Secretary. The scheme worked incredibly well in Derry/Londonderry and will work well in Hull. It galvanised a lot of other places into looking at whether they could get city of culture status; simply by applying, those places renewed their focus on their cultural assets. Mr Henley has announced the ambition for excellence scheme, a new £35 million funding programme to support talent, excellence, leadership and ambition across the arts. The vast majority of that money will be spent outside London. The previous chief executive, Alan Davey, announced the creative people and places scheme, another £30-odd million scheme, the majority of which has been spent outside London. Mr Henley has made it clear that 75% of all lottery funding from now on should go outside London.

That is a massive shift from the situation under the last Labour Government, when less than half of national lottery funding went to organisations outside London. Perhaps that is why I use the word “chutzpah” when referring to the speech by the hon. Member for Clwyd South. I do not think we need to take lessons from a party that spent the majority of funding in London and, indeed, was quick in the run-up to the general election to tweet—tweeting is a theme of our debate—its support for future arts cuts. Having seen Newcastle City Council plan to cut all its arts funding and reverse the decision only after a great hue and cry, I do not think we need to take any lessons from the Labour party.

It is possible for the debate on the arts to look simply at grant in aid and funding, and not look at some of the innovations we have introduced. For example, we have introduced catalyst funding to encourage philanthropy and donations both within and outside London, and have put in place match-funding programmes. We will

publish an evaluation of the scheme shortly, which I think will show some significant success. We have introduced tax credits for theatre, which have already had a major impact. The tax credits for orchestra will come into play next year. The tax credits for theatre are for touring theatre, so will ensure that all parts of the country benefit from the productions they support.

Technology will play an important part in spreading culture. One has to choose one’s words carefully—I do not want somehow to give the impression that crumbs are being given from the table—but my constituents go to see screenings from, say, the Royal Opera House in the cinema, and they think that is the most fantastic thing. It is a different experience from being in the opera house but is equally enjoyable in its own way. That is a very good way of ensuring that culture from some of the leading arts organisations in the country can get out there. That applies to anything, from the grandest opera production to the simplest theatre production, and it is a great way of ensuring that the production can escape its physical boundaries and reach as many people as possible.

I am also interested in how we use technology in our education system and in the pilots getting under way between TES Global, which is the digital arm of *The Times Educational Supplement*, and museums, so that some of their collections can be used by teachers as a teaching resource. That is a real partnership between teachers, who know how to teach and engage their pupils, and museums, which know about curation and the objects in their care.

I should say a word about education, because, of course, we have done a lot to support culture education. The hon. Member for Clwyd South was kind to note that the Secretary of State for Education will be speaking to the Creative Industries Federation, where she will reinforce her support for arts education. As hon. Members know, the Education Secretary gave a very important speech about science education, making the point that although arts education was in itself fantastic, we should not neglect science and technology education. For some reason, some people have—I would hate to say “deliberately”—misinterpreted that as an attack on arts education. They seem to think that we live in a binary world where, if we praise the sciences, we are somehow denigrating the arts. Nothing could be further from the truth, but my right hon. Friend will reinforce her support for arts education tomorrow.

It may be that words will be enough, but by your deeds shall ye be judged. Of course, one of the great successes that we had in the last Parliament, working with the Department for Education, was to ring-fence music education funding and ensure that it was transparent, clear and secure for local authorities to incorporate the In Harmony programme, which was started by the last Labour Government but has now been put on a secure footing so that it can continue. It is interesting that the Liverpool In Harmony programme just had its sixth anniversary, and the enthusiasm that can be seen on Twitter and the massive impact that the scheme is having in Liverpool is really fantastic.

Not only that, but in the last Parliament, the Department for Education increased the amount of funding going to music education. It has also supported other programmes such as the museums and schools programme and the heritage schools programme, which are new initiatives

to get heritage and museums centre stage in our schools. The Department for Education is an absolutely fantastic partner in all the work that I do as a junior Minister, standing up for the arts with its support. Those are important points.

We are planning to publish a White Paper at the end of this year or the beginning of the next, looking at the arts and heritage, and it is important to recognise what we have done in heritage. We have given £90 million to English Heritage to help it restore all its buildings and to create a new charity that will be set free from the constraints of Government bureaucracy. The need to give freedoms was a point made strongly by my hon. Friend the Member for Newark in his opening remarks, and we have given our national museums more freedoms to borrow and be flexible in how they go about their work. More freedom will be transformative for English Heritage.

The White Paper will look at an idea that I am fascinated by, which is place making. One of the problems in arts funding is that we tend to look at it in silos: how much is this theatre getting? How much is this dance company getting? Even in a small town or city, a lot of arts organisations do not talk to each other and do not see how the whole can be greater than the sum of the parts. We need to put culture at the centre of place making. That is what makes the place someone lives in, grows up in and works in a wonderful place to be, whether they are working, retired or visiting. I think that will be very important, and it will give us a platform to formalise our relationship with other Government Departments. The Department for Education is fantastic, and we need to work more closely with the Department for Communities and Local Government, with the Department for International Development, and with the Department of Health in particular, because we know the incredible impact that the arts can have on health.

One other idea that I am interested in, which I hope the hon. Member for Workington will help me with—this has become a mild obsession of mine—is museum storage. I am obsessed by museum storage—I am also obsessed by radio spectrum, but that is another matter—and the reason is that I echo her sentiments, up to a point. By the way, I am planning to go on beyond 4 o'clock because of the Division; is that all right, Mr Rosindell?

**Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair):** Yes.

**Mr Vaizey:** The reason that a lot of objects are in storage is for preservation. Sometimes a Turner watercolour will be kept in storage because it is not sensible to have a Turner watercolour on display permanently, given that it is a fragile and important cultural object. However, lots of objects are in storage, and I want to transform museum storage—I will need the hon. Lady's help, because I am only a junior Minister—and I want to have big centres outside London. For example, there is Wroughton in Swindon or Boston Spa in Yorkshire, where the Science Museum and the British Library respectively have huge storage facilities. There are also areas such as Cumbria, with fantastic local MPs who are keen to campaign to see more cultural assets in their area, and Thurrock, where the Royal Opera House has its stage and set design facilities. Would it not be brilliant if we could set up storage centres outside London? That is tick-box one. However, can we not go further and make them centres of excellence? For example, they could

be centres for digital curation, so Boston Spa could become a centre of digital excellence for the preservation and digitisation of print material.

Thirdly, and most crucially—and where I let out a mini cheer when the hon. Lady was speaking—we could make them accessible to the public. That obviously comes with a cost and we would not necessarily make them accessible 24 hours a day or even seven days a week. There is something really exciting and enjoyable about visiting a museum storage site—I know that I am now beginning to sound slightly odd—because it is so informal and people feel like they are on their own voyage of discovery. I go on a lot of regional tours and I remember that, when I went to Liverpool, my private secretary said to me that it was the best trip that she had had, because we went round the stores of the National Museums Liverpool. It was exciting to be able to look in nooks and crannies. I want to bring out that informality and accessibility and build national storage sites all around the UK. I have decided to go public on that in this debate because I have been moved by the hon. Lady, and because I think it is about time that we started debating the issue in public. I have asked people to come to me to talk about the White Paper and about their ideas.

I am sorry that I have not been pugilistic and battered the Opposition on these issues, and defended the Government's record vigorously. I think the Government's record speaks for itself. We have never seen a more vibrant arts scene in the UK or more vibrant creative industries. The hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire talked about the incredibly generous funding in Scotland and it is, of course, possible to elide the figures. We remember the terrible, tortuous birth of Creative Scotland, with resignations left, right and centre, but it remains one pot, so if he is going to compare Creative Scotland to the Arts Council, he also has to include Creative England and the British Film Institute.

However, I do not want to divide us. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and I will go together to see the Celtic exhibition that the British Museum and the National Gallery of Scotland are jointly putting on. Perhaps one lunchtime, when the Titians are in London, we can wander up and look at these two wonderful paintings, jointly owned by the peoples of Scotland and England, and reflect on this great Union, brought together by a shared culture and a passion for this great United Kingdom—a passion I know that you share, Mr Rosindell, in your daily life, celebrating this wonderful country of nations. I did not go on beyond 4 o'clock after all.

3.58 pm

**Robert Jenrick:** Thank you for your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell, and all Members for being here today. I am very grateful for their many contributions and to the Minister, who was entertaining and eloquent as always. It was very interesting to hear about his obsession with storage. From my days at Christie's, I remember that the best place to take the most valuable clients was the stores, because that always excited them more than the carefully manicured halls. I look forward to seeing that develop in the weeks and months to come.

This has been an important debate. It was important to have it at the start of the Parliament and to say to the many people throughout the country who are passionate

[Robert Jenrick]

enthusiasts of the arts and work in arts organisations that Parliament is interested in what they do and care about, and that we will pursue this issue for the rest of the Parliament. I thank everyone who participated in the debate and particularly the 250 people who participated in our digital debate and the allegedly 1.2 million people who followed it on their Twitter accounts.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered regional support for the arts.

## Bank Closures (Northern Lincolnshire)

[PHILIP DAVIES *in the Chair*]

4 pm

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered bank closures in Northern Lincolnshire.

It is, as always, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I sought this debate because our high street banks are reducing the service that they give to my constituency and the neighbouring constituency of Gainsborough. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) has asked for his name to be associated with my comments. Unfortunately, a diary clash prevented his being here.

It might be helpful if I give a brief outline of Barton-upon-Humber, which is the northernmost part of my constituency. That market town is being affected by two bank closures. Both HSBC and NatWest have announced that they are closing their local branch; the NatWest one will close on 20 August and the HSBC one in early September. Barton-upon-Humber is a long-established trading town, situated on the southern bank of the River Humber. It has held some significance from as long ago as Saxon times. It has developed into what I think it is fair to say is a typical market town. The banks have announced the closures at a time when the population is increasing and there is a real boost to the local economy, wrought in part by the reductions made by the coalition Government in the Humber bridge tolls, which have made journeys between the northern bank and the Barton area much more accessible.

When we talk of a high street, we have a vision of a cluster of small shops—butchers, bakers, newsagents and so on—but they are always supplemented by the local solicitor's office, perhaps an insurance broker and, of course, our high street banks. They come together and provide the essential ingredients of a thriving local economy, not just in our provincial towns but—perhaps even more so—in our market towns.

Barton-upon-Humber is one such place. Three years ago, it suffered a major setback when the Kimberly-Clark factory closed. That resulted in more than 500 job losses but, thankfully, Wren Kitchens took over the factory and it is now a thriving commercial enterprise, employing almost as many people as when Kimberly-Clark had it and with the prospect of yet more jobs in the pipeline. As I mentioned, the reduction in the Humber bridge tolls has been a real boost to the local economy, but the offshore renewables sector, based around the ports of Immingham and Killingholme, has made Barton very much an expanding town. More residents equal more potential customers, whatever the business—or so people would think. That will not be so at our high street banks, NatWest and HSBC, which, as I said, have recently announced the closure of their branches.

Of course, we all recognise that banking has changed, particularly for the personal customer, and in that respect most of us are to varying degrees guilty. We want the bank or the bookshop there when it suits us, but for the rest of the time we are tempted by online banking, Amazon or whatever. However, that is no help to our local butcher, newsagent or other trader who wants to offload his takings for the day.

Let me focus on NatWest, as it was the first of the two banks to announce the closure of its branch. Like most high street banks, it occupies a major building in the marketplace in Barton. It has been there since 1913. The announcement came as a major disappointment to the community: private customers and, as I have mentioned, small businesses. Older residents in particular feel it as a blow. Once again, personal contact is being taken away from a commercial transaction. Local people, of course, are concerned that this might be the start of a trend. I am pleased to say that I met officials from Barclays earlier this week and they have given me an assurance that they are not planning any closures—for the moment; that is the big concern of local people.

I mentioned the neighbouring constituency of Gainsborough, where two towns, Caistor and Market Rasen, are affected. For Caistor, it is a particular blow because the NatWest is the last bank in town.

There are more ways than ever to bank. NatWest has provided me with a host of statistics. It says that branch transactions have fallen by 36% in the past five years and mobile transactions have increased by 300%. It states:

“Only 9% of our transactions were undertaken in our branches in 2014, compared to 25% in 2010”.

It goes on to state:

“We know the value of the High Street branch, we have the second largest branch network in the UK, and it will remain the cornerstone of our service to customers.”

How will it remain the cornerstone if it is closed?

Branches are important because, as I mentioned, they provide an opportunity for customers to interact with staff on what may be big life decisions, such as taking out a mortgage or starting a business. Both NatWest and HSBC are very keen to tell me that they are making alternative arrangements with the Post Office. That, of course, is in line with the protocol agreed between the British Bankers Association and the Government earlier this year, but local post offices do not constitute a vast network. As anyone who has queued up in the post office with loads of money from their takings will know—I used to work in Market Rasen and can tell my hon. Friend the Minister that even to go and buy a stamp was a half-hour job—the reality is that post offices are not an ideal alternative.

The British Bankers Association has provided me with a host of information about how banks go about assessing closures. As the Barclays representatives told me yesterday and, indeed, as the HSBC representative told me, this is customer-led—customer-led meaning, of course, that people are moving online or to mobile transactions. I hope that the Minister will be able to give some reassurance that the agreed protocol will be firmed up a little. As I am sure she will appreciate, people are rather cynical about consultation processes. They tend to think that the bank decides on closure and consults on how to go about the closure, not on whether the closure should take place. I hope that the review of the protocol, which is scheduled for a year after it comes into force, will result in its having a few more teeth than has been the case up to now.

The British Bankers Association protocol does go into a fair amount of detail, whereas the Government's website is a bit thin on the ground when it comes to what should actually be provided. The previous Minister,

who is now my hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Department of Energy and Climate Change, said at the time of the protocol's introduction:

“I've received a lot of correspondence from consumers and businesses who are worried about bank closures and the trend in banking services moving online, and I think it is essential that banks continue to take into account the impact of their decisions on their customers.

I therefore welcome the agreement announced today that banks will work more closely with their customers and local communities to minimise the impact of bank closures.”

In other words, it is an acceptance that bank closures will take place. My constituents look to me, and I look to the Government, to be on their side and the side of customers—not on the side of the banks, which are well positioned to take account of themselves.

If we look further at the details from the British Bankers Association, they go on to outline community engagement. Although it happened eventually, NatWest was seemingly somewhat reluctant to meet Barton Town Council. It has now done so, and has also met North Lincolnshire Council. The meeting was to discuss the impact of the closure on the community and customers, and to look at alternative provision. It was not—I repeat not—to discuss whether alternative arrangements could be made, such as mobile banking or reduced opening hours. I look to the Minister to give some reassurance that when the review takes place, she will seek to strengthen the protocol on behalf of my constituents.

Hon. Members across the political spectrum continually speak about the high street and how important it is to maintain a vibrant local economy and support our local shops. If we are to expand our market towns, however, shops need the services of our local banks. Banks, I am afraid, take a rather high-handed attitude. It is easy for us all to slip into the much-favoured habit of criticising bankers, and I accept that we are talking about high street bankers rather than those who have even less public appeal. The reality, however, is that customers, such as the local newsagent, who are looking for services from their bank will easily notice the large profits and the rather generous—to put it kindly—payments to senior directors. If just a little of that were to trickle down into the local branch network, perhaps we could sustain our market towns and small shops to a much greater extent than we have done in the past.

I go back to the Government's website, which is, as I say, a bit basic when it comes to outlining the protocol. The website states:

“Today's ground-breaking agreement will make sure customers still have banking services close at hand if a branch closes. Communities will be given fair notice of any closure and clarity about the alternative places and ways to bank. This includes the Post Office, which is an ideal shared service for customers who prefer to use counter services. The agreement will also make sure there is the right support to help customers use internet or mobile banking.”

I have to say that my constituents in Barton have not seen many examples of support for customers when it comes to greater involvement of online banking.

I conclude by appealing once again to the Government to be on the side not only of my constituents in Barton and those in the neighbouring constituency, in Caistor and Market Rasen, but of customers throughout the country who deserve and need a proper high street commercial banking network if high streets and the business community are to survive.

4.14 pm

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin):**

What a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Davies! I congratulate my hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) on securing the debate. He has spoken eloquently on behalf of his constituents and communities. He is without a doubt the most diligent and effective Member for Cleethorpes I have ever known.

As my hon. Friend set out, bank branches play an important role in their communities—communities such as Barton-upon-Humber, Caistor and Market Rasen. They are valued by individual consumers and small businesses, and the services that they provide make a real difference to people's lives. One of my key priorities as Economic Secretary is financial services that deliver for customers. I strongly believe that banks should be there to help and enable customers to achieve their aspirations at every stage of their lives, whether that is saving for their first home, taking out a mortgage, buying a car or saving and investing for the future.

As my hon. Friend mentioned, how we bank is going through a period of unprecedented change. New online and mobile technology means that customers are reducing their use of high street branches. As he mentioned, some banks had pledged not to close a branch if it was the last one in town, but since those pledges were made the volume of transactions in high street branches—including in the last branches in town in places such as Caistor—has continued to decline. Those changes mean that the banking industry, which has to modernise and improve its services to maintain profitability, often has to make tough decisions. They are commercial decisions for the individual institutions, but it is right for the Government to seek to ensure access to banking services for everyone, wherever they live.

We made strong progress on that agenda during the last Parliament. In March this year, the Government welcomed an industry-wide agreement known as the access to banking protocol. I am pleased to say that all the major high street banks agreed to that protocol, which came into effect in May this year. The protocol means that when a bank decides to close a branch, it must think carefully about the consequences of doing so; it must engage with its customers; it must consider the needs of its customers; and it must identify ways for its customers to continue banking after the branch has closed. The results of that engagement with the community and an impact assessment will be made public before the branch is closed. We have also made it easier for my hon. Friend's constituents in north Lincolnshire to switch their bank accounts, with seven-day switching to one of the banks that remain open.

I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern about the impact that branch closures will have on shops in local high streets. I assure everyone that the Government are committed to safeguarding high streets and town centres. For example, through the high streets innovation fund we have provided funding to the 100 towns that have the highest rates of empty property. Small business rate relief is also a valuable bonus for high street shops. In March 2015, the vacant share of retail outlets fell to 13%, which is the lowest vacancy rate since 2010.

As well as taking seriously the impact of branch closures on local communities, we must consider how customers will continue to access banking services. A range of

alternative measures is in place, and I would like to talk in more detail about some of those measures. As my hon. Friend mentioned, at more than 11,500 of its branches in the UK, the Post Office allows customers to access their bank accounts, check their balances, withdraw money and deposit cash and cheques. Sixteen banks offer services to their personal customers and small businesses through the Post Office, including those that he mentioned. That is a huge network, which offers most customers a real opportunity to continue banking locally.

I know that more can be done, however. The range of services offered by the Post Office may be more limited than those offered in a traditional bank branch, and my hon. Friend has mentioned how popular they are. Service provision may vary by bank and by the capacity of each post office. That is why the Government are supporting measures to improve the banking services that the Post Office offers and to make those services more consistent for customers.

Late last year, the British Bankers Association and the Post Office began negotiations to agree a standard set of services, such as withdrawals, deposits and balance checking. The agreed services will be made available to bank customers at post office counters across the country. The negotiations are ongoing, but I make it clear that the Government consider completion of that work to be a priority. The protocol includes a measure for an independent review after one year, which I hope will indicate whether it has been effective—I will take a close interest in that matter.

We also expect to see concrete progress on publicising the services that are already available. As I have made clear, banks should be there to help their customers achieve their aspirations at every stage of life. We should also recognise that the modernisation of banking services is leading to new opportunities for customers, and we should all be excited about that. Since April 2014, for example, customers have been able to transfer money instantly to another bank account using only their mobile phone number; from 31 July 2016, customers will be able to use their smartphone to photograph cheques for payment into their bank account, helping to make life easier for customers in remote areas. Banks are taking action to ensure that customers are able to use such new and exciting technologies with confidence.

Those innovations also apply to the UK's ATM network, which can play a more important role in addressing some of the concerns voiced by consumers when their local branch closes. Steady progress is being made in extending the ATM network across the UK, and the number of free-to-use ATMs is at an all-time high. In fact, 97% of withdrawals are now made free of charge. Isolated, disadvantaged and rural communities often have the worst access to free-to-use ATMs, however, so the Government are working closely with the Link network's financial inclusion programme to subsidise free-to-use cashpoints in more than 1,400 remote and deprived areas across the UK. Importantly, members of the public in my hon. Friend's constituency can nominate their area for inclusion in that programme.

This debate has focused on branch closures, but it is also important to recognise that many banks are choosing to prioritise their branch network and are opening new high street bank branches, with TSB and Metro bank

being good examples. Metro bank is planning to open 150 branches by 2020, and its branches are open seven days a week.

**Martin Vickers:** I thank the Minister for the information she has provided. My constituents, and people across the country, would appreciate more opportunities for face-to-face contact. Can she give an assurance that the Government will do all they can to influence the banks to make provision for people who want personal contact? It is one thing for people who are applying for a car loan of a few thousand pounds not to have face-to-face contact, but people who are committing to a mortgage for 25 or 30 years need detailed, experienced advice. It is much easier to provide such advice on a one-to-one basis.

**Harriett Baldwin:** I agree. My hon. Friend will be glad to know that 58% of people agree with both of us that face-to-face contact and having a local branch are important when choosing where to bank and engaging in major transactions. Some banking organisations take the view that they will gain market share by opening new branches. I have mentioned Metro bank, and TSB currently has 630 branches serving 4.5 million customers, which makes it the eighth-largest branch network with 6% of all UK branches. The Government are keen to encourage such healthy competition between different brands, some of which offer a face-to-face banking model.

The Government's ambition is for 15 new banks to enter the market over the life of this Parliament. If we achieve that, it will give customers far more choice of whom to bank with and encourage banks to compete more effectively with one another. Competition will also continue to drive innovation in the delivery of banking services, such as contactless payment and payment by mobile phone. Atom bank, which recently received

its banking licence, is a good example of innovation. It plans to be an online-only organisation and has ambitions to offer a range of innovative services to customers, which could include face-to-face contact through technology, as well as between individuals in the same location.

One often suggested solution is the sharing of bank branches, which would allow banks to lower overheads and maintain local provision when they may otherwise have to close their branches. Of course, each bank must specialise and differentiate itself from its competitors, but that should not prevent the industry from thinking creatively about how premises and services could be shared. The British Bankers Association is currently considering that issue in consultation with its members. In particular, it is exploring where local circumstances may mean that sharing a branch is the best solution.

I understand the concern of communities in northern Lincolnshire about local bank branch closures—my hon. Friend mentioned Barton-upon-Humber, Caistor and Market Rasen—and many communities across the UK, including the one I represent, are experiencing a similar situation. Changes in the banking industry reflect changes to customers' needs and habits. Banks and building societies need to balance customer interests, market competition and other commercial factors when considering their strategy. It is right that the Government do not intervene in such commercial decisions, but we are clear that banks and building societies should support access to banking services for everyone.

Once again, I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising these important issues today.

*Question put and agreed to.*

4.26 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust

4.30 pm

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust.

I begin by declaring an interest: I was a patient at Queen's hospital in January. My operation was cancelled at two hours' notice, but despite that hiccup I was given excellent treatment a couple of weeks later. I want to place on the record the fact that despite being in a very busy department, the staff were working very well and had excellent morale, as far as I could see during my groggy recovery from my operation.

The Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust was established in the 1990s. It brings together two acute general hospitals—King George hospital in Ilford in my constituency and Queen's hospital in Romford, which was a new-build private finance initiative hospital to replace the old church hospital.

Since 2006, there have been many pressures for reorganisation of services in north-east London. There was a misnamed project called "Fit for the Future", which was scrapped because it was clinically unsound. Since then, there have been proposals that would have meant downgrading services at some hospitals, particularly King George hospital. To cut a long story short, an independent reconfiguration panel looked at the proposals, and eventually, in 2011, the then Secretary of State for Health, Andrew Lansley, gave the go-ahead to close the maternity and accident and emergency services at King George hospital in around two years. The maternity services were reconfigured in early 2013, but A&E is still at King George hospital.

The trust is very big. There are 750,000 people in its catchment and it covers three London boroughs—Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge, and Havering. Havering has an elderly population overall, but Barking and Dagenham and Redbridge have some very young people. There is a churning population, with lots of migrants, from both elsewhere in the UK and many other parts of the world. GP services and primary care services have been poor and inadequate for many years. There have always been pressures on the hospitals and trusts in north-east London. Those pressures have led to accumulated deficits and concerns about the quality of service.

In October 2013, the Care Quality Commission carried out an inspection of the services at the Barking, Havering and Redbridge trust. It concluded that the trust should be put into special measures. The press release put out on December 18 said:

"The NHS Trust Development Authority...today confirmed that Barking, Havering and Redbridge...will be placed into special measures. The move follows the CQC Chief Inspector of Hospital's report...which concludes that while there have been signs of sustained improvements in some areas, the leadership of the Trust needs support to tackle the scale of the problems it faces. While aware of many of the issues raised by CQC around patient safety and patient care, attempts to address these issues have had insufficient impact."

As a result, the trust was put into special measures and all the management were got rid of. It took a while to fill the various posts, but an interim chief executive was

brought in and other posts were changed. I have been impressed with the chief executive, Matthew Hopkins. He and the team around him are doing their best to improve services in the area. However, fundamental, difficult problems remain.

The CQC's 2013 report, which led to the involvement of the NHS Trust Development Authority, highlighted a number of areas of concern, and follow-up work was carried out. One underlying issue was the financial crisis, which remains at the trust. A new finance director, Jeff Buggle, was appointed in July last year, although he did not take up his job until December. The press release at the time he was appointed said that the trust had a £38 million deficit, with expenditure of somewhere around £400 million or more in 2013-14. I understand that the target for the deficit this year was £29 million, but that has not been met; the deficit remains at about the level it was a year ago. That is not surprising; the *Health Service Journal* from June 26 this year has an interesting statement from Richard Douglas, the former director general for finance at the Department of Health. He said that trusts placed in special measures "tend to exit the regime with a financial position that had deteriorated".

The reason is that there is so much pressure to improve services that the expenditure must continue.

It is a bit like the situation in Greece: we have an underlying deficit, a temporary troika, or body, comes in to sort out the problems and the trust is put into special measures. Fortunately, we do not have a far-left, far-right coalition running the hospitals. Nevertheless, we face fundamental difficulties.

The special measures, which were called for, have led to a number of changes. I wish to draw attention to the further inspection that the CQC carried out in March, the results of which were published only at the beginning of July. To the disappointment of the new leadership of the trust, the CQC says that BHRT must remain, for the next few months at least, in special measures. The CQC's latest report says that although improvements have been made in a number of services, many are still rated as requiring improvement. Professor Sir Mike Richards concluded that significant improvement was still required, and therefore there will be a further inspection before the end of the year to see whether other changes have been introduced since that assessment was made in March.

Clearly I do not have time, even in an hour-long debate, to go through the voluminous reports—the general one and the one on each of the hospitals in the trust—but I will refer to some of the main points. I hope the Under-Secretary of State for Health can reassure me on some issues in his response.

First, I want to make it clear that anything I say here is not a criticism of the staff in my local hospitals. They face enormous pressures; we have a trust that faces huge demand and there are huge pressures on it. I will just give some figures. There are just over 1,000 beds in the two hospitals, of which 80 are maternity beds, 32 are critical care beds, and 972 are general and acute beds. There are 73,000 in-patient admissions, 592,000 out-patient attendances and 245,000 emergency department attendances each year. That figure of 245,000 is divided into 97,000 attendances at King George hospital in Ilford, which Andrew Lansley said in 2011 should be closed within about two years, with the rest—nearly 150,000 attendances—at Queen's hospital in Romford.



Average bed occupancy in the hospitals is consistently around 93%, 94% or 95%. There is almost no flexibility, and my own experience in January of having an operation cancelled at short notice is sadly repeated from time to time. We had a mild winter and yet operations were being cancelled in January. The same pressures will come each year in this area in outer north-east London, which has a young population and rapid population growth.

I will refer to some of the issues affecting the hospitals. I begin by quoting Mike Richards again:

“Despite considerable attention the trust is failing to meet waiting time targets in the emergency department. Outpatients and diagnostics can’t cope with demand and the children’s services do not meet local need.

I am particularly concerned at the large backlog of investigations into serious incidents, which suggests that safety has not been given the priority it requires and lessons are not being learnt as they should.

However, the new executive team has made significant improvement ensuring the overall culture of the trust was more open and transparent making it a much more positive place to work.”

The point I am making is that this trust needs support, and it needs that support to continue for a period of time.

The CQC report asked whether services at the trust were safe, effective and caring. The rating for all three was “Requires improvement”. It asked, “Are services at this trust responsive?” The rating was “Inadequate”, which is the red one on the traffic lights. It asked whether services were well led; the rating was “Requires improvement”. That is the overall rating for the trust—“Requires improvement”—and there are particular concerns about urgent and emergency services.

The CQC report covers a range of different services at the two hospitals, but the essence of the report is that there are major difficulties, and I will refer to just a few of them. First, the report says that

“The service planning for children’s services was not responsive to local needs.”

Secondly, it says that

“The trust faces significant capacity pressures which it has tried to address”.

Thirdly, it says that

“Across all core services there was limited evidence of learning from complaints and concerns being applied to service improvement. We identified areas where complaints response was slow leading to backlogs, lack of action planning and absence of thematic analysis.”

Fourthly—and this is very significant—it says, under the heading “Governance, risk management and quality measurement”, that

“Amidst many improvements within the trust since our last inspection, governance, risk management and quality measurement is an area of significant concern as little improvement has been made...Previous cost reduction plans had significantly reduced the infrastructure to support governance and safety.”

This is a trust with a deficit of about £37 million or £38 million, and it has to eliminate that deficit. When it comes out of special measures—as it no doubt will, perhaps in a few months or maybe in a year, depending on what the next inspection says—it will still face these financial pressures. One of the reasons why it has had difficulties is that it has already had to subject itself to those pressures.

The CQC report continues:

“There is a heavy reliance on individuals and the use of short term interim staff.”

Recruitment and retention of staff have been major difficulties, and they have added to the cost pressures.

We face a difficult situation. We have a management—a leadership—that is trying to turn the trust round, and they are doing much better than their predecessors. They face enormous pressures, and those difficulties are perpetuated and even made worse by the cuts in social care at local authorities, the fact that we have inadequate GP services and the fact that many people just present themselves at accident and emergency rather than going to a GP. That is because they have been trying to get an appointment with their GP for two weeks, and, in the case of the Loxford polyclinic in my constituency, they have been phoning for hours but cannot get through because there is a problem with the switchboard. The same problems arise in a more intense way while the trust is dealing with this financial crisis.

What is the way forward? I will speak for just a few more minutes, to allow my colleagues the chance to contribute to the debate. The CQC report carries out a “Friends and Family test”, and I find the results for the trust extremely concerning. In the test, there is an assessment of the different departments. The report says:

“NHS Friends and Family test (July 2014)—average score for urgent and emergency care was 20%, which was worse”—

in fact, considerably worse—

“than the national average of 53%.”

The report continued:

“The average Friends and Family score for inpatients was 73, which is the same as the national average...The Friends and Family score for maternity...was 70, which was better than the England average of 62.”

So it is not all bad news.

However, the urgent and emergency care is a significant problem, yet the Government decided in 2011, based on the independent reconfiguration panel and the CQC report, that the A&E department at King George hospital should be closed and all A&E services should be relocated to Queen’s hospital. Queen’s cannot cope as it is. Consistently, the Queen’s A&E has had worse assessments than the King George A&E. Yet the sword of Damocles is still hanging over the A&E at King George, and there is this mass of 245,000 patients who go to the A&E departments at the two hospitals, which they cannot cope with.

Let us suppose that the assessment in December, or whenever it is, leads to the trust coming out of special measures next year. What will that mean? What will the consequence of that be? I will quote the summary of the CQC report on urgent and emergency services. The “Friends and Family test”, which I have just quoted, said those services were

“showing no signs of improvement over the 12 months prior to the inspection. The hospital had not achieved the national four-hour waiting target of 95% of patients seen within this timeframe for more than a year, and usually averaged around 90% of patients seen within this time. Patients often had waits of four hours or more in the department and were waiting for long periods of time to be moved to an appropriate bed once it has been decided they should be admitted.”

This is the key sentence:

“There was no clarity about the future of the department and when, or if, it might close in the future.”

This has been hanging over my local hospital since 2006. We have fought vigorous community campaigns and the issue is still hanging over it. There is no clarity. If, because of improved management, the situation improves

[*Mike Gapes*]

later in the year and the trust comes out of special measures, will that mean—I suspect it will—that there will then be moves to close the A&E at King George because the trust is no longer in special measures? There is not the capacity at Queen's to deal with that. It will take years, considerable cost, and millions of pounds of investment on the Queen's hospital site before Queen's hospital is ready to cope with this situation.

Rather than wasting millions of pounds and causing more difficulties for several years, would it not be better if the sword of Damocles was taken away, thereby ending the uncertainty and lack of clarity mentioned in the CQC report? Then we could deal with the problems of recruiting sufficient specialist doctors and having adequate cover at all times, and maybe work out a plan for a relationship between the two acute and emergency departments whereby there would not be a closure, but perhaps a rethink about how services were run.

Clearly, Queen's cannot cope today. However, it is still the Government's plan to close King George. I have asked Ministers about this for several years and the answer has never changed. There is still uncertainty. What will the future of King George be? It is time to end the uncertainty, to give a sense of clarity and, as the trust improves, to take away the threat to close the A&E department at King George.

4.52 pm

**Margaret Hodge** (Barking) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (*Mike Gapes*) and join him in commending and thanking the many staff who work under huge pressure in both King George hospital and Queen's for the very good work they do, which I hear a lot about from my constituents.

I have been involved with BHRUT and its predecessors for over 20 years. I have seen six chief executives and 12 different chairs, men and women. Every new generation blames their predecessors for the problems that they inherit. I am perhaps a little more sceptical than my hon. Friend: I do not think that we have suddenly, magically got a new team that will solve many of the intransigent problems facing that trust. It has been co-operative and is trying hard, but we are now over a year into the new regime, and on many of the indicators I cannot see demonstrable improvements. The trust has been bankrupt for years; the deficit has not gone down for years and I cannot think that it will go down much in the coming period, given the pressures and the failures to deal with some of the intransigent problems.

Quality has been pretty poor for years. We finally got the CQC report that put the trust into special measures, but the most recent report shows that the necessary improvements that I wanted for my constituents and that would take the trust out of special measures have not been made. Although I share my hon. Friend's hope, I am not confident that we will get there by the time the CQC comes back yet again.

Compared with all other trust areas throughout the country, ours is the eighth most deprived area in terms of health need. The NHS ought to be delivering equal access to high-quality care to people wherever they live, but it is not. I sincerely feel that that is the biggest battle for my constituents. Where I live, I get much better access

to much better quality healthcare than my constituents in Barking and Dagenham who use both Queen's hospital and King George hospital.

I should like some assurances from the Minister about the north-east London sector. Not only are we bankrupt in our neck of the woods, but Barts City—predictably, I have to say—is also in incredible deficit. One knows how these allocations of moneys go and how views are taken about the health service across the country. There is a real danger that salvaging the new Barts hospital, with its £1 billion PFI and the massive call of that on revenue funding there, will come at the expense of BHRUT and the hospital provision that we need locally. I seek assurances from the Minister that, in considering an undoubtedly difficult financial situation across the whole north-east London sector, he does not disadvantage our residents by putting everything into the much more powerful Barts and the Royal London Hospital NHS Trust.

I want to raise three other issues. First, I have been shocked in recent times by how much is spent on agency staff by BHRUT. For example, in 2013-14, it spent £27 million, and in June this year it spent £2.5 million. When *Matthew Hopkins* gave evidence at the Public Accounts Committee, when we were looking at the state of a number of vulnerable trusts, he talked about a 50% shortage of consultants in the A&E department and told us that he was spending £1,760 on one 16-hour shift of A&E consultants. After that session, I asked a consultant in A&E during one of my usual visits round the hospital whether he was an agency consultant or a full-time employee. He had been a full-time employee, but deliberately switched to being agency staff because as an agency member of staff he earned more and did less. His doing so put the trust in greater difficulties.

That sort of behaviour is simply an unacceptable waste of what we all understand is a very small amount of money that is not enough for local healthcare. According to the CQC's most recent inspection, a third of the nurses on night duty on the first night of its inspection were agency nurses. I should like the Minister to talk a little bit about how he is going to tackle the use of agency staff, who provide poorer quality care, because they do not know the systems or the people and do not know their way around the hospital, and cost the hospital a lot of money.

Secondly, although I recognise that there have been improvements, particularly in maternity, where we were first alerted to quality really going wrong in Queen's, on reading the report I was worried about radiology. There is still a huge bill—millions of pounds—to be paid to people now litigating against the hospital because of what happened to the mothers and children through poor maternity care there, but the original CQC report in 2010 highlighted that the radiology department was poor. There were delays in people having scans done and scans were not passed to relevant consultant, so people with cancer were simply not being diagnosed in a proper, timely manner that would have allowed them to access the treatment they needed. The recent inspection still finds problems there: it is too short-staffed, with too many locums.

One of the incredible things I read was that on one day of the inspections, five radiologists were on leave. What sort of culture does a hospital have if it allows five radiologists to go on leave on the same day and so

provides a poor service to patients? There is a large backlog of patients who have waited well over 18 weeks. During the inspection, the CT scanner kept breaking down and patients had to be transferred from Queen's hospital to King George hospital. That is unacceptable. It is about more than money; it is about a culture in the management that was originally identified in 2010 and now, in 2015, the A&E is still appalling.

I will raise a couple of other issues that I think are relevant and which my hon. Friend alluded to. The first is GP services. If we cannot sort out primary care, demand on acute and hospital services will continue to exceed their ability to respond. Barking and Dagenham has the highest number of GPs aged over 60 in the country: a third of our GPs are over 60. We have been completely open—we will try any experiment on the ground. We have had salaried GPs, private practice GPs and GPs linked to universities in an attempt to provide some training. We will do anything to attract and get more and a better cadre of GPs in our patch, but we have failed. We are still the eighth in London in terms of concentration of single-person practices. I raise this issue all the time with the powers that be in the health service locally. One in five of our GP practices remains single-handed. We know that that does not provide an adequate service to local people, yet there is not any sort of energy or urgency in the actions of the local health service officials to sort that out. They ought to be able to do so and to apply much greater pressures on some of the GP services, so that we get better primary care.

People cannot get appointments. We have done a survey of our residents—it is not a proper survey; I do it when people attend my very regular coffee afternoons. However, those surveys show that 50% of our residents had to wait more than a week to get access to their GP. Some 30% went to A&E because they could not get access to the GP. Nearly half said that they had found it difficult to get an appointment. The typical story is, "I ring up at half-past 6 to see the GP the next morning. I am told to ring the next morning. When I ring the next morning, it is engaged and engaged, and in the end I give up and go to the A&E." Unless there is a forceful, determined attempt to sort out the failures of our primary care system, we will not make progress in the acute sector.

One of the little things we did was run a campaign on the use of premium phone numbers. From constituents who came to see me, we uncovered in 2013 that 10 GP practices in the constituency had 084 numbers. One constituent had spent £10 trying to get an appointment, because ringing such numbers from a mobile costs 41p or 42p a minute. Another constituent spent £30 trying to get an appointment for her son because she had to hang on until she was dealt with. She got through to the system, but the call was not answered by anyone to secure an appointment. We have run a tough campaign on that, but two and a half to three years on, we still have one GP practice—Castleberry medical centre—that is refusing to put in a landline, and three others that have a landline but have kept their premium phone line, and my bet is that patients cannot get through on the landline and have to use the premium phone line. Access to GPs is important. I thought we had halted the use of premium phone numbers after another PAC inquiry, but it has not happened.

My final plea is on access to the hospital for the poorest people in my constituency. They live in the most south-western part of my constituency, in Thames ward. Getting to Queen's hospital from there takes three buses. I did the journey during the election period, and it took me about two hours. If someone has to go for regular chemotherapy or kidney treatment—whatever it is—that four-hour journey every day means that the person does not go and so does not get that treatment and therefore dies younger. I have been pleading with the Mayor and the transport authorities to ease that just by diverting the No. 5 bus so that it goes straight to the hospital. That would save people one change—they would get two buses, not three—but I have completely failed so far. I have been fobbed off. I urge the Minister to join me and write to the relevant authorities to ensure that while at least keeping those hospitals there, trying to get them properly funded, sorting out the financial mess and improving the quality, we also allow people to get there easily, particularly those who need the hospital services the most and are most dependent on public transport.

5.5 pm

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) on securing this important debate and on opening it in the way he did, setting out the chequered history of the trust and the particular challenges we face right across our borough of Redbridge and the wider north-east London health economy.

I will not repeat the points made by my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge). I want to express my concern about the outstanding problem that the CQC has identified with the trust and the impact that is having on patient care in a wide variety of areas. I share the concerns expressed by both my colleagues that the CQC inspectors rated the trust as "requires improvement" on most measures, and the responsiveness of service at the trust was deemed "inadequate", but it is also important to highlight some of the areas that were identified as having outstanding practice—in particular, the values of the trust and how they have been embedded in the culture of the staff.

Like my colleagues, I congratulate the NHS staff who work in the trust on the hard work they do in difficult circumstances. I commend the fact that the radiotherapy unit was one of the top five in the country. There are good outcomes for stroke, and the genito-urinary medicine clinic had

"excellent service with appropriate protocols".

Significant improvements have been made, so while it is disappointing that the trust remains in special measures, the improvements described in the report are encouraging and reflect well on the NHS staff and the reinvigoration of the trust leadership. They can take genuine pride in their teamwork. I have no doubt that the trust will emerge from special measures sooner rather than later.

My right hon. Friend spoke about the high level of agency spend. One of the problems that the trust has suffered from for a number of years—frankly, some of the trust's challenges were well known before the inspectors put the trust into special measures—is that when a trust has a poor reputation, it is hard to recruit and retain the

[*Wes Streeting*]

best staff. While I am disappointed that we are not yet out of the woods, I hope that when people are thinking about their careers, they identify not only that the trust requires improvement, but that it is improving and is a good place for good people to be at this point in its journey.

I want to speak briefly about the wider north-east London health economy. Until May, I was chair of the Redbridge health and wellbeing board, deputy leader of Redbridge Council and the cabinet member for health and wellbeing. It is fair to say that the challenges in the north-east London health economy—the challenge in primary care has already been touched on—are not just restricted to the trust. I was the first chair of the primary care transformation board, which is trying to change how primary care is delivered and bring about genuine service improvements. In the very first meeting, I asked GPs about their experiences, and they described primary care as being in crisis. They know that they are not providing a good enough service to their patients. They work hard to do so, but the pressures are immense. That relates to the quantity and quality of GP provision. My right hon. Friend talked about the wider concerns about the number of GPs who are past or nearing retirement and the workforce pipeline. Combined with the fact that Redbridge has one of the lowest levels of public health spending in London, that gives me cause for great concern. I am concerned not only about the level of public health funding but about the fact that the Government are seeking to give councils new responsibilities—for example, for health visiting—without sufficient funding. The in-year cut that my council will experience will place even greater pressure on services. On that note, I should probably declare that I am still a member of Redbridge Council, albeit an unpaid one.

Finally, I want to talk about A&E. Since January, there have been some improvements in A&E performance at both King George and Queen's. In January, King George's performance standard was 92.67% and at Queen's it was 79.15%. As of June, King George had improved, up to 96.56%, but Queen's was still lagging behind at 93.31%. I have seen absolutely nothing in either the CQC's inspection report or the performance data for our local A&E departments to alter my view that the loss of the A&E department at King George hospital would be a disaster for patients.

Since the decision to close the A&E department at King George, much has changed in terms of both the population pressures and the immense strain on the whole health economy in our part of London, which I have already described. In that context, it is really not unreasonable to ask Ministers to intervene, to look at the A&E closure with a fresh pair of eyes, and to ask the clinical commissioning group to reopen the A&E closure decision and reconsider its position. Previously—this always happens at the height of elections, particularly local elections—my local Conservative association put out a statement claiming that there had been some sort of reprieve and the A&E would not be closing, but nothing of the sort has happened. Thousands of residents across Redbridge will never forgive the Conservatives if they do not at least look at this matter with a fresh pair of eyes.

We all heard what my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking said about the financial issues at the trust. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that those issues and the difficulties in recruiting staff across two A&E departments are what are really driving the closure of King George's A&E. It is being driven not by what is in the best interests of patients or what good A&E configuration in our part of London would look like, but by the inability to get the right staff and to rescue the trust from its very difficult and precarious financial position. That is not good enough. I hope that, when he responds, the Minister will at least assure residents that the Government will look at this matter with a fresh pair of eyes and ask the CCG to do the same.

5.12 pm

**Jon Cruddas** (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab): I will be brief, given that I want to leave sufficient time for the shadow Minister and the Minister to respond. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) on securing this debate.

From the contributions so far, I think we would all agree on what politicians tend to call the challenging environment that the trust has existed in for many years—including the initial Care Quality Commission report, which contained a lot of criticism, specifically on A&E and maternity. A whole host of other issues were raised, leading to the placing of the trust into special measures in December 2013 and the improvement plan of 12 months ago.

We know that there are huge demographic pressures on the trust, reflected in the number of emergency patients, of which there were 220,000 across Queen's and King George last year. That illustrates the pressure from footfall. All speakers so far have mentioned the huge budgetary pressures, in terms of both the debt overhang from the private finance initiative and the management's ability to secure the in-year budget. The deficit was some £38 million last year, and it is estimated to be the same this year.

There have been huge management changes across the trust, and I, too, support Matthew Hopkins's work. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge) mentioned, there has been a squeeze on Barts, on the west side, and also on the Essex trust, on the east side, meaning that there is a danger in the distribution of resources: we could be squeezed between the two trusts on the western and eastern borders of our trust.

The CQC report was a bit of a mixed package. There were positive outcomes for radiotherapy, strokes, nurse-led oral chemotherapy and the humane end-of-life care service, and there was increased cleanliness and good infection control across the trust, which compares well with some of our experiences a few years ago. However, the report also consistently pointed to issues relating to clinical governance and waiting times, especially for A&E.

The in-patient survey results mentioned improvements in single-sex placements, the decline in changes to admission dates and the offering of alternative hospital placements to patients. It also mentioned the need for improvements in waiting times for beds, doctor communication and the number of nurses on duty. I acknowledge, however, that in 2015-16 there will be £5.8 million of extra spending on improved nursing care, which will amount to some 80 additional nurses.

On the broader issues that have been raised, I echo a number of points mentioned by colleagues about the pressures on primary care, the age profile of the GPs, the number of single-handed practices and the fact that we have waited for a promised new integrated health centre in Dagenham East for 10 years—it has still not been delivered. Similarly, the Rainham practices desperately need new facilities. Getting appointments is becoming more difficult, putting more and more pressure on the acute sector because of people rolling up to A&E.

Overall, there have been improvements—we all support the management—but there is a long way to go. As we, hopefully, move out of special measures, it is especially important that we remove what my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South called the sword of Damocles that is hanging over King George. I hope for a positive response from the Minister on that specific point.

5.16 pm

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) for securing this important debate. His speech highlighted the very real danger of closing his local A&E department while the trust is, sadly, in the protracted throes of special measures.

I also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge) and my hon. Friends the Members for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) and for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) for their contributions. All have been champions for patients at the Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust for a number of years. Like my right hon. and hon. Friends, I pay tribute to the staff at the trust who, in very difficult circumstances, are working hard to deliver high standards of care to patients.

As we have heard, the trust is facing particularly profound challenges. It is one of the largest in the country, serving a huge and diverse population. There is a lot of churn and movement of people and, as a result, things are even more difficult for GP and primary care services, which, as we know from elsewhere in the country, have been under intense pressure in recent years. My right hon. Friend the Member for Barking made some particularly pertinent points on that: if someone cannot see their GP, the pressure is moved on to local hospital services. When those services are already in difficulty and struggling to cope, they could well do without the added pressure of extra demand.

I hope the Minister will accept that the trust needs real support, because it has been hit hard by certain decisions. The trust itself must bear some responsibility, but I am afraid that some of the previous Government's policies came at the wrong time. Last winter, as we heard, the trust suffered its worst quarterly A&E performance since records began. In January, more than one in four patients were waiting longer than the recommended four hours in A&E—some were even waiting longer than 12 hours.

In December 2013, the trust was placed in special measures following a Care Quality Commission report that raised serious concerns about patient safety and care, particularly in A&E. The report said that staff at the A&E at King George

“did not have confidence in the trust leadership to make the necessary improvements in A&E.”

Although some of the problems at the trust are deep-seated, the CQC report was clear that many of the problems, such as the difficulty in recruiting staff to the emergency department, have either become worse or emerged in recent years. The report also suggested, for example, that staff were concerned about the wide range of locum doctors turning up to shifts. They felt that there was no problem when they were assigned locums with whom they had worked before, but they were clear that the lack of permanent staff posed a risk to patients.

The trust is in a difficult financial situation. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking said, and she was echoed by other Members, that is not helped by its having to spend £27 million on agency staff last year because of a shortage of qualified staff. The trust has also been forced to recruit nurses from overseas because not enough home-grown nurses are being trained. It is well worth remembering that, despite what Ministers claim, the NHS now contains fewer nurses per head than in 2010.

The future of A&E services at King George hospital obviously remains in doubt. I remind the Minister that the 2010 Conservative manifesto promised to

“stop the forced closure of A&E and maternity wards”.

Since then, the maternity ward at King George hospital has closed. The plan to close the A&E unit and relocate it to Queen's hospital has been delayed, but not abandoned. The Minister can, hopefully, update us on those plans and address the valid concerns not only of local MPs, but of the local communities that they represent on the capacity issues that have been mentioned.

Clearly, many of these challenges cannot be tackled in isolation and require working across London and, indeed, considerable support from the Department of Health, but I hope the Minister has listened carefully to the assessment of the problems laid out by my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South. I also hope that he is prepared to take on board some of my right hon. and hon. Friends' suggestions. What they have said is eminently reasonable. With the right support from central Government, I know that their constituents can receive the standard of care that they deserve.

5.22 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer):** It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I thank the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) for raising what is an important matter not only for his constituents, but for the whole health economy of east London, and for the measured way he presented his case. He has been a watcher of and campaigner on the matters in his constituency for a long time. This matter has been addressed and debated on several occasions in this Chamber, and I know he has raised it in the main Chamber too. The last time he raised it here was in January 2014, just after the trust had been put into special measures by the Care Quality Commission in December 2013.

The distance that has been travelled since then is quite considerable. I was able to see it for myself recently, as my first ministerial visit was to visit the Queen's hospital site—albeit to hear about the trust as a whole. It was clear from talking to staff, which I was able to do without management being present, that the distance travelled over the past 18 months has been considerable and transformative not only for patient care, but for

[*Ben Gummer*]

staff experience of the workplace—the two, as all Members will recognise, are coterminous. The most instructive moment came in the staff discussion, when a nurse explained that, the day before, a petition signed by 3,000 local people, which had not instigated by anyone at the hospital, had been delivered to say how much they valued staff efforts to turn around their hospital and how they felt that it was a different place from the one that had gained a mixed reputation in the many years before the hospital was put into special measures.

I will address each of the issues raised by hon. Members in turn, but I want first to set the context and add slightly to the narrative provided by the hon. Member for Ilford South in his recounting of the trust's history. The key review in the matters that we are discussing was begun in 2009. The review took in the whole of Health for North East London and was conducted under the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), then the Secretary of State for Health and now the shadow Secretary of State. It began reporting just before the 2010 election and required an answer immediately after. The hon. Member for Ilford South will know the report's conclusion, which is basically what we are still sitting with. It encompassed not only the health economy of north-east London, but the relationship with what is now the Barts Health NHS Trust, encompassing Whipps Cross university hospital, St Bartholomew's hospital, Newham university hospital and the Royal London hospital.

Several hon. Members have discussed the Government's intentions regarding reconfiguration, but the report was not led by the Government or Whitehall but was under the sensible regime set up by the previous Labour Government of clinically led reconfiguration panels. The principle behind it was a better organisation of A&E and urgent care in east and north-east London—in particular, being able to provide superior trauma care at fewer sites. That model has wide understanding across the House and is based on international evidence and, increasingly, the experience in the NHS. It has affected my constituency as much as it has others around the country.

I understand why hon. Members who are concerned about a hospital that will lose particular services—although King George hospital will retain a 24-hour urgent care service—will feel aggrieved by that change. When engaging with patients and constituents, however, I ask that we remind everyone that this was a clinically led decision that was set up under the previous Labour Government and that the recommendations were continued by the coalition Government as a result. However, none of that questions the fundamental reason why the hon. Member for Ilford South called for this debate, which was to ask, “How can you continue this reconfiguration when one part of the trust is in crisis?” Crisis is the correct word to use for a hospital that was put into special measures. It was not one of the Keogh trusts that were put into special measures due to adverse mortality; it was one of the first to be put in because of systemic and endemic problems at the trust, many of which the hon. Gentleman highlighted.

The change that has occurred over the past 18 months to two years—I am grateful to the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) for highlighting exactly

what has gone on—has been one of culture. Another remark from a nurse with whom I spoke was that, since special measures, her comments about patient care were being noticed by management for the first time. That was the difference that the CQC inspection made. The change in culture has been recognised by local people and the result is much-improved family and friends figures. I do not recognise the figures provided by the right hon. Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge), but the most recent figures are close to the national average. I will receive those figures in a moment, but I believe the overall A&E figure for family and friends was up at 84%. That is quite not where it should be, but the in-patients figure had also risen to nearly the national average. The most recent family and friends figures showed an improvement in results.

Hon. Members recounted figures suggesting that the A&E performance was poor. It is true that the A&E department has failed to hit its required standard for a long time, but the most recent figures are encouraging. Performance for the first quarter of this year was 93.39%—just under the 95% target—compared with the figure for the first quarter of the previous year of 85.62%. That is like for like. Despite the problems encountered across the NHS over last winter, that hospital showed a sustained improvement in the first quarter of this year.

I second the remarks made by several hon. Members about the quality of the new chief executive and the team he has built around him. I have spoken to him, and although he was not going to make predictions, his confidence about going into winter, as well as the place the hospital was in, was significantly different from where he and his team were this time last year.

Let me clarify the A&E figures before I get upbraided. I believe that the figures are that 96% of in-patients would recommend the service to their family and friends, and 1% would not; in A&E, 84% would recommend and 10% not; in maternity, 98% would recommend; in antenatal, 95%; in postnatal wards, 93%; and in postnatal community, 97%. Those figures are roughly around the averages in national FFTs—family and friends tests—which is a significant and marked improvement, showing that local people are responding to the changes made in the hospital and to what needs to happen.

None the less, despite all the improvements, it is true that the A&E is not in a sustainable position to receive the services from King George hospital, either physically—I saw its buildings for myself—or in terms of the new rotas and rosters, although recruiting is now much better managed than in the past. I understand from local commissioners that there is no intention to move these services from the King George to the Queen's site until the physical and staff changes have been made to the satisfaction of the commissioners and the provider—the trust itself. I understand also from the commissioners that the time limit they have imposed means that that cannot happen even within the next two years, because they need to see a degree of sustainability before they can have the confidence to make the changes.

**Mike Gapes:** Does the Minister accept that, given that the A&E will be closed, whether in two, three or four years' time, there is a level of uncertainty? The CQC report comments on that. Is it not better for the sword of Damocles to be lifted and for us to go ahead on the basis of having two A&Es that work together?

**Ben Gummer:** I understand the hon. Gentleman's points. I accept that uncertainty is created at the King George site and that the effect of that is potentially destabilising, especially when the hospital and the trust have had to endure the whole process of special measures. His solution, however, is a false one in two senses.

First, the decision was clinically led in the first place, so to go against it would be to go against a clinical decision after several reviews. The hon. Gentleman is therefore suggesting that we make a political intervention against a decision made by doctors about the best distribution of trauma centres and urgent and emergency care centres according to population. Decisions have been made on a similar basis throughout the country. I do not believe that he really feels that that would be an acceptable route to take. Secondly, even were we to do that, it would not remove uncertainty, because there would still need to be some sort of reconfiguration in future in order to get the best outcomes for patients. So the uncertainty would remain.

The hon. Gentleman's point is valid to an extent. If the situation were to occur again—clearly none of us would have wished things to proceed as they have done—we need to make it clear that reconfigurations can happen only when we have the correct sustainability in receiver organisations. That should be something we think about as we go ahead. However, we are where we are now with his trust, and to proceed on the basis that he suggests would not give either the patient outcomes or the certainty that he desires, whether for staff or his constituents.

**Margaret Hodge:** The Minister referred to a decision that was initiated in about 2009. That is correct, but circumstances change. Our area is the most rapidly expanding in London. I do not know the figures for Redbridge, but those for Barking and Dagenham show, potentially, another 30,000 to 35,000 houses being built over the next 10 to 15 years. That is massive expansion. I put it to the Minister that not only is the number of houses increasing, but the nature of the households is changing. What used to be a house lived in by a couple with perhaps two kids now tends to be lived in by intergenerational families with many more people. What regard has he paid to those changes? Should he not pay regard to them and review his decision in the light of them?

**Ben Gummer:** It is not ultimately my decision. It is the decision of the Secretary of State, but only on the advice of the Independent Reconfiguration Panel. The IRP takes a view over a long horizon, so it takes population growth into account in the original decisions—

**Margaret Hodge:** It did not.

**Ben Gummer:** I will come back to the right hon. Lady with a final comment, but that is what I understand. In the end, such decisions are left to local commissioners, who are the experts in buying the right kind of health provision for their patient groups. If their decision changes, that should be reflected in the IRP's final decision, but the commissioners remain certain that that is the correct way to go for east and north-east London, and while that remains the case, we as politicians should support that clinical decision.

I will respond to some of the other points made by hon. Members. The finances of the hospital were brought up several times. It is true that it has had a sustained poor financial performance, but it is unlike other hospitals which have become indebted or are lifting up. The hospital's position is a sustained one involving a large number—£38 million, which includes a very large figure for agency workers. That figure is now declining as the new management gets a grip on recruitment, and I heard some good stories about the improvement in recruitment when I went there only a couple of weeks ago. There is also £60 million annual provision for PFI payments, which is a problem in many trusts around the country, but there is no point rehearsing those issues, which the right hon. Member for Barking looked at many times in her previous role.

The chief executive is clear about the deficit. He shares my view and that of the Secretary of State that financial performance and quality go hand in hand. No hospital in this country offers outstanding care but has poor financial performance. We cannot get efficient care anywhere if the books are not being looked after at the same time, because the two work together. The chief executive understands that getting the trust into a decent financial position is central to providing the kind of consistently high-quality care that he wants to see across the trust, and not only in the specific areas rightly highlighted by the hon. Members for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) and for Ilford North.

The hon. Member for Ilford South was right to talk about capacity. There was a serious lack of capacity because of the failure to discharge patients and to get people through the system, which caused problems at the front end, in A&E. Remarkable change has been achieved in the past six months through the new measures put in place by the new management, but it is true that there is a great deal more to do. I heard a different story from the one the hon. Gentleman recounted: actually, they thought that the last CQC judgment was completely realistic; the action points highlighted were in large part already being addressed and needed to be done. The new management recognised that special measures was a regime that had to be exited once a sustainable improvement over time had been shown. That was gratifying to hear, because when it is heard from the shop floor, the management and the CQC, that shows that the whole team understands the problems and how they need to be addressed.

Several Members mentioned the problems in primary care, and I am aware of the acute issues in east and north-east London. They are the reason why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State launched the new deal for GPs a couple of weeks ago. NHS England is now mapping hotspots of GP shortage across the country. It will use that information to target resources to make sure we are putting the new GPs being recruited into the right places and using every possible incentive to make sure that under-doctored areas are brought up to parity. Members will know that this is a historical problem and it will take a great deal of heavy lifting from all of us to change it. It is not simply about sheer numbers of GPs; we must have new models of delivering care and new diversity, so that we can deliver primary care appropriately rather than in a way that is based on a model that does not fit.

[*Ben Gummer*]

The right hon. Member for Barking raised understandable concerns that the existing system for the Barts trust was set up to finance one PFI deal. She is not alone in those concerns. I am taking a deep interest in the progress of the special measures regime at Barts. The financial performance and accounting procedures at that hospital and trust when it went into special measures were frankly shocking. They have now been changed, and we will be reviewing the situation on a weekly basis. I hope that if she discusses the matter with the CQC and the trust, she will understand better that it is not that the trust is subsidising one PFI but that there are systemic financial problems across the trust. I take her point completely, however. As we address the financial problems in east London we must reassure everyone that mergers have not happened simply to prop up one organisation at the expense of another.

Finally, I welcome the constructive approach and fair questions of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne). I hope I have answered the majority of his questions, but I question the idea that Government policy has made the situation worse. The reason we are debating here is that the CQC gave an inadequate rating to the Barking hospital trust and put it into special measures. The ratings and the special measures regime were a creation of the previous Government. They have provided transparency and clarity that we did not have before and allowed us to have an honest discussion about what is wrong and what is right. I can now stand up and say where the problems are and accept responsibility for what needs to change. None of that was possible when we could not say that anything was wrong and had to pretend there were no problems, because there was a culture of denial rather than one of transparency and openness.

We are not at the acme. We have a great deal of distance still to make up, but we are in a much better place than we were back in 2013, when the trust was put in special measures, or in 2010, when the review was

completed. We now have clarity about what we need to do and the process for doing it. I believe that we will soon have a much better health economy in north-east London than the one that Members have had to endure so far.

5.42 pm

**Mike Gapes:** I am pleased to have got some injury time, Mr Davies. I emphasise to the Minister and his officials that the problems in north-east London and in my borough of Redbridge in particular are serious. He referred to the Barking and Havering trust and the Barts trust. Every single resident of Redbridge now has to use a hospital that is in special measures, as Whipps Cross hospital is part of the Barts and Royal London agglomeration and King George hospital is part of the Barking and Havering trust. In that borough people cannot go to a hospital that is not in special measures. Some of the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) go to Whipps Cross rather than to the King George.

The reality is that the situation is a fundamental challenge to a population that is growing rapidly. The Mayor of London has just agreed to invest £55 million to build 2,000 new dwellings in the heart of Ilford. A young, dynamic and largely migrant population is moving to Ilford. That means we have to deal with these problems soon—they must not become long-term issues. I am conscious that the people of north-east London—of Redbridge, Barking, Dagenham and Havering—will expect decisions to be taken in their interests. I and my colleagues will continue to fight for them.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the future of Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust.

5.44 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

Wednesday 15 July 2015

## DEFENCE

### Military Inquests

#### **The Minister for the Armed Forces (Penny Mordaunt):**

On 13 July 2013, Army Reservists Corporal James Dunsby, Lance Corporal Craig Roberts and Lance Corporal Edward Maher were among 37 reserve soldiers taking part in an individual navigation exercise on the Brecon Beacons. Tragically, Lance Corporal Maher and Lance Corporal Roberts died while taking part in the exercise and Corporal James Dunsby was evacuated and died in hospital on 30 July 2013. An inquest into the circumstances of these tragic deaths heard evidence from 1 to 26 June 2015, and HM Senior Coroner for the City of Birmingham and the Borough of Solihull yesterday returned a narrative conclusion. The coroner has identified failings in the running of the exercise and has indicated that she will make a number of recommendations to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in order to prevent future deaths.

I would like to apologise on behalf of the MOD and the armed forces for the deaths of Corporal Dunsby, Lance Corporal Roberts and Lance Corporal Maher. We would also like to offer our sincere condolences to their families and friends who have shown great dignity during what has been a very difficult period.

We accept the failings identified by the coroner and are truly sorry. In response to our own and the Health and Safety Executive's investigations we have made a number of changes to the way this exercise and similar exercises are conducted. These changes include improvements to the preparatory training that reserves undertake and a thorough review of the risk assessment process to ensure that all those involved have been trained in the effective management of risks. A new tracker system has been implemented to improve monitoring of individual candidates and to enable two-way communications between directing staff and candidates. We are looking at how this can be further improved. We continually review our code of practice for the prevention and initial medical treatment of climatic injuries in the armed forces in order to minimise the risk of such tragic events. We will continue to work hard to ensure the code of practice is understood and followed.

Over the next few days the coroner will issue her report to prevent future deaths to the MOD. We will treat her recommendations with the utmost seriousness. We will ensure everything possible is being done to reduce the risk to personnel who undertake these types of exercise and to try to prevent a reoccurrence of these terrible events. The MOD will have 56 days to provide our formal response, a copy of which I will place in the Library of the House. As soon as civil investigations are complete we will initiate our own service inquiry to see where further lessons can be identified and improvements made. The Royal Military Police will also consider whether any non-criminal service offences appear to have been committed.

The reserves continue to form an important part of military capability, whether on operations or at home. We will continue to ensure that the reserves have the

necessary training, skills and fitness levels to do the tasks required of them. It will always be necessary to train and test our military personnel to the highest possible level so that they can meet the challenges to national security that we face both in the UK and overseas.

Achieving this end does involve individuals having to push themselves and take some risk. However, as an organisation we must ensure that this is balanced with the need to ensure these risks are effectively mitigated. In this case, we did not do this and we accept full responsibility for these tragic deaths. We are determined to learn the lessons. I am the Minister who will be responsible for taking any corrective action forward. I will be writing to the families personally and will make myself available to meet them if they wish, and to facilitate any requests they might have.

[HCWS106]

### Submarine Dismantling Project

#### **The Minister for Defence Procurement (Mr Philip Dunne):**

On 16 October 2014 I announced that the Ministry of Defence (MOD), Submarine Dismantling Project (SDP) public consultation process would take place between 14 November 2014 and 20 February 2015. Today I can announce, with the conclusion of that process, an initial report from the public consultation is being published online.

Five sites were shortlisted to house an interim store for intermediate level radioactive waste (ILW) removed from 27 nuclear submarines that have been, or will be, decommissioned. The interim store will have the capacity to hold all this ILW until it is transferred to a geological disposal facility (GDF) some time after 2040.

The public consultation sought views about the sites that had been shortlisted and how people felt about the site near them being chosen. The report draws together all the views and collates them under themes to provide a clear and accurate consensus of the opinions raised by site and subject.

This initial report contains only views from the public and no response from MOD as yet, this will come in a later report. It has been published today on the Government website at:

<http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/submarine-dismantling-project-site-for-the-interim-storage-of-intermediate-level-radioactive-waste>

Moving forward, assessment continues, taking into account the public consultation findings and information that has been requested and gathered from the sites themselves. The five shortlisted sites are: AWE Aldermaston in Berkshire; AWE Burghfield in Berkshire; Capenhurst in Cheshire; Chapelcross in Dumfriesshire and Sellafield in Cumbria.

A final decision about which site will house the interim store will be made in 2016.

A copy of the report has been placed in the Library of the House.

[HCWS110]

## HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

### House of Commons (Governance)

**Tom Brake** (*Representing the House of Commons Commission*): Following the House's agreement on 9 July to a motion appointing Sir Paul Beresford, Tom Brake, Nicholas Brown and Stewart Hosie to the House of Commons Commission, the Commission met on 13 July

for the first time since the House of Commons Commission Act 2015 took effect. The majority of the meeting focused on progress with implementation of the recommendations of the Select Committee on House of Commons Governance.

The Commission noted that the final interviews for the new post of director general of the House of Commons had been held on 2 July, and hoped that it would be possible to announce an appointment shortly.

The Commission agreed a delegation under the terms of paragraph 5 of schedule 1 of the House of Commons Administration Act 1978 to establish an Executive Committee to replace the Management Board and to set out the authority for senior appointments. This delegation is appended to the “decisions” of the meeting, which are published on the Parliament website at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/other-committees/house-of-commons-commission/>

The new Executive Committee’s main delegated responsibilities will be delivery of the strategy to be agreed by the Commission and ensuring that the terms and conditions of staff are consistent with the Commission’s statutory duties. Pending the outcome of a senior management review, the Executive Committee will comprise the director general of the House of Commons (once appointed) as chair, the Clerk of the House of Commons, the head of the Department of Chamber and Committee Services, the head of the Department of Facilities, the Director of Finance, the head of the Department of Human Resources and Change and the head of the Department of Information Services. In addition the Executive Committee may co-opt the director of the parliamentary digital service and/or the parliamentary security director into its membership.

The Commission agreed that Tom Brake would act as its spokesperson, and that he would answer all questions tabled to the Commission and the Members Estimate Committee.

The Commission agreed that to improve transparency, it would publish its agendas on the Parliament website prior to its meetings.

The Commission agreed to begin the process of recruiting its external members in September. In the meantime, the former external members of the Management Board will continue to attend by invitation.

The Commission also up-dated its statement of membership, functions and practice to reflect the changes that have occurred as a result of the Governance Committee’s report. In particular, it agreed that its quorum should increase from three to five, to include four members and one official.

[HCWS108]

## ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

### Election Administration 2015

**Mr Gary Streeter** (*Representing The Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission*): The Electoral Commission has today published its statutory report on the administration of the 7 May 2015 elections, including the UK parliamentary general election. The commission’s report indicates that, overall, the elections were well run.

The commission’s research with the public demonstrates that the UK continues to enjoy well-run elections with high levels of voter satisfaction and confidence. Nine in 10 (91%) people surveyed said the elections were well-run. Within this, nearly all (94%) of those who voted in person at a polling station were satisfied with the process, and nearly all (97%) of those who voted by post were satisfied with voting this way.

The commission notes that this success is due to the dedication of all those who had a role in these elections: the returning officers (ROs) and their staff in election offices, polling stations and count centres across the UK; the candidates, political party volunteers and campaigners; and the millions of voters who participated. Any problems that did occur were confined to a small number of local areas and the commission has also today published a paper alongside its statutory report which addresses in more detail the performance of returning officers at the May 2015 polls and where there were failures against the commission’s performance standards.

The commission’s view at present is that there were high levels of compliance with the rules by parties and candidates. Later this year, the commission will publish campaigners’ spending returns which will give voters transparency in how they financed their election campaigns.

The May 2015 elections involved several important new changes for voters, campaigners and electoral administrators: there was a new individual electoral registration system for England, Scotland and Wales, which also allowed people to apply to register to vote online for the first time; and there were additional transparency rules for non-party campaigners in place for the first time at a UK parliamentary general election. The 2015 UK parliamentary general election was also the first held under the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, which meant that the date of the elections was known since autumn 2011.

The general election alone was contested by 134 political parties and 3,971 candidates. In addition, in several hundred local authority areas in England, the poll for the UK parliamentary election was combined with other polls including parish council elections, elections for local mayors and local referendums.

A total of 2.6 million applications to register to vote were submitted during the Electoral Commission’s public awareness campaign, and contributed to over 1.5 million new additions to the electoral registers. The elections staff adapted to the level of demand and on the whole coped well, and 85% of voters surveyed were satisfied with the procedure for registering to vote. The May parliamentary electoral registers contained 46.4 million entries, an increase of 1% since February/March 2014, when the last registers were published under the household registration system.

The commission makes a number of recommendations to further improve voters’ experience and sustain trust in our democracy at future polls, based on lessons from the experiences of these most recent elections and long-standing policy recommendations.

Key recommendations include: the new online electoral registration service should now be extended to electors in Northern Ireland; people should be able to check whether they are already correctly registered to vote, using an additional online system, before submitting a new application to register to vote; all returning officers

should include the correct postage on postal ballot packs for overseas electors so that they can be delivered to voters and returned as quickly as possible before polling day, with funding made available by the UK Government for ROs to deliver this.

The commission has also reiterated its 2014 recommendation that voters at polling stations in England, Scotland and Wales should be required to provide proof of their identity before being issued with a ballot paper. The commission will publish further information on proposals for a proportionate and accessible scheme for verifying the identity of electors at polling stations by the end of 2015, and recommends that the UK Government should legislate to introduce this requirement in time for elections in 2019.

The commission also recommends in its report that all UK Governments should ensure that any legislation relating to elections for which they are responsible is clear at least six months before it is required to be implemented or complied with by campaigners or electoral administrators, and suggests that if this cannot be achieved, statements should be tabled in the relevant legislature to explain the reasons.

Copies of the commission's reports have been placed in the Library and it is also available on its website at: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

[HCWS109]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Office for Nuclear Regulation

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson):** Later today I will lay copies of the Office for Nuclear Regulation's annual plan for 2015-16 and the Office for Nuclear Regulation's strategy 2015-20 before this House, both are un-numbered Act papers.

Having consulted the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change who is accountable for civil nuclear security and the Office for Nuclear Regulation, I can confirm, in accordance with schedule 7, section 25(3) of the Energy Act 2013, that there have been no exclusions to either of the published documents on the grounds of national security.

[HCWS106]



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**Written Statements [Col. 21WS]**

**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

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