

Wednesday  
28 October 2015

Volume 601  
No. 59



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**  
(HANSARD)

Wednesday 28 October 2015



# House of Commons

*Wednesday 28 October 2015*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Climate Change

1. **Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): What progress her Department has made on its work on the effects of climate change in developing countries. [901837]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening):** We are doing climate-smart development. Through the international climate fund, the UK has helped over 15 million people cope with the effects of climate change and given 2.6 million people access to clean energy. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently announced that over the next five years the UK's climate funding will increase by at least 50%.

**Holly Lynch:** In 2015 we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make progress on both international development and climate change. In countries such as Bangladesh and in regions of Africa, the connection between climate change and child marriage is stark. Desperate families faced with failing crops, flooding and extreme weather impacting on their livelihoods and homes are deciding to see their daughters married earlier and earlier, in the hope that they will at least have a roof over their heads and food to eat. Too often that gamble is leaving girls at risk—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We need a question.

**Holly Lynch:** I hope that we will look to resolve climate change in order to deal with international development.

**Justine Greening:** The hon. Lady is right to point out that climate change has a number of different impacts that go well beyond the environment. She will know that last year we held the Girl summit, because it is all about increasing momentum to tackle child marriage worldwide. The UK now has a flagship programme in place to do just that.

**Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): Some 660 million Africans currently have no access to power. Will my right hon. Friend explain what she is doing to ensure that global goal 7 is met, while at the same time being careful and cautious about climate change?

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that last week the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), announced a brand-new programme that the UK will be heading called Energy Africa, which is supported by Kofi Annan. It will mean that we can get energy to the people who are least likely to be able to afford it, but—this is critical—we are doing that in a renewable way, which we think will have a huge impact in the coming years.

**Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Is the right hon. Lady in any way concerned about the signals that the Department of Energy and Climate Change might be sending out through its lack of support for renewable energy and the change in that regime, and what lessons other countries might draw from that?

**Justine Greening:** There are two aspects to tackling climate change. The first, of course, is mitigation, and many developed countries such as the UK have significant plans in place to transition to low carbon economies. The second is adaptation, which is the challenge for many developing countries. It is about how they can ensure that they not only adapt to climate change, which often hits them first, but grow sustainably and develop nevertheless.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): I congratulate the Department on the excellent work it has done with the Nepali Government over many years on the community forestry programme, which has seen forestation increase in Nepal. Are there lessons to learn from that programme for other areas in which the Department operates?

**Justine Greening:** Yes, I think that the key is to work with the grain of human nature and put in place programmes that allow livelihoods to be more successful and profitable, and that can go hand in hand with protecting and preserving the environment. The programme to which my hon. Friend refers is one of a number that the Department has put in place to ensure that reforestation happens.

#### Refugee Camps: Winter

2. **John Nicolson** (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): What steps her Department is taking to support preparation for winter in refugee camps in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. [901838]

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Desmond Swayne):** We are supporting 11 partners with £221 million to respond to the onset of winter. Vulnerable refugees will receive warm clothes, thermal blankets, fuel and cash.

**John Nicolson:** The Minister will be aware that in Lebanon around 190,000 refugee families do not live in formal camps, because those who cannot afford to rent accommodation are often forced to live in informal tented settlements in rural areas, such as the Bekaa valley, or in unfurnished buildings in urban areas. What steps is the Department taking to support those who live outside the refugee camps?

**Mr Swayne:** As the hon. Gentleman observes, there are no refugee camps in Lebanon—I have visited the settlements in the Bekaa valley—and it is precisely for that reason that we support UNICEF and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to make the provisions that we are paying for.

**Mrs Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): Are persecuted Christians and other religious minorities able to get into the camps, and will they be able to remain within them and take winter refuge?

**Mr Swayne:** I have visited camps that are specifically for Christians, but I would be reluctant to make any kind of aid provision specific to a religious confession, because that would be to pour combustible material on a conflagration that is already in progress.

**Mr Speaker:** Very pithy—we are grateful.

13. [901849] **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): Refugee children in Europe also face a tough winter. Last week the UNHCR expressed concern that unaccompanied children moving within Europe are at a heightened risk of violence and abuse, especially in overcrowded reception centres, while Save the Children operations in Italy and Greece have identified that these children are suffering a high level of psychological distress. Does the Minister agree that just because these children have arrived in Europe, it does not mean they are safe? Will he have a word in the Prime Minister's ear to remind him that I wrote to him on 11 September and am still awaiting an answer?

**Mr Swayne:** I do not think the Prime Minister will be needing any reminder about the nature of the crisis. However, the hon. Gentleman is quite right. It is precisely for those reasons that we provide core funding to the UNHCR and UNICEF.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): The United Kingdom is rightly, in my view, taking 20,000 refugees. There are eight categories of profiles of resettlement under the UNHCR guidelines. Will the Government be using those guidelines or will we introduce our own guidelines given that those eight categories do not include widows and orphans?

**Mr Swayne:** We will be using the UNHCR guidelines.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I welcome the new Labour Front-Bench team and look forward to working with them on these important matters.

Does not the onset of winter and the challenges it brings highlight the importance of the UK playing a diplomatic role in resolving the crisis in Syria? Does the Minister agree that as winter sets in and families start to freeze, this is a situation where the Government should be prioritising bairns, not bombs?

**Mr Swayne:** I agree entirely that we must bend every muscle to provide a settlement.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): In supporting preparations for winter in refugee camps, will my right hon. Friend confirm that the United Kingdom is taking the lead in Europe in providing more resources than any of our European allies?

**Mr Swayne:** My hon. Friend is quite right. This is the greatest humanitarian response that we have made to any emergency ever.

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): There are terrible reports of the conditions in the Syrian refugee camps on Greek islands such as Lesbos, with no dry clothes, no shelter, no food, and children sleeping in bin bags, and conditions can only get worse as winter approaches. Are the Government really prepared to turn their back on people like these?

**Mr Swayne:** We have already done work, and are doing work, with the UNHCR and the Red Cross.

### Migration

3. **Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): How much of her Department's budget is directed at tackling the root causes of migration. [901839]

**The Secretary of State for International Development** (**Justine Greening**): I, too, take this opportunity to welcome the shadow Front-Bench team to their roles. I look forward not only to debating but, I hope, to constructively working with them in common cause on this agenda.

The root causes of migration are diverse. They include conflict and lack of security, but also a lack of opportunity and jobs. That is why we provide help and security for refugees affected by the Syria crisis. Doubling our work on jobs and growth, as we are, is not only good for people in the countries we are supporting but in our national interest.

**Chris Davies:** The focus in recent weeks has been on migrants from the Syrian conflict, but what is my right hon. Friend's Department doing to tackle migration from Africa?

**Justine Greening:** Two things. In short, we are working to create jobs, and we have doubled our economic development work across the Department, but we are also helping African countries to cope with the refugees and displaced people that they themselves have—for example, in Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm that migrants from Eritrea are no longer going to be described as economic migrants, since some of the worst human rights atrocities are taking place in that country?

**Justine Greening:** The right hon. Lady is absolutely right to highlight the human rights concerns that we have in relation to Eritrea. On her more specific question, let me write to her with an update.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Mims Davies. [*Interruption.*] It is not compulsory, but we are happy to hear the hon. Lady if she wishes.

10. [901846] **Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Many women and girls come to our shores to escape evil and barbaric oppression abroad. Will the Minister update me on what the Department is doing through our aid programme to fight the practice of female genital mutilation around the world?

**Justine Greening:** The UK has a flagship programme—the largest of its kind in the world—which is supporting the African-led movement to end FGM in 17 of the most affected countries. Our Girl summit last year galvanised a global movement on ending FGM and child marriage, and next month the African Union will host the African Girl's summit to maintain momentum, which I hope to join.

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): This is a disappointing Whips' question. The root cause of migration by Brits to Spain is the fact that they prefer the weather. Will the Secretary of State have a word with the Conservative Whip's Office, and colleagues, to stop them conflating the refugee crisis with economic migration?

**Justine Greening:** I was not expecting a question on UK pensioners and migration, but the hon. Gentleman has made his point. DFID's focus is to help people who have been caught up in crises such as that in Syria, through no fault of their own, and to ensure that they get support, shelter, medical treatment, and that their children receive the education they deserve.

#### Refugees (Registration of Children)

4. **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): What steps her Department is taking to support the legal registration of children born to refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. [901840]

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Desmond Swayne):** Registration is essential to enable refugees to obtain humanitarian services and protection under international law. To date we have provided the UNHCR with £44 million in Jordan and Lebanon, which includes support for registration and issuing birth certificates.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** I am grateful to the Minister for that helpful answer. As he said, registration can be vital to prevent statelessness, yet some estimates suggest that nearly 30,000 Syrian refugee children born in Lebanon could fall into that category, with long-term consequences for their education and a vulnerability to violence and exploitation; it could even affect their ability to return home should the conflict come to an end. Does the Minister recognise that that situation requires a response from the Governments of the host countries and grass-roots legal advice organisations on the ground, and will he commit to working at all levels to support access to registration—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. May I suggest politely to the hon. Gentleman that the deployment of a blue pencil is helpful on these occasions?

**Mr Swayne:** I cannot confirm the figures. If people are not registered they are difficult to count, but the hon. Gentleman is right, and it is essential that we continue to work with the UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council, which has particular expertise in securing rights for refugees, and that we continue to lobby the host Government.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): Given the complexity of the situation that the Minister has mentioned, how meticulous and precise are the

processes to ensure that those children who are most at risk are prioritised when trying to deliver a more acceptable outcome?

**Mr Swayne:** I have visited registration centres in Lebanon, and I assure the hon. Gentleman about the extraordinary efforts that are being made by a remarkable staff. Undoubtedly, the situation has become challenging since May, although it has improved recently. We are on the case.

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his answer about the £44 million, but what action will the Government take on the specific issue of the complexity and cost of registering stateless children? We do not want anyone to be left behind. Will he come back to the House with a more specific answer to the question?

**Mr Swayne:** I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the Front Bench. It is important to put our money where our mouth is, and £44 million to the UNHCR is an important part of the answer. It is vital to work with the UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council, and to lobby the host Government. Unfortunately I do not rule Lebanon.

#### Occupied Palestinian Territories

5. **Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): What recent assessment she has made of the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. [901841]

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Desmond Swayne):** Some 2.3 million people in Gaza and the west bank have insecure access to food, and 1.4 million are in need of water, sanitation and hygiene. This month 58 Palestinians and eight Israelis have been killed, and 7,042 Palestinians and 70 Israelis have been injured.

**Tommy Sheppard:** I have a related question on Gaza, if I may. What assessment has been made of the destruction of UK-funded facilities in Gaza by the bombing of the Israeli air force? It seems that we provide facilities, either directly or through the UN, but then those facilities get bombed and we have to provide them again. What can be done to stop that tragic merry-go-round, and will the Minister work with colleagues to try to persuade the Israeli Government to have a more proportionate response in Gaza and to stop hindering the relief effort?

**Mr Speaker:** I am sorry but these questions are too long. We are very short of time—we need pithy inquiries.

**Mr Swayne:** Twelve UK-funded United Nations Relief and Works Agency schools were substantially damaged in the hostilities. The only way that can be prevented is by a peace process.

**Mr Speaker:** A tutorial can be provided by Mr Howell.

15. [901851] **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend praise the doctors at the Hadassah medical centre in Jerusalem, who are showing real humanitarian characteristics by treating victims and attackers at the same time?

**Mr Swayne:** That is an object lesson on the measure of leadership now required to overcome the huge amount of distrust and hatred.

12. [901848] **Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Israeli Government on the increase in illegal building on the west bank and the impact that that has had on current levels of violence?

**Mr Swayne:** I have had substantial discussions with the Israeli Government on this issue and could not have been more robust in my representations.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What consideration has my right hon. Friend given to the provision of a desalination plant for Gaza, as proposed by the Israeli Government, which would supply all the water needs for Gaza and satisfy the humanitarian grounds we want to see?

**Mr Swayne:** My hon. Friend draws attention to a very important issue. UN studies predict that Gaza will become uninhabitable, as a consequence of the water problem, by 2020. A peace process is vital, so that the level of investment required to drive such developments becomes available.

#### Foreign National Offenders

6. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): In which countries her Department is working with the Ministry of Justice to build prisons to facilitate the return of foreign national offenders from the UK. [901842]

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Grant Shapps):** This summer, in my capacity as a joint Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister, I visited Tower Street prison, Jamaica, where we have negotiated a prison build and transfer arrangement to return foreign national offenders, as reported by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

**Mr Hollobone:** Given that we spend £300 million a year on incarcerating foreign national offenders in this country, it makes sense to use the DFID budget to build prisons in other countries so that they can be returned. Would the Minister be kind enough to consider Pakistan, Bangladesh and Vietnam for future projects?

**Grant Shapps:** My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that we work in various countries, through the returns and reintegration fund. I mentioned Jamaica. There are also examples in Ghana, which I will shortly visit, and Nigeria, where I have just been.

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Where does building prisons fit into the UK's stated spending priorities for foreign aid? Does the Minister understand concerns about aid money perhaps increasingly being siphoned off for other purposes?

**Grant Shapps:** As the hon. Lady knows, we have a strict regime for where money is spent and how it fits into official development assistance expenditure. In the end, this is about security both in those countries and at home.

#### Topical Questions

T1. [901852] **Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening):** Last month, I was at the UN for its historic adoption of the 17 global goals. The UK played a key role in creating goals that are universal, inclusive and have a commitment to leave no one behind. At the World Bank annual meetings and with EU Ministers, the UK pressed for more support for Syrian refugees. Finally, at a Rotary event in Parliament last week, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), we recognised that for the first time there have been no polio cases in Africa for over a year, and just 51 cases of polio globally this year to date. That is incredible progress and we will finish off that job.

**Chris Davies:** I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her Department recently winning a procurement award, beating several leading British private sector companies for the third year running. What more can she do to provide value for money in her Department?

**Justine Greening:** I have been very keen to deliver value for money for the taxpayer. In fact, smarter procurement has saved DFID more than £400 million over the past four years alone. We are now looking at how we can make it easier for small and medium-sized enterprises to work with DFID and at how we can get better value for money from our work with non-governmental organisations and UN agencies.

T2. [901853] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): As a result of the ongoing conflict in Yemen, 21 million people now are in desperate need of aid. What is the Secretary of State doing to secure action by the UN Security Council to ensure the constructive engagement in peace talks by all parties to the conflict, to end the de facto blockade and to provide humanitarian access?

**Justine Greening:** The hon. Gentleman is right to raise this forgotten crisis. At the UN in September, I held a discussion with a range of stakeholders, including UN agencies, about how we can do a better job of reaching people in need, but that fundamentally requires a dialogue on how to achieve peace.

T5. [901856] **Mr Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): Given that the Government of Somalia have now taken control of several towns and areas previously occupied by al-Shabaab, does the Secretary of State agree that it is crucial that effective local government services be put in place to win the support of local communities? What further support will DFID provide to support communities in this troubled area?

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend is right that, as we hopefully achieve growing political stability in Somalia, we back that up by allowing a more federal approach to government. Indeed, DFID is pulling together programmes that will enable us to support local government to provide the basic services people depend on.

T3. [901854] **Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): Speaking about the situation in Palestine at the World Zionist Congress last week, the Israeli Prime Minister declared that Israel would have “to control all of the territory for the foreseeable future.”

If Israel has no intention of allowing the creation of two states and prevents Palestinians from having equal rights in one state, what is left but apartheid, and what implications does that have for UK development policy?

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Desmond Swayne):** It is vital that we get the peace process back on track, and I hope that the agreement at the weekend over Temple Mount and al-Aqsa will at least be the start of that process. However, the only way to address the issue the hon. Gentleman raises is to pursue a two-state solution.

T6. [901857] **Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend update the House on what work her Department is doing to help failing and fragile states?

**Justine Greening:** We have chosen to focus more work on helping fragile and failing states, tackling instability and helping people affected by conflict. It is not just the right thing to do for those people and their countries; it is also a way of keeping our own country safe, secure and prosperous.

T4. [901855] **Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): On 15 October, Human Rights Watch published a report on the deteriorating situation in Nepal. It documents more than 45 deaths in recent months and in particular criticises the Nepali police. Given that the Department is funding the Nepali police, will Ministers read the report and give a considered response to its findings?

**Justine Greening:** The hon. Gentleman raises an extremely important point. Our work alongside the Nepali police has been important in providing the conditions for us to ensure that humanitarian support can get to people affected by the earthquake, but he is right to raise concerns, and we will of course respond to them.

T10. [901861] **Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): Hampshire fire and rescue played a critical role in the immediate recovery efforts after the earthquake in Nepal. What steps have now been taken to ensure economic recovery in that country?

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend is right that beyond providing initial emergency humanitarian aid, we now need to consider how we can help Nepal recover, and that includes investment in infrastructure, in particular, but also broader investment in energy and access to it and improving the business environment so that we can get investment into the country.

T7. [901858] **Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Following the recent outbreak of violence in India-controlled Kashmir, can the Secretary of State reassure the House on what steps her Department is taking to protect freedom of religion and belief?

**Justine Greening:** Much of our work is aimed at engendering stability in countries, but in the end, many of the issues that hon. Members raise need to be dealt with at a political level and require long-term political

leadership to ensure that communities can live side by side. When that is in place, we have the best prospect for development.

**Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): The global humanitarian system is struggling to cope under the pressure of many crises in the world. What is Britain doing to reform the system so that it is fit for purpose for the years to come?

**Justine Greening:** First, we are encouraging UN agencies to improve on value for money. Secondly, we are looking ahead to the world humanitarian summit in Istanbul next May, making sure that the international community and UN agencies have a better response to protracted crises, such as the one in Syria, where children are left with no education and people are left with no jobs. Those are the root causes of why migration is now taking place from that region.

T8. [901859] **Stuart Blair Donaldson** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (SNP): It has been more than a month since the sustainable development goals were agreed at the UN. When will the UK Government publish their plans for the implementation of the goals? What role will DFID play in co-ordination across Whitehall and the devolved Administrations?

**Justine Greening:** First, we can be proud of the work the UK did in shaping those goals—it was very much led by the Prime Minister and his participation in the high level panel, which was set up by the UN Secretary-General. The UK meets many of the goals, but we, too, wanted those goals to be universal. We will now work on them domestically.

**Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on her fantastic work on tackling female genital mutilation. Will she update the House on what further steps she will take to tackle the equally abhorrent practice of breast ironing?

**Justine Greening:** I put improving the prospects for women and girls at the heart of everything that DFID does. It is vital that women have voice, choice and control in their lives. That is at the centre of DFID's development programmes and what we do in our humanitarian support, and it will continue to be so.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I welcome DFID's recent announcement of increased support to the urgently needed humanitarian relief operations in Yemen. Will the Secretary of State comment on the effectiveness of this aid, given that the UK Government are simultaneously supporting the coalition that is currently carrying out indiscriminate bombings in civilian areas, including on a Médecins sans Frontières-run facility on Monday night?

**Justine Greening:** The long-term solution to helping people in Yemen will be a political process that delivers peace. The hon. Lady is right to highlight the dire humanitarian situation, which leaves 80% of people in Yemen in need. I assure her that we are working on not only improving access for aid getting into the country, but on ensuring that when it does get there it can get around the country to communities in need—that is particularly the case for fuel, which is desperately needed.

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

Q1. [901822] **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 28 October.

**The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron):** Before I answer my hon. Friend, I know that the whole House will wish to join me in paying tribute to Michael Meacher. He died suddenly last week, and we send our condolences to his family and friends. Michael dedicated his life to public service, diligently representing his Oldham constituents in this place for a staggering 45 years. He was a passionate advocate of the causes he believed in, which included the environment, and he was able to put these into practice as a Minister between 1997 and 2003. This House and our politics are a poorer place without him, and I know that colleagues from all parts of this Chamber will remember him with affection and will miss him greatly.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, and in addition to my duties in this House I shall have further such meeting later today.

**Stephen Metcalfe:** May I associate myself with the sympathies expressed by the Prime Minister?

Will my right hon. Friend join me in celebrating the fact that one in 10 of the world's tractors are built in Basildon, that not an Airbus A380 flies without a part built in Basildon and that Thurrock is not only home to the largest inward investment in the south-east, but is attracting investment from world-renowned organisations such as the Royal Opera House? All that is leading to job creation and opportunity, so will he do all he can to ensure that Britain remains a great place to do business and prosper in?

**The Prime Minister:** Basildon has a special place in my heart—I did not know all those statistics, so it now has an even more special place. I can tell my hon. Friend that the long-term youth claimant count in his constituency is down by 42% in the past year. He spoke about what a good place Britain is to do business in, and I am pleased to say that we are now sixth in the world rankings for the best place to set up and to run a business. I know that the Leader of the Opposition, not least because his new spokesman is, apparently, a great admirer of the Soviet Union, will be very pleased to start the day with tractor statistics.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): I start by associating myself with the Prime Minister's remarks about Michael Meacher. On behalf of the Labour party, his constituents and a much wider community, I express our condolences to his family. I spoke to them last night and asked them how they would like Michael to be remembered. They thought about it and sent me a very nice message, which I would like to read out, if I may, Mr Speaker. It is quite brief, but very poignant. As "Memories of Michael", they provided this statement:

"When I was young...one of the things he frequently said to me was that people went into politics because they had principles and wanted to change things to make the world better, but that in

order to get into power they would often compromise on their principles and that this could happen again and again until, if they eventually did get into power, they would have become so compromised that they would do nothing with it."

Those of us who knew Michael knew him as a decent, hard-working, passionate and profound man. He represented his constituency with diligence and distinction for 45 years. He was a brilliant Environment Minister, as the Prime Minister pointed out, and he was totally committed to parliamentary democracy and to this Parliament holding Governments—all Governments—to account. He was also a lifelong campaigner against injustice and poverty. We remember Michael for all of those things. We express our condolences and we express our sympathies to his family at this very difficult time. His will be a hard act to follow, but we will do our best.

Following the events in the other place on Monday evening and the rather belated acceptance by the Prime Minister of the result there, can he now guarantee to the House and to the wider country that nobody will be worse off next year as a result of cuts to working tax credits?

**The Prime Minister:** What I can guarantee is that we remain committed to the vision of a high pay, low tax, lower welfare economy. We believe that the way to make sure that everyone is better off is to keep growing our economy, keep inflation low, keep cutting people's taxes and introduce the national living wage. As for our changes, the Chancellor will set them out in the autumn statement.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I thank the Prime Minister for that, but the question I asked was quite simply this: will he confirm, right now, that tax credit cuts will not make anyone worse off in April next year?

**The Prime Minister:** What we want is for people to be better off because we are cutting their taxes and increasing their pay, but the hon. Gentleman is going to have to be a little patient, because although these changes passed the House of Commons five times with ever-enlarging majorities, we will set out our new proposals in the autumn statement and he will be able to study them.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** This is the time when we ask questions to the Prime Minister on behalf of the people of this country—[*Interruption.*] Mr Speaker, if I may continue. People are very worried about what is going to happen to them next April, so what exactly does the Prime Minister mean? He is considering it and there is an autumn statement coming up, but we thought he was committed to not cutting tax credits. Is he going to cut them or not? Are people going to be worse off or not in April next year? He must know the answer.

**The Prime Minister:** I want to make two points. First, we set out in our election manifesto that we were going to find £12 billion-worth of savings on welfare. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There is too much noise in the Chamber. We need a bit of calm. The questions and the answers must be heard.

**The Prime Minister:** It is an important point because every penny we do not save on welfare means savings we have to find in the education budget, the policing budget or the health budget. My second point is that because of

what has happened in the other place, we should of course have a debate about how to reform welfare and how to reduce its cost. I am happy to have that debate, but it is difficult to have it with the hon. Gentleman because he has opposed every single welfare change that has been made. He does not support the welfare cap; he does not support the cap on housing benefit; he does not think that any change to welfare is worth while. I have to say that if we want a strong economy, if we want growth and if we want to get rid of our deficit and secure our country, we need to reform welfare.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** What we are talking about are tax credits for people in work. The Prime Minister knows that; he understands that. He has lost the support of many people in this country who are actually quite sympathetic to his political project, and some of the newspapers that support him have now come out against him on this. He did commit himself to cuts of £12 billion in the welfare budget, but repeatedly refused to say whether tax credits would be part of that. In fact, he said that they would not be. Will he now give us the answer that we are trying to get today?

**The Prime Minister:** The answer will be in the autumn statement, when we set out our proposals, but I must say to the hon. Gentleman that it has come to quite a strange set of events when the House of Commons votes for something five times, when there is absolutely no rebellion among Conservative Members of Parliament or, indeed, among Conservative peers, and when the Labour party is left defending and depending on unelected peers in the House of Lords. We have a new alliance in British politics: the unelected and the unelectable.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** It is very interesting that the Prime Minister still refuses to answer the fundamental question. This is not a constitutional crisis; it is a crisis for 3 million families in this country who are very worried about what is going to happen next April.

Just before the last election, when asked on the BBC's "World at One" whether he was going to cut tax credits, the former Chief Whip, now the Justice Secretary, said: "we are not going to cut them." Why did he say that?

**The Prime Minister:** What I said at the election was that the basic level of child tax credits would stay the same, and, at £2,780 per child, it has stayed exactly the same. However, the point is this: if we want to get our deficit down, if we want to secure our economy, if we want to keep on with secure growth, we need to make savings in welfare. Presumably, even with his deficit-denying, borrow-for-ever plan, the hon. Gentleman has to make some savings in public spending. If you do not save any money on welfare, you end up cutting the NHS, and you end up cutting police budgets even more deeply. Those are the truths. When is the hon. Gentleman going to stop his deficit denial, get off the fence, and tell us what he would do?

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Mr Speaker, I have—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I said a moment ago that the answers needed to be heard; the questions need to be heard as well. The hon. Gentleman is going to ask his question, and it will be heard. If it takes longer, so be it.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I have asked the Prime Minister five times whether or not people will be worse off next April if they receive working tax credits. He has still not been able to answer me, or, indeed, many others. May I put to him a question that I was sent by—[*Interruption.*] It may seem very amusing to Conservative Members.

I was sent this question by Karen. She wrote:

"Why is the Prime Minister punishing working families—I work full time and earn the 'living wage' within the public sector. The tax credit cuts will push me and my family into hardship."

Can the Prime Minister give a cast-iron guarantee to Karen, and all the other families who are very worried about what will happen to their incomes next April? They are worried about how they will be able to make ends meet? He could give them the answer today, and I hope that he will. I ask him for the sixth time: please give us an answer to a very straightforward, very simple question.

**The Prime Minister:** What I would say to Karen is this: if she is on the living wage working in the public sector, next year, in April, she will benefit from being able to earn £11,000 before she pays any income tax at all—it was around £6,000 when I became Prime Minister. If she has children, she will benefit from 30 hours of childcare every week. That is something that has happened under this Government. But above all she will benefit because we have a growing economy, we have zero inflation, we have got 2 million more people in work, and we will train 3 million apprentices in this Parliament. That is the fact. The reason the Labour party lost the last election is that it was completely untrusted on the deficit, on debt and on a stable economy. Since then the deficit deniers have taken over the Labour party. That is what happened. When we look at their plans—borrowing forever, printing money, hiking up taxes—we see that it is working people like Karen who would pay the price.

Q2. [901823] **David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): In my constituency, unemployment has fallen by 30% since 2010. This Government have delivered the M6 link road—after 60 years—which will create even more jobs in my area when it is completed. Does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agree that the Conservatives are ensuring that Morecambe is back open for business?

**The Prime Minister:** I well remember visiting my hon. Friend's constituency and looking at the very important road works that are going to open up the port, and that are going to help when we bring in the new nuclear power station and all the other steps he wants to see. The long-term youth claimant count in his constituency has fallen by 30% in the last year, so those young people are now able to work, and able to benefit from our growing economy.

**Angus Robertson** (Moray) (SNP): Scottish National party Members associate ourselves with the condolences expressed by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition about Michael Meacher.

Last week I asked the Prime Minister about the tragic circumstances of Michael O'Sullivan, a disabled man from north London who took his own life after an assessment by the Department for Work and Pensions. We know that at least 60 investigations have taken place

into suicides following the cancellation of benefits, but their findings have not been published. The Prime Minister said to me last week that he would look carefully at the specific question about publication. Will he confirm when those findings will be published?

**The Prime Minister:** I will write to the right hon. Gentleman about this, but from memory we cannot publish the report because it contains personal and medical data that would not be appropriate for publication. If I have got that wrong, I will write to him, but that is my clear memory of looking into his question after last week.

**Angus Robertson:** Tim Salter from Stourbridge in the west midlands was 53 when he took his life. The coroner ruled:

“A major factor in his death was that his state benefits had been greatly reduced leaving him almost destitute.”

Tim’s sister said:

“It’s the vulnerable people who are going to be affected the worst. The DWP need to publish these reviews.”

The Prime Minister says that he is confused about the views of the families involved. The families say the findings should be published. Will he publish them? Three million families are going to have their child tax credits cancelled. We need the answers to these questions.

**The Prime Minister:** First, let me correct the right hon. Gentleman on that last point. Under the proposals we put forward, those on the lowest levels of pay were protected because of the national living wage, and those on the lowest incomes were protected because we were protecting the basic award of the child tax credit at £2,780. I have already answered the other part of the question: I will send him a letter if I have got this wrong, but my understanding is that there were too many personal and medical details for the report to be published. That is an important consideration in deciding whether to publish something.

**Q4.** [901825] **Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): I would like to ask the Prime Minister about Ruby, one of my youngest constituents. She is just one month old. Why should Ruby face the prospect of spending her entire working life paying off the debt built up by this generation?

**The Prime Minister:** I think it is absolutely right to care about Ruby. When we became the Government £1 in every £4 spent by the Government was borrowed money. We had one of the biggest budget deficits anywhere in the world. It is always easy for people to say, “Put off the difficult decisions; don’t make any spending reductions,” but what they are doing is burdening future generations with debt. What I would say to the Labour Front Bench is that that is not generosity; that is actually selfishness.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Mrs Sharon Hodgson.

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I think the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) must have misheard me. An innocent error, but I called Mrs Sharon Hodgson.

**Q3.** [901824] **Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): We all know about the Prime Minister’s broken promise on tax credits, but would not the final nail in the coffin of compassionate conservatism be hammered home if he were to scrap universal infant free school meals in the spending review, taking hot healthy meals out of the mouths of innocent, blameless infant children? Will he now guarantee not to scrap universal infant free school meals, so that he does not go down in history as Dave the Dinner Snatcher?

**The Prime Minister:** I am immensely proud that it was a Government I led that introduced that policy. In 13 years of a Labour Government, did they ever do that? [HON. MEMBERS: “No!”] Do we remember an infant free school meals Bill from the Labour party? [HON. MEMBERS: “No!”] No. I am proud of what we have done, and we will be keeping it.

**Q6.** [901827] **Stephen Phillips** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): My right hon. Friend has demonstrated considerable leadership in ensuring that Britain is the second largest bilateral aid donor in Syria, but there is another crisis going on, which the world has largely forgotten about. In Yemen, there is an ongoing war, as a result of which 1.4 million people have been forced to flee their homes, 3 million are facing starvation and at least 500,000 children are at risk from life-threatening malnutrition. The president of the International Committee of the Red Cross has said that Yemen is in the same position after five months as Syria is after five years. Please can we do more?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right to raise this. We have been involved in trying to help in this situation right from the start. As in Syria, we are a major contributor in terms of humanitarian aid, and we have made it very clear that all Yemeni parties should engage in peace talks, without preconditions and in good faith, to allow Yemen to move towards a sustainable peace. That peace needs to be based on the fact that all people in Yemen need proper representation by their Government. There are similarities with Syria in that regard, in that having a Government on behalf of one part of the country is never going to be a sustainable solution.

**Q5.** [901826] **Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): How dare anyone in this House earning £74,000 a year tell families that a combined income of £25,000 is too much and that they need to give some of it back to balance the economy? Did the Prime Minister refuse to put this in his manifesto because he knew that, if he did, he would not be elected?

**The Prime Minister:** Let me remind the hon. Lady about the situation we inherited. When I became Prime Minister, nine out of 10 families were getting tax credits, including Members of Parliament. That is how crazy the system we inherited was. We reduced that to six out of 10 families during the last Parliament, although we were of course opposed by Labour and the SNP. Our proposals will now take that down to five out of 10 families. But these proposals are not on their own: they are accompanied by a national living wage for the first time. They are also accompanied by allowing people to earn

£11,000 before paying tax, for the first time. Those sorts of measures will help the sort of families she talks about.

Q7. [901828] **Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): The Prime Minister spoke movingly at conference about the plight of young people in the care system. Will he tell me what the Government are actually going to do to improve the life chances of those young disadvantaged children and to give them opportunities as they move forward in their lives?

**The Prime Minister:** The most important thing we can do is to speed up the adoption system so that more children get adopted. We have seen an increase in adoptions since I have been Prime Minister, but because of one or two judgments, that has slipped backwards a bit, and we need to work very hard to make sure more children get adopted. For those who cannot be adopted, we need to make sure that our residential care homes are doing the best possible job. That is why I can announce today that I have asked the former chief executive of Barnardo's, Sir Martin Narey—an excellent public servant who I worked with when he was at the Home Office—to conduct an independent review of children's residential care, reporting to the Education Secretary and me, so that we can take every possible step to give those children the best start in life.

Q11. [901832] **Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): Redundant steelworkers such as those at Caparo Wire in Wrexham pay national insurance contributions and play by the rules. Why then are this Government limiting mortgage interest support for them in the future, and making them pay twice—once through national insurance and once through paying back the loan? Is that not the type of action that a responsible Government should not pursue, and is it not an example of compassionate Conservatism dying?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman refers to a temporary recession measure on mortgage payments that was continued for five years. He gives me the opportunity to update the House, as I promised that I would last night, on what we are doing to help the steel industry, which I know is so important to his constituency. On energy costs, I can announce today that we will refund the energy-intensive industries with the full amount of the policy cost they face as soon as we get the state aid judgment from Brussels. I can confirm that that payment will be made immediately, and that it will be made throughout this Parliament, which is far more generous than the Opposition proposal.

Q8. [901829] **Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): I have had hundreds of emails from constituents regarding the northern powerhouse, and I have chosen just one. John from Weaver Vale emailed me to tell me not to listen to the Leader of the Opposition with his strategy of higher spending, higher borrowing and more debt, but instead to stick to our long-term economic plan for a higher-wage, lower-welfare and low-tax society. Does the Prime Minister agree with John from Weaver Vale?

**The Prime Minister:** I do agree. John from Weaver Vale has demonstrated more sense in his email than the Leader of the Opposition did in at least six of his questions.

The point is that not only have we seen an economy that is growing—2 million more people in work—inflation that is low and living standards that are rising, but there are 680,000 fewer workless households and 480,000 fewer children in workless households. If we want to measure the real difference that the growth in our economy is making, think of those children, those households and the dignity of work.

Q12. [901833] **Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): Last weekend was the first anniversary of the death from cervical cancer of Derry girl Sorcha Glenn, aged 23. In June 2013, she had been concerned enough to ask for an early smear test, but was refused because she was under 25. As Team Sorcha, which highlights other cases, her family has now written an open letter to the Prime Minister. May I ask him not to offer here a reflex repeat of the rationale for current screening age policy, but to reflect on the questions raised about how that translates into refusing smear tests to young women such as Sorcha, and to consider the age-related data since the screening age was increased in 2004?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman raises an absolutely tragic case, and our thoughts go out to the family and friends involved. He raises an important case, because the UK National Screening Committee set the age at 25. My understanding is that that was not a resources-based decision. The reason was to do with the potential perverse medical consequences of carrying out screening routinely below that age. It is felt that there could potentially be a number of false positives because of the anatomical changes that go on at that age. As he says though, the matter is worth considering, as there are people who fear that they have family history and who ask for a test. I will certainly write to him on that specific issue.

Q9. [901830] **Amanda Solloway** (Derby North) (Con): Yesterday, the EU said that we can no longer have internet filters to protect our children from indecent images. I want to know what the Prime Minister will do to ensure that our children remain protected.

**The Prime Minister:** Like my hon. Friend, I think that it is vital that we enable parents to have that protection for their children from this material on the internet. Probably like her, I spluttered over my cornflakes when I read the *Daily Mail* this morning, because we have worked so hard to put in place those filters. I can reassure her on this matter, because we secured an opt-out yesterday so that we can keep our family-friendly filters to protect children. I can tell the House that we will legislate to put our agreement with internet companies on this issue into the law of the land so that our children will be protected.

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): May I associate myself with the Prime Minister's earlier remarks about the late Michael Meacher, who was a decent man, a good constituency MP and an extremely effective Environment Minister?

Yesterday I visited the refugee camps on Lesbos, and there I met families that were inspirational and desperate. Alongside the British charity workers I found there, I am frankly ashamed that we will not offer a home to a single one of those refugee families. Will the Prime Minister

agree to Save the Children's plea that we as a country should take 3,000 vulnerable unaccompanied children in Europe, some of whom are as young as six?

**The Prime Minister:** Let me again welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place, and it is good to see such a high turnout from his MPs.

Let me answer him directly. We have taken the decision as a country to take 20,000 refugees and we think that it is better to take them from the camps instead of from inside Europe. I repeat today that we will achieve 1,000 refugees brought to Britain and housed, clothed and fed before Christmas. On his specific question about the 3,000 children and the proposal made by Save the Children, I have looked at the issue very carefully and other NGOs and experts point to the real danger of separating children from their broader families. That is why to date we have not taken that decision.

Q10. [901831] **Christopher Pincher** (Tamworth) (Con): As he begins his negotiations on our reformed relationship with the European Union in earnest, will my right hon. Friend confirm to our partners and the British people that no option is off the table and that all British options will be considered, including the option of a relationship such as that of Norway if it is negotiable and in our interest?

**The Prime Minister:** I can certainly confirm to my hon. Friend that no options are off the table. As I have made clear, if we do not get what we need in our renegotiation I rule absolutely nothing out. I think that it is important that as we have this debate as a nation we are very clear about the facts and figures and about the alternatives. Some people arguing for Britain to leave the European Union, although not all of them, have pointed out a position like that of Norway as a good outcome. I would guard strongly against that. Norway pays as much per head to the EU as we do and takes twice as many migrants per head as we do in this country, but has no seat at the table and no ability to negotiate. I am not arguing that all those who want to leave the EU say that they want to follow the Norwegian path, but some do and it is very important that we are clear in this debate about the consequences of these different actions.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating my 17-year-old constituent, Jessy McCabe, on her 3,800 name e-petition, which has managed to get the exam board Edexcel to accept women composers on the syllabus for the first time ever? While he is at it, will he tell us whether he is a feminist?

**The Prime Minister:** If feminism means that we should treat people equally, yes, absolutely. I am proud that women make up a third of the people I have sitting around the Cabinet table, which we promised and we delivered. I congratulate the hon. Lady on this e-petition, which sounds thoroughly worthwhile. Her constituent and her have done a good job.

Q13. [901834] **Mr Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): NHS England knows that the Isle of Wight clinical commissioning group is a significant outlier in relation to its allocation targets. Will my right hon. Friend

confirm that progress is being made to identify the factors affecting the island? Will we benefit from amendments to the new CCG formula?

**The Prime Minister:** It is right that decisions on allocations are made independently of Government and not by Government. That is how the formula is reached. I can also tell my hon. Friend that there is an independent review of the funding formula under way. We expect to see its recommendations later this year, but these things should be done in a fair and transparent way.

**Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): The Prime Minister will remember meeting my constituents, Neil Shepherd and Sharon Wood. Nine years ago this week, Neil took their two children, Christi aged 7 and Bobby aged 6, on holiday to Corfu. The children tragically died of carbon monoxide poisoning. The family's dearest wish is that no other family suffers the heartbreak and tragedy they endured. Tomorrow in the European Parliament there will be a vote on the recommendation that the Commission brings forward legislation to improve carbon monoxide safety and fire safety for tourism premises in the EU. Will the Prime Minister's MEPs support it and, if the motion falls, will he consider instigating legislation in this country?

**The Prime Minister:** I well remember the meeting that we had and the great bravery of the parents, after their terrible loss, in wanting to go on and campaign to ensure that others did not lose children in the same way. I will look carefully at what the hon. Lady is saying about the European Parliament. As for legislation in this country, we have strict legislation on the use of fire-resistant materials, but I will look carefully at that too.

#### West Midlands Combined Authority

Q14. [901835] **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): If he will have discussions with the Secretaries of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and for Communities and Local Government to determine the progress of the Midlands Engine initiative and the proposed West Midlands combined authority.

**The Prime Minister:** The Chancellor and I set out an ambitious long-term plan for the midlands, making it a future engine for growth for the whole of the UK. Across Government, we are actively working with business leaders and local authorities to progress this ambition.

**Michael Fabricant:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer. The northern powerhouse will help millions, but it is the west midlands that is the only region in the UK that has a trade balance surplus with China, and it is Greater Birmingham that has the fastest rate of private sector job creation in the UK since 2010. So will the Prime Minister now ensure, in the national interest, that the west midlands secures the best devolution deal possible?

**The Prime Minister:** I think we have huge potential here to secure massive devolution to the west midlands. First, I would say to everyone in the west midlands who is concerned that somehow they will be left out by the northern powerhouse that the west midlands is in the perfect place to benefit both from the success and growth of London and, of course, a rebalancing of our

economy towards the north of England. We look forward to the West Midlands combined authority coming forward with its plans. I would say to all of these areas contemplating devolution and devolution deals that the more they can put on the table, the bolder they can be with their vision, and the bolder the response they will get from Government.

**Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): May I tell the Prime Minister and the Chancellor that there is strong support from all the parties, the local enterprise partnerships, business and local authorities right across the west midlands for a properly funded and significant devolution deal to strengthen the economy, to boost productivity, to get the brownfield sites redeveloped and to tackle congestion, so that we can transform the west midlands, with more jobs, better skills, quicker transport links and new homes?

**The Prime Minister:** I am glad to hear from the hon. Gentleman what an opportunity there is in the west midlands to work across party, to get the best deal

across all these authorities. As I said, the more we can get the local authorities to come together and work together and put their ambition and vision on the table, the better the response they will get from the Government.

### Engagements

Q15. [901836] **Sir Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that bullying in the workplace is reprehensible? Can he tell me whether the Government are planning any review of the legislation with a view to extending it to this Chamber?

**The Prime Minister:** Given that my right hon. Friend has been called for Prime Minister's questions at 12.38, I would have thought any hint of bullying was clearly over in this House in any conceivable way. He suffers no disadvantage and I think that is a very good thing. But I must not make light of the subject—bullying in the workplace is a problem. I think we do need to make sure it is stamped out and dealt with wherever it occurs, and that should apply in Parliament, as elsewhere.

## Commons Financial Privilege

12.38 pm

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Leader of the House if he will make a statement on the Government's review of the financial privilege of the Commons under Lord Strathclyde.

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling):** On Monday, the House of Lords rejected a financial measure that had been approved three times by the elected House of Commons. We are clear that that raises constitutional issues that need to be examined carefully. We need to ensure—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I apologise for interrupting the Leader of the House. This is a very serious matter and it would be seemly if colleagues who are leaving the Chamber did so quickly and quietly and if others inclined to conduct private conversations decided to do so outside the Chamber. There is a very important matter being treated of by the Leader of the House in response to the urgent question.

**Chris Grayling:** We need to ensure that we have arrangements in place that protect the ability of elected Governments to secure business that has the support of the elected House.

Yesterday the Government announced that we are in the process of setting up a review to examine how to protect the ability of elected Governments to secure their business in Parliament. The review will consider in particular how to secure the decisive role of the elected House of Commons in relation to its primacy on financial matters and on secondary legislation. The review will be led by Lord Strathclyde, supported by a small panel of experts.

The relationship between the Commons and the Lords is extremely important. When conventions that govern that relationship are put in doubt, it is right that we review that. Clearly, the House will be fully updated when more details of the review have been agreed.

**Chris Bryant:** It is clear that the Government intend to give the House of Lords a kicking, but they should remember, as they fashion this pretend constitutional crisis, that the vast majority of people in this country applauded the Lords on Monday, because the measure was not in the Government's manifesto. Does the Leader of the House see no irony at all in getting a Member of the House of Lords—and, for that matter, a hereditary peer—to review the financial privilege of the House of Commons? Is this the right person for the task? After all, in 1999, Lord Strathclyde said of the convention that the House of Lords did not strike down statutory instruments:

“I declare this convention dead.”

That same day, he and the Lords voted down two Labour Government statutory instruments. Now he thinks that it is an utter disgrace to do so. Is there one rule for Tory regulations and another for Labour ones? Is he now a convert or frankly just a hypocrite?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. [*Interruption.*] I am perfectly capable of dealing with these matters. I certainly do not require any sedentary chuntering, however well-intentioned,

from hon. Members. Their interventions are superfluous. The shadow Leader of the House should withdraw that term.

**Chris Bryant:** I withdraw that term unreservedly, Mr Speaker; I presume that he is a convert.

Why are there no representatives of other parties or of the House of Commons on the review panel? Would it not be better for this House to conduct its own inquiry into the operation of secondary legislation? Could not the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, whose admirable Chairman is in the Chamber now, do the job far better?

Is there not a far simpler means of guaranteeing the financial privilege of the Commons? The Government should stop relying on secondary legislation and introduce properly scrutinised primary legislation as money Bills that are covered by the Parliament Act instead. In all honesty, is it not a disgrace that measures affecting 3.2 million people should be decided in a 90-minute debate with no opportunity for amendment? There is a very simple principle here: money Bills do not receive scrutiny in the Lords, so they get extra time in the House of Commons; secondary legislation does not get much time in the Commons, so it does receive consideration in the Lords.

Does the Leader of the House not realise that the Lords had the power they did on Monday only because the Government tried to sidestep scrutiny by using secondary legislation dependent on the Tax Credits Act 2002, section 66 of which specifies that changes to tax credit rates must be approved by both Houses of Parliament? As things stand, the Government rely on hundreds of Acts that have the same provision. Does the Leader of the House intend to make retrospective amendments to each and every one of those Acts, and will he use the Parliament Act to drive that through?

We have very few checks to Executive power in this country. If we do not protect our constitution, it is not worth the paper it is not written on. There is a real danger that if Parliament as a whole lets the Government of the day dismantle every check and balance, they will no longer be governing by consent—and that really would be a constitutional crisis.

**Chris Grayling:** I have great respect for the hon. Gentleman's experience as a parliamentarian, but he will not be surprised to learn that I tend not to anticipate the outcomes of reviews before they have even started. I said a moment ago that we would publish full details of the terms of reference and the full review panel in due course, so he will have to wait to see the full detail when we bring it to this House. There is no restraint on any Committee of this House from carrying out any inquiry that it wishes to conduct, within its remit. Lastly, on primary legislation, it is a simple fact that tax credits are classified as a benefit. They cannot be included in a money Bill. You, Mr Speaker, would not certify a Bill containing a reference to tax credits as a money Bill, so I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is talking about.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend recall that the 2002 Act was produced by Gordon Brown precisely to keep tax credits out of a Finance Bill so that he could alter them by statutory

instrument and raise them before elections without proper scrutiny? Will he confirm that the Labour and Liberal peers, having discovered that they have a large party political majority in the upper House, are using it with increasing frequency and that they have cast a vote that is totally contrary to every sensible understanding of the constitutional position for the past 100 years? Indeed, the situation is an exact replica of the Conservative peers foolishly voting against Lloyd George's Budget.

The Lords does not vote against Budget measures. So although I welcome the advice of my noble Friend Lord Strathclyde, for whom I have enormous respect, will my right hon. Friend not delay too long before bringing forward legislation that sets out clearly what convention has previously established? If the Lords keep repeating these party political votes, it will be almost impossible to have stable government taking firm and difficult decisions for the remainder of this Parliament, when presumably they will start misbehaving with ever more frequency.

**Chris Grayling:** I share my right hon. and learned Friend's concerns. He makes his point with his usual wisdom, and I hope very much that Lord Strathclyde will address the issues to which he refers. It is essential that these matters are dealt with. It is worth remembering that in 13 years of Labour government, the Labour party did not have a majority in the House of Lords, yet Conservative peers and others respected the conventions. It is a great shame that Labour and the Liberal Democrats clearly have no intention of respecting the conventions and will cast them out of the window, which will fundamentally change the relationship between the two Houses.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I am sure the British public are amazed and bewildered by that ermine-handbags-at-dawn spat between the Tories and the unelected Lords in this great battle of the nobles. We on the Scottish National party Benches are hoping it is a double knock-out blow.

Is it the case that the way democracy now works in the UK is that if the Government do not like what one part of the legislature does, they simply emasculate it or re-appoint it? Is this the sort of democracy we are living in? The emergence of the cronies and donors as some sort of ermined tribunes of the people is a ridiculous concept. We have great concerns about Lord Strathclyde. An unelected Tory peer—[*Interruption.*] Indeed, a hereditary peer is to handle this inquiry. The only comfort we take from this case is the fact that he reviewed and reported on the Scottish Tories and set recommendations in place for their progress in future. They are now at 14% in the polls.

**Chris Grayling:** I know very straightforwardly what the hon. Gentleman's submissions will be to any review of the relationship between the House of Lords and the House of Commons. He can surely take comfort also from the fact that Lord Strathclyde is a Scot and therefore brings to this job great wisdom.

**Mr Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for the announcement made yesterday and assure him that the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

requires no instructions from the Government about what inquiries we will carry out, and nor does it require any prompting from the Opposition.

At our meeting yesterday, we started to cross-examine witnesses about events on Monday, and we will be looking at what Lord Strathclyde is likely to consider, but there is a simple point to make. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Parliament Act 1911 established the principle of financial privilege at a time when there was very little secondary legislation? Now that so much is done by secondary legislation, it should not be too complicated to make sure that that principle in the 1911 Act is extended to secondary legislation, to avoid such misunderstandings in the future.

**Chris Grayling:** I have no doubt that my hon. Friend and his Committee will look closely at those issues. I am not in the least bit surprised to learn that they have made a start. Most Members of the House realise that this week has marked a significant change or potential change in the relationship between the two Houses. We need to establish a firm foundation for the future. My hon. Friend and his Committee will play an active role in that. When change is necessary, I want to bring it forward as quickly and sensibly as possible, but we need to take the time to get it right and ensure that we deal with the issues for the foreseeable future.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House ensure that the review includes whether the House of Lords has the right to vote down measures introduced by a Government who said that they would not take such measures? Secondly, will the members of the review panel be paid a daily rate? If so, will it be higher than the minimum wage?

**Chris Grayling:** As I have said, we will bring forward full details of the review panel and the terms of reference in due course. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that nobody can be in any doubt that the Government won a general election in May saying that we would have to take tough decisions and cut welfare. That is what we are doing.

**Dr Liam Fox** (North Somerset) (Con): Many of us in the House believe, as a point of principle, that those who make the law should be accountable to those who live under the law. Does my right hon. Friend accept that that is absolutely impossible as long as we have an appointed Chamber? How does he feel about the fact that, nowadays, only Britain and Iran have unelected clerics in our legislatures?

**Chris Grayling:** As we have learned from debates over the past few years, there are strong opinions in the House about the need for reform. Up to now, the House has chosen not to pursue the avenue of reform of the House of Lords, but it is difficult to see how, in the wake of these events, there can be no change at all to the relationship between the two Houses.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Lords were right and entitled to table the fatal motion and it has not created a constitutional crisis. That is a smokescreen to distract attention from the pain that would have been inflicted by tax credit cuts on 3 million working families on low incomes. If the Leader of the

[Tom Brake]

House wants to reform the House of Lords, I recommend that he dusts down all the hard work done in the coalition on House of Lords reform. This time, he should get the Conservative party to support those reforms rather than scupper them.

**Chris Grayling:** I am not sure how the Liberal Democrats advance their case for reform by throwing out conventions and behaving in a way that is contrary to all the workings of Parliament over the past few decades. They can by all means make the case for reform, but they should not behave in a way that is simply designed to wreck the manifesto of an elected Government.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): The House knows only too well that knee-jerk reactions leading to rapidly made legislation often result in poor law. What assurances can the Leader of the House give that such a hastily convened commission will be given reasonable time to carry out its work, and that no pressure will be brought to bear on it on the timetable? We do not want results produced in haste that we regret at our leisure.

**Chris Grayling:** One thing I said clearly yesterday was that I do not think we should do change on the hoof and rush headlong into change. Equally, we must accept that there appears to be a strategy in the House of Lords—an alliance between Labour and Liberal Democrat peers—to demolish the Government's platform on which we were elected in May. This cannot therefore wait forever, but I accept my right hon. Friend's point that we must do it carefully and properly.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Does the Leader of the House appreciate the irony of selecting a hereditary peer who has previously said that the convention is dead to undertake the review?

**Chris Grayling:** It is entirely sensible to pick a respected senior figure who knows the workings of government and of the House of Lords, and who will undoubtedly produce words of wisdom for all of us.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): My friends on the Scottish National party Front Bench want me to mention that, from 1407—the beginning of the 15th century—the Commons was given primacy over financial matters. That was confirmed in our motion of 1678, when all matters of taxation and expenditure were to be the preserve of this House. In 1839, the Speaker of the House of Commons insisted that an amendment from the House of Lords on a financial matter must be rejected. At that date, the House of Commons would not even consider the change of a trustee of a turnpike trust if it was suggested by the House of Lords, so jealous were we of the privilege that the democratic House must have control of taxation and expenditure.

May I urge my right hon. Friend to send the clearest message to the House of Lords that, if their lordships do not obey the conventions that have governed this country for centuries, they will be forced to do so by legislation?

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend speaks with enormous wisdom and knowledge on these matters. He will not be surprised to remember that history was downplayed in our curriculum under the Labour Government. Parliamentary history does not appear to be top of the knowledge of Members of the other place. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have traditions and ways of working in this country that date back decades and centuries. They have been cast away this week entirely inappropriately. It would be a huge mistake for us to allow them to slip away. It is a shame that the Opposition parties appear not to respect them.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I gently ask the Leader of the House to face the House so that we all get the benefit of his words.

**Alex Salmond** (Gordon) (SNP): As we all carefully reflect on the 15th-century precedent, could we also carefully reflect on the modern world? A Government elected on 37% of the vote and 14% in Scotland might not be expected to win every single Division in the legislature. Should the Government not accept that their position seems to be based on a sense of entitlement as opposed to an attachment to the democratic ballot box?

**Chris Grayling:** The issue has nothing to do with entitlement and no Government should ever take either House for granted, but it is not unreasonable that, when precedents and conventions have existed for handling financial matters for decades and decades, they should be respected.

**John Stevenson** (Carlisle) (Con): Does the Leader of the House agree that the time has come for proper reform of the House of Lords? By “proper reform”, I mean a reformed Chamber that is fully elected.

**Chris Grayling:** From talking to colleagues around the building, I know that House of Lords reform has returned very much to the centre stage, but we face big challenges in this country and have important legislation to get through. I want to deal first with challenges in health, education, environmental matters, enterprise and the economy, but there is no doubt that reform will now be discussed much more widely in the House.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The Leader of the House has explained why the measures were not in a Finance Bill. He seems to be confused: he seems to believe that the big bill attached to tax credits makes them a finance measure. If we follow his logic, no Bill that involves spending could go to the other place, be it on legal aid or HS2.

**Chris Grayling:** Let us be clear to the House—this is a very simple matter—that tax credits are officially categorised as a benefits matter and not a tax matter. If one puts a change to tax credits into a Finance Bill, that Bill will not necessarily be certified as a money Bill. That is the state of play and the reality of what we are dealing with. That is why the tax credits measures were not in a Finance Bill.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): Has not the Leader of the House just said why the Lords were entitled to amend the statutory instrument? They did not reject it but delayed it because it clearly was not a

tax measure. If it had been a tax measure, we would have put it in the Finance Bill. We are seeing a knee-jerk reaction to the House of Lords doing what it is supposed to do. I am all for a review, but let us have a proper review and take our time over it. Will my right hon. Friend reflect on that and announce more than just Lord Strathclyde heading a review?

**Chris Grayling:** It is absolutely essential that we do not rush this. We have said that there will be a panel of people working with Lord Strathclyde. Their names will be announced in due course, but I remind my hon. Friend that a statutory instrument has been rejected by the House of Lords in that way only five times in the past century. This is the first time that it has happened to a specifically budgetary measure. That is the important change.

**Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP):** Before we all join the Lords resistance army in a synthetic constitutional crisis, will the Leader of the House not acknowledge that the real issue is not the procedural powers of respective Houses in this Parliament, but the spending powers of hard-pressed and hard-working households in this country? In any review, will he ensure that our first priority is to get this House in order, not another?

**Chris Grayling:** I think that this House is in perfect order. It has voted for these measures five times and passed them five times.

**Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con):** I frequently take schoolchildren and visitors from other democratic countries on tours of this building, and I always feel slightly awkward when explaining that the House of Lords is appointed. As my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) and my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) suggested, is it not time we had a fully elected second Chamber?

**Chris Grayling:** I know that my hon. Friend thinks that, along with a number of other Members. Certainly, as a result of Monday's activities, that debate is likely to restart in this Parliament, having not continued in the previous one.

**Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab):** Does the Leader of the House not accept that the other place has a constitutional role to provide pause to this House when it feels that we have taken a decision that is wrong and out of sync with the feelings of the country? Why should we take seriously his views on the powers of the other place, and indeed the views of Government Members, given that he is continuing to pack that House will 50-odd new peers at the same time as slashing the number of elected Members of this House by 50?

**Chris Grayling:** The simple reality is that this House has now voted for these changes five times—prior to Monday it was three times. Ultimately, it must be the elected House of Commons that has the final say on these matters, which is why the actions of the House of Lords were, in my view, unacceptable.

**Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con):** I welcome the Strathclyde review and the Leader of the House's reiteration of the primacy of the elected House of Commons.

The shadow Leader of the House alluded to our unwritten constitution, which is a constitution of convention. Is it not the case that the House of Lords has breached that convention and therefore, by definition, is acting in a very unconstitutional manner?

**Chris Grayling:** I very much agree with my hon. Friend. In recent years I have heard many Members of the House of Lords stress the importance of convention, but on this occasion they appear to have completely ignored it, which is why we now face this issue.

**Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab):** Will there be any political balance on the panel, and will it be taking evidence?

**Chris Grayling:** As I said earlier, we will give more details about the panel's composition and terms of reference shortly.

**Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con):** Is it not true that although changes to the House of Lords might be necessary, the last thing we want is another House of Commons?

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend sets out one of the great subjects of debate: if we replace the House of Lords with something else, should it be elected? As he knows, that has been debated several times since he and I were first elected in 2001, and I suspect that it will now be debated again. The important thing, from my point of view, is to deal in the coming months with the apparent wrecking strategy that Labour and the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords appear to be taking to the platform of the elected Government, so we have to resolve these matters quickly.

**Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** The Conservative Government keep trying to play politics with this but keep finding themselves in a hole. For a start, they did not put the tax credits policy in their manifesto, which has allowed the Lords to vote against it. Then they introduced it in a statutory instrument, which also allowed the Lords to vote against it. Now they have appointed a hereditary peer to conduct a review into the unelected House of Lords. Mr Speaker, when will the Government stop digging?

**Chris Grayling:** We have appointed a respected former Leader of the House of Lords, and a compatriot of the hon. Lady, to conduct a review, and I think that he will do an excellent job.

**Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP):** Yesterday the Chancellor said that the House of Lords has no mandate for tinkering with his tax credit changes, but, with 14% of the vote, it is his Government who have no mandate to introduce their vicious welfare reforms up in Scotland. After all the constitutional tinkering we have already had to introduce English votes for English laws, would not the solution to both constitutional conundrums be to abolish the House of Lords and replace it with an English Parliament?

**Chris Grayling:** The Scottish nationalists keep making that argument. Over the past few weeks, I have listened to them express fury about the introduction of EVEL

[Chris Grayling]

because it gives them less say over matters that they say affect Scotland. But an English Parliament would give them no say, so their argument simply does not stack up.

## Points of Order

1.4 pm

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Leader of the House has pointedly refused to answer any questions about the terms of reference of the panel of experts, its members and whether they will be paid, or whether they will be able to take evidence. He said that he would make those details available in the fullness of time. He has chosen not to make a written ministerial statement or an oral statement to the House, so we cannot presume that he will make the details available to the House before he makes them available to the rest of the country. I wonder whether he might now like to leap to his feet to point out that he will make all the details available in the Library.

**Mr Speaker:** The Leader of the House is entitled to rise to his feet, but he is not obliged to do so. I think that it would be fair to say that these matters, as far as I can discern, are under consideration. Conclusions have not been reached. The detail is not yet known. It will be decided in due course. The request is that the House be informed first. I think that it would be a reasonable supposition that if an important part of the subject matter is the prerogatives of the House of Commons, it will occur to the Leader of the House first to notify the House of Commons of the particulars.

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling)**  
*indicated assent.*

**Mr Speaker:** I think, judging by the gentle nod of assent from the Leader of the House, from which the Government Chief Whip does not demur, that that is indeed, at any rate now, the Government's intention.  
*[Interruption.]*

**Chris Grayling:** And it is what I said in my statement.

**Mr Speaker:** And it is what the Leader of the House said in his statement. *[Interruption.]* Order.

**Alex Salmond** (Gordon) (SNP): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I do not think that it is in order for the Leader of the House to contribute from a sedentary position; he must go to the Dispatch Box and inform us of what he has just said.

**Mr Speaker:** I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, but I think that I can make a judgment about the handling of matters. *[Interruption.]* Order. It is certainly open to the Leader of the House to come to the Dispatch Box, but he is not obliged to do so. I think that it is clear that we will get the details and that they will be communicated first to the House.

**Chris Grayling** *indicated assent.*

**Mr Speaker:** We will take that as a yes, and I think that the *Hansard* writers will have recorded that. We will leave it there for now, although I always appreciate the attempts by the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) at what might be called diplomacy.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. At Prime Minister's questions today the Prime Minister said that the previous Labour Government failed to act on introducing free

school meals. That is not correct. Having been Schools Minister in that Government, I know that we introduced three pilots for free schools meals for all primary school pupils in Durham, Wolverhampton and Newham, and the plan had been to roll them out in September 2010. When the coalition Government came into office, however, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats cancelled the scheme. Is it possible to have the record corrected, Mr Speaker?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Lady has just done that. As a spirited and indefatigable parliamentarian of nous, she knows that that is what she has just done.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In recent days I have received two parliamentary written answers from two different Departments on exactly the same vital question for Wales of Barnett consequential for HS2. The reply from the Department for Transport provided a straight answer to a straight question and was very informative. Regrettably, the reply from the Treasury was not as useful, offering only a generic response that could be used to answer any question. What can be done to encourage the Treasury to follow the best practice of the Department for Transport when it comes to answering parliamentary questions?

**Mr Speaker:** I suspect that a representative of the Treasury will shortly hear of the hon. Gentleman's point of order. Meanwhile, it has been heard by, among others, the Leader of the House. It has been a long-standing practice, and one from which I certainly do not think for one moment that the current Leader of the House intends to depart, that the Leader of the House chases Ministers on the importance of timely and substantive replies. The hon. Gentleman is adding into the mix the incentive of wanting to compete favourably with another Government Department. The idea that the Treasury would want to be outclassed by any other Department strikes me as improbable. We will leave the matter there for today.

## Regulation of Enforcement Agents (Collection of Council Tax Arrears)

1.9 pm

**Yvonne Fovargue** (Makerfield) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the use of bailiffs and other enforcement agents by local authorities to collect council tax arrears; to establish a code of practice for enforcement agents; to create an independent bailiffs ombudsman to administer the code and to investigate and adjudicate complaints; and for connected purposes.

This Bill deals with two interrelated problems which, taken together, are pushing too many people into a debt trap by forcing them to borrow more to pay council tax arrears and unaffordable bailiff fees. The first problem is that local councils are too ready to call in the bailiffs when people fall into arrears on their council tax bill. This is despite guidance that is meant to encourage local authorities to look towards establishing affordable repayment plans in such situations and thus avoid the bailiffs. The Bill gives people a stronger right to challenge councils to offer an affordable repayment option before instructing the bailiffs.

The second problem is that bailiffs, despite recent reforms, continue to use unreasonable methods such as aggressive behaviour and intimidation. They charge unreasonable fees and misrepresent their powers in order to gain entry to collect goods. The Bill would ensure that when bailiffs are instructed they conduct collection activities in a reasonable and fair way. Crucially, for the first time, it will give people access to an independent ombudsman to secure redress when the bailiffs fail in their duty. At present, there are extremely limited circumstances where a complaint can be made to an existing ombudsman or where action can be taken through complicated court processes, leaving many people who feel they have been treated unfairly completely unsatisfied.

The number of people contacting debt advice charities for help with council tax debt has increased rapidly in recent years. More than 63,000 people sought help from StepChange Debt Charity in 2014—a staggering 372% increase since 2010. Council tax arrears are the fastest-growing problem debt dealt with by National Debtline, and 24% of clients had this type of debt in 2014, up from 14% in 2007. It is the debt issue most commonly seen by local citizens advice bureaux. Too many cases are sent to the bailiffs, and sent too quickly, as the default option for many councils. A recent StepChange review found that half the clients who sought help from their council were instead referred to bailiffs—twice as many as were offered an affordable payment plan. Research by the Money Advice Trust in 2013 found that councils had referred debts to bailiffs on 1.8 million occasions in the course of a single year—a figure that rose to 2.1 million last year.

Sending in the bailiffs often makes a bad situation worse, tipping people much deeper into problem debt. Many bailiffs still fail to comply with the national standards for enforcement agents. The high fees mean that six in 10 StepChange clients paid at least £310 extra for bailiff collections, and 15% have paid more than £420. Most people fell behind on other bills—naturally—or borrowed money, often from payday lenders or friends and family, in order to pay these fees. The lack of help means that people are more likely to fall into debt.

[ Yvonne Fovargue ]

They are more than three times as likely to take out a payday loan, twice as likely to borrow money from friends and family, and 50% more likely to fall into debt on other bills to pay the council tax demand.

The previous Government committed to clamping down on aggressive bailiff behaviour, and last year a series of changes to their procedures was introduced. Those changes are a move in the right direction, but the light-touch approach does not seem to have had much effect. Recent Citizens Advice data showed that in the year since the regulations came into force there has been an extremely significant increase in the number of problems caused by bailiffs. Last year, Citizens Advice helped with 77,000 problems caused by bailiffs—an increase on the previous year's figure of 45,000.

The evidence from Citizens Advice also shows that people are continually intimidated by bailiffs. For example, one of its clients was told that he was “looking at a prison sentence of up to 51 weeks” if he did not pay his debt in full by the end of the day. Another bailiff told a client that he was going to come round with a “gang of lads” if the debt was not paid—and that threat was made within 24 hours of the enforcement notice being issued. Evidence from StepChange echoes this. A bailiff called at one of its client's houses—a single parent—to collect unpaid council tax. She was threatened with prison unless she allowed the bailiff into the house. The bailiff said, in front of the child, “Do you want your two-year-old son to be taken away from you when you go to prison?”

The ways in which bailiffs apply fees and charges cause huge numbers of problems for people facing bailiff action. One client had been paying a magistrates court fine of £600 via a deduction from her benefits while she was looking for work. When she found work, the deduction stopped. She had been paying for a considerable period, and she believed that she had paid off the fine. She received notice from a bailiff regarding an outstanding fine of £60. This was inflated to £370 by compliance and enforcement fees. The original documents asking for repayment had been given to her teenage daughter, who did not live at the property. The bailiff contacted the client by phone threatening to come round that day with a locksmith and a removal van if

she could not pay in full. She offered £170 that day and £200 on the day she was paid, which was the following week, and the bailiff refused to accept that offer.

Another common issue is bailiffs misrepresenting their powers to force entry into people's homes. The forcing of entry is restricted to certain debts, but last year 67% of Citizens Advice advisers saw cases where bailiffs had misrepresented their powers by saying that they could break in, use force, and take the goods.

This Bill will not solve everything, but it will help. It will put good practice guidance for councils and bailiffs issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Ministry of Justice on to a statutory footing, and introduce an ombudsman scheme for bailiffs. Together, those measures will provide a stronger impetus for councils and bailiffs to offer sustainable repayment plans to people in arrears and thus avoid pushing them into the debt trap. It is no use asking somebody on a low income to pay £370 by the end of the day.

Problem debt costs the economy in the region of £8 billion, with councils picking up the bill for at least £2 billion through the cost of homelessness and additional demand for care, support and public health services. I fully recognise that councils are under huge pressure to balance their books in-year and are named and shamed based on collection rates, but it is counterproductive if their actions just add to people's debt woes. They need to make more of a concerted effort to ensure that reasonable repayment plans are available and that debts are not simply passed on to bailiffs as a default position.

As I have seen, the reform and regulation of bailiffs is not working, with too many still believing that they can act like a heavy mob, pressurising people into repaying by using illegal tactics. I believe that this Bill would take a considerable step further towards remedying the situation.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered.*

That Yvonne Fovargue, Bill Esterson, Robert Flello, Graham Jones, Helen Jones, Andy McDonald, Anna Turley, Margaret Greenwood, Liz McInnes, Stella Creasy and Andrew Percy present the Bill.

Yvonne Fovargue accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 November, and to be printed [Bill 87].*

## Opposition Day

[8TH ALLOTTED DAY]

### Steel Industry

**Mr Speaker:** I advise the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

1.19 pm

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the UK steel industry is of national strategic importance and should be supported by the UK Government; notes that the UK steel industry is in crisis and that the recent closure of SSI in Redcar has resulted in 2,000 direct job losses, with a further 1,000 contractor jobs lost and 6,000 jobs to be lost in the local supply chain, the announcement by Tata Steel that they will no longer produce steel plate at Dalzell, Clydebridge and Scunthorpe has resulted in 1,170 job losses, and that 1,700 jobs are at risk as Caparo Industries has gone into administration; recognises that for every direct steel job lost a further three indirect job losses will follow; further notes the vital importance of the steel industry to those local communities it serves, the proud industrial heritage of Britain's steel towns and the very real threat to these parts of the country should the steel industry disappear; and calls upon the Government to take immediate action to protect the steel industry, including immediately implementing the Energy Intensive Industry Compensation Package, taking action with the EU Commission on antidumping measures, looking at temporary action on business rates, reviewing how regulatory frameworks impact the industry, and promoting local content and sustainability in procurement contracts, and for the Government to publish a full industrial strategy including what level of capacity the Government envisages is needed in the steel industry, so as to safeguard this vital strategic asset.

Labour has secured this debate because the British steel industry is in full-scale crisis, and before they were pushed the Government seemed unwilling to do anything practical about it. In the last three weeks, 2,220 employees in Redcar have lost their jobs, 3,000 on-site contractors have been laid off, and 6,000 further jobs will be lost in the local community. The hard closure of the site means the effective destruction of its steelmaking assets, including what was the second largest blast furnace in Europe. The Government's refusal to help has effectively ended 170 years of steelmaking in Redcar, destroying specialist local skills and condemning the community to a bleak future. Tata Steel's announcement about the closure of its long products business in Scunthorpe, Dalzell and Clydebridge has cost 1,170 jobs, and effectively ended steelmaking in Scotland. The news that Caparo Industries has filed for administration means that 1,700 more jobs are at risk across the country.

Alongside the tragedy of each job loss, and the ramifications for supply chains and local economies, there is a real worry that the UK's steelmaking capacity is being sacrificed on the altar of laissez-faire economics by a Government who simply will not act to preserve our country's strategic assets. Labour contends that steelmaking in the UK is an industry of national strategic importance and should therefore be supported by the Government.

Steel is important for UK manufacturing as it helps our balance of payments, and it is vital for our defence and security. If we are about to embark on the huge infrastructure investments that the Chancellor is so fond of boasting about, surely we should ensure that

UK steel has every chance to compete and win those contracts. To do that, we must ensure that the UK steel industry still exists when those contracts come up for competition. As the industry has lurched deeper into this wholly foreseeable crisis, the Government have been quick to come up with expressions of sympathy, but noticeably reluctant to take any decisive action.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend will be aware that concerns about the challenges facing the steel industry have been raised repeatedly in this House—I think there have been 10 debates—and there have been repeated questions, meetings, exchanges with officials from the Departments for Business, Innovation and Skills and of Energy and Climate Change, and others, for more than two years. Is she surprised, as I am, that it has taken until today for the Business Secretary to get on a train to Brussels and try to sort out this mess?

**Ms Eagle:** I certainly am surprised. If the Business Secretary needs an Opposition day debate to encourage him to do his job by going to Brussels and talking to the Commission after years of not doing that, we will secure more such debates and persuade him to do his duty, which he should have been doing in the first place.

**Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I was proud to secure a Backbench Business Committee debate on the crisis in the steel industry. It took place just one day before the Redcar steelworks paused production, yet we were accused by the Minister for the northern powerhouse of “showboating”. Does my hon. Friend think that that is an appropriate description for a parliamentary debate?

**Ms Eagle:** I was fairly astonished to read the comments from the Minister for what the Government call the “northern powerhouse”. He said that what has happened to Redcar was a “tragic distraction” from his work on the northern powerhouse—I had hoped that he would have seen it as part of his job to try to get the Government to take much earlier action to head off an entirely foreseeable occurrence.

**Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Chinese have not just started dumping steel but have been doing so for a long time?

**Ms Eagle:** They have, and I will come on to the Chinese later in my remarks.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): I lived in Sheffield for the best part of 30 years. Does the hon. Lady accept that the real decline in the steel industry started with the horrendous nationalisation of the industry by the Labour party? What steps have Labour Governments ever taken to restrict state aid in other parts of the European Union, and from countries such as Germany and others?

**Ms Eagle:** I suspect that the nationalisation of the steel industry took place before I was born, and we could have a history lesson on that. There are many examples of EU Governments who do a much better job at preserving their steel industries than this Government appear to have done so far.

**Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): The House of Commons Library has produced a paper on European state aid. It states clearly that Germany, for example, gives more than twice the amount of state aid that is provided in this country. Moreover, a raft of indirect state aids are given in Germany, but this Government have decided not to do that in this country.

**Ms Eagle:** My hon. Friend's comments speak for themselves.

**Lady Hermon** (North Down) (Ind): When this Conservative Government were considering devolving to the Northern Ireland Assembly the power to set their own corporation tax, they were exceedingly concerned that that would be a state aid and illegal under EU legislation. However, where there is a will there is a way, and within the Stormont House talks the Government have been able to devolve that power to set corporation tax. This Government should have the will to save the steel industry in this country, and ensure that such aid is not illegal under the state aid rules.

**Ms Eagle:** The hon. Lady is correct. Many EU Governments manage to deal with the state aid rules far more creatively than this Government.

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): On the EU helping out, does my hon. Friend agree that there is a strong case for carbon tariffs from the EU so that we do not displace clean steel produced in Britain with dirty steel produced in China and elsewhere?

**Ms Eagle:** My hon. Friend's practical suggestion should be considered with great seriousness not only by the Government but by the EU.

The steel summit in Rotherham was convened only following the Backbench Business Committee debate, and it ended with more job losses and no significant Government announcements. Far from keeping the House informed as the crisis has unfolded, the Government have had to be dragged kicking and screaming to the House to answer urgent question after urgent question.

Steel is an energy intensive industry that inevitably results in extra costs being placed on it for environmental reasons, but the Government have the power to lower energy costs for steel producers through implementing the energy intensive industry compensation package immediately.

**David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Eagle:** In a minute.

Despite being announced in the Chancellor's autumn statement in 2011, the most substantial part of this package is still waiting to be implemented. Ministers admitted in a parliamentary question to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) that they have not even bothered to raise the issue with the Commission in the last 12 months. It is clear that the Government have shown no leadership in Europe, and the Business Secretary is visiting the Commission for the first time today—better late than never I suppose, but what on earth has taken him so long? I welcome his visit, and I trust he will emerge from the Commission with some tangible progress—after all the foot dragging and inaction, it is about time he did.

**Tom Blenkinsop** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): The EU emissions trading system has already been compensated—that is an EU-wide market taxation system—and we are talking about the carbon price floor, which was introduced by the Chancellor. He did not consult industry or talk to the European Union, and he had to go to Brussels—well, we do not know whether anyone has gone there yet; we presume the Business Secretary is there today—to get compensation for a tax that this Government introduced unilaterally and without any consultation with industry. That is the issue. We are talking about a compensation package for a British tax.

**Ms Eagle:** My hon. Friend represents many constituents directly affected by the closure in Redcar, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), and he demonstrates his knowledge of the problems faced by the British steel industry. It is a pity the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not acknowledge those problems when he came up with that policy.

**David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con) *rose*—

**David T. C. Davies:** *rose*—

**Ms Eagle:** I said I would give way to the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies), so I will be polite and give way to him first.

**David T. C. Davies:** In the spirit of politeness, the hon. Lady and Opposition Members are absolutely right to raise this important issue, which affects many in my own constituency in south Wales. She mentioned environmental taxes. I have much sympathy with the point she is going to make, but does she not concede that it was her Government who brought in the environmental taxes in the first place?

**Ms Eagle:** The hon. Gentleman needs to demonstrate to his constituents that he is fighting for their jobs now. He needs to be putting pressure on his own Front Bench to have a proper strategy. This is a heavy industry, which is, by definition, energy intensive. The problem is that the Government do not have a strategy and are living hand to mouth trying to deal with a crisis they should have seen coming.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is no strategy across the country? For example, Govia Thameslink is about to have new trains built for 2018, for the Hornsey depot in my constituency, yet there seems to be no attempt to get it to purchase steel from our own steelmakers.

**Ms Eagle:** My hon. Friend comes up with yet another example of the lack at the heart of this Government. They do not seem to believe we should have an industrial strategy. Therefore, as these contracts come up, they seem to be living from hand to mouth without actually having a coherent and proper strategic approach to use the power of government procurement to try to preserve UK jobs.

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that there can be absolutely no doubt that the Conservative party does not believe in an industrial

strategy? The Secretary of State for Business said in an article in the *Financial Times* not four weeks ago that he does not like industrial strategy. Does she not agree that that is an absolutely disgraceful statement for a Secretary of State to make?

**Ms Eagle:** I agree with my hon. Friend, whose constituents are particularly badly affected by the hard closure at Redcar. That hard closure will come to be seen as a folly of the highest order committed on this Government's watch.

**David Mowat:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Eagle:** I will give way one more time. This is a short debate and a lot of colleagues want to get in, so I hope Members will forgive me if I get on.

**David Mowat:** The hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) is right: the carbon tax floor is a bad tax and a tax on manufacturing, but so, too, is it true that in every one of the five or six occasions in the previous Parliament when we debated energy prices, Labour Members voted for higher energy prices. In particular, in December 2012 they were led through the Lobby to vote for the accelerated closure of the British coalfields in advance of anything happening in Europe. The carbon price floor is a unilateral tax, because the EU abandoned the emissions trading system and left us acting unilaterally in this regard.

**Ms Eagle:** In this Parliament, we always have to remember the issue of tackling climate change, but we have to balance that with the cost that that puts on our energy-intensive industries. We have to ensure that we get the balance right.

**Julie Elliott** (Sunderland Central) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Ms Eagle:** I will give way to my hon. Friend and then I really will want to get on with the rest of my speech.

**Julie Elliott:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the carbon price floor was a tax introduced by the previous Conservative-led Government, and that it is an entirely revenue raising tax that does absolutely nothing to contribute to combating climate change?

**Ms Eagle:** Yes, I do.

Rather than hiding behind the European Commission, why do the Government not take action first on energy-intensive industry payments and get retrospective approval later? That is what Germany did with its Renewable Energy Act 2012. It provided support to producers of renewable energy from January 2012. It did not submit the Act for prior state scrutiny. It let the Commission investigate and then state aid approval was received in November 2014, two years after it had first provided support. Why can our Government not look after the interests of UK steel in the same way? It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Government have been so slow to act because they have an ideological aversion to any

Government intervention. We have a Secretary of State who will not let the phrase "industrial strategy" cross his lips.

We on the Labour Benches support international trade, but free trade must also be fair. China is currently responsible for a tsunami of cheap steel, which is being dumped on European markets. The UK should be at the forefront of demanding rapid and effective action to stop it.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): We are not just talking about the here and now, but the longer-term economic vision for the country. As sure as night follows day, the steel price will recover at some stage and we could find ourselves without a steel industry and be wholly beholden to other countries.

**Ms Eagle:** My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. The steel industry is very cyclical in nature. During the hard times and the downturns, it is very important to try to act to preserve assets of strategic importance to our country, so that we can take advantage of the upswing and the recovery when it comes.

China is currently responsible for a tsunami of cheap steel products. Last week's Chinese state visit is over and done with, so I hope the Business Secretary will be making the case in Brussels today that we should act rapidly to stop the dumping of Chinese steel products in Europe. The scale of the new Chinese imports and the speed of their arrival is staggering. Its surplus production is nearly twice the annual production in the entire EU, and it is increasingly finding its way here. Chinese rebar has grown from having zero presence in the UK market in 2013 to comprising 37% of it a year later. There are quality concerns with some imported Chinese steel. We also know that Chinese steel production causes more environmental damage than UK production, so it is a false economy to allow it to continue.

For both those reasons, action to tackle dumping is vital and long overdue. Perhaps the Minister can tell us, when she winds up, what she managed to achieve during her recent visit to China. I can tell her that both the leader of the Labour party and I raised this issue with Premier Xi and his delegation during the recent state visit to London. Did she raise it during her visit to China? If so, what are the Government actually going to do about the huge amount of imports and the dumping? When it comes to acting on China specifically, perhaps the Government should be less interested in selling off our nuclear industry and more interested in standing up for the strategic interests of the UK.

Standing up for British steel means standing up for the high-quality skills that have built some of the UK's, and indeed the world's, most iconic landmarks. British steel built Canary Wharf, the new Wembley stadium and Sydney Harbour bridge, and it will be building the Freedom Tower in New York. We should all be proud of what the UK steel industry has achieved, but the Government cannot treat it as some relic of the past; it has to be a vital part of our country's future. That is why the Government must do more—much more—to see the industry through these tough times and prepare it to seize future opportunities. The Government should publish an industrial strategy for steel and be open about how they envisage maintaining the strategic

[Ms Angela Eagle]

steelmaking assets in this country during hard times. It is only firm action now that will guarantee any future at all for UK production.

I commend the campaign by the *Daily Mirror*, which is setting out daily the compelling case to save our steel. Just in case Ministers were in any doubt about the urgency, Gareth Stace of UK Steel has today described the industry as being like a patient on the operating table “likely to die” without help.

Community, the main steel union, has called for an urgent meeting with the Business Secretary because of the ongoing threat to jobs, as it has emerged that no representative of the workforce, be it Community, the GMB or Unite, has yet been invited on to any of the working groups set up after the steel summit. [Interruption.] The Minister says there is no need to invite representatives of the workforce on to these working parties. Ministers should meet the workers from steelmaking communities, including Teesside, Lincolnshire, Yorkshire and south Wales, who are lobbying Parliament to hear at first hand, as I have, the real cost of Government inaction.

The Prime Minister claims the Government are acting on procurement. Just yesterday, the Minister told the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee:

“I would say buy British because it’s quality.”

However, the inadequacy of the Government’s response was laid bare on the very same day, when it was revealed that the Government had just spent more than £3 billion on three new Royal Navy ships and 589 Scout specialist vehicles for the Army, which will use imported Swedish steel.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): The Minister is a former Defence Minister, and her own Department announced this year the new £200 million icebreaker for the polar research undertaking. I tabled a question to the Minister for Universities and Science, who could give no commitment from the Business Department that the ship, which is being built at Birkenhead, would use British steel. Is that not a great example of where the Department could put its money where its mouth is?

**Ms Eagle:** I hope we can get some progress on procurement, not least from BIS, which is contracting out the icebreaker research vessel as we speak. Otherwise, all of this is a missed opportunity. The UK steel industry needs action, not good intentions. The Government need to act much more effectively on procurement, and if they do, we will support them, but we will judge them on the contracts awarded that guarantee a future for UK steel; we will not judge them on warm words or grand but meaningless press releases.

The Government should explore the scope for acting temporarily on business rates. Failure to act is not cost-free, as the hard closure at Redcar demonstrated. With redundancy costs and employment support of £80 million and on-site clean-up costs running into hundreds of millions of pounds, it might well be that in the long run strategic support is far better value than the cost of total closure.

Last week, the Business Secretary said that the Government would

“do everything within their power to support”

the industry, and he said to our steel communities:

“We will not abandon you now, in your time of greatest need.”—[*Official Report*, 20 October 2015; Vol. 600, c. 815.]

The Prime Minister had previously stated that the Government would

“do everything we can to keep steelmaking in Redcar.”—[*Official Report*, 16 September 2015; Vol. 599, c. 1046.]

The Government then abandoned the people of Redcar by refusing to mothball the plant and save the assets, which would have kept alive the possibility of a return to steelmaking in the future. In fact, the Minister said yesterday in evidence to the Select Committee:

“It needed that awful moment in Redcar to concentrate all political minds in Government”.

So, Redcar has been sacrificed and minds have been concentrated, and now we need to know what the Government are planning to do to safeguard the future of UK steel and what is left of our steel communities. In Redcar, Scunthorpe, Clydebridge, Dalzell and Rotherham, those facing uncertainty across the midlands and Wales—men and women who have spent years developing highly specialised skills but who now have to find alternative employment in local economies shattered by steel plant closures—are waiting to see how the Government intend to deliver on their warm words.

**Ian Lavery** (Wansbeck) (Lab): We saw this happen in the coalmining industry: jobs went and people were asked to retrain. It is an absolute disaster. I welcome the £80 million, but Redcar, Rotherham and the other areas have high unemployment. We can train people as much as we like, but the jobs are not there. Does my hon. Friend agree that the money should be invested in keeping the steel industry alive, instead of closing it and trying to retrain people for jobs that are not there?

**Ms Eagle:** My hon. Friend speaks with much passion because he has been through this process with the coal community. It is easy for the Minister to dismiss the searing experiences that our coal communities went through following decisions taken by the last Tory Government, but I do not think she should.

**Tom Blenkinsop:** We have to talk about the £80 million. We now know that the statutory redundancy was part of it, so that brings it down to £50 million. The northern powerhouse Minister wrote to one of his constituents informing them that the last month’s payroll would be paid out of that money as well, so it is now less than £50 million. To date, I have not seen evidence of more than £3 million—for the 50 apprentices—of the money promised. At the Steel House meeting, on the same day as the liquidation, we were informed, in front of other agencies and the press, that the vast majority of the £80 million would be new money. I know, other Opposition Members know and the Minister knows that less than £50 million of that is potentially new money. I would like to see evidence of what money, where, for who and when.

**Ms Eagle:** We would all like to see that. The Government do their cause no good by attempting artificially to inflate how much money they are giving to help a steel community that they refused to save by intervening in the hard closure.

**Sir Greg Knight** (East Yorkshire) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise for interrupting the hon. Lady, but the deferred Division

has less than 15 minutes to run, and the ballot papers have run out. There are no papers available to vote in the deferred Division. Could you tell us what you are going to do about this and whether you will extend the period of the Division beyond 2 pm?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order, but I am informed that this has now been sorted and that there are now ballot papers.

**Ms Eagle:** If only it was so easy to sort out the problems in the steel industry.

Other countries across the EU support their workers. Other countries across the EU find ways to support their industry. In Germany and the Netherlands, we saw the Governments—

**Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab):** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Ms Eagle:** I am just coming to the end—

**Toby Perkins** *rose*—

**Ms Eagle:** Go on then.

**Toby Perkins:** I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend, who was obviously slightly reluctant to give way. She is making an incredibly important point. One of the things that will upset so many people who recognise the damage that will be done to their communities and the people left out of work is the sense that the Government have not done all they can. They see people in other industries in competitor nations around Europe being much better supported by their Governments. Does not the fact that the Secretary of State refuses even to show up for the debate demonstrate his contempt for steelworkers in our country?

**Ms Eagle:** I am always happy to give way to my hon. Friend, and I am not reluctant ever to listen to him. He makes an important point about other EU countries seemingly much better able and more willing to support their strategic industries. I believe that is because they do not have the ideological qualms that this Government have about the idea of an industrial strategy.

Why will our Government not show the same commitment? We need an active industrial strategy. We need a proactive and strategic Government, not a Business Secretary in thrall to an outdated economic theory and too eager to offer the Chancellor huge cuts to his Department in a bid to burnish his Thatcherite credentials and prepare for the leadership battles ahead. Last week, the Prime Minister claimed that the Government wanted a “strong and viable steel industry.”—[*Official Report*, 21 October 2015; Vol. 600, c. 948.]

Now they have to tell us what they intend to do to secure it.

1.49 pm

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Stephen Crabb):** I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “House” to the end of the Question and add:

“is concerned by the impact that recent redundancies in the steel sector could have on local communities and welcomes Government support for affected people in those communities; recognises the unprecedented global challenges currently facing the UK steel industry and agrees that all parties, including Government, opposition

parties and the industry need to work together to secure a sustainable future for UK steel; and notes that the Government is in regular dialogue with the industry, including hosting a recent Steel Summit, and is taking urgent action to address both the industry’s short-term and long-term concerns, including energy costs, unfair trade, the Industrial Emissions Directive and long-term procurement opportunities for the industry so as to ensure that the UK steel industry has a sustainable future.”.

I should perhaps explain to the House that I am responding to this debate on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovations and Skills who is in Brussels right now having urgent and important discussions with European Commissioners to address the crisis that the steel industry faces all across Europe.

I wish to start by saying that I have total respect for constituency Members who represent steel communities and who have come here this afternoon to speak passionately and earnestly on behalf of the workers and their families who are affected by this crisis. What has been really disappointing about the debate so far is the way that the Labour party has tried to turn this into a political football. I look across at the Opposition Benches to the faces of Members who were here before 2010 and I do not recall a single one of them coming to this place and standing up to speak up for steelworkers during Labour’s term of office, when the number of steelworkers in the UK fell by a half and the volume of steel production fell by a half. I think, therefore, that the Labour party needs to show some humility on this issue.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Stephen Crabb:** As we debate this crisis today—  
[*Interruption.*]

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. I think hon. Members need to calm down a little. If the right hon. Gentleman is not giving way, Members must sit down. If he is giving way, he will say so.

**Stephen Crabb:** I am happy to give way to the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith).

**Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab):** I thank the Secretary of State for giving way. I was in this House from 2005, and Labour Members repeatedly made representations to the then Prime Minister, who listened to what we had to say. Before 2010, we did not have the carbon floor price. It is now damaging the steel industry significantly and this Government are doing nothing about it.

**Stephen Crabb:** I am not going to engage in a tit-for-tat on this. Let us just say that the record of the previous Labour Government on steel and on manufacturing was not a stellar one.

**David T. C. Davies:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that Labour Members ought to do him the courtesy of listening to what he has to say? Does he agree that it was they who started bringing in the carbon taxes that have caused problems for manufacturing and that it is this Government who have tried to hold those taxes down?

**Stephen Crabb:** As we debate this crisis today, we rightly make the thousands of workers in the steel industry and their families, who have faced devastating news about their jobs, and the many more who are working with the cloud of uncertainty hanging over the industry at this time, the central and primary focus of our concerns. When an individual loses their job, the pressures it creates can be a tragedy for their family and themselves. When whole communities are affected by large-scale job losses, the impact can be devastating—I completely recognise that.

**Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab):** I am pleased that the Secretary of State is now looking forward, because I, along with my colleagues on the other side of the House, have been talking about the needs of the steel industry in our community since being elected to Parliament in 2010. We need to look forward together and work together to build a better future. It just so happens that it is his Government who can make decisions now, not anybody else.

**Stephen Crabb:** I completely take the hon. Gentleman's points and I pay tribute to the work he does on behalf of his constituents.

**Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con):** I wish to make a similar point to that made by the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin). Although the Secretary of State is right to point out that the steel industry halved under the last Labour Government, does he agree that it would be a cruel deception for anybody to suggest that the solution to this crisis is wholly in the hands of any one Government, be they the British Government or even the European Union? Does he also agree that the best way forward is to have as much political consensus as we can across the House, just as we do in north Lincolnshire? That is the only way of ensuring that we do as much as possible at the national level and at EU level to deal with a crisis where, sadly, many of the factors are outside the control of any of those Governments?

**Stephen Crabb:** My hon. Friend makes an essential point about two things: the global nature of the crisis, which I shall discuss a little further during my remarks; and the need for political consensus, where it is possible. Opposition Members and Conservative Members who know me from Wales know that that is exactly the kind of approach I like to take, but it does require two sides to play—

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Stephen Crabb:** I will take one more intervention and then I will make some progress.

**Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab):** Jobs in my constituency are at risk at Caparo in Wolverhampton. I am asking, on behalf of the people there: when did the Government first see the signs of this crisis? Why has it taken them so long to do something about it? Those are the kinds of questions that my constituents are asking, because their jobs are at risk. This is not a party political thing; this is a practical thing about job losses that may be happening in my constituency and elsewhere.

**Stephen Crabb:** There is continuous engagement with the steel industry and there has been for a long time; we have been discussing concerns with the industry since

the beginning of the coalition Government in 2010. A Labour Member made the point earlier that this crisis has been around for a long time, but the phenomenon that the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) described as a “tsunami” of cheap Chinese steel is very recent, and it has completely changed the global dynamics of the steel industry.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Stephen Crabb:** I am not going to take any more interventions for the time being.

The steel industry across Europe and around the world is in the midst of a crisis, the magnitude of which has not been seen in at least a generation. Chronic global overcapacity has squeezed prices to the extent that the price of certain products has halved in recent times and is expected to fall further still. European demand is still about 30% below pre-crisis levels. The Chinese economy, which has until recently been the driver behind global steel demand, is slowing down. The world is awash with cheap steel looking for markets. For some products, cheap Chinese imports have gone from accounting for 0% of the market to representing 37% of the UK market share within 18 months—that is an extraordinary growth in a very short period. Chinese steel exports roughly doubled between 2011 and 2014. That is the extremely challenging backdrop to the current crisis facing our steelworkers. It has been described as a “perfect storm” in terms of the configuration of different events and phenomena that are affecting the global steel industry, but that is why the Government remain absolutely committed to doing everything in our power to support steelworkers across Britain in the weeks, months and years ahead.

**Geraint Davies:** Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that giving the contract on HS2 to the Chinese will increase the probability that they will use Chinese steel? Moreover, if we had given that contract to a British consortium, those companies would have paid British corporation tax, British national insurance and British income tax, and they would have supported British supply chains and built British capacity for the future. Is not his laissez-faire approach, which has neglected British steel and British industry, at the root of this problem—or a large part of it at least?

**Stephen Crabb:** Forgive me for saying so, but the hon. Gentleman makes a slightly confused point. The investment going into the rail industry is creating opportunities, now and in the future—huge opportunities for the UK steel industry. The Government are determined to help the UK steel industry take advantage of those investment opportunities.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that last point?

**Stephen Crabb:** I will take an intervention later.

We are providing support for those communities and families who have been affected by recent announcements. In Redcar, we have outlined a support package worth up to £80 million. We are working with the local taskforce we have established to develop proposals to support the individuals, the local economy and the supply chain.

It is worth making the point that this is not a Whitehall, top-down solution; our commitment is to work with local partners to develop the right solution for those workers, their families and the communities. In Scunthorpe, we have set up a local taskforce to look at what needs to be done to support those affected and the local economy. Funding of up to £9 million has been provided to the Scunthorpe taskforce—

**Mr Kevan Jones:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thought we were having a debate on steel today, but what we have is a Minister just reading out a civil service brief to the House. It is an absolute insult that he will not take any interventions. I know that BIS is not his own Department, so he might not understand the subject but surely the Government should have sent somebody who knows something about the subject rather than someone who is simply reading out what the civil service has given him.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** I think the hon. Member has put his point on the record. Let the Secretary of State continue.

**Stephen Crabb:** Madam Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) was one of those Members I mentioned earlier who were here before 2010 and sat in silence while employment and manufacturing plummeted and UK steel production plummeted.

Moving on, we are also supporting the Scottish Government's taskforces in Dalzell and Clydebridge. We will work with them and also continue to monitor the situation in the black country to make sure that necessary support is provided for communities and families affected by the Caparo Wire announcements.

The House understands that there are no easy solutions in the face of what are, unquestionably, incredibly difficult market conditions right now. Excess capacity in global steel is enormous—about 570 million tonnes last year, almost 50 times the UK's entire annual production. The price of steel slab has fallen by a half in the past year alone, while fluctuating exchange rates have added further pressures.

**Tom Blenkinsop:** The right hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point about production, but what we have in the home UK economy is 3 million tonnes of scrap steel, which we export to Turkey and China, and it comes back here in slab. Will the Government look at developing a potential strategy for electric arc furnaces on sites such as Redcar to use to create a new home market to supply the British market rather than exporting to Turkey and China?

**Stephen Crabb:** That is a useful and constructive point. It is, of course, the model that Celsa Steel uses in Cardiff. At the moment, we are looking at all aspects of the steel industry to identify future growth opportunities.

**Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab):** The Secretary of State talks about what he cannot do, so can he talk about what he can do, which is in the area of procurement? What proposals do the Government have to procure British steel products in the next 12 months to keep this business open and flourishing?

**Stephen Crabb:** I am coming on to exactly those issues. We all have to acknowledge and be honest about the fact that there are limits to what we can do in

response to the economic realities facing the steel industry. I see Opposition Members shaking their heads, but I make the point again—they need to step back and be honest about the realities of a global steel crisis that is affecting steel manufacturers across north America and all across Europe.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab):** I grew up in a steel-working family and have constituents who work in Llanwern. Will the right hon. Gentleman accept what is being said to me—that there is not an acceptance that the Government have done enough? There are social as well as economic consequences. There are huge problems in the global steel industry currently, but is this not the very moment for protecting our foundation steel industry and keeping it for the future?

**Stephen Crabb:** I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman's point. That is exactly why my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary is talking to European Commissioners right now and exactly why we have set up a programme of working groups to look at all aspects of how the UK steel industry functions to identify future growth opportunities and help the UK industry to take advantage of them. Where we can, we want to protect, as the hon. Gentleman describes it, the foundation of a strong UK steel sector.

We cannot influence the price of steel and we cannot fix foreign exchange rates. The rules governing state aid to the steel sector are very strict. The UK steel industry signed up to those state-aid rules for a very good reason: the rules help secure a level playing field for UK steel within Europe. Within those strictures, we have done—and we are doing—all we can to help the steel industry at this very difficult time.

**Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con):** I am grateful for the way in which the Secretary of State is conducting his speech and not making party political points. That is good news.

On this specific point, the Government believe they can introduce compensation; the Prime Minister said that from the Dispatch Box today. If we believe that is within state-aid rules, let us just get on and do it—even if the European Union says no. We can worry about that consequence afterwards.

**Stephen Crabb:** We are pushing for a quick decision on the state-aid decision. Labour Members have referred to the German example. I have looked at it: Germany had a pre-existing scheme set up. When the new state-aid rules kicked in, that prevented other European countries from implementing a scheme on their own prior to seeking state-aid rules. That is why we have gone to get state-aid approval prior to bringing forward the compensation package.

**Stephen Doughty** *rose*—

**Stephen Crabb:** The hon. Gentleman represents a steel constituency, so I give way to him.

**Stephen Doughty:** The Secretary of State is well aware of these issues, as I raised the issue of state-aid clearance with him and Celsa on 11 November last year. Will he confirm whether the state-aid clearance for the steel

[Stephen Doughty]

industry, which the Government say has been a top priority, has actually been at the top of the UK Government's state-aid clearance priorities at any point in the last 12 to 24 months—and is it now? It is all very well talking about what the Secretary of State is doing today, but has that been at the top of the priority list for the last 12 months?

**Stephen Crabb:** We have absolutely been pushing for state-aid clearance on this. It is really important. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear today, as soon as that state-aid clearance is given, we will start paying the compensation to steel companies. It is worth pointing out that we have already paid out £50 million to a number of steel companies to compensate them for additional energy costs arising from environmental and climate change policies, a lot of which were imposed by a previous Labour Government.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Stephen Crabb:** We are taking action to tackle unfair trading practices. We have already supported and voted for the renewal of anti-dumping measures at an EU level and lobbied for an investigation into cheap imports of reinforcing steel bar. We lobbied the EU because the steel industry raised its concerns with us; when the industry provides us with evidence, we act on its behalf. We will continue to do that by pressing the European Commission for firmer, faster action against unfair trade practices, and that is exactly what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills is doing at this moment in Brussels.

**David Mowat:** A few moments ago, my right hon. Friend referred to the pre-arrangements in Germany, by which its steel industry pays 4p for a unit of electricity and its consumers pay between 10p and 15p a unit. That was pre-arranged, but it cannot be right that the state-aid rules do not apply to those circumstances, while everything we try to do falls foul of those rules. That simply cannot be right; it may well be an EU rule, but it is not adequate.

**Stephen Crabb:** I agree with my hon. Friend about the price differential. We recognise that very significant differential, and we are determined to take action, but I do not agree that we fall foul of state-aid rules all the time. We are committed to doing what we can within the rules, to which not just the British Government but the UK steel industry have signed up.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): If we go down the road of looking for EU approval for changes to state-aid rules, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the situation will not be resolved quickly? When it came to corporation tax in Northern Ireland, it took four years, and when it comes to the aggregates levy, we are still fighting on the issue after eight years. Does he accept that by the time the EU gets round to making a decision, the steel industry is likely to be well gone?

**Stephen Crabb:** I do not accept that the European or the British steel industry will be “well gone”, to use the hon. Gentleman's phrase, but I think he is right when he

talks about the length of time it takes to get state-aid clearance on these issues. This is one aspect of the overall issue that we are pushing for. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise has had some discussions about this herself. This is a matter on which we are determined to take action—and not with respect only to the issue of state-aid approval that we are seeking at the moment, because we are concerned about the overall process for speeding up state-aid applications generally.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed this issue with President Xi of China during the important state visit last week. President Xi recognised the UK's concerns and will be taking action to address Chinese overcapacity. The working group on international comparisons in the steel industry, chaired by the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise, met last week and is looking at how we can speed up cases within the EU by working with other member states facing similar issues and working with the industry to speed up its provision of evidence on dumping, which would mean that we could then take action.

**Andrew Gwynne** *rose*—

**Stephen Crabb:** Secondly, we are addressing the impact on intensive energy users such as the steel industry of policies to reduce the negative impacts of climate change.

As I said a moment ago, we have already given more than £50 million of support to the steel industry. We were the first EU country to pay compensation for indirect costs of the EU emissions trading system to energy intensives in 2013, we started to pay compensation for the costs of the carbon price support mechanism as soon as the European Commission gave state clearance in 2014, and we exempted the metallurgical industry from the climate change levy in the same year. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has announced, we will provide further compensation for climate change policies, with payments starting as soon as state aid is approved and continuing throughout the current Parliament.

**Andrew Gwynne:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Stephen Crabb:** The hon. Gentleman has been very persistent, so I will.

**Andrew Gwynne:** We must remember that behind all this are communities, and individuals living in those communities, who are facing a very uncertain future. Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to dissociate himself and the Government from the views of his noble Friend Lord Heseltine, who has said that now is as good a time as any to lose a job? Is it not time that he found himself a different job too?

**Stephen Crabb:** I have no idea what comments the hon. Gentleman is referring to, but I do know that the noble Lord whom he mentioned has a track record of regeneration, winning support for UK industries, selling UK plc around the world and driving up growth in some of the most deprived parts of the UK to which not a single Labour Member could aspire.

All energy-intensive industries will benefit from the compensation at the earliest opportunity, and we are working with the Commission to gain approval quickly for proposals to provide additional relief for the impact

of indirect low-carbon energy policy costs. The Business Secretary spoke to the Commissioner last week, and, as I said, he is in Brussels again today to make the need for urgency clear to our colleagues there. Once they are in place, these measures will save energy-intensive industries such as the steel industry hundreds of millions of pounds over the next five years.

Thirdly, we are determined to drive up the number of public contracts won by UK steel manufacturers and their partners through fair and open competition. In the last Parliament, we successfully renegotiated EU procurement rules to allow wider social and economic considerations to be taken into account, and we were the first country to put those new rules into action in February 2015.

We have identified more than 500 infrastructure projects and programmes, valued at over £400 billion and listed in *National Infrastructure Pipeline*, to help the industry to plan for and win contracts. Those contracts include Crossrail, which we are building with more than 50,000 tonnes of British steel, and HMS Queen Elizabeth, for which Tata provided 40,000 tonnes. We are currently embarking on the biggest programme of investment in our railways since Victorian times. Network Rail's £38 billion, five-year investment and replacement programme includes demand for British steel worth billions of pounds, and Network Rail sources 95% of its steel from the UK.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Stephen Crabb:** I will give way one last time, because I know that the hon. Gentleman likes talking about these issues.

**Mr Jones:** I thank the Secretary of State for finally giving way. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is sponsoring a £200 million contract for a new polar research vessel. I know that his Department is not involved, but can he guarantee that the ship, which is to be built in Birkenhead, will be produced with British steel?

**Stephen Crabb:** As I think the hon. Gentleman knows, I have had no sight of the details of that issue, but I shall try to find an answer for him by the end of the debate.

The steel procurement working group chaired by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office met representatives of UK Steel last week to work out what steps need to be taken to ensure that Government projects use as much British steel as possible, and that includes considering the feasibility of more central procurement.

On 16 October, we hosted a summit with the key players from the UK steel industry to discuss where more progress could be made. The summit, which brought together industry leaders, trade unions, Members of Parliament and senior figures from the Government, created a framework for action that will help us to support steelworkers now and in the future. Progress needs to be made quickly, but we also need to find the right solutions rather than just rushing into action.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Stephen Crabb:** We have working groups from the summit who will now supply evidence and recommendations to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The subjects will include driving up the number of public procurement contracts won by UK steel manufacturers, the lessons that can be learnt from other countries in the EU and beyond—

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Nic Dakin:** Minister!

**Stephen Crabb:**—and what more the Government can do to boost productivity and help steel manufacturers to cut production costs.

**Nic Dakin:** Minister!

**Stephen Crabb:** The UK's steel industry is part of the foundation of many of the nation's great, world-beating supply chains—

**Nic Dakin:** Minister!

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. The Secretary of State has indicated that he is not giving way. Shouting "Minister!" from a sedentary position is not going to help anyone.

Let me also say that Members who are included in a very long list of speakers and who make constant interventions will not be called. We shall not be able to fit everyone in as it is, but if the interventions are kept to a minimum, we may have a chance of getting a little way down the list.

**Stephen Crabb:** This is a very important debate, and loads of Members want to speak in it. I think that I have been quite generous with interventions, and I shall now bring my remarks to a close.

As I was saying, the UK's steel industry is part of the foundation of many of the nation's great, world-beating supply chains: automotive, aerospace, construction and energy, to name just four. The Government therefore remain committed to a healthy and growing steel industry in the UK. That is essential if we are to increase productivity and thereby raise standards of living for everyone in the country. However, during what is an extremely difficult time for the UK steel industry, we must do as much as we can to support the families of those affected by these changes, as well as supporting the UK steel industry, here and abroad, so that it can compete on a level playing field.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Before I call the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell)—on whose speech a time limit will not be imposed—I must inform Members that there will be a time limit of four minutes for Back-Bench speeches. I hope that that will enable us to get everyone in.

2.16 pm

**Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP):** I am pleased that, following last month's Backbench Business debate, we have a further opportunity today to discuss the

[*Hannah Bardell*]

challenges facing the steel industry in the United Kingdom. Let me say at the outset that SNP Members will support the motion.

Since last month's debate, more challenges have arisen than solutions have been implemented. The global pressures that triggered a series of recent announcements on job losses at UK steel plants have been apparent for a number of months and have been emerging for considerably longer, but the Government have been slow to act with our European partners. In the light of these announcements, the steel industry has been clear and united in its requests for Government assistance, but the Government have been flat-footed for too long. I welcome some of their very recent progress, but the timely delivery of what they have promised is key. I hope that today's debate will offer them another opportunity to set out, in detail, the measures that they will take immediately to protect threatened jobs and support the continuing industrial production of steel in the UK, and also to provide a timeline for the delivery of that support.

Last week, Tata Steel announced its intention to consult on the mothballing of its Dalzell—Members should note the pronunciation of that; I was glad to note that Conservative Members managed to pronounce it correctly—and Clydebridge facilities, with the potential loss of 270 Scottish jobs. Each one of those jobs supports a further three in the wider economy, which serves as a reminder that closure of the two facilities will be felt not just locally, but much further afield. I intend to allow my hon. Friends who represent the communities involved to speak at greater length about the impact of last week's announcement, but let me just say this: if there is to be a future for the industrial production of steel in Scotland, the lights at those plants must not go out.

The commitment from the SNP and the Scottish Government is clear. We will work relentlessly, and resolve to do everything in our power, to keep Dalzell and Clydebridge open. I am pleased, therefore, that the Scottish Government have assembled a cross-party, multi-agency Scottish steel taskforce, and that our First Minister has visited both sites affected. All members of the taskforce will work to explore a future for the facilities—and, unlike the Conservative party, I can say that that includes the trade unions.

I also welcome the commitment from Tata Steel to work with the Scottish Government to find an alternative operator. The plants at Dalzell and Clydebridge are powerful assets, with a labour force who are highly experienced in the processing of steel for use in military products as well as in the offshore oil and gas industry. The economic climate may be challenging, but I am confident that my colleagues in the Scottish Government and their agencies will do everything in their power to protect jobs and see production continue.

**Michelle Thomson** (Edinburgh West) (Ind): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Hannah Bardell:** I would like to make some progress.

Wherever the endeavour to save these plants may lead and whatever the outcome, our first consideration will always be the affected communities. Every job lost and every single redundancy tells its own personal story. For the communities of Motherwell and Cambuslang,

which have been home to the facilities for generations, the news could not have been more devastating, and the workers and families face a very anxious and uncertain time ahead. Modern apprentices starting their careers face losing the opportunity to learn a trade in an industrial setting. Workers who have dedicated 30 years and more to these plants face losing their livelihoods and a nation faces losing a key part of its industrial heritage. I am conscious that these emotions are being felt not just in Scotland, but across the communities of south Yorkshire, the west midlands and Scunthorpe, all of whom have been subject to similar announcements and job losses at steelworks. On behalf of my hon. Friends on the SNP Benches, I express our solidarity with those workers across the UK who have an uncertain future ahead of them.

The primary challenge to Scottish, English, Welsh and, indeed, European steel is a common one. As the OECD has identified, excess global capacity is expected to widen to 645 million tonnes above demand this year. Much of that has been driven by rapidly expanding Chinese steel production. Although that production predominantly met domestic demand at the outset, since 2010 China has been a net exporter of steel. Since 2013 a near-collapse in domestic demand for steel in China has led to a dramatic increase in Chinese steel exports. Indeed, Chinese steel exports are likely to exceed 100 million tonnes this year. If we are to see a correction of global supply, it will be largely incumbent upon China to reduce capacity. In China's case, that might need to be by as much as 30%, some way above its current target of a reduction of 80 million tonnes of overcapacity by 2017.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Hannah Bardell:** No, as many Members wish to speak in the debate.

European-produced steel is unable to compete with such alternatives. As an illustration, according to recent data from the Steel Index, European-produced domestic hot-rolled coil at €415 a tonne is at a €53 premium compared with export prices from China. The presence of excess Chinese steel in European markets requires urgent redress, and I welcome the attention paid by the European Commission to the issue over the past year. There is some evidence that the anti-dumping duties are having some success, and there may well be a case for further action. I urge the Government to participate fully with our European partners in co-ordinating what that further action might be. However, in this endeavour I would also encourage the Government to consider carefully the impact of further anti-dumping duties on the global price competitiveness of European-produced steel.

I was pleased to note that the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills has belatedly recognised the importance of working with European partners to address the issues of dumping and overcapacity. Today's press release from his Department triumphantly announces:

“Business Secretary to put steel top of Brussels agenda.”

While I would not wish to rain on the Secretary of State's parade, I am sure that when he arrives in Brussels he will find the EU Commissioners quite well-versed, given that they have been taking action on these issues for over nine months. I had also hoped, given the impact on

the Scottish steel industry, that the Secretary of State might accede to the request from the Scottish Government to be represented at the discussions in Europe today, and I am disappointed that the Scottish Government have once again been frozen out of fighting Scotland's corner.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I note that the Secretary of State has now left the Chamber. I might be an old-fashioned fuddy-duddy, but I thought there was a convention that a speaker should stay for at least the next two contributions before leaving the Chamber.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, but the Secretary of State has just told me that he has popped out to do some media and is coming straight back again. *[Interruption.]* As I said, the hon. Gentleman is correct, but the Secretary of State approached the Chair on this, and I said it was fine, and there is a Minister listening. At the end of the day, it is the Secretary of State's choice.

**Mr Jones:** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it now convention that a—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. I think we have dealt with this. I call Hannah Bardell.

**Hannah Bardell:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Not only is there disrespect in Europe; there is disrespect in this Chamber. Members on the SNP Benches and people across Scotland may well ask what of the much-lauded respect agenda.

On Government support for the industry, we welcome the positive developments over the last week and welcome the Government's commitment to the implementation of an energy compensation package to bring down the cost of energy to that enjoyed by rivals, the reduction of business rates in line with those of competitor countries, and more time to meet directives on emissions. I would, however, echo the note of caution from Gareth Stace, director of UK Steel, who told the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee yesterday that "time is not on our side".

The issues facing the industry in the UK are pressing and I would encourage the Government to outline today when they will bring forward promised measures to pre-empt any further damage to the UK industry or to jobs. These measures will, of course, be short-term support for the industry to weather what is a tumultuous period, but continuing industrial steel production in the UK in the long-term will not be ensured by a business rate cut here, a delayed emission deadline there or prolonged protectionism from the European Commission.

The Clydebridge steelworks that has been designated for mothballing first opened in 1887 as a giant of industrial Scotland. The steel plates it made were used in many of the most famous ships ever built—the Lusitania, the Mauretania, the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth. The Dalzell works can trace its history to the 1870s. Scotland once had a proud and distinguished industrial heart, but I fear that for much of the latter half of the 20th century Scotland's industrial story became one of decline.

This idea is encapsulated in a seminal hit—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should listen because I am making an interesting point. This idea is encapsulated in a seminal hit by one of Scotland's favourite bands, The Proclaimers—if any Members do not know them, they should listen. "Bathgate no more", goes the lyric, as the Leyland plant closed in 1986; "Linwood no more" as Hillman cars factory closed; "Methil no more" as the fabrication yards that assembled the North sea's greatest rigs closed. My own grandfather spent a good part of his career at Leyland in Bathgate and I do not want a new generation of Scots to pen songs describing further decline in Scottish industry.

For the time being, the economic powers that Scotland needs to reindustrialise for the 21st century remain with Westminster, but successive Westminster Governments of all colours do not boast a proud record on stewardship of Scotland's industry. I implore the Government to work with the Scottish Government to enable the development of a coherent, visionary industrial strategy for Scotland. What a refreshing change it would be to be able to help our industry thrive and not just survive, to innovate, to compete and to succeed, rather than stepping in and picking up the pieces when the jobs are lost and the damage is done.

I will conclude my comments the way I started them: by paying tribute to the workers, their families and the communities affected. We salute their resoluteness in this period of adversity. We stand with them in solidarity as they face uncertain and anxious times, and we on these Benches want to reassure them that the SNP Scottish Government will leave no stone unturned in seeking to keep Scotland's steelworks open and Scottish steelworkers in jobs.

2.27 pm

**James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con):** Metal runs through the heart of the black country and the west midlands. On a personal note, my grandfather worked as a forger in the Halesowen steelworks after the second world war. He had an industrial accident there in 1947 and was not able to work again after that, so I know in the blood of my family the difficulties often faced by people in steel communities.

Last Friday I took part in a midlands steel taskforce group, which had been set up by Beverley Neilsen, director of the Institute for Design and Economic Acceleration at Birmingham City university, following the collapse of Caparo into administration across the west midlands, and I was pleased to see that there was cross-party representation at that meeting, as well as representatives of business and local chambers of commerce.

Caparo went into administration for complex reasons. Over a long period of time there have been financial difficulties in the Caparo group. It has been heavily debt-laden since a refinancing deal it did in 2008-09, so not all the Caparo problems are related to the issues of the global steel market. However, jobs are at risk in Cradley heath in my constituency and other areas of Sandwell and across the west midlands, and we need to do whatever we can to help these companies and those people whose jobs are at risk.

At the midlands steel summit that I attended on Friday, we discussed a number of the immediate, short-term steps that we should consider in relation to Caparo.

[James Morris]

There was a strong argument for setting up a Caparo in administration task group to work with the administrators of the Caparo group. After speaking to the administrators on Friday, it became clear that there were a number of profitable, high-quality businesses in the Caparo group, in the high-tech, high-end engineering sector, that would be able to find buyers. I understand that the administrators have had about 45 representations about acquiring certain parts of the group.

We also need to take action in relation to the impact of Caparo's collapse into administration on the supply chain across the west midlands. I understand that some small and medium-sized companies were not expecting the group to go into administration and have been suffering cash-flow difficulties. We also need to identify as early as possible those companies that will be at risk, so that we can determine how their skilled workers might be able to find other work quickly. Manufacturing in the black country has been doing very well over the past two and a half years, and there is demand in the area for high-skilled workers, but we need to have a strategy in place around that. Steel plays an important part in the west midlands manufacturing supply chain, and there could be an impact on companies such as Somers Forge in my constituency.

There is no easy solution to the present problems. We need to take short-term action in relation to Caparo, but we also need to take action on energy costs and Chinese dumping. There may be no easy solutions, but there are things that the Government are doing—and should continue to do—to mitigate the problems of the Caparo administration in the short term and to re-establish the steel industry and protect the supply chain in the west midlands in the long term.

2.31 pm

**Mr Iain Wright** (Hartlepool) (Lab): Like the hon. Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris), I have a Caparo steel factory in my constituency. The 200 workers there are obviously facing troubled times, and it is vital that, as part of the wider steel strategy, we look into the issues affecting them.

Yesterday, we on the Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee held an evidence session on the state of the steel industry. I am grateful to all the expert witnesses who came along and gave their fantastic evidence. Let me start with the positives. It was welcome to hear the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise, the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) tell the Committee that she considered the UK steel industry to be of strategic importance and enormous value to British manufacturing. Her predecessors in that post would not have said that. I fear, however, that others in Government, including the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Business Secretary, do not necessarily feel the same way. Therein lies the problem. We need that strategic priority in the light of the challenges facing the industry.

The UK steel industry is in grave crisis. All the expert witnesses yesterday said that they could not recall a more serious time for the survival of their industry. Since the summer, a fifth of the workforce in the UK steel industry have either lost their jobs or are at risk of doing so.

The tragedy of job losses for the individual steelworkers, their families and their communities is immense, but the loss of the skills, the capability and the competitiveness in such a strategic industry will affect British manufacturing for decades. Gareth Stace, director of UK Steel, gave us a vivid description of the situation yesterday. He told us that the industry was like

“a patient on the operating table. We are bleeding very quickly and unless it's stopped very soon we are likely to die”.

**Richard Fuller** (Bedford) (Con): On that point, has the hon. Gentleman been struck by the relative slowness of the European Union's response to Chinese dumping, compared with the speed of the response of the United States?

**Mr Wright:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comment, and I will come to that in a moment. He is a fantastic member of the BIS Select Committee, and he was incredibly supportive yesterday.

This is not necessarily a question of the Government waving a magic wand. Global forces are affecting the steel industry. I am not suggesting that the UK Government have a disproportionate influence over what is happening in the global steel industry, but there are things that they can do. The Minister rightly said that she saw steel as a strategic industry because it acts as a foundation for many other parts of the manufacturing value chain. I agree with her on that. A modern steel industry is at the heart of a dynamic and innovative economy.

I would suggest that the role of the Government is to level the playing field for British-based steel makers and ensure that they do not face costs and pressures that our competitors do not face. The role of the Government is also to go out and bat for the British steel industry on the European and world stage. Alas, it emerged clearly from our Select Committee inquiry yesterday that, despite their warm words, the Government have been slow and reactive and that, despite their protestations, they have not prioritised the steel industry in a way that its strategic importance requires.

The Government have been exposed as having been left baffled and battered by the forces affecting global steel. That is perhaps inevitable, given the scale and gravity of the challenge, but it is a challenge that the industry has been raising with Ministers for some time. Plant closures and the loss of jobs, steelmaking skills and capacity could have been lessened had the Government been more on the front foot and responded more swiftly.

I have enormous respect for the Minister, but she sounded like Elvis Presley in the Committee yesterday when she told us that she wanted a little less conversation and a little more action, please. Her words were welcome, but it became abundantly clear that, in the main, words are all we have. Words are not going to save the British steel industry.

At the steel summit on 16 October, we were provided with an excellent analysis of the state of the industry from its representatives. We were provided with a clear and achievable five-point plan on factors such as energy costs, business rates and local content in procurement projects. However, that analysis was nothing new. It has been known about for weeks and months, if not years. The Government were familiar with the asks from industry long before 16 October, so why was urgent action not taken sooner in such a strategic industry?

The Minister's insistence on a change in policy on voting in Europe on dumping is welcome, but why did industry tell us yesterday that we in the UK were out on a limb in Europe in not acting in a co-ordinated way on cheap Chinese imports? In response to the hon. Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller), he will recall that the Select Committee was told yesterday that an astonishing 94% of all the cheap Chinese steel coming to Europe comes to Britain, at a time when our domestic industry is dying. We have put up the white flag for our steel industry in response to the Chinese red flag. That is not appropriate.

We have been left in no doubt about the gravity of the situation. We may not even have reached the bottom of the job losses and plant closures. It is not too melodramatic to measure the survival of the British steel industry in weeks rather than decades. We do not have time to reflect or reassess; the Government have to move from warm words to action, and they have to do it now.

2.37 pm

**Andrew Percy** (Brigg and Goole) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright). I do not agree with the last 30 seconds of his speech, but otherwise I could not put a cigarette paper between him and me. I voted for him to be Chairman of the Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee because he knows how to do this. I apologise if I told anyone else that I was going to vote for them—I tend to tell everyone that—but I actually voted for him. I cannot disagree with the way in which he has just put the case for the UK steel industry. As I said in an earlier intervention, taking the politics out of this is the way to do it. There are things that the Government can do, and things that they cannot. In fairness to the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell), she said the same thing. Not everything is in the hands of the UK Government, and the less shouting and screaming we hear from the sides and the more working together we can achieve, the better.

That is not to say that people do not have a right to be angry; they do have that right. I represent a steel area, as do many hon. Members, and I understand the passion. A lot of people have contacted me in the past few days saying, "We've bailed out the banks. Why not the steel industry?" Do you know what? I cannot disagree with that. It is a strategic industry and it should be viewed by the Government in the same way as the banking industry is. I pay tribute to the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise, my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), who has said, time and again, that the steel industry is vital to this country and should be supported appropriately.

I pay tribute to the workers at Scunthorpe, who do an amazing job producing the best steel in the world. I also pay tribute to the unions there, which have responded to this crisis in a sensible and measured way and worked with everyone involved. They deserve credit for that. But where are we at with Scunthorpe? We local Members of Parliament all know that we are in a pretty bad place, and we are all committed to doing everything we can.

We have two prongs to our attack. The first involves supporting those who are affected by the announced and proposed job losses. I met the Minister the other night to put a couple of requests to her, and I shall put them on the record today. We welcome the £9 million

that has been announced to support those who are affected. We wish we did not need it, but we welcome it. Our request in relation to that is that we want the support to be spent locally. We do not want outside providers coming in and giving training. We have excellent local colleges, and we have a local council which has a record of delivering through the regional growth fund. It delivered 800 jobs through a £10 million grant when we lost 1,000 jobs four years ago. We want a guarantee that funding can be used to support local small and medium-sized enterprises.

The taskforce, which has been referenced by the Secretary of State, has also put a couple of important asks to the Minister. We know that an offshore wind revolution is approaching the Humber. Some of the skills that have been lost from the site can be used in the jobs that are coming. However, there is a gap between the number of those who will lose their jobs and the number of jobs that are expected in places such as the South Humber Gateway in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers). We need support to ensure that the workers can make that transition, and support from the Government to encourage DONG Energy to move beyond its memorandum of understanding with Able.

We need an acceleration in infrastructure projects locally. The North Killingholme flood project would be one that would help, as would bringing forward some of the offshore wind projects.

**Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): British steel is a quality product. My hon. Friend talks about bringing forward projects, but when I speak to companies in Pendle they say that they use British steel because they have concerns about the quality of imported steel. Does he share those concerns?

**Andrew Percy:** Absolutely. I am sorry that we do not have more time, because there is an awful lot more that I would like to say in this debate.

My hon. Friend brings me to the second part of our asks, which is how we try to secure the long-term future of the site, because we in Scunthorpe cannot afford to lose it. Scunthorpe is a steel town, and, like all local MPs, I want it to remain a steel town. There are things on which we need to take action. Chinese dumping and the quality of Chinese steel are mentioned repeatedly in that regard. It is true that, before this crisis and following pressure from all parts of the House, the Government had taken action in Europe, and we welcomed that. The carbon floor price was a mistake; my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes and I voted against it. I agree with those who say that we need to bring forward the compensation scheme. I also have sympathy with those who say let us pay it and damn EU approval.

It is worth noting that it is this Government who secured new EU procurement rules that make it easier to get local content. We want the HS2 contracts to go to Scunthorpe, new projects being brought forward and a clear message from this Government that they will do everything they can—in fairness, we have had that message—that, under these new rules, UK content will be used as much as possible. We have been having useful meetings with the Cabinet Office Minister on this, and we will keep on meeting, as there are other things that need to be done around business rates. We need an

[Andrew Percy]

enterprise zone for part of the site at Scunthorpe. It is a huge site and it is underutilised, and other things can be done there to secure more business. I wish that I could say more, but, unfortunately, I am out of time.

2.42 pm

**Tom Blenkinsop** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I pay tribute to Roy Rickhuss, General Secretary of Community trade union, who is in the Public Gallery. He has led steelworkers through a very dark time with dignity, great class and humour. Also in the Public Gallery are more than 40 steelworkers from across the UK, who have come here today to talk to MPs and to demonstrate their desire to see a British steel industry.

My first small point is about Chinese dumping. Yes, it is a problem, and the quality of the steel that is being dumped is poor both environmentally and on health and safety grounds, but it will get better. We can stop it now; there are provisions within the European Union on which we should now act, but the quality of Chinese steel will get better, and what do we do then? The real issue is whether we want a British steel industry. It is more about political will than it is about any organisation, institution or legislation. Do we want a British steel industry? British steel is as British as roast beef or the Union Jack; it is fundamental to our national identity.

Let us look at steel in relation to our country's history, how we define ourselves as defenders of democracy and how we defeated fascism. It was steelworks up and down the length and breadth of this country that ensured that we could arm ourselves in those struggles. That is a story that we heard not from the men on site, but, in large part, from the women working in the industry. It is an often untold story. The arguments about the carbon floor price, energy prices, Chinese dumping and the current exchange rate are all well versed and well made.

What I wish to focus on in Teesside is the future. We are an area that can attract not just steel but other energy-intensive industries. If the Government act in the immediate and medium term to bring about those five industrial asks to defend a British steel industry, we in Teesside can buoy that up even more.

**Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): On those five asks, particularly around anti-dumping and state aid, does my hon. Friend agree that the principle that should now be applied is shoot first and answer questions later? Is it not time that we started looking at unilateral action, as we are now dealing with a crisis.

**Tom Blenkinsop:** I thank my hon. Friend for that comment and for reiterating a quote from the hon. Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove), who made exactly that point in a previous debate.

Before I get to business rates, the issues around Teesside and why SSI no longer exists, let me say that, in Teesside, we are next to the Durham coalfield, under the North sea, which could be gasified. Shale gas is coming to this country from America only because America does not have the capacity to retain it. America will stop exporting gas to this nation in five to 10 years, so we need our own gas supply. When we set that up, we need to sequestrate

that gas to provide cheap energy and to remove the threat from green taxes. If we do that, we would create a renaissance of industry on Teesside and across the UK.

In relation to taxation on industry—quite apart from CPF, which is a British tax inflicted on its own industry—there are 17 English and Welsh sites that have business rate values of more than £1 million, 15 of which have outstanding rate relief applications still not answered. Since 2010, business rates for the steel sector have increased by 19% in England. Not one steel site has seen any rate relief yet. Let us compare that to the retail sector, which, in this financial year alone, has received £1.8 billion in rate relief. That is madness. That rate relief is paid for by the taxes of a steel industry that we are killing via the CFP and the lack of relief in business rates.

On the important matter of SSI, I want to ask the Minister a couple of questions. How long has the insolvency unit been monitoring what was happening in Redcar? She disclosed to me on the day of liquidation that it had been monitoring the situation for “many months”. Indeed, it anticipated that SSI, alongside other companies dealing with long products such as Caparo and Tata in Dalzell, Clydebridge and Scunthorpe, would “pop” in November. What were the red flags? Were they pensions, the lack of student loans being paid, liabilities—[*Interruption.*] Exactly, the Minister knew all of this, but when? At what point did it all start? What we need to know is whether it could have been pre-empted.

2.47 pm

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): Many of the points relating to Scunthorpe have already been concisely covered by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy). May I slightly widen the debate to include the effect on the northern Lincolnshire economy as a whole? I represent a neighbouring constituency, and many of my constituents work in Scunthorpe. Many also work in ports and logistics, which is an area that is heavily influenced by what happens in Scunthorpe. Indeed Tata Steel has a site on Immingham docks, which is the largest port in the country.

I welcome the £9 million that has been announced by the Government. I say to the Minister that some of my constituents, whom I met at the weekend, were reassured by the interviews that she gave last Friday on the BBC in which she made a clear and welcome commitment to the continuation of the steel industry in Scunthorpe.

I have spent all of my life living in the Grimsby-Cleethorpes area. I witnessed the decline of the deep-sea fishing industry, and saw what the loss of a staple industry can do to a local community. It took a whole generation for the area to go anywhere near to recovery. We need to learn from the mistakes that were made not just in the Grimsby area but in other parts of the country, and provide the necessary support. I know that Ministers are determined to do that. We have had talk of strategies, and strategies are fine, but world conditions can change rather dramatically. We can have as many strategies as we like, but what we need is hard and fast commitment from Government.

A taskforce set up under the able leadership of Councillor Redfern, leader of North Lincolnshire Council, has made some clear asks that were outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole relating to enterprise zones and skills training in the burgeoning offshore industry. I echo his words about the Able UK

site at Killingholme, where DONG Energy has a memorandum of understanding signed with Able. The Government did a great deal to support the establishment and give permission for the Able development, and a little help and support, or perhaps just negotiations, might help to seal the deal and give a great boost to the area.

There has to be a balance with environment taxes. It is nice and cuddly to be able to say that we are in favour of being green and that all sounds fine, but heavy industries such as the steel industry and the oil refineries in my constituency rely heavily on economically priced energy. We need to achieve a balance.

The Chancellor has repeatedly mentioned the importance of the northern Lincolnshire economy as part of the northern powerhouse, but many in the area are still sceptical about that. Now is a real opportunity to show that the northern powerhouse, and the part that northern Lincolnshire can play in it, means something. We want real, tangible benefits. The community will struggle for some time to recover, so positive action, linked to the northern powerhouse initiative, can play a major part in the regeneration of the area and in supplying the jobs that are so urgently needed.

2.51 pm

**Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab): I have been an MP for only three years, but it is depressingly familiar to stand in this Chamber following the announcement of another steel plant closure, with thousands of yet another steel-producing community being ripped out.

Rotherham steel shows the best of British industry. It is world leading, innovative and dynamic. Steel is vital to my constituency and we are facing 720 imminent job losses. Our local economy is hugely reliant on steel. If this Government allow the industry to continue to decline, not only those who are employed in steel will feel the impact: local businesses, large and small, will be hit hard. Apprentices will lose their careers and young people will lose their hope of a future in steel. Ministers need to know that Rotherham is still feeling the effects of the loss of coal mining in the 1980s. The town was built on coal and steel and the loss of coal hurt us severely and deeply. The impact of the loss of steel would be incalculable.

It is deeply ironic that the advanced manufacturing park where the steel summit was held is built on the site of the battle of Orgreave, which vividly demonstrates our ability, hard work, durability and will to succeed despite what the Government throw at us. To succeed, we must be given the tools. Many commentators, including the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), have compared the lack of support for steel to the decision to bail out the banks in the wake of the global financial crisis. Although I accept the intention, the comparison is flawed. Steel does not need bailing out. It simply needs to be allowed to compete on a level playing field.

Our steel industry is world leading, but it is hamstrung by a Government who appear unconcerned by its present and unwilling to support its future. Parliamentary colleagues and I have repeatedly called for the Government to act to address the high energy costs that leave British steel unable to compete with European neighbours, but what we receive, time and again, are warm words.

**Andrew Percy:** May I clarify that I am not suggesting that steel requires a bail out? My key point is that the steel industry should be seen as strategically as important as the banking sector to the future of this country.

**Sarah Champion:** I completely agree, and I understood the hon. Gentleman's intention fully.

What is needed now is abundantly clear. The Government might be unable to control the pressures of the global economy, but there are steps that they could and should take to assist the industry in weathering the current crisis. The Government must take action on business rates, which penalise investment in plants and in the technology the industry needs to survive. They must immediately introduce a compensation scheme for high-energy users to ensure that Britain can compete with the world. They must reform energy tariffs. They must commit to favouring British steel in procurement. It is obscene that the Government can decry the impact of cheap foreign steel while turning to foreign suppliers for infrastructure projects. Projects such as HS2 should be using British steel and the skills and expertise our industry can provide.

The Government must also work productively with our European neighbours to enact anti-dumping measures to protect British steel from cheap subsidised imports. The recent steel summit was an opportunity to move from words to action and the message to the Government from MPs, the industry and the unions was clear: we need action and we need it now. That is what colleagues are repeatedly saying in this Chamber. What did we receive? Yet again, warm empty words.

The Government must have an industrial strategy that places steel at its heart, but they seemingly have no industrial strategy at all. The only conclusion it is possible to draw is that the Government do not care about steel, do not care about industry and do not care about the north. I am sad to say that it feels like we are back in the 1980s with a Tory Government who are wilfully ignorant and insensitive to the needs of industry. Once again, it is my constituents who will be left alone to pick up the pieces.

2.56 pm

**David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): Unlike the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), I do not have a direct constituency interest in the steel industry, but 25 years ago I visited the blast furnace at Port Talbot, where I was working. It is one of those memories that stays with you, seeing a blast furnace in full flight. It is clearly a tragedy that the blast furnace at Redcar will no longer operate.

I wish to focus on energy prices. We have heard about Chinese dumping, business rates and so on and, of course, Chinese dumping is a major issue. However, as far as I am aware countries such as Germany and France are not closing blast furnaces or announcing major job losses. One reason is that the steel industry in Germany and France pays 4p per unit for electricity and the steel industry in this country pays 9p per unit for electricity. What matters is how big a proportion of the costs that difference makes up. No matter how efficient the guys watching us from the Gallery are, overcoming such an impediment is impossible. Energy makes up 15% to 20% of steel input costs, so we can work out that the cost in the end is something like 5% of

[David Mowat]

the differential on the product. That is the margin that places such as SSI make on their product, and that is enough to make a difference.

We have an example of what happens when we do not pay attention to these things. Ten years ago, the aluminium industry in our country had three major primary smelters. That is now decreased by 90% and there is only one left, which is in Scotland. It is only left because it has its own hydropower and therefore has no need to deal with the electricity issues. Not only have we seen the demise of aluminium and steel, but this is true also across what we call the foundation industries, including ceramics and chemicals. Chemicals are a big industry and, unless we act on energy prices, we will be in the Chamber discussing chemical plant closures. The industries employ about 900,000 people and I make the point to those on both Front Benches that in this place we have Ministers responsible for banking, for digital, for farming and for sport, but we do not have a Minister responsible for the foundation industries. Perhaps we should.

I shall return to climate change. When I intervened on the shadow Secretary of State, she immediately closed the point down by saying that we have to be aware of climate change issues. That is true, but we cannot be aware unilaterally. No other country in the world has signed up for an 80% reduction by 2050—nobody has done it. It may be that we are right—that we are the only country in the world that will fix our 1.5% of global emissions—but the cost is the stock stuff that we are talking about now, and we all need to be aware of that. As I said in an intervention, when this issue is discussed in Parliament the Labour party and the Scottish National party always take the side of going further and faster on green stuff. Even in the Chamber this week, there were two examples of what I would describe as virtue signalling on this issue by Opposition Members, saying how green they are compared with the guys over here on the Government Benches. That is because we understand the impact of such measures, and we know that unless we act to close that energy price differential, we will be here discussing more industries in future.

3 pm

**Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I was elected to the House in a by-election in November 2000. Within a week, I became vice-chair of the all-party cast metals group, and subsequently the cast metals and steel group. Since then, I have campaigned with Members from all parties in the House and Governments of different political persuasions on the issues surrounding the steel industry. I resent some of the Secretary of State's opening remarks, which implied that there was political partisanship. I know that across all the parties of this House there has been a unified approach on issues surrounding the steel industry, and never before has that been more necessary.

I have Caparo headquartered in my constituency together with several of the constituent companies. It employs 1,700 people in the black country—800 in the immediate locality of my constituency—and manufactures a range of products from girders, barriers, portal frames and forged components to heavy rolled bar, sheet and profiles. When Caparo went into administration on Monday 19 October it did not just affect the jobs at that company; a comprehensive network of small businesses

that were dependent on Caparo looked with great trepidation to their future. It is part of a complex supply chain in the midlands and many companies and employees within those companies are affected by it. If we consider a huge range of products—computers, white goods, transport, cars, aeronautics, iPads and so on—the chances are that at least one of their components has been made by the highly specialised small producers in the black country. What is worrying is that those companies could not have anticipated the closure of Caparo, and the threat to them is even greater because they have not had the chance to diversify, as happened when MG Rover collapsed 15 or so years ago.

I commend the work of the West Midlands Economic Forum and of the Midlands Steel Taskforce, which the hon. Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) referred to. It is making recommendations to deal with this problem and I shall highlight some of those which I feel are absolutely vital. The first action needed is to set up a transition fund, as was set up under the Labour Government when Rover went, to deal with the immediate impact on the small businesses that are tied in with Caparo. I understand that one issue is that PricewaterhouseCoopers is demanding payment within 15 days; 60 days is the norm in the industry. That could potentially cause enormous cash-flow problems to a whole range of small businesses, which they need help to resolve.

The second action needed is on skills. We have almost a unique blend of manufacturing skills in the area. We will lose not only the contribution to the economy, but the contribution that those skills could make in the future. We need help to ensure that people, particularly young people, have comparable jobs to sustain their skills. We need help with specialised imports; many products cannot be imported from China. The quality of goods locally must be sustained, and there will need to be some sort of financial support in order to keep that capacity there for the future.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Before I call the next speaker, I am going to drop the time limit down to three minutes. That way, we will be sure to get everybody in.

3.4 pm

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey). I am pleased that the shadow Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills is in her place this afternoon, but I was incredibly disappointed that not once did she talk about working together on this issue, which is so important to our constituents. I will say why it is important. Corby has a rich steel history and 600 people are still employed there, working in the steel sector at the Tata plant. I know that they are all concerned by the events of recent weeks.

**Mr Bone:** It is not only, of course, my hon. Friend's constituents but the whole of north Northamptonshire. My constituents and my industries are wrapped up with the steel industry in Corby. It goes much wider than any one constituency.

**Tom Pursglove:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I know that his Wellingborough constituents are also very concerned about what they are seeing day in, day out on the television.

Historically, since my election to the House, there has been a lot of cross-party support on this issue, but no one would know that based on today's debate. Watching this from afar, one would not know that there is that cross-party support. That is very disappointing, because both sides of the House acknowledge how necessary it is to provide assistance to the steel industry at this incredibly difficult time.

It is important to thank both my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise, my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), who is in her place this afternoon, for their hard work and their interest. They should be given much credit for making themselves available to talk to Members on both sides of the House about their concerns and the issues facing their constituencies, and for not shying away from this. They have done so much more than many Ministers who have gone before them and that has made a positive and significant difference to the debate. My right hon. Friend the Business Secretary is in Brussels today, to discuss the state of the steel industry and the unfair practices that we are seeing, particularly through Chinese dumping. At those discussions, I urge him to stress the need for the protections enshrined in international rules to be deployed to the fullest possible extent.

**Mr Bone:** Can my hon. Friend answer this specific question? If the EU says no, should we go ahead and do it anyway?

**Tom Pursglove:** My hon. Friend knows that I am sympathetic to that point of view. I know that Ministers are concerned about that. For me personally, one of the easiest solutions is to get out the European Union; that would be a solution for that particular point. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may shout me down; they quite often moan about the European Union but do not say very much about how we should put things right.

Some key issues must be tackled before it is simply too late. One is the way that business rates are calculated. Rates are calculated not only on the basis of the size of the site but on new investment in machinery and equipment on the site. As I stated in the Backbench Business debate in September, the UK prides itself on innovation in business and Ministers maintain that they want Britain to be the best place in the world to start and grow a business. As local MPs, we see cutting-edge innovation week in, week out, with British business at the forefront of international innovation. I therefore find it impossible to understand why industries such as steel are penalised through the business rate system, thereby disincentivising investment and pushing up costs. It makes no sense to me, but I know that it makes even less sense to the Tata executives sat around the boardroom table in India.

On energy costs, we need to be mindful of the impact that green taxes and levies have on businesses. There is quite often a clamour to do more on the climate change agenda. I understand that people are passionate about that, but we need to be mindful of the impact that has on the costs attached to doing business.

At Prime Minister's questions, the Prime Minister alluded to the energy compensation package. Will the Minister say a little bit more about that? That compensation is very important. I entirely support efforts to implement

the full package as quickly as possible. At the steel summit she stated that there were delays at the European level. Will she identify exactly where we are at on that point as of today?

I want to mention buying British. I have asked Ministers a lot of questions about that in the past few weeks, across Government. We have a unique opportunity to try and use British steel in key infrastructure projects that are coming forward—on HS2, on fracking, on Crossrail. We should seize those opportunities—make the most of them, use British products where we can. It is incredibly important. That is another reason why I support the charter for sustainable British steel. We should see that adopted across Government, across local government and across public sector procurement more generally.

My constituents tell me week in, week out that they are sick to death of politicians bickering rather than sitting down and finding solutions to the challenges facing our great country. The debate around the future of the steel industry, as I said earlier, in large part has been carried out with good—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order.

3.10 pm

**Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): Like other hon. Members, this morning I met steelworkers from my constituency and officials from Community union. No Member who meets any constituent affected by this situation can be in any doubt about its gravity or the scale of the crisis. As speaker after speaker will say here today, this is a critical time for steel; we feel that our industry is on the edge.

Quite rightly, in the numerous debates and urgent questions we have had over the past few weeks, the focus has been on the devastating impact on Redcar, Dalzell, Clydebridge and Scunthorpe. In my constituency, we want to convey our solidarity with the steelworkers and their families, communities and trade unions in what is an unbearably difficult time. Steelworkers in my constituency are feeling it too. Nine weeks ago, Tata announced that it was mothballing the hot strip mill in Llanwern, the cold mill and one of the pickle lines, and on the remaining pickle line the tonnage would be reduced. The effect of the mothballing is that 175 contractor roles will end this week, and 100 Tata Steel employees will be redeployed to Port Talbot and other south-east Wales sites.

This is the third time that the hot strip mill has been mothballed in six years, but the crucial difference this time is that we do not know when it will open again. Llanwern is now Tata's flex plant, with the mills coming on and off line depending on market conditions, leaving local workers, especially contractors, feeling the pain. The dynamics of the market are plain to see.

The Secretary of State for Wales talked about the global challenges, but we need the Government to act where they can. The shadow Secretary of State referred to the tsunami of Chinese steel imports. For Llanwern, action on energy costs is crucial; it is particularly affected by those costs because it takes energy straight from the grid. Llanwern has also been affected by action taken in the United States in defence of its steel market. We have talked also about the action in Italy. We need to talk too about what we can do to protect our own industry in our constituencies.

[Jessica Morden]

Nearly two weeks on from the steel summit, what action have we had on energy costs and on major construction projects? Electrification will run through my constituency, and we hope that UK steel will be involved. I say to the Government: please act now; please do not wait. In debates like these, we always talk about the sacrifices that steelworkers have had to make over their terms and conditions during difficult times for their companies. They need the Government to act now, to be pro-active and to have an industrial strategy to help steel in the future.

3.13 pm

**David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden), not least because when I left school I started work at British Steel in her constituency. I have to declare an interest as a British Steel pension-holder. I would like to leave everyone with the impression that I was manfully firing a blast furnace, but I was actually a junior filing clerk.

I feel very strongly about this issue and about this industry, which employs so many people in Monmouthshire. We all now accept that there is a problem throughout the world—a huge glut in steel caused by falling demand and an increase in production from China. There are things that the Government can do, and I believe that they are taking the right steps. I am delighted with the idea of the Government's using British steel as far as possible—not bending or breaking the rules, but changing them so that we can buy our own steel, in projects such as High Speed 2 and in industries such as fracking. That will be very important.

I was glad to hear words in support of the industry from across the Floor because we all have a responsibility in this matter. It is no good blaming the Government for everything; Opposition Members have to be able to challenge themselves and some of their colleagues, who are opposed to fracking on rather spurious green grounds. They should challenge those who say that we should always support everything that the European Union does, even when it makes it difficult for us to get around some of the state-aid rules.

Most importantly—this point has been made by Back Benchers in all parts of the House—we need to do something about the energy crisis. It is no good blaming the Government for that because the whole drive to push up energy prices started with Labour Members, who became persuaded, like so many others, by this idea of global warming. I wish that I had 10 or 15 minutes to outline some of the obvious falsehoods that are propagated around that issue. Suffice it to say that manmade carbon emissions are about 30 gigatons a year out of a total of 700 gigatons that arise naturally. Carbon dioxide is in natural gas, and only about 5% of it comes from man. Of that 5%, only 2% comes from the UK—a tiny fraction of the total amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere.

There has been no warming—no increase in the temperature—of this planet for the last 16 years, despite all the CO<sub>2</sub> that has been pushed into the atmosphere. None of the scientists can explain that; they say that the pause is caused by volcanoes, they blame other kinds of gases or they say that there is a natural pause, as

Jim Skea did. The reality is that there is no global warming at the moment. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change accepts that.

Why on earth, then, are we levying all these taxes on our industries? I support the Government's coming up with a compensation scheme and freezing the carbon floor price, but I have a much better idea, which I ask Members in all parties to think about: scrap the carbon taxes. There is no point in having them if the Chinese do not have them and when we are generating only a tiny amount of CO<sub>2</sub>. Scrap the whole lot and we will not need a compensation scheme. Allow our steel industry to compete on an equal basis with everyone else. It is not the global climate that we need to worry about; it is the economic climate.

3.16 pm

**Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I begin my contribution by way of reference to the three HMS Sheffields, two of which served in conflict. The first saw service in world war two, and the second was a guided missile destroyer which was badly hit in the Falklands war. What all three Sheffields had in common, apart from their name, was the use in their construction of stainless steel fixtures and fittings made in Sheffield. It is easy to see why those ships all carried the nickname “the Shiny Sheff”.

The point of mentioning the Sheffields today is not to indulge in a nostalgic eulogy to naval ships long gone. Rather, it is to draw attention to what I think is the most powerful case for maintaining a steel capability in the UK—namely, that the integrity of our defence demands it. Sheffield steel engineering continues to play a key role in maintaining our defences. Forgemasters provides high-strength steel grades for the Royal Navy and has provided critical components for defence applications, including valves for the Astute class of nuclear submarines. It is not only Sheffield that plays a key role. We know of the potential contribution to the construction of the Trident submarines by the two steel plants under threat in Scotland. We also know that a high proportion of the steel required by BAE Systems is sourced from Tata at Scunthorpe.

We could do more. BAE Systems considers that UK steel plays an important part in its supply chain but has made it clear that UK steel providers do not manufacture the range of steels needed by the company, due to the complex demands of its manufacturing specifications. That tells us a great deal about how far the steel capability in this country has been hollowed out.

**Sarah Champion:** My hon. Friend makes superb points about specialism, but does she think that the Government recognise that this is a modern, forward-looking industry?

**Angela Smith:** It is a very modern, efficient industry, and no, I do not think that the Government recognise that at all.

On its own, the hollowing out of our steel capability utterly justifies the demand for a proper industrial strategy. The alternative is to stand idly by while one of our oldest industries withers away and dies. That would be negligent and reckless—negligent because steel making in the UK has one of the most dedicated and skilled work forces in the world, and reckless because we need a strong UK steel capability for the sake of our defence and security.

**Mr Iain Wright:** My hon. Friend talks about the defence supply chain. Could she talk about the supply chain in other manufacturing sectors, particularly aerospace, automotives and offshore wind? We discussed all that in the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, and I am concerned that the third working group on public procurement is not looking at the alignment of supply chains. What does my hon. Friend think about that?

**Angela Smith:** Indeed. Tata speciality steel is headquartered in my constituency and plays a major part in providing components for the aerospace industry. It would not exist today if it were not for the work done by the Labour Government in 2009-10, and I pay tribute to Lord Mandelson for that.

It is important to have the capability not just for the sake of our defence and security and not just because it is good for our GDP, but because we surely would not want to see our defence industry dependent for a range of its key components on steel sourced from foreign shores. That is the important point. I support the five demands laid out by UK Steel and by Community, but the Government's response has generally been warm words and frequent reference to the law of the free market. That is not good enough.

We need to place those five demands in the context of the two strategic arguments that underpin the case for Government intervention to secure the future of the industry. First, our steel industry is one of the foundations of manufacturing. It has a critical part to play in the job of rebalancing our economy. If we want the march of the makers, we need a steel capability—it is as simple as that. Secondly, we need to maintain and develop our UK steel capability in the best interests of UK defence and security. BAE Systems wants to use UK steel—make it possible for it to use more UK steel.

I hope I have managed to convey a clear sense of the second strategic argument, and I hope the Minister will be persuaded that the Government need to act sooner rather than later to deliver the stability needed for one of our oldest and most important manufacturing resources.

3.21 pm

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I speak as somebody from Middlesbrough, and at the last time of counting, 33% of the workforce at Redcar hailed from my constituency. I have no reason to believe that the figures are much different today.

We need an inquiry into the collapse of SSI. I echo the demand from my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), who has done a sterling job in her fight for her constituents. We also need an inquiry into whether the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is fit for purpose. I think it has been sadly lacking in many respects. The bottom line is that this Government could have acted in Redcar and they did not. The coke business was viable and it is an outrage that PWC was not directed to ensure that that business was sustained. That coke could have been made. There was a ready-made market for it. That would have put electricity into the national grid. It was a viable business, and people on Teesside cannot understand why the Government sat back and allowed it to fail. It is a very Conservative failure, and death by neglect—they sat back and did nothing at all. We have heard a lot of

blether today about what the Government cannot do. What we want to hear is what the Government can do and what they will get on with.

**Tom Blenkinsop:** My hon. Friend will be aware that for the sake of £17 million, the third grade required in the three grades for sellable foundry coke could have made that business viable. The often-quoted £2 million cost was actually about South Bank coke ovens, which was already designated for mothballing in April 2016. Redcar coke ovens was profitable and viable, which is why SSI tried to re-form itself as a new company, and Kirby Adams, a former CEO of Tata Europe, tried himself to set it up as a business.

**Andy McDonald:** My hon. Friend and neighbour makes a very good point. We have heard throughout that the coal in situ was not suitable for purposes other than the blast furnace. Other coal could have been brought in. Hargreaves was able and available for that and was not embraced. Any sensible Government would have grabbed that opportunity with both hands, but they did not do so.

**Anna Turley:** A lot of the conversation has been about the price of steel as the reason why SSI went under. We are talking about coke and, as my hon. Friend said, there were companies in Germany willing to buy all the foundry coke that we could make in those coke ovens. It was selling at over £500 a tonne, compared with the £100 a tonne cost for making it. That was a profitable business which could have kept the coke ovens going, it could have funded a proper mothballing of the blast furnace, and we could still have steelmaking on Teesside.

**Andy McDonald:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That would have been the basis for keeping that coke oven going and mothballing that blast furnace. It is no good the Minister coming to me after the event and telling me in hushed tones that she wishes she had mothballed the site. That will not do at all.

We hear about bringing forward compensation packages. When the Prime Minister was at the Dispatch Box today, it seemed to be a revelation to him that suddenly we were talking about bringing forward a compensation package. We have been talking about it in the Chamber for months. It is as if the scales have been removed from his eyes. The hon. Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller), who is no longer in his place, hit the point exactly when he spoke about the role of Chinese steel and the fact that it is produced at less than cost. We have now heard from the Prime Minister that he discussed it with the President of China. We want to know what action is going to flow from that discussion. There is no point just bringing it up. We want to know what is going to happen. If 94% of the steel coming to Europe is dumped on these shores, it is up to this Government to take action about it and not sit on their hands.

I went to Italy last Friday to speak to the representatives of FIO from the Ilva plant in Taranto in southern Italy. What a difference from a Government who not only identify the strategic importance of the industry, but are prepared and have the political will to do something about it. They recognise the social impact of thousands of people losing their jobs and they will do anything to stop that happening. That is what we want to see in this country. In Italy there are solidarity laws so that people are not laid off. The bankruptcy laws were

[Andy McDonald]

changed. In Teesside we saw creditors go to the wall—Hargreaves was struggling, as were personnel agencies, engineers, hairdressers and so on. In Italy, bankruptcy laws were changed so that such firms got tax relief on future businesses. That is what I call an active policy.

For the Minister to say that the Government could not embrace state aid is utter nonsense, and she knows it. Regional aid and environmental aid could have been embraced with no difficulty; that was done for carbon capture and storage at the Florange plant in France. We on Teesside are sitting on a wonderful opportunity that this Government are letting slip through their hands. We need an active industrial strategy. We need a Government who will access the European globalisation adjustment fund—they have not even made an application to it. We need a BIS Department that is scouring the world in advance, not saying, “We were caught out at the last minute”. The Minister responsible for the northern powerhouse openly admits that he had known for ages about the problems. The Department should have been getting on with it, scouring the world, making sure it had the capacity in financial and engineering terms to respond properly.

3.37 pm

**Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I ask the Government to remember that there are still two steel plants in Scotland, one of which, Dalzell, is in my constituency, near my constituency office. It predates Ravenscraig and has been involved in steelmaking since 1872. Steel has been at the heart of my constituency since then.

I reiterate those facts because my constituency seems not to have figured in the minds of the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills or the Prime Minister. On Tuesday 20 October, I had occasion to remind the Secretary of State that Tata Steel's announcement affected plants at Dalzell works and Clydebridge. On the following day at Prime Minister's questions, in a reply to the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom stated:

“I am always happy to meet him and neighbouring MPs again.”—[*Official Report*, 21 October 2015; Vol. 600, c. 956.]

On the strength of that reply, I wrote to the Prime Minister requesting a meeting. I received a reply from No. 10 yesterday declining such a meeting. My constituents deserve better from the Government.

In the past, the Prime Minister has said repeatedly that my constituents would be better together with the rest of the United Kingdom. They did not believe him on 18 September last year, when a majority of them voted yes—that Scotland should be an independent country. They certainly do not believe that we are better together now, because we clearly have an England-first and a Scotland-nowhere Parliament on non-devolved issues. The Prime Minister did not even raise the question of steel at the European Council and the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills does not remember where Scottish plants are. He refused to give leave to Fergus Ewing, the Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism in the Scottish Government, to take part in the talks on steel making that are taking place today.

The Secretary of State for Scotland has personally assured me that he will press his ministerial colleagues to ensure that the energy costs rebate will be expedited as soon as they are agreed by Europe. I wish him well in his endeavours, although he might first have to explain to them where Scotland is. I am a member of the Scottish taskforce set up by the First Minister immediately after the Tata announcement. She has said that she will leave no stone unturned to secure a future for Scottish steel—oh for the same commitment from the Tory Government in respect of the UK. They seem to see roadblocks to action everywhere.

Since the Tata announcement on the sale of the long products division, the Scottish Government and Scottish Enterprise have been in constant contact with the company—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. I call Anna Turley.

3.30 pm

**Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): It feels tragic to speak in this debate on the future of the steel industry because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) said in her introductory comments, our steel industry has gone—175 years of proud history and heritage that built the world, from bridges to stadiums to buildings of great note, has gone. That future is no more. That is the tragedy of which all hon. Members are aware.

The human tragedy remains. We have 3,000 people out of work and expect another 3,000 in the supply chain to go. I want to bring attention to that so that, first, it can be prevented from happening in any other constituency. I want to talk about the scale of what we are trying to deal with, the implications and the outstanding issues, and about the despair, anger and chaos that reigns in Redcar and Teesside.

As I have said, the coke ovens and the blast furnace are gone. John, who works there at the moment—he is one of the skeleton staff who are there to try to wind it down—tells me that the coke ovens are cooling rapidly, and that the brickwork is warping beyond good use ever again. He tells me that steel and coke making are at an end for ever.

**Andy McDonald:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is an absolutely criminal act of industrial vandalism to let those coke ovens collapse when that was entirely and utterly avoidable?

**Anna Turley:** I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. The blast furnace and the coke ovens are national assets. They are part of British industry and manufacturing, and they are strategically important to our economy. They could and should have been preserved.

I want to talk briefly about two outstanding issues that are causing a great deal of concern in my constituency. The first is the training that has not arrived. We were promised £80 million, but it turns out to be £50 million when we take out redundancy and the statutory entitlement that the workforce should have had. That training is not coming through. We were told that a local taskforce would have control—I was pleased to be invited to sit on it—but the reality is that decisions are being made by

officials. I understand that we are waiting for a decision from the Secretary of State to clear that money and send it.

**Sir William Cash:** The hon. Lady will know that the German Government provided subsidies for the training of employees, including steelworkers, to the value of €5.7 billion in 2013.

**Anna Turley:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We should look at how the Germans support and respect industry and manufacturing.

**Sir William Cash:** They were allowed to do that by the EU.

**Anna Turley:** Absolutely. If they do it, why can't we? I totally agree with the hon. Gentleman. We should also look at how the Germans support industry throughout their education system. He makes an important point.

The training is not coming through and plenty of people are coming to me—I have a huge postbag from people who are not accessing the training and support that they need. For example, Tom, an apprentice who came to my surgery at the weekend, has been an apprentice at SSI for three years and four months. He wants to continue and finish his apprenticeship and has worked very hard on it. He was told by a Department for Work and Pensions official that he should get a job in a bar or in retail.

**Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab):** I am being contacted by young people in my constituency who are finishing their apprenticeships, and who are concerned about accepting job offers from Tata Steel. Other young people are asking me for reassurance about starting apprenticeships in engineering and manufacturing, because they see no commitment from the Government to industry in this country. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is deeply concerning at a time when we have a national shortage of engineering and manufacturing skills?

**Anna Turley:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the great tragedies of this situation is the fact that 50 apprentices were due to start on the day that SSI paused production. Steel is a viable industry with a bright future, so engineering is exactly the sort of field we should be encouraging our young people into. The Government should be giving them confidence that they have an industrial manufacturing policy that will support their future.

An hon. Friend drew attention earlier to Lord Heseltine's recent comment that now is a good time to lose one's job. That was a grave insult to my constituents and all those who have lost their jobs in steelmaking, but I think that another comment he made was more profound. He said that we should not be supporting yesterday's industries. That drove to my heart exactly how people on the Conservative Benches view the steel industry: yesterday's industry. I totally disagree. It is an industry with a bright future. It should be a foundation industry for so many of the highly skilled manufacturing jobs that we want to create. Frankly, I wish we could give more reassurance to the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman).

I want to mention a couple of people who have contacted me about the trouble they have had with their training. Karl told me that he could not access heavy goods vehicle training because he was told that it is not currently a barrier to him getting work. I do not understand that. Dane, who is an electrical engineer, told me that he could have a course funded only if he had a job offer to go with it. There are a raft of problems that I am deeply concerned about. I was ever more concerned to hear that Subway was represented at the jobs fair that was organised a couple of weeks ago. I think that it is deeply inappropriate for highly trained, highly skilled steelworkers to be offered jobs making sandwiches at Subway. I hope the Minister agrees that is not the future we want for the industry.

3.36 pm

**Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC):** The steel industry is a vital component in the Welsh economy, not only providing thousands of people with employment, but contributing heavily to Wales's GDP and export base. The activities of Tata Steel alone reportedly support 18,000 jobs in Wales, and its operations are worth £3.2 billion annually to the Welsh economy.

However, the steel industry in Wales is under significant pressure. In the second quarter of this year alone, the value of Wales's exports of iron and steel were down by almost £120 million. Thousands of tonnes of cheap steel is being imported every week from Turkey, Russia and China, flooding the UK market and undercutting Welsh-produced steel.

Protecting the steel industry from the volatility of the markets should be a priority for the UK Government, and it should be pursued with the same vigour as we saw when the banks were bailed out in 2008. It is vital that both the UK and Welsh Governments strengthen internal supply chains and procurement practices to ensure that demand for domestic steel is maintained, and Plaid Cymru's policy of increasing infrastructure expenditure by 1% of GDP is one obvious way to increase demand.

Tata Steel has previously cited the high cost of business rates and high energy costs as causes of recent redundancies. Why do the UK Government not establish an emergency business rates relief scheme targeted specifically at the steel industry? Given that business rates in Wales are the responsibility of the Welsh Government, such a scheme at UK level would trigger consequential funding for Wales, which could be used by the Welsh Government to create their own scheme to protect this key sector in our country. Creating such a scheme would be more affordable than the reduction in tax receipts and the increase in out-of-work benefits to which the decline of the industry will ultimately lead. Also, as Aditya Chakraborty writes in *The Guardian* today, why not access the European Commission's globalisation adjustment fund?

Another key difficulty that British steelmakers face is the extraordinarily high cost of energy across the UK. The UK is one of the most expensive places in Europe for energy. Despite Wales being a net exporter of electricity, energy is even more expensive there than in other parts of the UK. Is it not time that the UK Government broke the monopoly of the big six and followed the example of Sweden and France by creating state-owned

[Jonathan Edwards]

energy companies? Many of my constituents will be receiving energy bills from EDF, an energy company almost entirely owned by the French state. The money they pay to EDF effectively subsidises energy bills for French consumers. Similarly, profits made by Vattenfall in its UK operations effectively assist the Swedish Treasury in funding upgrades to Sweden's energy infrastructure, and the same can be said for Statkraft and Norway.

Cutting the cost of energy would have a significant bearing on the future of the steel industry, but we need to do so sustainably, without threatening the future energy security by killing off the renewables industry. Is it not time to take profits out of the equation? Is it not time for the UK Government to adopt Plaid Cymru's policy and establish an arm's length, state-owned and not-for-dividend-profit energy company to serve the needs of industry and citizens?

3.39 pm

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I am bemused when I compare the Government's amendment with the main motion, because I cannot see what they have to object to. The amendment leaves out the motion's reference to the "national strategic importance" of the steel industry. I think it is nationally strategically important. The motion refers to having an industrial strategy. I think we should have an industrial strategy, and many Conservative Members have said so too. It refers to "looking at temporary action on business rates".

As my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), pointed out, discussions are ongoing with North Lincolnshire Council, BIS and Tata on that very issue. I really do not understand why the Government feel they need to amend this very effective motion seeking the five industrial asks, and I hope the Minister will explain why.

I want to give a voice to my constituents, to whom I pay the utmost tribute for the way in which they are handling themselves in these difficult circumstances following the announcements last week. Kevin Allen, who voted Conservative at the recent local and national elections, wrote to me to say:

"I'm a 4th generation steel worker and I'm in fear of my livelihood, if I lose my job then I've lost everything, I support two house holds in this town two families so not only have I lost everything so has the other party, that will be 5 people seeking government hand outs, I won't be the only one in this position, for every steel job this town loses there will be a huge knock on effect with others".

That is the heartfelt reality in my community.

I had an email from a homeowner in Bottesford who says,

"my husband and I have worked on the steelworks for 36 and 31 years respectively and we are passionate about our jobs and the industry that we are proud to be part of. It hasn't been easy and we have faced many issues but have fought to survive over the years often working long unpaid hours. The severe situation that we now face feels very different to all others".

She continues:

"From a strategic point of view we cannot afford to lose our steel industry, we will be totally at the mercy of other countries with little bargaining power."

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): A couple of weeks ago I met community officials in Stockton who talked about Ravenscraig in central Scotland, saying that the community there has not yet recovered. That fear must be shared in my hon. Friend's communities, as well as in others across Teesside.

**Nic Dakin**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why it is great to see steelworkers here lobbying Parliament today. It is great to see steelworkers and their families in Scunthorpe high street gathering signatures for petitions and people queuing up to sign them. This is crucial to our community.

It is clear what needs to be done. The five industrial asks that were considered at the steel summit are the five industrial asks that the Government now need to deliver on. They need to act before it is too late.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle)**: Order. I am dropping the time limit to two minutes. I call Stephen Doughty.

3.42 pm

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for fitting me in to speak for a very brief time.

I want to pay tribute to the Celsa Steel workforce in my constituency, to many members of the community, and to all the steelworkers who have come up here today to meet us to emphasise what a crisis this is and what needs to be done. I have never before seen an issue on which there has been such unanimity about what the Government need to do among MPs in all parts of the House, among the unions and the management of the steel industry across the UK, and across the supply chain and all those involved in the industry.

I am not going to rehearse the arguments because I do not have time, but we have been making them for a very long time. I want to get from the Minister a real understanding of why it has taken so long to get to this point. I do not want to cast any aspersions on the work that she and the Secretary of State for Wales, who is also here, have done. They have both listened carefully and acknowledged the concerns expressed, and I hope they are really serious about wanting to take action.

However, I and many others have been meeting on these issues for well over two years. I met the Secretary of State for Wales and the former steel Minister, the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock), on 11 November last year, and I was meeting BIS and DECC officials two years before that. We, and the industry, have consistently raised the concerns about dumping, energy costs, the impact of taxation, and the slowness in bringing forth the energy-intensive industries compensation package, yet only in very recent days have we seen substantive action. That reflects two basic things about this Government: first, the lack of an industrial strategy, and of political leadership, across Government; and, secondly and more fundamentally, their attitude towards Europe, on which I disagree with the hon. Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove). We cannot deal with dumping by countries such as China unless we are working together across the European Union.

I want to understand why this has taken so long. The Minister took action, but why was that? Why is this such a revelation at this stage? This should have been going on for years. That is the fundamental point that I want to make.

3.44 pm

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): My heart goes out to steelworkers, and their families, who are at risk of losing their jobs at Tata Steel, both north and south of the border, as well as to those whose associated jobs are also at risk. This is a huge blow to Lanarkshire, and we now learn that as well as the threat to steel jobs in Dalzell and Clydebridge, North Lanarkshire Council is consulting on shedding up to 1,100 jobs thanks to public sector cuts from this UK Government. This is a very worrying time in my area.

Yesterday, Fergus Ewing MSP, Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism, delivered a statement to the Scottish Parliament about the crisis, so let me contrast the approach taken by the two Governments so far. The Scottish Government took the first opportunity after the recess to go to the Chamber and make a statement; the UK Government had to be dragged to the Chamber by an urgent question and now an Opposition day debate.

In his statement Mr Ewing said:

“let me be clear from the outset that we will leave no stone unturned in our efforts to save the steel industry in Scotland. Our top priority is to secure an alternative operator to continue with commercial production. We are aware that that task is not an easy one and that there are significant challenges facing the continued production of steel in Scotland, but we are determined, as a Government, to use all our resources and, as ministers, to devote our individual time and attention, as required, to do absolutely everything that we can do to prevent the loss of steel making in Scotland.”

The Scottish Government had asked to be part of EU talks on the steel crisis, but this Government refused as they continue to abandon their so-called and short-lived respect agenda—an agenda that has been further abandoned by the revelation that the Prime Minister shamefully refused to meet my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows). I sincerely hope that a buyer can be found for the Tata sites, and that the steel industry can continue. For that to happen, the Scottish Government must work through the taskforce—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order.

3.46 pm

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): Although Northern Ireland does not have a steel industry, we have seen the impact that the loss of major industries has on communities. Two issues should concern all Members present in the debate. The first is our relationship with the EU. All suggestions that have been put forward—compensation for electricity prices, procurement or preference given to British steel, or even a reduction in business rates—must be cleared by Europe. Time and again our involvement with the European Union has been detrimental to our industry.

Secondly, energy costs have impacted on the steel industry and will impact on all major manufacturing employers across the United Kingdom. We have been warned that as a result of green taxes that we will impose between now and 2020, electricity prices will escalate. That is a deliberate policy. The carbon price

floor will take £23 billion from the pockets of electricity consumers, and on top of that we have feed-in tariffs, contracts for difference, and renewables obligations—all that is imposed on our major manufacturing industries.

There is a schizophrenic attitude in the House to energy prices. We complain when we lose jobs, yet we ask for the introduction of more green policies. If we do not have a consistent policy, many more jobs will be lost in future.

3.48 pm

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak up once again on behalf of my constituents at Clydebridge as they are facing an uncertain future. I know how they must be feeling right now. All too often politicians are accused of having no real-life experience, but I know only too well how it feels to be made redundant. The wait that steelworkers at Tata Steel are currently going through to find out whether they will still have a job in a few weeks is agonising. There is never a good time to lose a job, but job losses would be utterly devastating for those workers.

The Scottish steel taskforce meets tomorrow for the first time. I will be there, and I hope that the pragmatic approach taken will help to find a buyer who can continue commercial production at those sites.

**Angela Smith:** Will the taskforce consider the importance of the construction of Trident submarines to keeping steel jobs in Scotland?

**Margaret Ferrier:** No.

The force involves multiple stakeholders of various political persuasions, as well as those of none.

**Marion Fellows:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the trade unions, especially Community, have been fundamental in keeping the two Scottish plants going this far, and that this has been recognised by the Scottish Government, unlike by the Conservative party, which seeks—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. That intervention is far too long. We want short interventions. We should be on to the vote by now. We have been very generous and it has been abused.

**Margaret Ferrier:** I thank my hon. Friend for intervening.

I welcome yesterday's announcement from Scottish business Minister, Fergus Ewing, that Transport Scotland is reviewing all its infrastructure projects, looking at how public procurement might be utilised to help to stimulate the industry.

Steel is used to create more than 80% of the components required to build a typical wind turbine, and plate steel from Tata's Scunthorpe and Dalzell mills is used in the fabrication of these renewables. UK Government policy on the removal of support for renewables will have an adverse impact along the supply chain, particularly on the steel industry. Plans to cut support for renewables need to be dropped now. The UK has the highest carbon tax in the world. More than half the UK power price is made up of this tax. Steel needs to be given the recognition it deserves in helping to grow the renewables sector, thus reducing carbon emissions in the long term.

[Margaret Ferrier]

I welcome today's announcement that the Government will refund energy intensive industries for the full amount of the policy costs they face as soon as the state aid judgment comes from Brussels. The Chancellor, however, must take lessons from our European neighbours who have taken matters into their own hands to support their industries, and then obtained state aid clearance retrospectively. A bold move like that could almost certainly facilitate the process of finding a buyer for the sites in Scotland.

Chinese overproduction is leading to steel being sold below market price, and this is being achieved only through Government subsidy in China. Approximately 70% of the Chinese steel industry is thought to be unprofitable. If this were the UK, the industry would have collapsed by now. In short, the European steel market is fighting with one hand tied behind its back. We have both hands bound and the playing field urgently needs to be levelled.

We need a real long-term strategy for steel. We owe it to the thousands of steelworkers across the UK and their families to support them and ensure a sustainability and security of employment. I will work with anyone to help to secure a future for the industry and the jobs of steelworkers in my constituency and right across the UK.

Saving British steel will not be easy, but we must now rise to the challenge and explore every possible option, so we can reach what should be a shared aim for all in this place. We must never give up on the steel industry and the highly skilled workers in their hour of need.

3.52 pm

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): We have had a very good and, understandably under the circumstances, passionate debate. I am sorry that because the wind-ups have been truncated—the Minister and I have, I think, eight minutes each—we will not be able to refer to everybody who spoke in the debate. I think 21 Back Benchers participated in the debate. It is good that they were all able to speak and they did so with great passion. I would like to mention my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden), who represents the Llanwern area. That was where my father worked for 20 years and where I was privileged to work in the steel plant and coke ovens for six months before I went up to university. People who come from steelmaking backgrounds understand why everyone feels so passionate about this subject. I am sorry I cannot mention everybody's contributions, but I commend the knowledge and passion the hon. Members who represent steelmaking constituencies brought to our proceedings, not just today but throughout the current crisis and long before that.

The Government cannot say that they were not warned about the crisis in the steel industry. MPs have been assiduously vocal over a long period of time. I see that the hon. Member for Stockton South (James Wharton), the so-called Minister for the northern powerhouse, has joined us. If he missed any of today's proceedings he can read about them in *The Northern Echo* tomorrow. The efforts of my hon. Friends have been the very opposite of the showboating they were accused of. On the contrary, they have stood up for their communities, the British steel industry and its workers. They have made a substantial contribution towards forcing the

Government to acknowledge that action is required, however late and inadequate it might be. It is good that the Business Secretary is finally talking to the European Commission, and it is good that he has gone to Brussels. Only last week, we found out in a parliamentary question from my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) that he had not—incredibly—until now spoken to the Commission about this. Clearly, he booked his Eurostar tickets very quickly to get over there today, and we welcome that.

It is perfectly reasonable, however, to ask why it has taken so long. Why has the Business Secretary been chasing rather than leading events? We know that when he became Business Secretary he did not want to have an industrial strategy and preferred to talk about an “industrial approach”. That hardly smacks of someone who will intervene before breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner, let alone supper, on behalf of British industry. There are echoes today of the famous row between Margaret Thatcher and Michael Heseltine over Westland.

**Sir William Cash** *rose*—

**Kevin Brennan:** I am not going to give way, because of time.

We found out today that the Government are ordering hundreds of military vehicles and three new ships for our armed forces to be built using steel imported from Sweden. And this at the same time as Gareth Stace, of UK Steel, said that the British steel industry was “likely to die” without stronger support from the Government. He said that yesterday to the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee. We should not be surprised that the Business Secretary has until now pursued what Tata called in its briefing for this debate a *laissez-faire* ideology, because he has made it clear that that is what he believes in. You might not have read it, Mr Deputy Speaker, but his favourite book is “*The Fountainhead*”, by Ayn Rand, in which the hero blows up a poor housing estate because he does not like the design, such is his individualist approach.

**The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry):** Shameful.

**Kevin Brennan:** The Minister may say that, but my argument is that the basic cause of the Government's slowness to respond to the steel crisis is that the Secretary of State fundamentally believes that it is not the business of Government to get involved in markets and industry. So while he is having to be seen to be doing something by going to Brussels today, he is actually in practice—*[Interruption.]* Government Members can chunter away as usual all they like, but in practice he has been busy planning the dismantling of his Department's capacity to support steel and other key strategic British industries. He has volunteered to cut his Department's budget by 40%, and this week we read in the *Financial Times* how investment grants to key British sectors are being converted to loans. It turns out that the much-vaunted apprenticeship levy will become a displacement tax on business and will not compensate for their cuts to the training budget.

This approach has to stop, and it has to be replaced with a proper industrial strategy based on the consensus built up under the last Labour Government and, in fact, the last coalition Government, but which the Business Secretary does not believe in. We need a much clearer

steer from the Government that they are prepared not only to say that steel is a key strategic industry, but to act to ensure it remains a key strategic industry. I again ask Ministers what they think is the minimum capacity for steelmaking in the UK below which it is not in the country's strategic interests to go? The Minister told the Select Committee:

"I have an absolute determination to keep steel in this country".

In her winding-up speech, will she make it absolutely clear what she means by minimum capacity for this strategic industry? What efforts are Ministers making to calculate the cost of cleaning up sites such as Redcar when they close? In a written parliamentary answer to me last week, she could not say. How can the Government decide whether closure is the right choice when they cannot even estimate the cost of cleaning up the site?

At last week's urgent question, I urged the Business Secretary to implement the five points raised by UK Steel at the steel summit the previous week. At that time, he could not confirm that he would. Will the Minister now confirm, albeit belatedly, that the Government will do that, and will she fully implement the energy intensive industry compensation package now, not later?

Will the Government finally press hard at the EU level on anti-dumping measures? Will the Minister even admit that dumping is going on? Will she let that phrase cross her lips in her response? Will they remove plant and machinery from business rate calculations and stop gold-plating EU regulations? Will they support the use of British steel in major projects, unlike what we hear today with the staggering news about Swedish steel being used by the Ministry of Defence? Will they listen to calls from the trade unions, including Community, for a long-term strategy rather than a hand-to-mouth approach? What are the Government going to do to support skills retention and short-time working during the current crisis, if that is needed?

This has been the first major industrial test for the Business Secretary in particular and for the Conservative Government in general since the general election. As I have argued, their initial response was to revert to type and do as little as possible. They were prepared, it seemed, to let a key strategic industry die without a fight. Because of the chorus of voices from local MPs, from us as Her Majesty's loyal Opposition, from the workforce, from employers and from the public, they have had to move, albeit far too slowly and too late for thousands who have lost their jobs. The steel industry is a classic example of a case where the Government need to be prepared to roll up their sleeves immediately and intervene before breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner. This Government have been slow to act. The steelworkers whose jobs have been lost know it, the British public know it and, deep down inside, Ministers know it too—it will not be forgotten.

4.1 pm

**The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry):** May I begin by paying tribute to all those who work in our steel industry, particularly the workforce and indeed the management? I pay particular tribute to all those—it is mainly men, but some women also work there—who have unfortunately lost their jobs, and to their families, be they at Dalzell, Clydebridge, Scunthorpe, Rotherham, Llanwern or Redcar.

Nobody should ever dare to suggest that anybody on the Government Benches has taken any pleasure, happiness or anything else in the unfortunate demise we have seen over recent times of a large part of our steel industry. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) is sitting there, but he made one of the most disappointing speeches I have ever heard. He does no service whatsoever to his industry and the workers he says he seeks to support, who have come all this way to be here today. In the short time I have been in my position it has been a pleasure to attend a number of debates and even urgent questions to listen to the impassioned speeches of so many Members who speak on behalf of their constituents, and rightly so. That is their job and they do it. But, seriously and genuinely, to try to score cheap political and, in many respects, highly personal points does absolutely nothing at all. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) shouts at me, but he should know better. He knows how hard I, and others, worked to secure the future of the Redcar plant, but let us get to the facts.

The facts are as follows: the price of steel has in some instances, slab in particular, almost halved. That is the harsh reality. On the Redcar plant, it is a fact that all the time SSI was there—more than three and a half years—it lost hundreds of millions of pounds. You can have my word, Mr Deputy Speaker, that if anybody had come forward to buy the blast furnace to secure it or the coke ovens, the official receiver would have taken those offers exceedingly seriously. But the horrible truth is that no such buyers came forward, and why would they?

**Sir William Cash:** Will the Minister give way?

**Anna Soubry:** I am sorry, but I am not taking interventions. They would not, because the plant was losing hundreds of millions of pounds—even the coke ovens, which we fought so hard to secure, were losing £2 million a month. That was the harsh, awful reality.

All the steel industry asks for—and it is right to make these requests—is that we have a level playing field. It feels that its hands are tied behind its back. It makes its case, and I pay tribute to Gareth Stace, one of the first people—

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Anna Soubry:** No, I am not giving way. He was one of the first people that I met after my appointment, because I knew how much he knew about the British steel industry. It wants a level playing field, and it is right to do so. That is what this Government are doing.

Let me make it absolutely clear—

**Andy McDonald:** Will the Minister give way?

**Anna Soubry:** No.

**Andy McDonald:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. We hear from the Minister that no people were coming forward to discuss projects to take over at SSI. She needs to correct that position, because there were consortiums of—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. That is not a point of order, but a point of debate. I understand that emotions are running very high.

**Anna Soubry:** As I said, nobody came forward with an offer, and the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) knows that I held a meeting with someone who had said they were interested, but the harsh awful reality was that nobody came forward with an offer.

**Andy McDonald** *rose*—

**Anna Soubry:** No, I will not take any more interventions from the hon. Gentleman. I will talk to him as I always do but I do not have time for interventions.

Let me explain the actions that the Government have taken. On energy costs, we have already paid out £50 million in compensation to the steel industry. In relation to the “unfair trade”, as we put it—in simple and sharp terms “dumping”—one of the first things we did when we were elected was to take a decision and cast our vote to protect our steel industry. That had never happened before, and it was done specifically on the direction of myself and the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills. Then we turn to Rebar—the investigation was started on behalf of this Government and on behalf of the steel industry after it came to us and presented us with the evidence.

Now let us look at procurement. Opposition Members, and indeed Government Members—I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove) who fights as hard as he always does for his steel workforce—quite properly talk about a difficulty over procurement. Again, let us look at the evidence. The evidence is absolutely clear. We have already changed the rules for the benefit, not just of the British steel industry but for the whole of British industry, because we put into the score card of the public sector the fact that social and environmental considerations could be taken into account. That was the first time that had happened, so I am not taking any lessons from Labour Members, who had an opportunity to do that for 13 years and failed to do so. That is the sort of direct action that we have taken. We are taking this further. We have three working groups, one of which is looking specifically at how we can extend those rules further—and not just in the public sector.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Anna Soubry:** The hon. Members for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) and for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) can come to see me any time. The hon. Member for Hartlepool made a really good point about the supply chains. Yes, we can chase public procurement, but we have to make sure it goes through the supply chain, which is absolutely the sort of work that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr Letwin) is doing—looking at how best to take those new rules all the way through the supply chain.

The Government will take further actions. We have advanced the talks with the Commission for millions more in compensation. That is why the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills is not here today; he is over in Brussels doing a brilliant job. We have already spoken to the most important Ministers about how to change things and how to secure and work with our allies in Europe to make sure that we look at the state-aid rules and how we can do more on dumping to protect our steel industry.

If we look at the Crossrail contract, we find that 97% of all the materials have been placed with British companies using British materials. We know that 40,000 tonnes of steel for HMS Queen Elizabeth was made by Tata, while 95% of Network Rail’s steel is British steel. It has embarked, under this Government, on the biggest programme of railway investment that has been seen since Victorian times. If only it were as simple as—

**Mr Alan Campbell** (Tynemouth) (Lab): *claimed to move the closure* (Standing Order No.36).

*Question put forthwith*, That the Question be now put.

*Question agreed to.*

*Main Question put accordingly* (Standing Order No. 31(2)), That the original words stand part of the Question.

*The House divided:* Ayes 280, Noes 307.

**Division No. 100]**

**[4.9 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane	Cooper, Julie
Abrahams, Debbie	Cooper, rh Yvette
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Corbyn, Jeremy
Alexander, Heidi	Coyle, Neil
Ali, Rushanara	Crausby, Mr David
Allen, Mr Graham	Crawley, Angela
Anderson, Mr David	Creagh, Mary
Arkless, Richard	Creasy, Stella
Ashworth, Jonathan	Cruddas, Jon
Austin, Ian	Cryer, John
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Cummins, Judith
Bardell, Hannah	Cunningham, Alex
Barron, rh Kevin	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Beckett, rh Margaret	Dakin, Nic
Benn, rh Hilary	David, Wayne
Betts, Mr Clive	Davies, Geraint
Black, Mhairi	Day, Martyn
Blackford, Ian	De Piero, Gloria
Blackman, Kirsty	Docherty, Martin John
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Blenkinsop, Tom	Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Blomfield, Paul	Doughty, Stephen
Boswell, Philip	Dowd, Jim
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Dowd, Peter
Brake, rh Tom	Dromey, Jack
Brennan, Kevin	Dugher, Michael
Brock, Deidre	Durkan, Mark
Brown, Alan	Eagle, Ms Angela
Brown, Lyn	Eagle, Maria
Bryant, Chris	Edwards, Jonathan
Buck, Ms Karen	Elliott, Julie
Burden, Richard	Ellman, Mrs Louise
Burgon, Richard	Esterson, Bill
Burnham, rh Andy	Evans, Chris
Butler, Dawn	Farrelly, Paul
Byrne, rh Liam	Fellows, Marion
Cadbury, Ruth	Ferrier, Margaret
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Field, rh Frank
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Flelo, Robert
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Fletcher, Colleen
Champion, Sarah	Flint, rh Caroline
Chapman, Douglas	Flynn, Paul
Cherry, Joanna	Fovargue, Yvonne
Clwyd, rh Ann	Foxcroft, Vicky
Coaker, Vernon	Gapes, Mike
Coffey, Ann	Gardiner, Barry

Gethins, Stephen  
 Glass, Pat  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Godsiff, Mr Roger  
 Goodman, Helen  
 Grady, Patrick  
 Grant, Peter  
 Gray, Neil  
 Green, Kate  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanson, rh Mr David  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harpham, Harry  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayman, Sue  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Mr Mark  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Hermon, Lady  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hoey, Kate  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Hosie, Stewart  
 Howarth, rh Mr George  
 Hunt, Tristram  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Irranca-Davies, Huw  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, rh Alan  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Graham  
 Jones, Helen  
 Jones, Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Kerevan, George  
 Kerr, Calum  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lamb, rh Norman  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Chris  
 Leslie, Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lewis, Mr Ivan  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan  
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Mann, John  
 Marris, Rob  
 Marsden, Mr Gordon

Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCaig, Callum  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, John  
 McGarry, Natalie  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McLaughlin, Anne  
 Meale, Sir Alan  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Monaghan, Dr Paul  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morris, Grahame M.  
 Mulholland, Greg  
 Mullin, Roger  
 Murray, Ian  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Nicolson, John  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Oswald, Kirsten  
 Owen, Albert  
 Paterson, Steven  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Pugh, John  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Jamie  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Marie  
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret  
 Robertson, rh Angus  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Rotheram, Steve  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Salmond, rh Alex  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Simpson, David  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
 Smith, Angela

Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Starmer, Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
 Tami, Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Mr Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thompson, Owen  
 Thomson, Michelle  
 Thornberry, Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Umunna, Mr Chuka

Vaz, rh Keith  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Watson, Mr Tom  
 Weir, Mike  
 West, Catherine  
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Mr Mark  
 Wilson, Corri  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Wilson, Sammy  
 Winnick, Mr David  
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Woodcock, John  
 Wright, Mr Iain  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Holly Lynch and**  
**Jeff Smith**

#### NOES

Adams, Nigel  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Barwell, Gavin  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Mr Henry  
 Benyon, Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Berry, James  
 Bingham, Andrew  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blackwood, Nicola  
 Boles, Nick  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Borwick, Victoria  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bradley, Karen  
 Brady, Mr Graham  
 Brazier, Mr Julian  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burns, rh Sir Simon  
 Burrows, Mr David  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, Alun  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Chope, Mr Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Colville, Oliver  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, Byron  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Dorries, Nadine  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, Mr Philip  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellison, Jane  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Graham  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh Mr David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Michael  
 Fernandes, Suella  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Frazer, Lucy

Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Marcus  
 Gale, Sir Roger  
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Gauke, Mr David  
 Ghani, Nusrat  
 Gibb, Mr Nick  
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl  
 Glen, John  
 Goodwill, Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, Mr James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gummer, Ben  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matthew  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Simon  
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Heald, Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Mr Adam  
 Hopkins, Kris  
 Howarth, Sir Gerald  
 Howell, John  
 Howlett, Ben  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Hurd, Mr Nick  
 Jackson, Mr Stewart  
 James, Margot  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, Boris  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kennedy, Seema

Kinahan, Danny  
 Kirby, Simon  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lancaster, Mark  
 Latham, Pauline  
 Leadsom, Andrea  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leigh, Sir Edward  
 Leslie, Charlotte  
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver  
 Lewis, Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Lumley, Karen  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackintosh, David  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Mr Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Mathias, Dr Tania  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Mordaunt, Penny  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mowat, David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, Claire  
 Phillips, Stephen  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, Christopher  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria

Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, Mr Dominic  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Sandbach, Antoinette  
 Scully, Paul  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Stride, Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond

Swire, rh Mr Hugo  
 Syms, Mr Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Turner, Mr Andrew  
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watkinson, Dame Angela  
 Wharton, James  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Heather  
 White, Chris  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggins, Bill  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Guy Opperman and**  
**Jackie Doyle-Price**

*Question accordingly negated.*

*The Deputy Speaker declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to (Standing Order No. 31(2)).*

*Resolved,*

That this House is concerned by the impact that recent redundancies in the steel sector could have on local communities and welcomes Government support for affected people in those communities; recognises the unprecedented global challenges currently facing the UK steel industry and agrees that all parties, including Government, opposition parties and the industry need to work together to secure a sustainable future for UK steel; and notes that the Government is in regular dialogue with the industry, including hosting a recent Steel Summit, and is taking urgent action to address both the industry's short-term and long-term concerns, including energy costs, unfair trade, the Industrial Emissions Directive and long-term procurement opportunities for the industry so as to ensure that the UK steel industry has a sustainable future.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** I now have to announce the result of a deferred Division on the question relating to Joint Committee on Human Rights. The Ayes were 485 and the Noes were 61, so the question was agreed to.

*[The Division list is published at the end of today's debates.]*

## Junior Doctors' Contracts

4.21 pm

**Heidi Alexander** (Lewisham East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes the stalled discussions between Government and the British Medical Association (BMA) about a new junior doctors' contract; opposes the removal of financial penalties from hospitals which protect staff from working excessive hours; urges the Government to guarantee that no junior doctor will have their pay cut as a result of a new contract; and calls upon the Government to withdraw the threat of contract imposition, put forward proposals which are safe for patients and fair for junior doctors and return to negotiations with the BMA.

It is a privilege to be opening a debate from the Opposition Dispatch Box for the first time, and I want to start in a way that is perhaps untypical for these debates. I want the Secretary of State and me to agree on something. I want him to join me in saying thank you to everyone who works in the NHS and in the care system in our country—not just the junior doctors who are the subject of today's debate but all the staff who work day in, day out caring for our loved ones as though they were their own. So, to our doctors, nurses, porters, care workers and paramedics I say this: I know how hard you work; I know that many of you already work nights, weekends and even Christmas day, and for that we are hugely grateful.

I have called this debate today because I am deeply worried about the current stand-off between the Government and junior doctors. I am worried that a new Government-imposed employment contract will be unsafe for patients and unfair for doctors. I am worried that if the Health Secretary gets his way, he will fast become the best recruiting sergeant that the Australian health service has ever had.

**Mark Spencer** (Sherwood) (Con): Does the hon. Lady therefore agree that the best course of action would be to get round the negotiating table again? Will she encourage the British Medical Association to come back to the negotiating table?

**Heidi Alexander:** If the hon. Gentleman reads the motion, he will see that it talks about a return to the negotiating table, but the BMA and the junior doctors need to know that the Health Secretary is genuinely willing to compromise, and his performance over the past few months suggests otherwise.

**Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): My constituency has one of the highest proportions of doctors of any in the country. My junior doctors are worried that they are being asked to work in conditions that are becoming unsafe. They also point out that they have choices, and many do not think that their future lies in this country. They will make a different choice because the damage has already been done.

**Heidi Alexander:** My right hon. Friend is completely right, and I will come to some of those challenges later in my speech.

When the NHS is facing unprecedented challenges, it cannot be right to pick a fight with the very people who keep our hospitals running. I come here today to ask the Secretary of State to do three things: to show that

he is willing to compromise by withdrawing the threat of contract imposition; to guarantee that no junior doctor will be paid less to do the same, or more, than they are currently doing; and to ensure financial penalties for any hospital that forces doctors to work excessive and exhausting hours.

**Sir Roger Gale** (North Thanet) (Con): On that basis, given that the Secretary of State has indicated in terms that no junior doctor will be required to work more hours—rather, it is fewer hours—than at present and that they will not lose money, can the hon. Lady give me any reason why the doctors' leader was able to say to me earlier in the week that he would not get round the negotiating table and talk?

**Heidi Alexander:** I am afraid that the Health Secretary has given absolutely no guarantee that no junior doctor will be paid less.

I have set out the three things that I wish the Secretary of State to do today. Anyone listening to this debate would say that they were all reasonable things to request. Anyone who wants to avoid industrial action would want the Secretary of State to step up and do the right thing.

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware that tonight in Leeds, 2,000 junior doctors are getting together to protest against this Government's plans? Does it not come to something when 2,000 junior doctors get together in such a way? Why, despite the assurances from those on the Government Benches, does she think that that is happening?

**Heidi Alexander:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. The junior doctors I have met are deeply concerned about patient safety and about what the proposed new contract means for them.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Heidi Alexander:** I will not give way, because I wish to make some progress.

The Health Secretary may claim that he is doing all he can to make the contract fair and safe, but the truth is that he is not. He may say that the overall pay envelope for junior doctors will stay the same, but he will not say who the losers will be. He may say that no junior doctor will work excessively long hours, but he will not tell us that he is removing the very safeguards that were designed to prevent that. He may even say that he has some support, but he will not read out the range of independent clinical voices who have condemned his approach.

**Paul Maynard** (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): The hon. Lady is right to focus on the future contract, but does she recognise the inadequacies in the existing contract?

**Heidi Alexander:** I am not saying that the existing contract is perfect—I do not think that the British Medical Association would say that either. A few months ago, an alternative contract was being discussed, the work on which was led by the former Health Minister,

[Heidi Alexander]

the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter). The answer is not the contract that is on the table at the moment.

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): The Secretary of State may say that the overall pay envelope remains the same, but, as far as I am aware, it has been really hard to fathom how the difference between the local education training board contribution and the individual trusts will work. It may not be the same, but even if it is, is this not an example of further administrative and organisational costs being imposed on the health service by a Tory Secretary of State?

**Heidi Alexander:** My hon. Friend is completely right. The lack of clarity in all these negotiations is something that I will come on to later.

The truth is that if the Secretary of State wanted to persuade junior doctors that industrial action is not the answer, he has the power to do so; it is his political choice.

Junior doctors are the lifeblood of the NHS. Two weeks ago, I spent a morning shadowing a junior doctor at Lewisham hospital. It was the single most powerful thing I have done since taking on this role. I was blown away by the skills, knowledge, humanity and professionalism I saw. The junior doctor I shadowed was working a gruelling 11-hour night shift and regularly works 60-hour weeks. I left the hospital asking myself how it could possibly be right to say to that individual, "You might be paid less for the work that you do."

**Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): I think we would all join the hon. Lady in her glowing tributes to our tireless junior doctors, working long hours across the NHS. Considering that not a penny is planned to be cut from the junior doctors' pay bill, does she not agree that it is irresponsible for the BMA to suggest there will be pay cuts of 30% to 40% for some doctors?

**Heidi Alexander:** As I have already said, there is absolutely no clarity. The hon. Gentleman might do well to read the article that appeared in *The Guardian* on 4 October, written by the former Health Minister, who quite clearly states that he has concerns about the fact that the new contract might be used as a lever to find some of the £22 billion of efficiency savings that the NHS needs to find over the next few years.

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

**Heidi Alexander:** I will not give way, as I am going to make some progress.

Junior doctors are not just the first-year trainees fresh out of medical school. They are also the senior house officers and registrars with 12 or 15 years of experience. Junior doctors account for almost half of all doctors in hospitals and the vast majority already work nights and weekends. The responsibilities they carry are huge. Take the junior paediatric doctor working in accident and emergency who emailed me last week. Some of the things she does, I could never ever do. In her email, she said:

"I am in charge of teams resuscitating dying children regularly. I have had to make the decision to stop resuscitating a dying child. I have had to tell parents that their child is going to die.

I have been the only doctor trying to stick a tiny breathing tube into a baby born 16 weeks early and weighing 600g at 3 in the morning."

How is it right that she should face the prospect of being paid less? She is not asking to be paid more. She is just asking to be paid the same and to keep the safeguards that prevent her from being stretched even further.

**Lucy Frazer** (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): I do not think that any of us dispute the fantastic work that doctors do day in, day out, but we need to debate the motion that the hon. Lady has proposed. She said there were three points that she wants to put to the Secretary of State, but she failed to mention the one in the last line of the motion, which is that she wants proposals to be put forward that are "safe for patients". Given that there was an article just last month on 5 September in the *BMJ*, put together by seven experts, including three professionals, that said that there was a clear association between weekend admission and worse outcomes for patients—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I am sorry, but hon. Members should know that interventions should be short. You cannot make a speech in an intervention, and that should be a lesson for us all. Many Members want to speak and I want to get everybody in.

**Heidi Alexander:** The problem with how the Government have handled the negotiations is that they have provided absolutely no clarity to junior doctors about what the proposals would mean for them individually. Everyone thinks that they are going to lose out.

The Government say that they want to reduce the number of hours defined as "unsocial" and thereby decrease the number of hours that attract a higher rate of pay. They say that they will put the rate of pay for plain time up to compensate, but there is no guarantee that the amount by which basic pay goes up will offset the loss of pay associated with fewer hours being defined as unsocial. Does the Secretary of State understand that those who work the most unsociable hours, the junior doctors who sacrifice more of their weekends and nights, feel that they have the most to lose?

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): That is exactly the point, and I am glad that my hon. Friend is exposing the misleading comments of the Government, who are defending the indefensible. It is exactly those doctors—in maternity, in paediatrics, in emergency medicine—who will lose out the most and will see their pay cut by up to a third.

**Heidi Alexander:** My hon. Friend is right. His concern is shared by the President of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, along with 14 other leaders of medical royal colleges and faculties, who point out that as currently proposed, the new contract would

"act as a disincentive to recruitment in posts that involve substantial evening and weekend shifts, as well as diminishing the morale of those doctors already working in challenging conditions."

It cannot possibly be right.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way and I join her in the praise that she issued in her opening remarks. What advice might she give the BMA, were she asked for it? Is it better for the BMA to get back around the table, so that the very

important points that she is raising can be sorted out, or go straight to a ballot? Is it not better to talk first, then, if the BMA does not like it, by all means ballot? It is certainly doing it in the wrong way.

**Heidi Alexander:** The problem is that junior doctors are not convinced that the Secretary of State is negotiating in good faith.

When one talks to junior doctors about the proposed new contract, one thing is striking: pay is less important to them than patient safety.

**Ian Lavery** (Wansbeck) (Lab): I was humbled, privileged and honoured, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris), to march with the junior doctors in Newcastle on Saturday—5,000 junior doctors, hardly militants or revolutionaries, who were fighting not just for the pay but in the best interests of their patients. If there are no problems, if everything in the garden is rosy, why on earth are they demonstrating?

**Heidi Alexander:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. The junior doctors I have met are genuinely worried that the proposals make it more likely, not less, that they will be forced to work even more punishing hours. The removal of financial penalties for hospitals that force junior doctors to work beyond their rostered hours concerns them. They are right to be concerned.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): A junior doctor in my constituency made precisely that point. She was an A&E doctor. My hon. Friend knows that there is an A&E crisis in London. The Health Secretary needs to understand that while there is indecision and no conclusion to the negotiations, junior doctors are making decisions about where they are going—and they are not staying in England. That is the point.

**Heidi Alexander:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He makes a very valid point about the impact on recruitment and retention of doctors in the capital.

**Dr Murrison** *rose*—

**Heidi Alexander:** Tired doctors make mistakes. It is obvious but it is true. Nobody wants to return to the bad old days of junior doctors too exhausted to provide safe patient care. It is bad for doctors, it is bad for patients and it is bad for the NHS. So why are this Government hellbent on forcing through these unsafe changes?

The Secretary of State claims that the changes are about making it easier for hospitals to ensure that the staff needed to provide safe care at the weekends and on nights are available. Is he saying that there are not enough junior doctors on hospital wards and in A&E departments at these times currently? If so, how many more junior doctors would be present at these times as a percentage increase on current staffing levels if the new contract goes through? If the changes are about increasing the cover at weekends and nights, surely it means less cover at other times of the week unless he finds more money for more doctors.

I understand the arguments for increasing consultant cover at weekends and nights. I understand it is vital that patients who are admitted on a Sunday get to see a

consultant as quickly as those admitted on a Tuesday, and I am pleased that the BMA's consultants committee is negotiating with the Government on improving levels of consultant cover. Indeed, everyone in the NHS supports the principle of seven-day services. But this debate is about junior doctors. Junior doctors are already working evenings and weekends. So why has the Health Secretary tried to make this a row about seven-day services?

Let me quote some of the claims that the Secretary of State has made in recent weeks. In response to a question on the junior doctor contract from my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), he said:

“someone is 15% more likely to die if admitted on a Sunday than on a Wednesday because we do not have as many doctors in our hospitals at the weekends as we have mid-week.”

In response to a question that I asked him about junior doctors, the Secretary of State said that the overtime rates that are paid at weekends

“give hospitals a disincentive to roster as many doctors as they need at weekends, and that leads to those 11,000 excessive deaths.”

He went on to say:

“there are 11,000 excess deaths because we do not staff our hospitals properly at weekends.”—[*Official Report*, 13 October 2015; Vol. 600, c. 150-1.]

The authors of the research that the Secretary of State has been quoting said that it would be “rash and misleading” to claim that the deaths were all avoidable. Yet the Health Secretary has got dangerously close to doing just that. Indeed, he has gone so far down that route that some people do not think that our hospitals are properly staffed at the weekend. I know of elderly patients delaying their visit to hospital because they do not think that there will be enough doctors there. That leads to more complicated treatment, longer patient recovery time, people's lives being put in danger and a bigger bill for the NHS to cap it all off. That is appalling. Don't get me wrong: I am as committed as anyone to high-quality care, available 24/7, 365 days a year, but the Secretary of State needs to be careful with his words. He should look in the mirror and ask himself whether his soundbites are true to the conclusions of the study he references.

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): Rather than quoting the Secretary of State, I quote back to the hon. Lady the words of Professor Sir Bruce Keogh, the NHS medical director, who said that if the weekend effect is addressed, it “could save lives”.

**Heidi Alexander:** I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Let me quote the editor of the *British Medical Journal*, who wrote to the Secretary of State on 20 October, saying that he had

“publicly misrepresented an academic article published in *The BMJ*”.

She asks him to clarify the statements that he has made in relation to the article to show that he fully understands the issues involved. She further says:

“Misusing data to mislead the public is not the way to achieve the very best health service for patients and the public. The Health Secretary needs to be clear on exactly how reforming the junior doctor contract will deliver a seven-day NHS. He should set out how he plans to pay for seven-day services, and precisely which services he is talking about.”

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): Last week I meet junior doctors in my constituency, many of whom told me that they cannot afford to live in London. One reported that she was sleeping on the sofas of friends and family members in order to cover her night shifts while working in London. The doctors also reported unfilled vacancies in departments in the hospital which serve and look after the sickest patients. Does my hon. Friend agree that the recruitment and retention of junior doctors is a bigger threat to patient safety than the issues to which the Secretary of State alludes?

**Heidi Alexander:** I do agree. I was talking about a seven-day NHS. A truly 24/7 NHS does not just mean consultants being more readily available; it means 24/7 access to diagnostic tests, social care, occupational therapists—the list goes on. If the Secretary of State has a magic pot of money to pay for all that, bearing it in mind that the NHS can barely pay for the work that it is currently doing, I am all ears. If his plan is to deliver seven-day services by spreading existing services more thinly, he should come clean and say so.

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): My hon. Friend makes a very powerful speech. I bring her back to an earlier point which needs emphasising. At the moment trusts have to provide rosters that are not only fair but safe, so that junior doctors get time off. Now it seems that trusts will no longer have to pay attention to those rules and will no longer be fined if they do not follow them.

**Heidi Alexander:** There are very serious concerns about the proposed new contract, and my hon. Friend is right to highlight them.

The sad thing is that it did not have to be this way. Instead of using the dispute with junior doctors to suit his own political ends, the Health Secretary should have listened. He should have understood the depth and strength of concern before it got to the point where junior doctors feel as though they are the first line of defence in a fight for the future of the NHS. Instead of telling junior doctors that the BMA was misleading them, he should have respected their intelligence and responded to their concerns. At the very least, he should have heeded the words of the present Prime Minister, who said this about junior doctors when addressing a rally in 2007:

“There’s a simple truth at the heart of this: you came into the NHS not because you wanted to get rich or famous, but because you have a vocation about curing the ill, about serving your community.”

The Prime Minister went on to say in his conference speech a few days later:

“I will never forget walking on the streets of London marching with 10,000 junior doctors who felt like they were being treated like cogs in a machine rather than professionals with a vocation to go out and save lives”.

It is time the Health Secretary started treating junior doctors like the intelligent professionals they are. When I spoke at the junior doctors rally in London 10 days ago, I delivered a message for the Health Secretary. He was not working that Saturday so I repeat it for him now: stop the high-handed demands, show you are prepared to compromise and put patients before politics.

4.46 pm

**The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “House” to the end of the Question and add:

“welcomes the Government’s commitment to delivering seven-day hospital services and saving lives by combating the weekend effect; notes the British Medical Association’s (BMA) decision to walk away from negotiations to reform a contract which all sides acknowledge is not fit for purpose; further notes the Government’s proposed introduction of new contractual limits which protect staff from working unsafe hours and the commitment that average junior doctors’ pay will not fall; and calls on the BMA to put patient care first, to choose talks over strikes, and to return to negotiations.”.

I warmly welcome the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) to her post at her first Opposition day debate.

One Saturday in April 2006 a 20-year-old man called John Moore-Robinson was out mountain biking with his friends in Cannock Chase when he fell off his bike and the handlebars hit his stomach. His friends dialled 999 and he was rushed to hospital. Although the paramedic who took him to hospital thought he had life-threatening internal bleeding, instead of being treated he was left for 50 minutes, apart from a brief examination. Then he was told he had bruised ribs and sent home. In fact, he had a ruptured spleen and tragically died later that Saturday night.

Tragedies happen in any healthcare system, and despite such stories I am fiercely proud of our NHS and the brilliant care given by our doctors and nurses seven days a week. The hon. Lady was right to thank each and every one of them. Anyone who uses such stories to denigrate the NHS should remember that last year the Commonwealth fund rated us the best healthcare system of 11 major countries—better than France, Germany, Australia or the US—and rated our A and E departments —[*Interruption.*] It was the Opposition who called this debate, so they might want to listen to some of the arguments. This is a very important issue about the lives of NHS patients, and I am saying that the tragedies and the problems we have should not be used to denigrate the NHS or our A and E departments.

Part of being the best in the world is being honest about where we need to improve, and the fact remains that in our hospitals today we have around three times less medical cover at weekends. In our manifesto in May this Government committed to a truly seven-day NHS so that we prevent a repeat of the tragedy that happened to John Moore-Robinson.

**Ms Gisela Stuart:** The Secretary of State is absolutely right that we need to address the fact that there seems to be less cover at the weekends. He is trying to circle that square without expanding the number of doctors and the services. He is thinning the service on Monday to Friday to bring more cover to the weekends. That does not solve the problem.

**Mr Hunt:** I am happy to deal with that. We went into the election in May saying that on the back of a strong economy we were prepared to commit £10 billion extra to the NHS in real terms over the course of this Parliament. That was £5.5 billion more than the hon. Lady’s party was prepared to commit. In the last Parliament, when the increase in NHS spend was half that amount, we increased the number of doctors by 9,000, so we are increasing the number of doctors, but as we do so we need to ensure that we give the right care to patients.

I want to give a word of caution to the shadow Secretary of State. The tragedy of John Moore-Robinson, the gentleman I have mentioned, happened not only on a Saturday, but at Mid Staffs. The last time the House discussed the difference between excess and avoidable deaths was under a Labour Government, when they tried to brush the problems at Mid Staffs under the carpet, saying that we should not take the figures on excess deaths too seriously because they were a statistical construct and different from avoidable deaths. I would have hoped that the Labour party learned the lessons of Mid Staffs and would not make the same mistakes again. [Interruption.]

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. The hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) may shake her head, but I expect voices in the Chamber to be a little quieter. I want to hear the Secretary of State, and I think all our constituents do. I understand that you might not agree.

**Mr Hunt:** Let us look at some of the facts. What is the most important thing for people admitted to hospital at the weekend? It is that they are seen quickly by a consultant. Currently, across all key specialties, in only 10% of our hospitals are patients seen by a consultant within 14 hours of being admitted at the weekend. Only 10% of hospitals provide vital diagnostic services seven days a week. Clinical standards provide that patients should be reviewed twice a day by consultants in high-dependency areas but, at weekends, that happens in only one in 20 of our hospitals across all key services.

**Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con):** Is the Secretary of State shocked, as I am, that the shadow Health Secretary seemed to say that the NHS should continue as it is, and that she appears to deny the weekend effect, which means that people are dying unnecessarily?

**Mr Hunt:** Yes, I am shocked. I am really shocked about the suggestion that there is a difference between what is right for patients and what is right for doctors. The shadow Secretary of State spent a lot of time talking about morale. The worst possible thing for doctors' morale is their being unable to give their patients the care they want to give.

**Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op):** Does the Secretary of State not see anything perverse in making the case for a seven-day NHS—he has repeatedly done so—while drawing up a junior doctor contract that financially penalises doctors who already work evenings and weekends? How can that make any sense?

**Mr Hunt:** The contract will not do that. The contract we are proposing will give more reward to people who work the most antisocial hours. I will explain the details of that later.

The shadow Secretary of State talked about academic studies, so let us look at what the academic studies on the weekend effect say. The Freemantle study, published in the *British Medical Journal*, which is owned, incidentally, by the British Medical Association, said in September that the mortality rate for those admitted to hospital on a Sunday is 15% higher than for those admitted on a Wednesday. It said the weekend effect equated to 11,000

excess deaths. Let us be clear about what that means. It does not mean that every one of those 11,000 deaths is avoidable or preventable—it would be wrong to suggest that. It means that there are 11,000 more deaths than we would expect if mortality rates were the same as they are on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. Professor Sir Bruce Keogh, the NHS England medical director, called it

“an avoidable ‘weekend effect’ which if addressed could save lives.”

It is not just one study. In the past five years, we have had six independent reviews. Another study in the *British Medical Journal*, by Ruiz et al, states:

“Emergency patients in the English, US and Dutch hospitals showed significant higher adjusted odds of deaths...on Saturdays and Sundays compared with a Monday admission.”

The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges—the body that represents all the royal colleges—said in 2012 that deficiencies in weekend care were most likely linked to the absence of skilled and empowered senior staff and the lack of seven-day diagnostic services.

**Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD) rose—**

**Mr Hunt:** I am happy to give way to my former colleague.

**Norman Lamb:** During my travels across the country, I recently spoke with the chief executive and the chair of an acute trust. They said that they have no difficulty at all with junior doctors and ensuring that there is cover at weekends; their problem is with consultants—and the Secretary of State has just made that point. Has he not chosen the wrong target?

**Mr Hunt:** Chief executives of trusts and NHS employers have been very clear that this is about reform of contracts for both consultants and junior doctors, because the reduction in medical cover at weekends happens with both the consultant and the junior doctor workforces. Also, as I will go on to say, it puts huge pressure on junior doctors at the time when they do not have senior support and the ability to learn from it, and that is exactly what we want to sort out.

Junior doctors are not to blame for the weekend effect. The situation would actually be far worse without them, because they perform the lion's share of medical evening, night and weekend work. In many ways, they are the backbone of our hospitals. However, the BMJ study this year showed that there is evidence that junior doctors felt clinically exposed at weekends, and nothing could be more demotivating for a doctor than not being able to give the standard of care they want for a patient.

**Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab):** The right hon. Gentleman has prayed in aid the weekend effect and quoted Sir Bruce Keogh, his own NHS medical director. Is he aware that Professor Keogh has also said that

“it is not possible to ascertain the extent to which these excess deaths may be preventable; to assume they are avoidable would be rash and misleading”?

**Mr Hunt:** Yes, and I agree with that, but it would be equally rash and misleading to say there are no avoidable deaths. Professor Keogh was saying that lives could be saved if we tackled this. All these studies are saying that 15% more people die than we would expect if we had

[Mr Jeremy Hunt]

the same level of cover at weekends as we have during the week. Therefore, as he says, the moral case for action is unanswerable.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): The hospital to which my right hon. Friend referred earlier is in my constituency. The accident and emergency department has improved hugely over the past few years—well over 95% of patients are seen within four hours—and one reason for that is that it has consultant cover all the time. It is not open 24/7—we want it to be—but for the 14 hours a day that it is open, it has consultant cover all the time.

**Mr Hunt:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The fact is that this is a package designed to ensure that we eliminate the weekend effect, and it involves both junior doctors and consultants, because they both have their part to play.

**Emily Thornberry:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr Hunt:** I am going to make some progress before taking any further interventions.

The question for a Government and for a Health Secretary is this: when we are faced with this overwhelming evidence—six studies in five years—should we take action or ignore it? We are taking action. That is why in July I announced that we will be changing the contracts for both consultants and junior doctors as part of a package of measures to eliminate the weekend effect. If we believe in the NHS, and if we want it to be there for everyone, whatever their background or circumstances, we must be able to offer every NHS patient the promise of the same high-quality care, whichever day of the week they need it.

Let me set out for the House what I have proposed. We announced ambitious plans to roll out seven-day services across the country, with better weekend staffing across medical, diagnostic and support services in hospitals, as well as better integration with social care and seven-day GP access. That will reach a quarter of the population by March 2017, and the whole country by 2020. For consultants, we proposed an end to the right to opt out of weekend working, replacing it with a maximum obligation to work one weekend in four. To its credit, the BMA's consultants committee has agreed to negotiate on that.

For junior doctors, we proposed to reduce the high overtime and weekend rates, which prevent hospitals from rostering enough staff at weekend, and increase basic pay to compensate. We have made a commitment that the pay bill as a whole would not be reduced, and today I can confirm that not a single junior doctor working within the legal limits for hours will have their pay cut, because this is about patient care, not saving money. Incidentally, I made it clear to the BMA at the beginning of September that that was a possible outcome of negotiations, in an attempt to encourage it to return to the negotiating table. Rather than negotiating, it chose to wind up its own members and create a huge amount of unnecessary anger.

**Mark Spencer** (Sherwood) (Con): Given the Secretary of State's assurance, is there any reason why the BMA should not come back to the table and negotiate with him to solve this problem so that patients are safer at weekends?

**Mr Hunt:** There is no reason whatsoever. What was strikingly absent from the shadow Health Secretary's comments was an entreaty to the BMA asking it to come and negotiate. Labour Members can play a constructive role in this, but so far they have declined to do so.

**Emily Thornberry:** Is the right hon. Gentleman going to continue with his plan to change the rules so that trusts that insist on doctors working unsafe hours can no longer be fined for doing so? It will help if he can assure us that those rules will continue and trusts will be fined if they break them.

**Mr Hunt:** They are not fines; they are perverse incentives to doctors to work unsafe hours. We want to go one better than that. We propose to stop hospitals requiring doctors to work five nights in a row or six long days in a row, and to bring down the maximum number of hours that hospitals can ask a doctor to work in any one week. On top of that, we have imposed the toughest hospital regime of any country anywhere in the world that comes down very hard on hospitals that are not providing safe care.

**Lady Hermon** (North Down) (Ind) *rose*—

**Norman Lamb** *rose*—

**Mr Hunt:** I am going to make some progress before I give way again.

**Norman Lamb** *rose*—

**Mr Hunt:** As the right hon. Gentleman is my former colleague, I will give way once more.

**Norman Lamb:** I want to ensure that I fully understand the commitment that the Secretary of State gave about not a single doctor losing out. I think he said that that is “provided they are working within maximum legal hours”. Does that mean people working up to 48 hours, which is the maximum working week under the working time directive? What about doctors who have opted out of that and are working 60 or 70 hours? Could they lose out?

**Mr Hunt:** It applies to all doctors working within the legal limit. If they opted out of the working time directive, it would apply up to 56 hours. For people who are working more than the legal limits, even after opting out, the right answer is to stop them working those extra hours because it is not safe for patients. But yes, that is the commitment to people even if they have opted out.

**Lady Hermon:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr Hunt:** I am going to make some progress, if I may.

As well as reducing the maximum hours a doctor can be asked to work from 91 to 72 in any week—a significant reduction—and banning hospitals from requiring doctors to work five nights in a row or six long days in a row, as hospitals can currently make them do, we propose to ban the routine use of fixed leave arrangements that mean that some doctors have to give up to three months' notice before taking leave, meaning that they miss out on vital family or personal occasions.

We did not, and do not, seek to impose a new contract; rather, we invited the BMA to negotiate a new contract so that we could end up with a solution that

was right for doctors and right for patients. However, because we had recently won an election in which a seven-day NHS was a manifesto commitment, we said that having tried to negotiate this unsuccessfully for two and a half years, we would ask trusts to introduce new contracts if we were unable to succeed in negotiations.

**Lady Hermon:** I have a specific point about Northern Ireland. Of course, health is devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly, but I can assure the Health Secretary that junior doctors in Northern Ireland are absolutely furious about the proposed changes to their contracts. It would help if he could confirm that he is in regular direct dialogue with the Health Minister in the Stormont Assembly, Simon Hamilton MLA. I ask him not to reply that officials talk to each other regularly, because "Minister to Minister" is what I would like to hear.

**Mr Hunt:** We do have regular dialogue. I suggest that the reason doctors in Northern Ireland might be angry is that they have been listening to misinformation about what the Government in England are proposing, which has, very disappointingly, made doctors all over the UK very angry. I hope that the assurances I am giving, which I gave to the BMA last month and the month before, face to face and in letters, will encourage the hon. Lady to report to the doctors she mentions that the right thing for the BMA to do is to come and talk to the Government. Regrettably, the BMA's Junior Doctors Committee has refused to negotiate since last June. Instead, it put up a pay calculator on its website that scared many doctors by falsely suggesting that their pay could be cut by between 30% and 50%. It has now taken that pay calculator down, but the damage to morale as a result of it continues.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr Hunt:** I will make some progress. Some people say that this is a battle between the interests of patients and those of doctors, but that is profoundly wrong. Doctors who are happy and supported in their jobs provide better care to patients, and the link between a motivated workforce and high-quality care is proven in many studies, as well as in hospitals such as that in Northumbria, where staff have become the greatest advocates for seven-day services since their introduction. Our proposed new system is intended to provide better support to doctors who work weekends, and make seven-day diagnostics more widely available across the NHS.

**Simon Hoare:** Given the clarity with which my right hon. Friend has addressed the principal concerns of junior doctors, does he expect the BMA's Junior Doctors Committee to change its stance, come to the Department and restart negotiations, or will it continue to stall?

**Mr Hunt:** If the BMA is serious about wanting to do the right thing for doctors and patients, there is no reason for it not to negotiate with the Government to get the right solution. This is a test of how serious it is—my hon. Friend's point is well made.

**Rachael Maskell:** This debate is reminiscent of 12 months ago and the "Agenda for Change", when the Government refusal to negotiate with 1 million NHS staff, and caused

industrial action and a strike. The same thing seems to be happening again. Will the Secretary of State take the shackles off the negotiations and enable the professionals to put their case on the table? Will he listen to them and let them lead negotiations?

**Mr Hunt:** That is exactly what I would like to happen, but it can happen only if members of the BMA walk through my office door—it is open—and sit down and start negotiating, which they have refused to do since last June. Just as it is wrong to pit doctors against patients, it is also wrong for the Labour party to pit the Government against doctors. In the previous Parliament, Labour wanted to cut the NHS budget, but we protected it. In May's election we promised £5.5 billion more for the NHS than Labour did, and in the last Parliament a Conservative-led Government delivered 9,000 more doctors to the NHS, 1 million more operations a year, and 600,000 more people were referred for urgent suspected cancer every year.

Because we are not stopping at that, and because we are passionate that the NHS should offer the highest standards of care available anywhere in the world, the Government have also been honest about the problems facing the NHS. Two hundred avoidable deaths every week is too many—it is the equivalent of a plane crash every week. Nor is it acceptable that twice a week we operate on the wrong part of someone's body, or allow other "never events" to happen. In many of those areas the NHS is performing at or better than international norms, but that does not make such things any more acceptable. We want the NHS to be the first healthcare system in the world to adopt standards of safety that are considered normal in the airline, nuclear or oil industries.

**Rehman Chishti:** The Secretary of State said that we are open to problems being highlighted. May I thank him for what he did by putting hospitals into special measures? Medway Maritime hospital had the seventh highest mortality rate in 2005, yet nothing was done. Support is now being given to that hospital to turn it around. We are highlighting problems, but we are also introducing measures to fix those problems.

**Mr Hunt:** I thank my hon. Friend for his consistent support for his local hospital. It has had many troubles, but it is beginning to show signs of turning a corner. If we want to turn things around, we must first be honest about the problem.

I welcome the shadow Health Secretary to her place. Her predecessor tried to minimise the care problems that took place under a previous Labour Government, and he described our attempts to put them right as trying to "run down the NHS". I hope that she does not do the same. Labour used to be the party that stood up for ordinary men and women; it cared enough about them to set up the NHS, so that no one had to worry about getting good medical care, whatever their circumstances. People need to know that they can depend on our NHS seven days a week. Instead of making mischief about a flawed doctors contract that was introduced by a Labour Government in 2000, the hon. Lady should stand with us as we sort out this problem. Be the party not of the unions but of the patients who depend on high quality care, day in, day out. Professor Bruce Keogh talked about the moral and professional

[Mr Jeremy Hunt]

case for concerted action. Surely in that context, she might reconsider this rather ill-judged attempt to make party political capital out of a very real problem.

Everyone who cares about the NHS should want the same thing. The hon. Lady should tell the BMA to get around the negotiating table, something she conspicuously failed to do. In doing so she would stand alongside the many independent voices calling on the BMA to return to the table and discuss a solution with the Government—the Royal College of Surgeons, the Royal College of Physicians, NHS providers and the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges. If she does not do that, the British people will draw their own conclusion about which party is backing the NHS with the resources it needs, which party is supporting hospitals to become safer at the weekends, and which party is standing four-square behind doctors and nurses in their ambition to deliver high quality standards of care for patients. There is only one party that can be trusted, one true party of the NHS, and that is the Conservative party.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** There will be a four-minute limit on Back Bench speeches.

5.11 pm

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The hon. Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) described what a junior doctor is, and that is really important. Many people think that being a junior doctor is just for the first couple of years, and isn't it character-forming to work a bit hard and not have a lot of money? However, in the NHS, which is quite a hierarchical beast, a junior doctor is a junior doctor all the way until they are not a junior doctor and they become a senior doctor: either a consultant, as I was for the past 19 years, or a GP. That means we are talking about people who might be in their 30s, with children, families and mortgages. They are not youngsters who are able to move around flexibly and have very few financial commitments. It is important that we remember that.

It is obviously quite some time since I started as a junior doctor. More than 30 years ago, in 1982, we had absolutely no limits on hours. My light week was 57 hours; my heavy week was 132 hours. You just had no idea what your name was by the end of a weekend. It took more than 10 years of my career before the first new deal started to come in, in the early 1990s, and trusts or hospitals had to pay an additional premium to junior staff if they worked excessive hours. The definition of excessive hours at that time was still pretty lax, but it was the first step. It was tightened up in 2003, when the European working time directive came in. The Secretary of State talks about taking away those safeguards, but that he will replace them with something else. But with what? They have served us well. When trusts are in financial difficulties, the pressure on them to save money is likely to outweigh completely any little safeguard. The 48-hour working time directive does not come with punitive safeguards, and the financial one was important.

It is important to remember that the basic pay is already for 7 o'clock in the morning to 7 o'clock at night, Monday to Friday. That is a pretty long day for most people. It is proposed that the time covered by basic pay should be extended to 7 o'clock in the morning to 10 o'clock at night and include Saturday. What many

people do not know is that a junior doctor starts at under £23,000 a year—below the benefit cap we have been arguing about. The salary is made up largely of out-of-hours.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady not agree that in any other walk of life that would be intolerable, yet we put up with this situation in the national health service? Secondly, does she agree we still have not seen the £8 billion the Government promised, during the general election, to put into the NHS?

**Dr Whitford:** I totally agree with that.

As mentioned on both sides of the House, people do not work in an NHS hospital to make a lot of money. It is not high up the list of ways for the smartest people in our country to make money; it is a vocation, which means we have a responsibility not to exploit them. The Secretary of State says that no one will lose money, but what will happen to the people who start next August? After the first hours change, when I started my surgical career in Belfast, the “two in three” rota—every third evening off and no weekends off for a year—was no longer legal, and the hospital henceforth considered extra hours to be voluntary service. The NHS is a hierarchical organisation, bullying exists within it, and the junior doctor is in a weak position. These safeguards have worked well for a long time, and I would be reluctant to see them go.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady agree that across the piece—nurses, doctors, everybody—there is a huge loss of morale in the NHS? It is down to us to stand up for the workforce and put them at the heart of our thoughts, rather than concerns about how it might look politically.

**Dr Whitford:** I totally agree. I also agree with the Secretary of State about patient safety. There is no one in the profession who does not want a seven-day emergency service that is strong and responsive to the needs of unwell patients, but we keep moving from people who are ill to routine services. He has said we must not call them avoidable, yet he just referred to 200 avoidable deaths a week, which is exactly what Bruce Keogh described as “rash and misleading”, and people object to that. There are no excess deaths at the weekend; the issue is with people admitted at the weekend, usually for radiology or investigation. Scotland has been moving on this for the last decade, by working with the profession, not pulling out the pin and throwing a grenade.

**Mr Jeremy Hunt:** For the sake of clarity, the 200 avoidable deaths are not about the weekend effect specifically, but come from the Hogan and Black analysis, which found that 3.6% of hospital deaths in England had at least a 50% greater chance of having been avoidable, which is separate from the weekend effect—the higher mortality rate among people admitted at weekends. None the less, where there are avoidable deaths—where death rates look higher than they should be—we have an obligation to do something.

**Dr Whitford:** I agree that it is important to investigate, but it is also important to understand the cause of the problem. A lot of the problem at Mid Staffs was the ratio of registered nurses to patients. That was echoed

by Bray in his review of 103 stroke units, which showed that additional consultant ward rounds at weekends had no impact on death rates, while a better ratio of registered nurses reduced them by a third. We need to know the problem before spending billions trying to solve the wrong thing.

**Andy Slaughter:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for busting this myth about weekend death rates—these might be sick people admitted at weekends who die within the 30 days. In fact, fewer people die in hospitals on Saturdays and Sundays than on other days. The Secretary of State is not giving the right impression of the figures.

**Dr Whitford:** I agree.

Since coming here, I have heard stories of people unable to access diagnostic imaging or to work up patients, but there is no argument about that from the profession. That is what we need to focus on, yet a lot of this seems to be about routine. There are fewer doctors at weekends because we do not do routine work. We have teams of people doing toenail and blood pressure clinics in the week. Professor Jane Dacre estimates that doing those at weekends would require 40% more doctors. We cannot do that. We need to make sure that hospitals at weekends have enough people and the right people to be secure, but junior doctors are already there—it is not they who are missing—and emergency services already have a consultant on call. We might need more discussion about their being physically in, but that is a discussion to have with the profession, whereas what we heard on 16 July, which gave the public the impression that senior doctors only worked 9 to 5, Monday to Friday, was very hurtful to the entire profession.

**Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab):** The hon. Lady is making some extremely powerful and relevant arguments. I wish to make a point about the importance of junior doctors in my region, having spoken to some of them at the demonstration on Saturday. They are essential to the functioning of the service. They have the option of going not only to the Antipodes but to Scotland, where these contracts do not apply. If we lose these valued staff, it could hurt my region more.

**Dr Whitford:** We will roll out a red carpet somewhere on the M74 and welcome them with open arms. The progression and migration in Scotland towards robust seven-day emergency care has been happening through a dialogue, not through a threat to impose a contract.

There are other things in this, such as the plan to change pay progression, which is currently on an annual basis, to recognise experience. That will be replaced with just six pay grades. Such a move will affect women in particular, because they tend to take a career break and they tend to work part-time, so they will get stuck at a frozen level for much longer. It may also be a disincentive to people to go into research, because they will be stuck on the same rung of the ladder for longer. We do not want that disincentive. We need to make sure that we are valuing how people develop and the experience they accrue along the way.

**Mark Spencer:** The hon. Lady is making a powerful case for dialogue. Will she join the Secretary of State in calling for the BMA to come back to the negotiating table or join the shadow Secretary of State in refusing to call for it to do so? Which will she do?

**Dr Whitford:** There is no doubt that we require dialogue, but it must involve sitting down at a table without preconditions. What we had in July and through the summer was a threat of imposing a contract, instead of proper negotiation. That is where we should be trying to get to: both sides negotiating in good faith across a blank sheet of paper. The threat of imposition is what has hurt the junior doctors.

There has also been talk of taking away the guaranteed income protection of GP trainees, there to try to keep them at the same level as they were, and replacing it with a discretionary payment. Such a payment can be taken away at any time—it can be cut and it can be changed. The Secretary of State aspires to have 5,000 extra GPs by 2020. We know from the BMA that one third of GPs—10,000 out of just over 30,000—are planning to leave, which means we need to find 15,000 extra GPs. Anything that is a disincentive for people to go into that profession is not serving the NHS.

**Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab):** Does the hon. Lady think the Secretary of State is an incentive or a disincentive to junior doctors?

**Dr Whitford:** Sorry, I did not hear that. [*Interruption.*]

**Dawn Butler:** Conservative Members do not want me to repeat the question. Does the hon. Lady think the Secretary of State is an incentive or a disincentive to doctors?

**Dr Whitford:** I think that how this has been handled is a total disincentive, but that could change. We could simply take the decision to move to negotiations without preconditions—without the threat of imposition. We are talking about a threat to impose changes to the terms and conditions of people who, in the past, routinely worked more than 100 hours a week, as I did. That is a ghost that haunts the NHS and it really frightens junior doctors.

**Rehman Chishti rose—**

**Dr Whitford:** I will give way one last time, but I need to make progress; otherwise nobody else will get to speak.

**Rehman Chishti:** I have a huge amount of respect for the hon. Lady. She talks about her experience of working long hours. Does she think that what the Secretary of State has just said about introducing new limits on junior doctors' working hours is the right way forward?

**Dr Whitford:** What the Secretary of State has not explained is how, within the same pay envelope, there will be more people at weekends, but not working extra hours—and not having fewer during the week. At the moment, we have a circle that cannot be squared. We need to see the detail of how that can be done. If the vision is to have more routine work at the weekend, that would result in a massive uplift in the number of doctors, which we simply cannot afford. We are already haemorrhaging doctors. Acute physicians describe 48% of junior places as unfilled, with the figure for obstetrics being 25%. They can go anywhere. We heard that over 1,500 of them registered for certification for overseas work just last week. We need to be careful that we are

[*Dr Philippa Whitford*]

attracting them to stay. They are the brightest and best in our society; they have chosen a vocation. We need to bring them to the table, but by offering to start with a blank sheet of paper—not threatening them. As has been said, they are not radicals, but people who want to do the best for their patients.

I suggest that the Secretary of State and those working with him look at how they have spoken to both senior and junior doctors over this summer. Frankly, being new to this House, I found that to be quite shocking and quite disgraceful. We should draw a line under that and try to change the tone. We need to go forward and find a solution that is fair to junior doctors, fair to patients and safe—one that is not exploiting people and not threatening people.

5.25 pm

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): I start by declaring a relevant personal interest in that my daughter is a junior doctor, and one of many hundreds who have moved to Australia to work. Because of that very clear conflict of personal interests, I shall abstain in this evening's vote. I want to speak, however, because I have relevant personal experience, as before I came to this place I taught junior doctors and medical students for 11 years.

I can tell the House that this dispute is about far more than pay. It is about junior doctors feeling valued. The junior doctors I used to teach, including F2 foundation year doctors, felt that they were not being supported at the weekends, disliked the inability sometimes to work in the same county as their partner and disliked obstructive attitudes about rostering. That presents us with an opportunity to bring all those issues into the negotiations in this current dispute.

One thing I do know is that young people do not go into medicine because they are motivated by pay. I hope that the House sends a very clear message to junior doctors that we value what they do and are grateful for what they do on behalf of patients. What we must do is avoid a strike at all costs. A strike would be immensely damaging for patients. I would say to junior doctors that there is no meaningful industrial action that they can take that would not harm their patients. I urge them to step back from such a move. A strike would be damaging not only for patients, but for the professional reputation of doctors, and of course politically. That should not be the consideration. Our main consideration should be how we encourage junior doctors to walk back through the door of the Secretary of State's office, as he has stated. The best way to do that would be to start again.

Many elements of the dispute feel similar to the one we had in 2007, when I was teaching junior doctors, over the medical training application service—or MTAS, as it was known. It was a very unloved, unlovely scheme that collapsed, after a much-needed apology, in 2007. The Government of the day went back to the drawing board and started again. I think it would be right to do so on this occasion. We need to remove the barricades that are preventing junior doctors from walking back through the door. It would be right to take away the preconditions, the red lines and the threat to impose—and start again, looking at all the issues in the round.

Junior doctors share many of the Government's objectives. They want to improve care for patients; they recognise that shortage specialties in the NHS are a real issue and that if we are going to put patients first, we need to incentivise entry to specialties such as accident and emergency, general practice, psychiatry and so forth. We need mechanisms to make that happen. They recognise, too, the need to address variation across the NHS, including with respect to weekends, but we need to look at that in the round. It is not just about senior and junior doctors either; it is about nursing, access to diagnostics, being an outlier on a ward that someone should not be in because the hospital is over-full.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree that one thing about which junior doctors want certainty is no longer having whole weeks of nights or having to work beyond 72 hours. The Government need to be clear about how they will achieve that.

**Dr Wollaston:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. There is much to be welcomed in the new contract, but we need honesty about some of this. I am very pleased that the Secretary of State has given an assurance today that no junior doctor will be worse off, but I hope that when he sums up the debate, he will tell us what will happen to a junior doctor working 70 hours a week, perhaps in a specialty such as accident and emergency or anaesthetics. If the pay envelope is the same and some junior doctors will be better off, the maths indicates that some will be worse off and we need to clarify which ones. We need much more clarity, not just about whether an individual will be no worse off as a result of changing from one job to the next over the transition period, but about what will happen to the pay for that post over the coming years.

While I welcome many of the elements of the junior contract, I feel that, because the debate has become rather toxic, we should take the opportunity to begin again to examine all the issues in the round, and ask junior doctors themselves to work with the Secretary of State in establishing how we can achieve our common aims on behalf of patients. We should also take the opportunity once more to welcome junior doctors and value everything that they do.

5.30 pm

**Mr Andrew Smith** (Oxford East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow two such thoughtful speeches, and, in particular, the powerful speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander). I congratulate her on her appointment, and on the vigour with which she put the argument.

Three weeks ago, I went to a “keep in touch” meeting with doctors at the John Radcliffe hospital in Oxford. Two hundred and fifty doctors turned up, and their anger at the Government's threatened imposition of this contract had to be seen to be believed. They were so alienated that I had a hard job trying to persuade them that it was just the Secretary of State's incompetence which was to blame, and not a malevolent wish on his part to dismantle the NHS.

At a time when doctors, like other staff in the NHS, are working under such pressure, and when the Secretary of State knows that he needs to carry staff with him if further reform and efficiencies are to be delivered—including

the better seven-day hospital services that we all want to see—it is beyond belief that he has simply stumbled into picking a fight with the core clinical work force in our hospitals, threatening to impose a contract that will leave some of them earning significantly less and many vulnerable to working significantly longer hours, thus risking a return to the dangers of the past.

No one, including doctors themselves, wants to see this degenerate into industrial action, but, as with other groups of workers whom we do not expect to strike, a particular responsibility is imposed on employers and the Government to listen, to be fair, and to negotiate in good faith. That is why it is so damaging that the Secretary of State gives such a strong impression of doing the opposite: threatening when he should be listening, and using weasel words when he should be showing how assurances can be delivered. As the public well understand, the success of the NHS is hugely dependent on the dedication, good will and trust of its staff. By mishandling the contract in this way, the Secretary of State is putting all those at risk, and, once lost, they could be hard to win back.

No one should be under any illusion about the damage that the contract—were it to be imposed in the way that the Government want—could do to patient care, and would certainly do to recruitment and retention in the English NHS, especially in high-cost areas such as Oxford. I already know of local GPs who have moved away, including one who found that he had a better quality of life as a locum than as member of a practice, and then found that it would be better still in Canada than in our NHS. At my meeting with doctors at the John Radcliffe, a show of hands was taken to find out how many of those who qualified would move to other parts of the UK or abroad if the contract were imposed. A sea of hands went up.

If the Government want to make good the damage that they have been inflicting and settle the issue of this contract, it should not be hard. In his letter to the chair of the BMA junior doctors committee, the Secretary of State said:

“I share exactly the same aims for the new contract as you do.”

If that is the case, the way forward is clear. First, the Secretary of State should reopen negotiations, without preconditions, lifting the imposition of the contract. Secondly, he should keep the financial penalties that protect staff from working excessive hours. Thirdly, he should show flexibility on the reimbursement for Saturday working. Fourthly, he should give a clear guarantee that no junior doctor's pay will be cut as a result of the contract. That is what our motion calls for: it would deliver a new contract with safety for patients and fairness for doctors. It is what the Government would do if they had any sense, it is what the public wants, and I urge the House to vote for it.

5.34 pm

**Charlotte Leslie** (Bristol North West) (Con): I welcome this debate brought by the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) as a chance to offer some light, as opposed to the heat that has sadly dominated so much of this debate.

The House has often heard me quote the thinker and poet T. S. Eliot when he warns of the folly of trying to devise

systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.

This speaks extraordinarily to the NHS. The NHS is not a system; it is the people who work in it. That is why it is so important that we nurture and value our NHS staff in the ways so brilliantly expounded by my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston)—those staff who work day in, day out, and, as the daughter of a surgeon I can vouch, at weekends and on Christmas days, too.

I was extremely concerned to hear the British Medical Association's claims that this modernisation of the junior doctor contract would lead to dangerously long working hours and less pay for our junior doctors—cuts of 30%, it said. I began to look into this more closely. I noticed that the pay calculator had been taken down, but when I looked at the detail I became very surprised. In the proposals I could not see the kind of longer hours and the less pay scenario I had heard from the BMA with such certainty and to which many junior doctors, completely understandably, have been reacting with such worry and concern. I could not see anything approaching the authoritarian and draconian measures the BMA had led me to believe my own Government were imposing.

At most, I think there are areas where we need very careful negotiation and clarity with a doctor membership body so that we can work with doctors—that is incredibly important. I would have thought the BMA junior doctors committee would be very concerned for that to happen.

I cannot find evidence that the Government are imposing longer hours on doctors. What I did note was the new absolute limit on overtime worked, which is preventing dangerously long hours and those awful weeks of nights, and the current situation where doctors routinely work over the 48-hour working time directive often slightly off the record to get in the training that they need. I would have thought measures to tackle that would have been welcomed.

I know that huge numbers of people work during Saturday daytimes, but there needs to be further discussion on the agreement of what constitutes antisocial hours for doctors on a Saturday. Again, I would have thought the junior doctors committee would have valuably contributed towards that, and in fact the Government say the same.

To read the BMA submission we would think that less pay was a key aim of the whole exercise, but the plans make clear that there will not be an overall pay cut and that average earnings will remain the same. Yes, the distribution will be different to overcome the obvious unfairnesses in the system where a doctor working normal hours will get paid more than a doctor working antisocial hours, but I am not sure that is something to complain about. Yes, there will be a reward for progress as opposed to the time the doctor has been in training, but that is in line with many professions and I am just not sure that someone who takes longer in training to reach the same standard as a high-flyer should get paid more.

**Helen Whately:** I support my hon. Friend on that point. It is uncomfortable but true that in almost any profession outside the NHS if someone takes time out for parental leave the clock stops on their career progression. They gain other skills; they do not just press on with their career, but they can go back to it afterwards.

**Charlotte Leslie:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In addition, I am just not sure it should be possible for supervisors with more responsibility to be paid less than those they are supervising. I am slightly confused

[Charlotte Leslie]

about the BMA stance on this. When I spoke to it about the European working time directive, it assured me that it was not just time spent in training that mattered, but the quality of that training. Now in its submission it seems to have completely reversed that position and says that it is just time spent on the job that matters. That confuses me.

As the Government accept, there is a need for discussion on how doctors moving between different specialities can have their pay protected, but that is again something on which we must absolutely enter into discussion with junior doctors. I plead with the BMA to come to the table. The consultation committee in the BMA has done that and I applaud it for doing so. A part of the drive to get more consultants in at weekends is to improve the quality of junior doctor training which has suffered under the European working time directive.

I also note that one paragraph in the BMA's submission states:

"Much of the subsequent detail that has been discussed in the news was never fully outlined as part of the previous negotiation process."

That demonstrates that the Government are still completely open to talking about many things, yet the BMA almost seems to lament that fact. In the light of this, I simply do not understand why the BMA will not return to the table. I celebrated the BMA's "No More Games" campaign. We do need to de-politicise the NHS, but I am really concerned that the junior doctors committee is bringing that laudable aim by the BMA, and the work on that which the BMA does, into disrepute.

5.40 pm

**Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): Countless junior doctors have been in touch with me to say that they are worried and in despair about the Government's threat to impose an unfair contract on them. They tell me that the dangerously long hours that the contract will introduce will be a threat to patient safety. Doctors tell me that rostered hours are not a realistic gauge of total working hours, and that reducing them will not prevent dangerous increases in working time.

Sofia, an anaesthetist in my constituency, says:

"A 'normal' rostered day starts at 7.45am and finishes at 5.45pm. In reality there is no such thing as a 'normal' day, because the clock strikes 5.45pm and it is impossible to walk out the door with an operation ongoing."

Doctors like Sofia are content to work longer hours out of a sense of duty, but they are deeply concerned by plans to remove the financial penalties placed on hospitals to prevent dangerously long hours. She describes the Health Secretary's assurances as follows:

"It's a bit like trying to stop speeding on a busy road by lowering the speed limit, but at the same time getting rid of all the speed cameras, police and speeding fines."

What does all this mean for patient safety? I was contacted by another doctor, Keir, a paediatrician in a neonatal intensive care unit in West Ham. He cannot see how his team could be spread more thinly during the week in order to provide more doctors on Saturdays. He is rightly concerned that doctors would be at risk of exhaustion. He says:

"High intensity specialties are particularly affected from a safety point of view. You don't want any delay putting a three-month

premature baby on life support. Putting in a breathing tube, getting a tiny line into tiny veins—all require skill and concentration. Any tiredness affects the swiftness and accuracy of these procedures."

Doctors like Keir are aghast at what the Government are telling them.

Doctors are also deeply disheartened by the Government's handling of the new contracts. One doctor, Simi, has told me:

"The mood is grim in hospital at the moment. We feel under-appreciated and undervalued. We are not being misled by the BMA. We can read the facts and analyse them for ourselves."

Whatever the Health Secretary has said today, it is evident that some doctors will lose out financially. This uncertainty over pay is causing anxiety. Sofia says:

"Come August 2016, I have no idea how much I will be paid, whether I will be able to afford to pay my bills or even spend time with my children."

I agree with Oliver, another West Ham doctor, who says:

"Not one doctor should be taking home less pay than they do now."

This will have serious consequences for staff retention. Doctors are making plans to leave the NHS. Nick, a medical student in West Ham, says:

"I studied medicine to become not just a doctor but an NHS doctor. Under the proposed contract, I'll be left in the sad situation of being forced elsewhere."

That will be this Health Secretary's legacy. Kirsty, a histopathologist, says:

"The health secretary has been nothing but belittling and demeaning. He has suggested we have lost our sense of vocation. Imposing a contract on us and treating us like children rather than professionals is so wearing."

We trust these doctors with our lives and with our loved ones. Our NHS staff are truly phenomenal. They deserve nothing but the utmost respect, and they certainly do not deserve to have an unfair, unjust contract imposed upon them. The people in this country love the NHS. For their sake, the Government must put forward fair proposals, withdraw the threat of contract imposition and return to negotiations with the BMA.

5.44 pm

**Mike Freer** (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): Finchley and Golders Green is served by Barnet general hospital and the Royal Free hospital, which is just across the border in the constituency of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq). In particular, the Royal Free is the largest hospital serving my constituency, and it is one of the largest and safest acute hospitals in London. It has the high security infectious diseases unit, which has recently been in the news for treating Ebola, and it is a major centre for research into immunology and transplants. Not surprisingly, it is a major teaching hospital.

Many junior doctors who live in my constituency have contacted me and despite my best efforts, using the information provided by NHS employers and the Department of Health's online pay model, they continue to be confused and believe that their pay will be cut. I have no doubt that the selective information from the BMA has not helped. I welcome the reforms in principle and the commitment to introduce a new absolute limit on the number of extra hours that junior doctors can work. Bringing an end to the week of nights and capping the extra hours are welcome, but most junior doctors in my constituency are simply not aware that that is what we propose.

In fact, most of the junior doctors that I have seen believe that the reforms will increase their working week, leading to more fatigue and therefore jeopardising, not improving, patient safety. They believe that this will hamper the Secretary of State's quite-right drive to improve weekend mortality rates. I say to my colleagues in the Department of Health that something is going wrong in the communication of this welcome reform.

Let me turn now to a couple of issues that have been raised by junior doctors and that echo some of the concerns mentioned by the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford). On retention, the Royal Free is a major centre for research and yet Dr Renee Hoenkamp, who wrote to me, is concerned that those doctors who seek to go into research and to step away from the frontline will be penalised by being held back on their progression pay. Those doctors who choose to have a career break to raise a family will also be penalised. Both those concerns will impact on women more than on men.

**Dr Murrison:** On that point, the BMA is making a case for current increments on the basis of experience gained. A career break will probably mean that there will not be any experience accrued. Does he therefore agree that the BMA needs to get its logic right?

**Mike Freer:** My hon. Friend is right that just getting pay progression for time served is not the right thing to do, and most organisations have scrapped it. However, we must avoid accidental penalties acting as a disincentive for women joining the workforce. We should not encourage this idea that women, or any person, should be penalised for taking career breaks or for stepping away from the frontline by taking part in valuable research. I gently ask the Minister to look again at that matter.

When I met Dr Joseph Machta, a junior doctor in paediatrics, he said that, after consulting the Department of Health's pay model, his pay would reduce by 15%. Like many junior doctors living in my patch—it is not a cheap part of London—he was concerned that he would no longer be able to pay his mortgage. Will the Minister look into that matter? I suspect that London's junior doctors rely more than most on premium payments. While average pay across the UK may be neutral under the compensatory increase in basic pay, that may not be true in London. I would be interested to hear whether the Department of Health has done an impact assessment on London's junior doctors and the amount of premium pay that takes up the wage bill in London hospitals. If many junior doctors in London are over reliant on premium payments to pay their bills—that may be a wrong thing to do because they are working too many hours, but that is a different issue—it is a matter that needs to be considered.

It is not unusual to want to have contract terms changed to meet current needs. On that basis, I support the reforms, but I ask the Minister to look into those two issues that I specifically raised.

5.49 pm

**Joan Ryan** (Enfield North) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) on securing this important debate and on her powerful opening speech. As she will know, health services in my constituency have already suffered greatly

at the hands of the Conservatives. Two years ago they downgraded Chase Farm hospital, axing both our accident and emergency and maternity services and breaking every promise they made to local people.

Now they are seeking to implement changes to contracts that I believe are unfair on doctors and pose significant risks to patients, both in Enfield and across the country. That view has been reinforced by the number of doctors from Enfield North who have contacted me to express their serious concerns. Dr Irene Gafson is one of my constituents and has been a junior doctor for eight years. She took part in the march in London earlier this month and carried a sign bearing Nye Bevan's famous words that the NHS

"will last as long as there are folk left with the faith to fight for it."

Many Members may have seen the thought-provoking and insightful article she wrote for *The Daily Telegraph* after the event. Two things in particular struck me when I read her piece. The first was the deep sense of privilege she and her colleagues feel about being doctors. It is not just a job, but a vocation. These are hard-working, dedicated professionals who care passionately about what they do.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): I spent some time in a busy city hospital last week with doctors who told me that many junior doctors now feel so demoralised that there has been a flood of applications to receive the certification to go and work overseas, so much so that the department that deals with that process has had to take on extra staff just to deal with the number of applications. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is very worrying indeed?

**Joan Ryan:** Absolutely.

The second point Dr Gafson highlighted was the level of disillusionment in the medical profession with the Government's plans. She said:

"Whilst the sense of solidarity and unity amongst junior doctors"

on the march  
"was tangible to all, there was a much sadder force underpinning our mood...People who have invested years of passion into their work are feeling demoralised. This unique day that brought so many doctors together in one place really served to illustrate how dangerously low levels of morale amongst junior doctors have sunk."

Dr Gafson voiced her strongest criticism for the way in which these contracts had not been negotiated with doctors and how the proposals threatened the safeguards on working hours. Significantly, she voted for the Conservatives at the last election:

"I trusted them with the NHS and I feel let down. I actually feel embarrassed".

Dr Gafson is not the only one. Another local doctor who does not wish to be named contacted me to express her grave concerns at how the changes could impact on the NHS as a whole. She said that in a meeting last week a significant number of her colleagues were discussing alternative career plans and many were considering a move abroad to practise in another country. She said:

"If these reforms go through then the frontline specialties such as Accident and Emergency, General Practice and acute medicine will be hardest hit, and these areas are already undersubscribed". She went on to say:

"I am gravely concerned that if these changes go through they will signify the start of the dismantlement of the NHS."

[Joan Ryan]

The Secretary of State should heed those words. They are an indictment of how the entire situation has been handled. If what is being offered is a “good and fair deal”, as he has described it previously, how does he account for the upset and concern the offer has caused? Is he willing to publish in full the financial models being used to calculate the proposed changes to contracts so that doctors can know exactly what they can expect to be paid? If he is not willing to do that, junior doctors working evenings and weekends have every right to be concerned that they face a possible pay cut.

Finally, is he willing to accept that removing the safeguards that penalise hospitals that force junior doctors to work in excess of their contract hours has the potential to overburden doctors and compromise patient safety?

I therefore urge the Secretary of State to stop his continued and unwarranted attacks on the BMA and to get back to the negotiating table and offer a deal that is fair to doctors and safe for patients in the context of talks without preconditions.

5.54 pm

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I declare my interest as a doctor, and a veteran of truly awful rotas of the 1980s, involving one in two very often—that is every other weekend, every other night on duty, as well as a normal working day, which I would not recommend to either patients or practitioners. Thankfully, they are a thing of the past.

I welcome very much the Health Secretary's statement today and the guarantees that he has given. On that basis, I am more than happy to support the Government this evening. However, I would say that we need to insist on evidence-based policy making. It is important to understand the difference between a causal effect and an association. My worry is that perhaps the Front Bench has been more influenced by Euclidean theorem than a proper understanding of statistics. My reading of the Freemantle paper and Professor Sutton's remarks lead me to conclude that no causal link has been established between doctors' rostering and excess weekend deaths. If we are serious about reducing weekend deaths, and reducing the difference in health outcomes between this country and countries with which we could reasonably be compared, which I know that my colleagues on the Front Bench are, we need to properly understand what are the drivers of those differences, and I do not think that junior doctors' hours are a principal driver in the problem that we are trying to address today.

I think it is also right to appreciate that we are heavily dependent on the good will of all doctors—consultant grades and junior doctors. Most doctors that I know work well beyond their contracted hours—I know I certainly used to when I was in hospital medicine—and in dealing with them and in communicating with them, we need to keep that in mind and not take that good will for granted.

I very much regret the BMA action, and I very much regret the ballot on 5 November on strike action. The last time such action was taken was in 2012 on, ironically, the subject of pensions. It ended ignominiously and the only outcome was a reduction in the esteem in which the public held the medical profession. I would urge the

BMA, armed with the assurances we have had today, to think again. I say “ironically” because, of course, the proposals, as I understand them to be, would increase core hours, which are pensionable—out-of-hours are not—and I have yet to see the BMA make any comment on that, or indeed reflect it in its pay calculator. Maybe a belated understanding of that has meant that it has chosen to take it down.

In trying to reduce weekend deaths and in trying to reduce that gap between our health outcomes in this country and those in the rest of Europe, we need to be focused much more broadly than on junior doctors' hours. I know the Health Secretary is trying to work out how we can best configure the health service of the future. It is a dynamic thing; it never is fixed in one place. In my opinion, part of that means looking at our NHS estate all the time to make sure that we are getting the best from our assets. In my opinion, it means concentrating our specialist services in larger, regional and sub-regional centres. Those centres find it much easier to roster junior doctors and to concentrate expertise in one place. I am talking about stroke, heart attack and upper gastrointestinal bleeding—all things where we do less well in this country than in countries with which we should be comparable.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend and parliamentary neighbour for giving way. Does he agree that in the rural communities in south Wiltshire that we both represent, there does need to be a certain minimum proximity in order for patients to be able to access their hospital with confidence?

**Dr Murrison:** I agree with that, which is where networks come into our national health service, and making sure that we have specialist centres that can deliver the right outcomes for people, and that there are protocols to ensure that ambulance services take people to the right place at the right time, so that they can receive the treatment they need. What we cannot do is continue with the current situation, in which our constituents can expect lower life expectancy and health in later life than, say, French or German patients. That is not sustainable and it is not right. It means looking again at how we configure our national health service. It may mean some difficult decisions in some parts of our NHS, but that should not be a barrier to making sure that we do it right.

What I would say to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench is that this is not really about junior doctors; this is about consultant grades, who deliver the therapeutics and diagnostics in relation to upper GI bleeds, heart attacks and strokes. They are now, in our new NHS of the 21st century, at the coalface of delivery in a way that they previously were not. So, if I may say so, I would like a greater focus on consultant grades, perhaps at the expense of some of our junior doctors who are the principal subject of our debate today.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** It is obvious that there are too many people who wish to speak and not enough time left. We have only 40 minutes of Back-Bench time remaining. There is no point in people looking disappointed; there are only 24 hours in

a day and this is how it is. We can debate all sorts of things but there is only so much time. I have to reduce the time limit to three minutes, and I trust that colleagues will be decent and considerate to each other and not take too many interventions. If they do take interventions, could they not take the extra minute that is added on? I call Norman Lamb.

6 pm

**Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), who made a thoughtful and valuable speech. As a principle, we must be willing to accept the importance of debating the reform of working arrangements if we believe that there is evidence that current arrangements are undermining the best possible patient care, and I know that junior doctors absolutely accept that view. But I have to say that I am not convinced by the Government's arguments.

I mentioned earlier that I had talked to hospital leaders, who shared their view that junior doctors' arrangements are not the problem. It was striking, listening to the Secretary of State, that he referred to a shortage of consultants at weekends. It was notable also that when I talked to hospital leaders, they spoke of a concern that some senior consultants in some specialties make outrageous demands for additional pay for weekend work. There is a problem there, and I would support reform of that situation, but I am not convinced by the case for reform of the sort that the Government are pursuing. The Secretary of State also rightly talked about juniors being clinically exposed at weekends. Again, the issue is a shortage of consultants at weekends, not issues relating to junior doctors.

I met some junior doctors yesterday and found them all to be very passionate and completely dedicated to the NHS. I found them to be not driven and motivated by pay. I have to say to the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer), that junior doctors find it frankly insulting to be told that they have been misled by the British Medical Association. They are intelligent enough to make up their own minds, and they have done. The Secretary of State should choose very carefully the arguments that he puts to them. The Government must also recognise a basic reality—the contract will work only if it is attractive to junior doctors. If it is not, they will vote with their feet and do what the daughter of the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) has done and go to Australia—or Scotland or the United States—to work instead of in the NHS.

The reform and extension of plain time gives rise to real concerns about its impact on emergency medicine, on acute medicine, on intensive care and on maternity services—those areas where there is a particular need for substantial evening and weekend working.

**Rehman Chishti:** I have immense respect for the right hon. Gentleman's work on mental health. In relation to the shortage of specialists, does he agree with the Royal College of Psychiatrists that psychiatrists should be put in that category?

**Norman Lamb:** I totally agree, and I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that point.

Will the Minister clarify what the Secretary of State said with regard to no loss of pay for individual junior doctors because I fear that those may have been weasel words? He talked about working up to the legal maximum. Is he talking about working up to 48 hours or up to 56 hours? He has given no guarantee that those doctors who may still work 60 to 70 hours in a week will not end up losing their pay. It is very important that the Government are clear on that.

The Government seek to extract too much from a limited pot of money. We all know that £10 billion is not enough to keep the NHS going until 2020. We need to work together. I repeat the Liberal Democrat call for a non-partisan commission to ensure that we achieve a new settlement for the NHS and for care, and to engage with the public and the workforce to ensure that we get this right.

6.4 pm

**Paul Maynard** (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): Three minutes is never enough, but here I go. First, we have heard a lot about seven-day working and a seven-day NHS. That does not occur only within the hospital. I would like to restate the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) in the Westminster Hall debate on the e-petition that, most important of all, we need to look at how we can reduce in the first place unplanned admissions to hospital from the community. Secondly, I echo what the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) said. We here have a responsibility not to exploit junior doctors and their willingness, sense of vocation and commitment to the NHS.

It is worth looking at some of the deficiencies of the 2003 contract. As I understand it, a doctor working 47 hours can be paid the same as one working 41 hours. That cannot be right. A doctor working daytime can be paid exactly the same as a doctor working only nights and late shifts. A doctor progressing to a post of greater responsibility might not get any extra pay for that. There are multiple flaws in the existing contract that need to be addressed as part of the growing trajectory towards improving terms and conditions each time we reassess the contract.

I recognise that there is a desire on all sides to get back round the table, and I strongly urge all sides to do that. I hope it can be done, but there is no contract that I can see lurking in the Minister's bottom drawer waiting to be unveiled. In the report from the Doctors and Dentists Review Body three scenarios were set out. There are a further six, I understand, in circulation and in preparation by the NHS Employers organisation. There is so much to discuss, so many alternative scenarios, that it would be a dereliction of duty for all sides not to get back round the table.

We should note that in what has been proposed, by reducing the maximum number of hours to 72, there would be no more of the four nights in a row that some junior doctors have had to work, and no more seven consecutive nights on particular rota shifts. There is much that is positive in the contract, yet I recognise why there are concerns. I urge Dr Malawana who wrote to the Secretary of State to look again at what my right hon. Friend is seeking to achieve. There is clearly a willingness to discuss how to redefine daytime work, how to judge what we pay for Saturdays, how we change

[Paul Maynard]

flexible pay premiums. There is so much that can still be discussed that we are missing an historic opportunity here to set in stone for another decade a much better contract and a much better set of criteria for fairer working practices for our very, very hardworking junior doctors.

6.7 pm

**Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard).

I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander), the shadow Secretary of State for Health, to her new position.

I have three puncture marks on my left hand. They come from 2001 when I was admitted to accident and emergency suffering a life-threatening event, an ectopic pregnancy. It took four attempts before a junior doctor successfully inserted a line into my hand. He apologised to me and said, "I'm sorry, I've just worked for 24 hours without a break and I just can't see straight." I am grateful to that doctor, both for his compassion and for his honesty, and I will always be grateful to the junior doctor who wheeled me up to theatre at midnight and operated on me, saving my life.

Such overwork is what led the Labour Government to change the junior doctors contract. Under that contract, employers face financial penalties if junior doctors work longer than contracted. This Government want to remove these vital safeguards in the new contract and, instead, ask employers to follow the working time regulations. But in medicine, mistakes cost lives. The safeguards need to be much stronger than generic working time regulations, especially as junior doctors work a number of extra hours over and above what they are contracted to work, as we have already heard.

I have further concerns about the proposed changes. Currently, Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust, which manages Pinderfields, Wakefield's local hospital, carries vacancies in all specialties, like most other large trusts. Vacancies are particularly hard to fill in A&E, obstetrics, paediatrics and medicine.

Junior doctors provide all types of patient care—emergency care to mothers in labour, care for new born babies, specialist elderly medicine, cancer care and surgery. We have heard that almost 3,500 doctors applied for paperwork to leave the UK and work abroad in the first 10 days after the Government announced their threat to impose the new contract.

I have concerns that the contract will discourage junior doctors from gaining clinical experience and contributing to medical research. Currently, pay progression is an annual increment, irrespective of their stage of training. NHS employers want to change that. That will impact on doctors who work part time or who are taking maternity leave, because they will not get an annual increment at their stage of training, so will not get pay progression.

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mary Creagh:** I will not give way.

The Prime Minister said this morning that he was a feminist, but women junior doctors know that his warm words hide the cold reality of direct discrimination. Will the Minister tell us whether an equality impact assessment has been done on the proposals?

Finally, we have discussed the weekend effect, but Fiona Godlee, the editor of the *British Medical Journal*, has written to the Secretary of State criticising him for misrepresenting the research. He must think again and both sides must negotiate.

6.10 pm

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I rise to support our Secretary of State for Health. Far from the Opposition's claims, the reforms he proposes will improve patient care and protect junior doctors on their shifts by ensuring that there are higher staffing numbers out of hours.

I am disappointed that the British Medical Association, which should represent the views of junior doctors, has refused to meet the Secretary of State for Health to discuss the proposals. Instead, it has politicised the issue. One calculator on the BMA website—it has been taken down—led junior doctors to believe that their pay would be cut by 30%. That has never been the case and is not part of any proposal. As a trade representative, the BMA should be ashamed that it has been scaremongering on an issue that affects the heart of our NHS and patient care, instead of engaging with the process in a professional way.

Over the past few weeks, I have seen all sorts of rumours circulating about the number of hours that doctors will be asked to work under the new contract, but the maximum number of hours they will be allowed to work will decrease from 91 hours to 72 hours. No junior doctor working full time will be asked to work more than 48 hours a week on average. The proposal does not return doctors to the time before the working time directive, when they slept on hospital floors. That was very unsafe. On the whole, the premise is to ensure that patient care is the safest it can be.

Doctors working too many hours goes against the basic principles of what the NHS should provide: the best care in the world, free of charge. I support the proposal that Saturdays should become part of the working week. They are treated that way in many professions and attract no extra pay. The Government's proposal is cost-neutral and there are no cuts. No one will lose out. Junior doctors will be better off, because they will have more support on all their shifts. Patients will be better off, because care out of hours will improve.

I urge the BMA to listen carefully to the debate and to reopen talks with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. He is ready and waiting to discuss a package that works for all. Our NHS is fantastic, as are all our junior doctors who work in it. I urge the BMA to allow those young men and women to aspire to even greater heights, and to get around the table for a better NHS for all.

6.13 pm

**Marie Rimmer** (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): We have a very real problem in recruitment and retention in our national health service. Hospitals and general practices are forced to recruit doctors from overseas and highly expensive locum and agency staff. The British

Medical Association has described the plans as unsafe and unfair. My postbag is full of letters from junior doctors in the past weeks. Many of them feel that they are already overworked and undervalued. The threat of the imposition of the new contract does nothing to make that feeling better and only compounds it.

One of my constituents, Elizabeth, was born in Whiston hospital, which is ranked the best hospital in the country—I am so proud of it. She has lived in St Helens her entire life and is now a junior doctor in the hospital where she was born, training to be a GP. Admirably, she wants to put something back in to her community, but she tells me her plans are at risk because the new proposals financially penalise those on maternity leave. She tells me that she will have an enforced pay cut of approximately 30%—I listened to what the Secretary of State said about that—which would leave her unable to pay her mortgage, which she carefully budgets for.

She would also be unable to pay for the compulsory exams needed to complete her training. Sadly, that means she would be forced to take her skills elsewhere. She went on to tell me that other countries, such as Australia, can offer a better quality of life compared with what the new proposals mean for her. Given the very real prospect that she might default on her mortgage, she would have no choice but to move abroad with her family. Applications for certification to practise abroad are soaring. These proposals will also impact unfairly on female junior doctors, 80% of whom are part-time trainers, as pay progression will be slower for them; we will lose even more doctors as a result.

I do not want to go back to the old days, when a junior doctor told me he fell asleep while with a patient—the patient had to wake him up. Another junior doctor was killed in a car crash on the way home after working for nearly 30 hours without a break. It cannot be proved that his working pattern was responsible, but nothing would convince his colleagues and family that that was not the case.

We cannot afford to lose the doctors we are training. Not one hospital in the north-west would be able to balance the books in the next financial year. The clinical commissioning groups are facing enormous financial challenges. Hospitals can only get the money from the tariff from the Government and the CCGs, and it is not there. We cannot pay consultants seven days a week if there is not the money in the CCGs.

6.16 pm

**Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): As a doctor and BMA member, and having been a junior doctor until 2008, I have listened over recent weeks and months to medical colleagues who have articulated loud and clear their fears about what a new contract might bring. Of course, this is a contract for England and I am a Welsh MP, but some of my constituents work in the north-west of England, and we also know that the contract adopted in England is often reflected in the contracts adopted elsewhere in the UK.

I have been concerned by the breakdown in the relationship between junior doctors and the Government, particularly as there is widespread agreement that a new contract is necessary. I have met the Secretary of State and the chair of the BMA's junior doctors committee, Johann Malawana, and I am grateful to them for conducting sensible and reasonable discussions.

Junior doctors and other NHS staff want to feel valued, because they work extremely hard, have large workloads and, like the rest of the public sector, have been subject to pay restraint. There have been multiple attacks from the media in recent years, and indeed from politicians, which frankly have been unreasonable. Some doctors and NHS staff have been voting with their feet and moving abroad. We cannot afford that.

The Government have a duty to improve safety for patients at weekends and ensure that the NHS is affordable in challenging financial circumstances. It is evident to me that there has been some misinformation and unfounded fears about what is proposed in the new contract. The real difficulty with the current situation is that unless and until talks resume, there are in some respects no precise proposals to discuss, so it is very much a fear of the unknown. I believe that the main issue of concern is the threat to impose a contract. I understand how that threat came about, because two and a half years of negotiations led nowhere. I believe that that threat is now impeding the opportunity to resolve the current impasse.

Let me look at the rationale behind a new contract. It includes: an attempt to increase rostering of doctors at weekend; pay scale flexibility, with premiums to support shortage specialties or geographical areas; a change from time served in annual increments to pay progression based on training grades; a reduction of the total number of hours worked by doctors each week; and better consultant cover at weekends.

Of course, concerns have also been raised by the BMA. They include: the removal of financial penalties for hospitals that allow doctors to work excessive hours; and recognition of unsocial hours as premium time. We now know that no junior doctors are at risk of a pay cut. The BMA acknowledges that, in reality, compromise through discussion is required, but some of its current demands would effectively limit the ability for any new contract to be formed along the lines originally envisaged.

6.19 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Opposition for bringing this very topical issue to the Floor of the House for consideration.

Of course, we cannot be closed-minded about the need to reform large aspects of the state, but when reforms are blatantly of an ideological nature it is essential that the appropriate scrutiny is applied, and I welcome the opportunity to do so.

My party, the Democratic Unionist party, believes strongly that an imposed contract does not represent the best way forward. We remain optimistic that the widespread acknowledgement that the existing contract is not fit for purpose will provide sufficient incentive for all parties to ensure that UK-wide agreement can be achieved. I commend the hon. Members for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) and for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) for their very cohesive contributions setting the scene for this sensible, pragmatic and rational route, and I hope that others can join in pushing the House in that direction.

We cannot play politics with the future of such an essential part of our health service, nor with hard-working, aspirational young people who have, in many cases, worked hard their whole lives just to enter the medical

[Jim Shannon]

profession. Consequently, we must encourage constructive engagement between Government and junior doctors' representatives with a view to achieving a positive outcome that underpins safe working practices as well as delivering the highest safety and quality of care for patients.

The current proposals seek to improve something by taking from it. They seek to make improvements that, frankly, cannot be made in a safe manner without increasing investment. It is not just the BMA making noises over these proposed contracts; a tidal wave of stakeholders has weighed in voicing concern. The only way forward is the sensible, rational and pragmatic cross-party debate that my party and others in this Chamber want to see. Such matters are simply beyond politics. Our young people's futures are at stake, as is the safety of our citizens when treated by the NHS. We all need to come together, work out what is right, and make an agreement.

Although the Department of Health in London is responsible for these negotiations, Department of Health, Social Security and Public Safety officials from Northern Ireland have been engaged in ongoing discussions with local BMA junior doctor representatives to assist in identifying and understanding any issues particular to Northern Ireland. We need to find the middle ground so that, sensibly and positively, we can balance the concerns from the different parties involved and come up with a sustainable long-term solution to this issue. The DUP recognises the vital role played by junior doctors in our health service locally and trusts that an outcome can be achieved that appropriately recognises the important contribution that these dedicated professionals make to society in Northern Ireland and across the rest of the United Kingdom.

6.22 pm

**Mark Spencer** (Sherwood) (Con): I am delighted to be able to take part in this most important of debates.

It is worth saying at the outset that the most important issue we face when talking about changing these contracts is patient safety. We do well to recognise that our No. 1 priority should always be patient safety, and about the service that the NHS delivers to the patients who require its health and assistance at the most important time of their life. In order to deliver the improvements, level of service and safety that we require, we need to have an engaged workforce who are willing and enthused about their work. It is important to recognise the challenges that NHS staff face and the long hours that they have delivered over a number of years, putting themselves at great risk, frankly, in working what would be regarded in any other industry as silly hours. We clearly need to change those working practices to make sure that patient safety is once again brought right to the top of the agenda.

It is important to recognise that these negotiations are not about cash. This is not about saving money or changing the system so that the Government can spread things thinner; it is about delivering an NHS service over seven days of the week to make sure that when someone has that moment when they need the NHS to step in to save their life or to help them, the service is there and able to deliver.

Junior doctors currently receive between four and five incremental pay rises, depending on the time they serve. In most other industries, increments in pay should be about qualifications and the way in which someone has worked through them, not simply about the amount of time they have served.

We must get to a point where we can deliver a seven-day NHS and eradicate the weekend effect. As hon. Members have mentioned, some patients are starting to change the way in which they engage with the NHS because they are concerned that, if they are admitted on a weekend, that will affect the care they receive. It is important to ensure that that does not happen. There will inevitably be changes to work patterns, and current contracts will have to change. At the same time the Government will ensure that there is extra pay for time that doctors work at weekends.

6.25 pm

**Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): The Scottish Government have said that they will reject this new contract for doctors, and therefore doctors working in Scotland will not be affected by the reforms to pay and conditions. My constituency is in the far north of England, so this issue is of concern to me and my constituents. We already struggle to access decent healthcare in the county—particularly at our acute hospitals and Cumberland infirmary—due in large part to huge problems with the recruitment and retention of doctors.

Many people in my constituency already travel long distances to access the kind of treatment that they ought to be able to get much closer to home. If Scotland opens its doors to junior doctors from England who feel threatened by this new contract, that will have serious implications for my constituency and other constituencies on the Scottish borders. We already know—it has been discussed in this debate—that there is a problem with keeping doctors in the UK and stopping them moving to other countries such as Australia. If a doctor is working in Carlisle at the infirmary, and all they have to do is move to Dumfries, surely that is a lot more attractive and easier than emigrating to Australia.

As MPs we appreciate the sacrifices that come with working long hours, and the stresses of difficult decisions and the impact on our families. Surely, then, we should appreciate the highly skilled work that our doctors do, on top of the kind of work that we have to do, and we should respect and value their huge contribution. It disturbs me that the Government have lost the confidence of so many in the medical professions. While that lack of confidence continues, we will never resolve issues surrounding the recruitment and retention of professionals and junior doctors in our health service, and we will never resolve the problems experienced by my constituents in accessing the quality care to which they are entitled.

If this contract goes ahead, I have a genuine concern that not only will we fail to recruit the junior doctors we need, but we will lose those we have as they go over the border and into Scotland. I urge the Minister to consider that point. Has that impact been taken into account? Have the Government considered the potential loss of doctors to Scotland? I urge the Minister to look at the issue again.

6.28 pm

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): At the election, the Conservative party promised to deliver a seven-day a week NHS, and my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary is working hard to deliver a package of reforms, including the contractual changes under debate. As a former NHS worker, I know that junior doctors, like all those who work in the NHS, are dedicated to the service of patients. We owe them a great debt, and it is only right that they are rewarded fairly—something that I believe this new contract seeks to achieve.

It is time to dispel some of the mistruths about the updated terms and conditions that have been peddled by the Labour party and its lobbyist allies outside the Chamber. On pay, the facts are now clear. I am delighted that the Secretary of State has made it clear today that no junior doctor will be worse off as a result of the new contracts.

In terms of pay progression, the move away from an automatic rise for years served and towards increases linked to career progression through training grades and levels of responsibility must be welcomed. This will help to bring doctors in line with the industry standards of almost all other professions and see pay increases awarded fairly and on merit, rather than simply on how long a person has been in post.

Some plain time working will increase because of the changes, but there will be a new maximum working week of 72 hours, down from the current maximum of 91 hours. In addition, no junior doctor working full time will be expected to work on average more than 48 hours a week, and new limits on the number of nights and long shifts worked will be introduced. Surely these measures will provide a better work-life balance for our junior doctors and allow them to plan their time off with some certainty.

It is deeply concerning that the BMA has refused to negotiate on contract reform and has instead turned to the threat of strike action. Strikes, especially in vital public services such as health, are never in the public interest and serve only to detract from the valid points made by trade union members. I therefore urge the BMA to suspend the imminent strike ballot, get back around the negotiating table and start making some real progress with the Health Secretary to secure a fair deal for their members, while securing patient safety.

A Government who takes the difficult decisions rather than what is politically popular is, by its very nature, a responsible Government. As a Conservative Government, we are taking those difficult decisions so we can build a stronger and more sustainable NHS for the future.

6.31 pm

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): In order to save paper, I am going to read out an email that comes from a doctor in my constituency. It would be great if those responding to the debate dealt with the concerns that doctors have raised and told whether they consider their concerns to be right or wrong.

In essence, the junior doctor says the proposed changes will mean that doctors who work shifts of up to 11 hours will be entitled to only a 20 minute break; an NHS trust will no longer face penalties for introducing unsafe working rotas; and there will be a change in description

of what are called sociable working hours. For junior doctors, sociable working hours will now be from 7 am to 7 pm, Monday to Friday, and 7 am to 10 pm on Monday and Saturday. That means that 9 pm on Saturday will be considered to be the same as 9 am on a Tuesday morning. That cannot be right.

The proposals will lead to a decrease in doctors' salaries. As my junior doctor says, "Contrary to popular belief, we do not earn a lot of money. We start at £22,600 a year after five to six years of hard training and we rack up a debt of £40,000. We work a lot of hours." The £22,600 figure translates to £10.65 an hour. Junior doctors hold an incredibly responsible job for that amount of money. Changes to pay progression will mean that if they leave the NHS to take up either training or maternity leave, they will not receive the pay rises due to them. In addition, if they change specialism, they will start from the bottom of the pay scale again—all their experience will count for nothing. Patient safety will be compromised and to suggest that that will not happen is plainly wrong.

The junior doctor's email goes on to state, "We have to move jobs every three to six months. We struggle to settle anywhere and put down roots. We love our jobs and that's why we sacrifice so much to be doctors, but this new contract is bullying, undermining and undervalues the doctors in our country." Many doctors may well leave the profession. He says that that is the last thing they want to do, as they love the NHS and they want to serve the NHS.

The suggestion has been made that the information presented by doctors is wrong, or that they are worrying unnecessarily. If that is the case, I would really like an answer to every one of the questions we have raised. We must also be mindful of the fact that many doctors are leaving the United Kingdom. They are going to Australia and to New Zealand, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) said, they may go to Scotland.

6.34 pm

**Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): It is important to make the point that these reforms are categorically not about saving money—their impact on the pay bill for junior doctors will be cost-neutral—so any suggestion that they represent a pay cut for junior doctors, as *The BMJ* has claimed, is dishonest. Junior doctors' basic pay will increase, as will their pension contributions, and they will be awarded pay rises for progression, rather than simply time served, which is in line with most other industries.

NHS employers, who are part of the NHS Confederation, the only body that speaks on behalf of the whole healthcare system, have said in a briefing note that the previous increases, linked to time served, were unfair and did not reflect real progression in terms of increased skills and greater responsibility. The world has changed. People are living longer and have busy lives, and our population is increasing, meaning there are pressures on our health service that were not there 10 years ago. NHS employers have also said that the current contracts are not fit for purpose.

Doctors provide a vital public service, but the NHS must adapt to the needs of the people they serve. This means we need more services available at weekends and

[*Andrea Jenkyns*]

in the evenings, and we need doctors to give people the peace of mind that comes from knowing they can get the help they need when they need it.

Opposition Members claim that the reforms will have a detrimental effect on patient safety, but what is safe about a young trainee medic working the maximum 91 hours per week? The reforms will drastically reduce this to 72 hours in seven consecutive days, meaning we will be working our new doctors less hard, while striving towards the seven-day NHS the Government were elected to deliver.

I would like to turn to some of the concerns raised in the BMA's briefing document. On page 3, it claims that the reforms will not protect doctors from having to work "dangerously long hours". As I have said, the reforms will reduce the number of hours junior doctors have to work and introduce new safeguards on work-life balance by ensuring that all work schedules are mutually agreed between doctors and employers. No junior doctor will be expected to work more than a 48-hour week or more than four consecutive night shifts, and thanks to the Government's reforms to childcare all working parents with three to four-year-old children will have access to 30 hours a week of free childcare. The rise in childcare costs claimed by the BMA are therefore a fallacy.

In conclusion, these reforms will bring doctors' contracts into line with modern lives and working practices. They are important and right. They will improve outcomes for patients, which is the most important thing, and improve conditions for junior doctors. I welcome the Government's amendment to the motion, and I implore all colleagues from across the House to follow us into the Lobby this evening.

6.37 pm

**Grahame M. Morris** (Easington) (Lab): I would like to relay some comments made to me when I participated with other colleagues in a demonstration in Newcastle attended by about 5,000 junior doctors. I had the great honour to be in the company of Dr Rachel King, a dedicated professional from South Tyneside district general named "doctor of the year" for her outstanding contribution in the field of care of the elderly, and some of her colleagues. I was struck by their commitment. They love the service, they want to protect it and they want to see their profession valued, and to that end they asked me to make a few points today.

For them, this debate is not about money, although I take issue with the claim from some Members that the reforms are cost-neutral and that doctors will not lose out. That might be the case overall, but the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) made a really good point: some individuals might lose out. They pointed out that junior doctors, en masse, do not support the reforms. These are clever people—the cream of the crop—and we should listen to them. They know how the service works and how it should be reformed.

They also pointed out that the reforms could increase the danger to patient safety because they might well not solve the problem of junior doctors working longer hours. As colleagues have pointed out, including the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), the protections currently in place are to be removed, yet we have not

had an assurance that something else will be put in their place. As we all know, tired doctors make mistakes. We need to address this issue about discouraging career breaks. Many junior doctors are women who leave to have children. Having spent a great deal of money on training them—the Secretary of State may be able to tell us the figure, but I believe it is in the order of £200,000 or £250,000—we want to encourage them to come back into the profession. There are concerns about not having enough people going into specialist areas.

We need to address the issue about recruitment and retention. Members representing constituencies in the north of England have touched on the issue of how attractive it would be for people to go to Scotland where the new contract does not apply. Over a period of two or three days, about 1,300 GPs made an application for the certification to practise abroad. That should be a real concern when we are having difficulty recruiting and retaining GPs. There is also a knock-on effect in general practice, but I will leave it there, given the shortage of time.

**Mr Speaker:** We are extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

6.40 pm

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): My wife is a junior doctor, an F2 currently working in A&E in one of London's busiest hospitals. I could therefore start by thanking the Secretary of State for livening up my evenings, some of my afternoons and some of my mornings. Instead, I wish to start by saying that however hard colleagues in this place may think we work, precious few of us, as politicians, will ever really understand what it is like to work 10 hours a day and longer, when there is no time to eat, drink or even use the toilet, all while making decisions that are vital for patients and where a single error is both life-threatening and career-ending. Too many doctors feel that the current health service works despite the existing outdated systems, rather than because of them. That is why I hope all parties agree that reform is vital.

The fact that people are working in such intense conditions goes some way to explaining the intense passion that has surrounded this debate. Doctors not only deserve better than the contract they are currently on, but they deserve better than the negotiating process that has turned serious attempts at reform into a debacle where a vacuum has been filled by knowing misinformation from the BMA. Although it is hugely frustrating that the BMA has told many people, wrongly, that they are in line for a 30% pay cut when many will get a 15% pay rise and that many now think the Government want to impose longer working hours when in fact they will be cut, it is understandable. I have seen precious little attempt at genuine honesty from the BMA, but nobody should forget that the union has stepped into a vacuum, and that is why I hope the BMA will come back to the table and negotiate.

We need as little politics in the NHS as possible. We surely need to accept that doctors, however angry and however misinformed, have a commitment to their patients that transcends their commitment to any one hospital, any union or any political party. The low morale that has persisted in the NHS since last winter has not been helped by a lack of negotiation, and it will not be

helped by the exhausting anger of a strike. I would like to see a contract that entices people into specialties such as A&E and being a GP, in part because the latter will see fewer visiting the former, and which acknowledges that working on a Saturday morning is already the norm for thousands but says that working late on a Saturday night is distinctly antisocial. Above all, I would like to see the mature approach from the Labour party, the BMA and all those concerned that will put the NHS on a sustainable footing. We have acted in good faith and I hope that the Labour party will see that and not seek to undermine the health service to which we are all indebted.

6.44 pm

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): My constituent Dr Amy Di Marco, specialist registrar in general surgery, says that the term “junior doctors” is pretty misleading. She says

“in fact it applies to all those who are not GPs or Consultants and therefore includes many doctors who, like me, are nearing 40 (or over), with several years of experience and with responsibilities for patients as well as their own families.”

These are not work experience kids making the tea; they are serious professionals. They are highly qualified individuals who need commensurate remuneration and conditions that recognise that fact. In the areas of general practice, nuclear medicine, chemical pathology, emergency medicine, psychiatry, learning disabilities—the list goes on—we have a recruitment and retention crisis in any case, so these changes to contracts are not going to make the situation any better and risk exacerbating it. Junior doctors face the removal of the obligation on hospital trusts to safeguard the hours worked and the hiking up of plain time from 60 to 90 hours a week.

On 5 November there will be the ballot to strike. The BMA states that this is not a decision taken lightly. Indeed, being forced to work at weekends tending to patients on the brink of death after staying up all night cannot be good for anyone. There are also serious concerns that this proposal would disadvantage those on maternity pay or sick leave, employees working reduced hours or those doing research, yet this work pays dividends for the future and pioneering research on incurable diseases might save the NHS. All those people would be disadvantaged because their safeguards are being removed at a stroke.

This summer, we all saw the “#I’m in work, Jeremy” campaign on the promise for a seven-day NHS. It is happening already. I know this; I was born in Queen Charlotte’s hospital on a Sunday in 1972. Bolstered weekend care is obviously a good thing, but not if it means already stretched personnel being spread even more thinly, and not if it is unilaterally steamrolled through without adequate staffing and resources.

My constituent, Dr William Stern, neurology registrar—he has been in the Public Gallery since 4 o’clock—told me that he was not optimistic because of

“the current funding crisis...increasing deficits in most hospitals...targets being missed”

and junior doctors “threatening to strike”—something he does not want to do. I urge the Government to think again and end this stalemate. I urge all MPs to back the motion.

6.46 pm

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): We have had a comprehensive and powerful debate, with 23 speakers and many more Members who would have liked to contribute if we had had more time. I would particularly like to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith), my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown), my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan), my hon. Friends the Members for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), for St Helens South and Whiston (Marie Rimmer), for Workington (Sue Hayman), for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi), for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) and for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq); the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon); and the hon. Members for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie), for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer), for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris), for Vale of Clwyd (Dr Davies), for Sherwood (Mark Spencer), for Erewash (Maggie Throup), for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) and for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns).

Members of all parties have spoken with great passion and praise for our junior doctors, who work tirelessly to deliver good quality services—despite the challenges they face in an NHS that is increasingly under pressure and under strain.

**Andy Slaughter** *rose*—

**Andrew Gwynne:** I do not have time to give way, I am afraid.

I echo those sentiments of sincere thanks, but we have heard of junior doctors who already work weekends, already work nights, already work holidays and give their all for their patients. Despite all this, the junior doctors now face a situation that has left them feeling deflated, demoralised and devalued.

Patient safety has been a key theme of today’s debate. Some Members have valiantly leapt to the Health Secretary’s defence, but those voices have been far outnumbered by Members who are deeply concerned that this contract is unsafe for doctors and unsafe for patients.

Members have argued that the removal of the financial penalties that apply to hospitals that force junior doctors to work unsafe hours risks taking us back to the bad old days of overworked doctors, too exhausted to deliver safe care. The BMA says this safeguard, which is built into the current contract, has played an important role in bringing dangerous working hours down. Removing this financial disincentive to overworked junior doctors is extremely alarming, especially at a time when junior doctors are already coming under an enormous amount of pressure and strain. If the Health Secretary would just listen, he would hear junior doctors shouting loudly and clearly that they cannot give any more.

Many Members highlighted the protests and marches that have taken place throughout the country in recent weeks. We had only to catch a glimpse of the placards that were waved as thousands of junior doctors marched against the contract to understand that those doctors now fear for their own health and well-being. I was

[Andrew Gwynne]

struck by one banner which read, “I could be your doctor tomorrow, or I could be the patient”, and those doctors’ concerns have been echoed by many Members today. How can the Secretary of State possibly say that he is acting in the interests of patient safety if the very people who work in the NHS say he is putting safety at risk?

Another argument that has been advanced today is that the contract is necessary to ensure that our NHS works seven days a week. Not only does that argument do a huge disservice to our NHS staff who already provide care seven days a week and 24 hours a day, and reveal just how out of touch some Conservative Members are with the realities of working on the frontline in our NHS, but it is wholly inaccurate. If this junior doctor contract were imposed in its current form, it would have the opposite effect, as many independent clinical voices have warned.

It is a bitter irony that the problems that the new junior doctor contract was supposed to be trying to address when it was originally proposed back in 2012—the need to introduce better pay and work-life balance—are the very problems that will be made worse should the contract go ahead in its current form. In letters to the Secretary of State, the presidents of a number of royal colleges and faculties have made it very clear that they share those concerns, but he presumably thinks that they too have been misled.

The Secretary of State said that he did not intend to cut the pay of any junior doctor, but his sums simply do not add up, and everyone can see through the spin. No one with a GCSE in maths can believe that no doctor will be worse off as a result of the new contract. Let the right hon. Gentleman come to the Dispatch Box in the minute that I have left, and answer this question. To what percentage of junior doctors currently working within the legal limits will what the Secretary of State has said today apply? Is it 50%? Less than a quarter? What is it?

**Mr Jeremy Hunt:** All of them.

**Andrew Gwynne:** In that case, I ask the Secretary of State to explain this. If the pay envelope is not increasing, and if the pay is not being reduced, how can these sums add up? They just do not add up, and I suggest that he go back to night school and learn some basic arithmetic.

We know that the BMA has been conciliatory today: it has offered to speak to the Secretary of State again. I ask him, please, let us take this down a notch. Let us get him talking to junior doctors again. The simple fact is that these are the junior doctors who work in our A & E; these are the junior doctors who work in every department of every hospital on the frontline. They come in early and leave late, they already provide care for seven days a week, 24 hours a day, and they deserve a lot better than this Government.

6.53 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer):** Junior doctors form a critical work force in our national health service. They are critical in the truest sense of the word: they are indispensable to

the care of NHS patients. They work around the clock, and they are crucial to the cure of millions of people every year. That was recognised in the powerful speeches that have been made today, not least the very personal speeches made by my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) and the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh). It is clear that every Member appreciates the central importance of junior doctors, and the extent of their training was made plain by the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford).

The critical importance of junior doctors makes their career unique. Few professions are so rewarding, but few are so challenging. I know from my own experience in hospital and from listening to junior doctors how many strive to provide the very best care, how they devote themselves to advancing their knowledge and level of training, and how they frequently make sacrifices in their private lives that others in comparable professions are not asked to make. That is why I understand why there is such a sense of frustration and anger when junior doctors are told by a trusted source that they will soon be asked to work more hours for less money. I know it will be of small consolation to them, but we on this side of the House are as frustrated because we have always recognised in the contract negotiations that we have initiated with the BMA that no such situation would arise.

The assurances that my right hon. Friend has made in a series of letters over the past few weeks, and the assurance he has given today that no junior doctor working within the legal limits in their current contract will lose money as a result of these changes—

**Heidi Alexander:** Will the Minister give way?

**Ben Gummer:** I cannot because I have to conclude.

They are precisely the offers that were made privately both by the Secretary of State and negotiators in their discussions with the BMA. Our frustration is compounded by the fact that right from the beginning of this process, we have sought in the new contract to eradicate the slew of injustices in the current contract which make life unfair, and in some cases unbearable, for junior doctors.

Let me give a few examples raised by hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer). It is unfair that doctors who take time out for valuable medical research receive precisely the same increments as colleagues who might take time out to do something completely unconnected with their training and with service to the NHS, and the same increments as those who take time out altogether from the health service, working only part-time perhaps to develop a career in business or another field. They retain the same increments and basic pay through their career as the doctor who works diligently five, six, sometimes seven days a week, progressing through their training, passing their exams—yet getting exactly the same level of pay as the doctors who do not.

The greatest injustice arises for doctors from the perverse incentives in this contract—for example, hospital management choosing to use the current contract to avoid difficult decisions in rostering staff, paying doctors to work unsafe hours rather than getting to grips with the roster they should be putting in place to ensure safe care for patients.

Let me make it clear to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), who spoke for the Labour party, that the reductions so far since the 2000 contract are a result not of the penalty payments put in place as part of that contract, but of the working time regulations which have made a significant impact on the working hours of doctors, and quite rightly so. Does he not see the logic of his own argument? There are still doctors in the national health service who are working dangerous hours despite the fact that there are penalties in place to stop them doing so. By extension, the only way we can ensure that we have a proper, safe working environment in the NHS is to ensure, once and for all, that in contract and through review, and by exposure to regulatory bodies, junior doctors are not permitted to work unsafe hours. When we are asked whether we back the mis-statements by some of the people involved in this debate, or whether we encourage people to—

**Ms Rosie Winterton** (Doncaster Central) (Lab) *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No.36).*

*Question put forthwith,* That the Question be now put.

*Question agreed to.*

*Main Question put accordingly (Standing Order No. 31(2)),* That the original words stand part of the Question.

*The House divided: Ayes 260, Noes 301.*

#### **Division No. 101]**

**[6.59 pm**

#### **AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Abrahams, Debbie	Champion, Sarah
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Chapman, Douglas
Alexander, Heidi	Chapman, Jenny
Ali, Rushanara	Cherry, Joanna
Allen, Mr Graham	Clwyd, rh Ann
Anderson, Mr David	Coaker, Vernon
Ashworth, Jonathan	Coffey, Ann
Austin, Ian	Cooper, Julie
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Cooper, rh Yvette
Beckett, rh Margaret	Corbyn, Jeremy
Benn, rh Hilary	Coyle, Neil
Betts, Mr Clive	Crausby, Mr David
Black, Mhairi	Creagh, Mary
Blackford, Ian	Creasy, Stella
Blackman, Kirsty	Cruddas, Jon
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Cryer, John
Blenkinsop, Tom	Cummins, Judith
Blomfield, Paul	Cunningham, Alex
Boswell, Philip	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Dakin, Nic
Brake, rh Tom	David, Wayne
Brennan, Kevin	Davies, Geraint
Brock, Deidre	Day, Martyn
Brown, Alan	De Piero, Gloria
Brown, Lyn	Docherty, Martin John
Bryant, Chris	Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Buck, Ms Karen	Doughty, Stephen
Burden, Richard	Dowd, Jim
Burton, Richard	Dowd, Peter
Burnham, rh Andy	Dromey, Jack
Butler, Dawn	Dugher, Michael
Byrne, rh Liam	Durkan, Mark
Cadbury, Ruth	Eagle, Ms Angela
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Eagle, Maria
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Edwards, Jonathan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Elliott, Julie

Ellman, Mrs Louise	Lynch, Holly
Esterson, Bill	MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Evans, Chris	Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Farrelly, Paul	Madders, Justin
Field, rh Frank	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Mahmood, Shabana
Flello, Robert	Malhotra, Seema
Fletcher, Colleen	Mann, John
Flint, rh Caroline	Marris, Rob
Flynn, Paul	Marsden, Mr Gordon
Fovargue, Yvonne	Maskell, Rachael
Foxcroft, Vicky	Matheson, Christian
Gapes, Mike	Mc Nally, John
Gardiner, Barry	McCabe, Steve
Gethins, Stephen	McCarthy, Kerry
Glass, Pat	McDonagh, Siobhain
Glindon, Mary	McDonald, Andy
Godsiff, Mr Roger	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Goodman, Helen	McDonald, Stuart C.
Grady, Patrick	McDonnell, John
Grant, Peter	McGarry, Natalie
Gray, Neil	McGovern, Alison
Green, Kate	McInnes, Liz
Greenwood, Lillian	McKinnell, Catherine
Greenwood, Margaret	McLaughlin, Anne
Griffith, Nia	Meale, Sir Alan
Gwynne, Andrew	Mearns, Ian
Haigh, Louise	Monaghan, Carol
Hamilton, Fabian	Morden, Jessica
Hanson, rh Mr David	Mulholland, Greg
Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Mullin, Roger
Harpham, Harry	Nandy, Lisa
Harris, Carolyn	Newlands, Gavin
Hayes, Helen	Nicolson, John
Healey, rh John	O'Hara, Brendan
Hendrick, Mr Mark	Onn, Melanie
Hendry, Drew	Onwurah, Chi
Hepburn, Mr Stephen	Osamor, Kate
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Oswald, Kirsten
Hoey, Kate	Owen, Albert
Hopkins, Kelvin	Paterson, Steven
Howarth, rh Mr George	Pearce, Teresa
Hunt, Tristram	Pennycook, Matthew
Huq, Dr Rupa	Perkins, Toby
Hussain, Imran	Phillips, Jess
Irranca-Davies, Huw	Phillipson, Bridget
Jarvis, Dan	Powell, Lucy
Johnson, Diana	Pugh, John
Jones, Gerald	Qureshi, Yasmin
Jones, Graham	Rayner, Angela
Jones, Helen	Reed, Mr Jamie
Jones, Mr Kevan	Reed, Mr Steve
Jones, Susan Elan	Rees, Christina
Kane, Mike	Reynolds, Emma
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald	Reynolds, Jonathan
Keeley, Barbara	Rimmer, Marie
Kendall, Liz	Robertson, rh Angus
Kerevan, George	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Kinahan, Danny	Rotheram, Steve
Kinnock, Stephen	Ryan, rh Joan
Kyle, Peter	Salmond, rh Alex
Lamb, rh Norman	Saville Roberts, Liz
Lammy, rh Mr David	Shah, Naz
Lavery, Ian	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Law, Chris	Sheerman, Mr Barry
Leslie, Chris	Sheppard, Tommy
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Sherriff, Paula
Lewis, Clive	Shuker, Mr Gavin
Lewis, Mr Ivan	Siddiq, Tulip
Long Bailey, Rebecca	Skinner, Mr Dennis
Lucas, Caroline	Slaughter, Andy
Lucas, Ian C.	Smeeth, Ruth

Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Starmer, Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
 Tami, Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Mr Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thomson, Michelle  
 Thornberry, Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl

Twigg, Derek  
 Umunna, Mr Chuka  
 Vaz, rh Keith  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Watson, Mr Tom  
 Weir, Mike  
 West, Catherine  
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Mr Mark  
 Wilson, Corri  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Winnick, Mr David  
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie  
 Woodcock, John  
 Wright, Mr Iain  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Grahame M. Morris and**  
**Sue Hayman**

#### NOES

Adams, Nigel  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Barwell, Gavin  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Mr Henry  
 Benyon, Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Berry, James  
 Bingham, Andrew  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blackwood, Nicola  
 Boles, Nick  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Borwick, Victoria  
 Bradley, Karen  
 Brady, Mr Graham  
 Brazier, Mr Julian  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burns, rh Sir Simon  
 Burrowes, Mr David  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, Alun  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman

Chope, Mr Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Colville, Oliver  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, Byron  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Dorries, Nadine  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellison, Jane  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Graham  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh Mr David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Michael  
 Fernandes, Suella  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike

Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Marcus  
 Gale, Sir Roger  
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Gauke, Mr David  
 Ghani, Nusrat  
 Gibb, Mr Nick  
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl  
 Glen, John  
 Goldsmith, Zac  
 Goodwill, Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, Mr James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gummer, Ben  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matthew  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Simon  
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Heald, Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Mr Adam  
 Hopkins, Kris  
 Howarth, Sir Gerald  
 Howell, John  
 Howlett, Ben  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Hurd, Mr Nick  
 Jackson, Mr Stewart  
 James, Margot  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, Boris  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kirby, Simon  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi

Lancaster, Mark  
 Latham, Pauline  
 Leadsom, Andrea  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leigh, Sir Edward  
 Leslie, Charlotte  
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver  
 Lewis, Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Lumley, Karen  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackintosh, David  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Mr Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Mordaunt, Penny  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mowat, David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, Claire  
 Phillips, Stephen  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, Christopher  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, Mr Dominic  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Mary

Rosindell, Andrew  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Sandbach, Antoinette  
 Scully, Paul  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Stride, Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond  
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo  
 Syms, Mr Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie

Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Turner, Mr Andrew  
 Tyrrie, rh Mr Andrew  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watkinson, Dame  
 Angela  
 Wharton, James  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Heather  
 White, Chris  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Jackie Doyle-Price and**  
**Guy Opperman**

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 32(2)),*  
 That the proposed words be there added.

*Question agreed to.*

*The Speaker declared the main Question, as amended,*  
*to be agreed to (Standing Order No. 31(2)).*

*Resolved,*

That this House welcomes the Government's commitment to delivering seven-day hospital services and saving lives by combating the weekend effect; notes the British Medical Association's (BMA) decision to walk away from negotiations to reform a contract which all sides acknowledge is not fit for purpose; further notes the Government's proposed introduction of new contractual limits which protect staff from working unsafe hours and the commitment that average junior doctors' pay will not fall; and calls on the BMA to put patient care first, to choose talks over strikes, and to return to negotiations.

**Fabian Hamilton** (Leeds North East) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You might recall that on Monday you granted me an urgent question about the arrests of a Chinese dissident, who is now a British citizen, and two Tibetan students following demonstrations against the Chinese President during his visit last week. Can you advise me whether there is any way in which I can record the fact that all charges have been dropped against the two students and the dissident Chinese British citizen?

**Mr Speaker:** There is, and the hon. Gentleman has found it. On reflection, he will know that he has found it. The matter is on the record for ever thanks to the ingenuity of the hon. Gentleman.

**Fabian Hamilton:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** We will leave it there.

## Business without Debate

### COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES

*Ordered,*

That:

(1) Standing Order No. 148A be amended as follows:

- (a) line 4, leave out "ten" and insert "seven"
- (b) line 5, leave out "five" and insert "three"
- (c) line 10, leave out "consisting of no more than seven Members,"
- (d) line 29, leave out "the"
- (e) line 30, after "Privileges" insert "and of former Committees of Privileges";

(2) Standing Order No. 149 be amended as follows:

- (a) line 64, leave out "the"
  - (b) line 65, after "Privileges" insert "and of former Committees on Standards";
- and

(3) Kevin Barron, Sir Paul Beresford, Tom Blenkinsop, Mr Christopher Chope, Mr Dominic Grieve, Tommy Sheppard and Jo Stevens be members of the Committee of Privileges.—  
*(Charlie Elphicke.)*

### STANDARDS

*Ordered,*

That Mr Geoffrey Cox be discharged from the Committee on Standards and Tom Blenkinsop be added.—*(Charlie Elphicke.)*

**Mr Speaker:** I say again what I have often said: will any hon. Member who is unaccountably leaving the Chamber, not wishing to hear the Adjournment debate secured by the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna), please do so quickly and quietly, so that those of us who are all agog can hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say?

## Corporate Boards (Diversity)

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Charlie Elphicke.)*

7.15 pm

**Mr Chuka Umunna** (Streatham) (Lab): I thought I would start by setting in context the reason for initiating this debate. First of all, tomorrow the Labour peer Lord Davies of Abersoch—not just a peer but a leading businessman in our country—will be producing and publishing his final report on gender diversity on corporate boards. Secondly, as you know, Mr Speaker, I led for the Opposition on these issues for the past four years and maintain a very keen interest in them. Before entering this place, I practised as a lawyer advising companies large and small, and one of my big motivations for initiating this debate is that I often found, particularly when advising our large companies—attending board meetings, taking instructions from clients, going to a completion meeting for a transaction—that there were very few women in the room and I was almost always the only person of colour.

I want to make one observation before turning to the progress that has been made. Very often in this House, debate is characterised by sometimes extreme tribalism, which requires your intervention, Mr Speaker. The Minister shakes her head.

**The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry)**: I am just shocked.

**Mr Umunna**: Our debates have been described as “slightly yah-boo”, but the issue of diversity has illustrated that when there is broad agreement across the parties, we can actually achieve great progress and effect change in our society. In the last Parliament we had a Liberal Democrat Business Secretary in a Conservative-led Government, commissioning a Labour peer to carry out a review and then produce a report into how we can improve the way in which our boardrooms in this country operate—what they look like—ensuring that they are more representative. What happened as a result of that approach? In 2010, women made up just 12.5% of FTSE 100 boards. In the FTSE 100 at that point there were 21 all-male boards. Later in 2010, Lord Davies was commissioned to do his work by Sir Vince Cable, the then Business Secretary. In 2011, Lord Davies reported, making a range of different recommendations, and perhaps the one that stood out publicly was the target to ensure that women make up 25% of FTSE 100 boards.

The initial reaction of some businesses and business groups was not necessarily terribly encouraging. We all hear the merit argument: “Why pay attention to somebody’s background? Appoint on merit.” The problem with that argument, as ever, is that if boards have been appointing on merit, the reason that our boards do not look like modern Britain and do not have enough women on them is that there are not sufficient women who merit promotion to the board. That argument does not hold water. It did not hold water in 2010; it certainly does not hold water in 2015.

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way and I congratulate him on all the marvellous work that he did in opposition

on this subject. His comments on gender equality also apply to ethnic minority representation. Today I attended the funeral of a great British entrepreneur—Gulam Noon, who created a business from absolutely nothing. There are people of talent around now—people such as the late Lord Noon—who could easily serve as executive directors on the board of British Airways or others of that kind. It is not that we wait for legislation; this can be done now, if corporate Britain decides to act.

**Mr Umunna**: I could not agree more with my right hon. Friend. Lord Noon was a trailblazer, and his passing is a great loss for our country. On behalf of Members in all parts of the House I extend our sympathy and condolences to his family. He was a big man and he made a huge difference.

Effecting change so that we have more Lord Noons and more diversity in the boardroom has required leadership from business groups such as the CBI, the Institute of Directors and the women’s 30% Club. The last Business Secretary also undoubtedly forced change. One of the most important aspects of this debate is the Government ensuring that they keep on the table for business the prospect of more prescriptive action if a business-led approach does not achieve sufficient change. The result of what was done on gender is that in 2015 there are no all-male boards in the FTSE 100, and 26.1% of board members overall are women—a fantastic achievement.

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate on a very important topic. He mentioned that there are no all-male boards in the FTSE 100, but there are 23 all-male boards in the FTSE 250. That is an important point, and I wonder whether he could reflect on the fact that it is not just about boards in the big companies; it is about how we encourage both gender and ethnic minority diversity in middle-sized companies and also in middle management.

**Mr Umunna**: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right; we are talking about the pipeline. He pre-empts my point that, given that we have seen such fantastic progress, there is now a strong instinct to take our foot off the pedal. Yes, the glass ceiling for women is starting to show cracks, but we have yet to smash it. We now need a crusade to ensure that we increase the number of female executive directors. It is a disgrace that in 2015 there are so few women at CEO level in the FTSE 100 and beyond when there is such an abundance of talent out there. That should not detract from our enjoyment of the moment tomorrow when Lord Davies presents his final report and reflects on what has been achieved on gender.

If gender diversity has increased, however, the appalling lack of ethnic diversity in UK boardrooms persists, and progress has gone into reverse in 2015. That is no way for our country to mark the 50th anniversary this year of the first Race Relations Act. The latest annual survey of 10,000 top business leaders by executive recruiter Green Park, which has done fantastic work in this area, shows that the number of visible ethnic minority CEOs is falling, and the number of all-white boards is increasing, at a time when 14% of our population is from a black or minority ethnic background. Today there are just four non-white CEOs in the FTSE 100, following Tidjane Thiam’s move from Prudential to Credit Suisse.

**Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): I, too, commend the hon. Gentleman on the brilliant choice of topic for debate. Is there not a danger of examining the symptoms rather than the cause here, which could mean that we end up with the less competence on boards? Should we not be trying to inspire and encourage a range of people on to boards by targeting education and looking at the beginning of the process, which explains why these people are not succeeding in getting to that higher level?

**Mr Umunna**: I am afraid that there are simply too many people out there with the talent and ability who are not being appointed. That is the reality of the situation in 2015.

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for all that he is saying, and I congratulate him on his engagement, which was announced in the last few days.

Does my hon. Friend agree that this is not special pleading? If we look overseas to America, we see that they have made huge strides with the appointment of African-Americans and Latinos to boards. That increases the diversity of talent, and most pioneering companies understand that to be the case.

**Mr Umunna**: I could not agree more with my right hon. Friend, and I thank him for his best wishes. On the point that he makes, he and I represent very similar constituencies, and we cannot carry on like this. When my young black constituents ask me what they should consider doing in the future, I want to be able to point to people who look like them in the boardrooms, to inspire them to think that they can do it too. In 2015 there are far too few people who I can point to and give as an example.

**Dawn Butler** (Brent Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this Adjournment debate. It is this very subject that led us to create the all-party parliamentary group on governance and inclusive leadership. Members on both sides of the House recognise how important diversity is in business and on boards, and most businesses recognise the business case for diversity. Does my hon. Friend agree?

**Mr Umunna**: I could not agree more, and I very much welcome the establishment of that all-party parliamentary group. My hon. Friend mentioned the economic benefits. We are not harnessing the huge benefits that our diaspora communities in the UK can bring to the boardroom—their family connections to and cultural understanding of the emerging markets, as we seek to export more and tackle from a trade perspective a current account deficit which is the largest on record.

In response to what I have said, I call on Ministers, first, to set a target for ethnic minority representation on FTSE 100 boards to be met by 2020, so that there are no all-white boards by 2020. That is a sensible target. The 2020 campaign led by Lenny Henry, Trevor Phillips and others has suggested that. I think that is a reasonable suggestion. Secondly, in 2013 the Companies Act 2006 was amended to require companies to include a breakdown of the number of female employees on boards, in senior management positions and in the company as a whole. We should do the same for ethnicity. If businesses do not know the problem in their workplace, they cannot do anything about it. Finally, Lord Davies

has done a fine job on gender diversity. Let us now commission him to carry out a similar review on ethnicity. I praise the Government and the previous Government for their political will to make that happen on gender: get Lord Davies to carry out a similar review into ethnic diversity.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for securing this important debate. Does he agree that the issue in respect of individuals who have a disability also needs to be taken forward, and that it has not been addressed appropriately so far?

**Mr Umunna**: I agree. As is often said in debates when we are considering equality issues, it is a not case of either/or; it is and. We need to look at all these aspects.

Ultimately, if there is not sufficient progress in a reasonable time frame, Ministers must be clear that they will act. Both carrot and stick are necessary if we are to build that fairer, more equal Britain where all my constituents, regardless of their background, can aspire to achieve, to reach for the stars and lead British business.

7.28 pm

**The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry)**: I am always grateful to my team in the Department because they always write me a speech. Most of the speech that has been provided is not of much relevance because I am in listening mode on this issue. The hon. Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna), whom I congratulate not just on his engagement, but on having secured this debate, makes some extremely interesting and valid points, which I did not realise until he secured the debate. I am pleased to record in *Hansard* some of the things that have already occurred which are interesting and which are at least the building blocks for tackling what is undoubtedly a real problem, which he properly brings to this place. He properly calls on Government, in effect, to take the same attitude to people of different colour, ethnicity and background as we have taken in the past five years to women. That is what I believe the hon. Gentleman is saying. If he is not, he can tell me.

The 2020 group is chaired by Sir John Parker. He is the chairperson—interestingly, it says “chairman” in my notes—of Anglo American plc. The aim of the group is to help to create the climate and conditions in which UK business leadership can take the maximum advantage of the cultural, religious and ethnic diversity available within the population. We know the figures: 98% of all FTSE 100 chairs are white; 96% of FTSE 100 chief executive officers are white; and 95% of the FTSE 100 chief financial officers are white. As the hon. Gentleman has said, that comes from the Green Park leadership campaign and work.

As a result of the 2020 vision, the Prime Minister said that, in the next five years, we will increase the proportion of apprenticeships started by young people from black and minority ethnic communities by 20%; increase the number of BME students going to university by 20%; and work to ensure that 20,000 of start-up loans are awarded to BME applicants by 2020.

That is good and laudable and it resonates with the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight), who is no longer in the Chamber.

[Anna Soubry]

He and my hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) made the point that we must ensure that people from all backgrounds go into business. The point made by the hon. Member for Streatham was that we cannot wait, because we know that people of ability are in businesses and are more than capable of reaching the upper echelons but are not getting there.

There is therefore a problem. I do not know—I am asking the hon. Gentleman to help me—whether there is research on why more perfectly capable and able people who happen not to be white are not making the progress they clearly should make.

**Mr Umunna:** To answer the Minister's question, Green Park in the main has produced the research. That is one reason why I think it would be fantastic if the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills asked Lord Davies of Abersoch to do on this what he did on gender. He collated the research, and I am sure the Minister's civil servants have given her his various reports, which he produces every six months. We need the same kind of evidence-building and research on the reasons why—they may not be purely discriminatory or anything like that—to find out what blockages are stopping such people getting to the top.

**Anna Soubry:** I absolutely understand that. Lots of people are doing all sorts of research. After the first Opposition day debate this afternoon, I went to an event in the Shard organised by a foundation called the Pink Shoe Club. It is doing a lot of in-depth work with women to see why, for example, women in small businesses are not having the successes that men have. It is complex. One reason is access to money. Another is that, frankly—I can say this as a woman—it would seem that not enough women have enough aspiration. It is not simply the case that there is still discrimination and bias—I am sure there is and there is no debate about that—but there are lots of other factors. Obviously, with the rise of women through the ranks, there will always that debate on the topic of children and how women fit their children in with that sort of career and advance. Any man can do it—the problem never seems to stop men having children and continuing their career. It is hugely complicated.

**Mr Lammy:** Does the Minister agree that chairmen and CEOs have to lead and say that the issue is important, and they have to mentor? In that sense, it is no different from politics.

**Anna Soubry:** I completely agree with the right hon. Gentleman—he is now my right hon. Friend for the purposes of this debate. When I was a Defence Minister, one thing that really struck me was that the people at the very top of the three armed services undoubtedly got it. They understood that it was unacceptable that there were not enough women, gay people or people from ethnic minority backgrounds making their way up through the ranks in the same way that white, straight men were. After the people at the very top got it, we began to see the most astonishing successes. For example, our armed forces have done particularly well in getting rid of the awful discrimination against gay people. Some progress has been made for people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Frankly, we could do a lot more

for women. The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that it has to come from the top, because that is where the leadership is.

This probably sounds completely obvious to those of us who get it, but it is not about saying, “I want 50% of my board to be women, and I want more people with brown skin on my board, because that's what we really should be doing.” It is about saying, “We've got to have the very best people on our board, so there should be no barriers to them getting there. If there are barriers, how can we be sure that we're getting the best people?” It is not about saying, “We want more women and more people from ethnic minority backgrounds because that reflects society.” It is about saying, “We want the very best, and that means people with ability have to be able to get on.”

**Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con):** I am listening carefully to my right hon. Friend, who is making a powerful case. She will no doubt be aware that for the past 16 years more than 50% of graduates coming out of Russell Group universities in this country are women, and that more women get first-class degrees from those leading universities than men, yet only 8% of executive directors in this country are women. She is making a powerful case for people to listen and act, but we are not seeing much action, so how will she change that in an acceptable time frame?

**Anna Soubry:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that intervention. She brings huge experience to this debate, given her role in government over the past five years. I think that we have made very good progress, and I think that it is accepted that there are now many more women sitting on FTSE 100 boards, but I accept that we are nowhere near where we should be. I take the point made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull that it is not just about the FTSE 100. Indeed, there is always a danger that we forget about all the other companies. However, the FTSE 100 is a symbol, so if we can get it right in the top 100 companies the message will drop all the way down to smaller business.

**Dawn Butler:** As you are making such good points, may I invite you to attend the all-party group and listen to the Powerlist Foundation and Green Park as we collate all the information and work out how we can fix the problem?

**Mr Speaker:** I would welcome that privilege, but I think that it will be that of the Minister.

**Anna Soubry:** I was just thinking that you would love to attend that, Mr Speaker. I would love to attend as well, so we will see whether that can be arranged.

**Michelle Donelan:** While assessing the solutions, does the Minister agree that quotas are demeaning and do not foster the necessary culture of diversity?

**Anna Soubry:** I absolutely agree. I do not like quotas or targets, but that does not mean that I do not like ambitions—there is an important subtlety in that word. That is why I had no difficulty with some of the great campaigns to get more women into this place or on to boards. I have no difficulty with a hard drive behind ambition, but I absolutely would not go down the route of having strict legal quotas.

**Mr Umunna:** With regard to the point that the hon. Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) made about quotas, we looked at that in the previous Parliament, after the European Commission came forward with proposals. I think that the general consensus in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills was not to rule them out completely for the future, but that they are not something people want to move forward with at the moment. We wanted business to lead the charge, and it has done that. I have a practical suggestion for the Minister. The Powerlist Foundation has been mentioned, and she will be aware of the existence of the list of the 100 most powerful black Britons that is produced every year. I suggest that she meet its representatives, because it would be a very valuable resource for her in finding out about research and getting advice on what to do next. I also ask that we change the narrative reporting rules to require large listed companies in the FTSE 100 to produce statistics on the situation in their business so that they know whether there is a problem that needs to be addressed.

**Anna Soubry:** I do not want more regulation. The hon. Gentleman would expect me, as a BIS Minister, to say that. However, he is absolutely right. If people do not look at their own institution, business or whatever to make this analysis—in my chambers, for example, we would look at our stats and our figures—then how do they know when there is a problem and where it might be? It is necessary for businesses to look at this.

The hon. Gentleman made some very powerful points. He had three asks. I hope he will forgive me if this sounds a bit wet, but I would like to not only take this away with me, but, most importantly, to meet him and the key players to look at it and advance it. The Secretary of State is from a particular background, and is no doubt the first person from that background in that role, so he will certainly have an interest in this, especially as he has a business background, as did his family.

**Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con):** In his speech at the Conservative party conference, the Prime Minister gave a very clear direction that he wanted change so that people could overcome issues about their names and so on. I am worried about who we can point to as examples for seven, eight, nine and 10-year-olds, and teenagers, in school in my constituency. That point was made by the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna). I am hearing very positive words from the Minister, but there has to

be a bit more action. The hon. Gentleman said that there has been a mixture of carrot and stick. When the Minister has finished having her conversations and looking at the information, will she at least, short of quotas and regulation, look at what sticks can be used if progress is not made?

**Anna Soubry:** My hon. Friend has known me for long enough to know that I do not shy away from things. I am more than happy to look at the kinds of sticks that can be put in place to encourage action now. We are not going to wait for those 10-year-olds to get up to these levels; we have to sort it out now. I know, as a woman, that when somebody has “made it” they can become an incredibly powerful force.

**Mr Umunna:** As a role model.

**Anna Soubry:** Yes, as a role model. I am a huge fan of mentoring. I have seen the great work that mentors can do with women, and often people from difficult backgrounds, in inspiring them and giving them a helping hand along their journey. I am a huge fan of that. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that we need to get the right role models in place.

I am sorry if this is not one of those speeches whereby I just trot out all the usual lines. However, I absolutely give an undertaking that I will speak to the Secretary of State about this debate and the very powerful speech that the hon. Gentleman made. He mentioned Vince Cable. The article in the *Evening Standard* was very good and very powerful.

**Mr Umunna:** I very much welcome the Minister’s invitation to come to her Department to meet her and, I hope, the Secretary of State, and bring a group together to discuss how to move forward. I undertake to do that.

**Anna Soubry:** That is excellent. I undertake to see whether Lord Davies’s remit can be extended, now that he has done such great work, in the way that we want. I hope that this gives us a real basis now to do some really good, positive work.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.44 pm.

*House adjourned.*

## Deferred Division

### HUMAN RIGHTS (JOINT COMMITTEE): NOMINATION OF COMMITTEE

That Fiona Bruce, Ms Karen Buck, Ms Harriet Harman, Jeremy Lefroy, Mark Pritchard and Amanda Solloway be members of the Joint Committee on Human Rights.

*The House divided: Ayes 485, Noes 61.*

### Division No. 99]

#### AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane  
 Abrahams, Debbie  
 Adams, Nigel  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Alexander, Heidi  
 Ali, Rushanara  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Mr Graham  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Anderson, Mr David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Austin, Ian  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Bailey, Mr Adrian  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Barwell, Gavin  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Beckett, rh Margaret  
 Bellingham, Mr Henry  
 Benyon, Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Berry, James  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Bingham, Andrew  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta  
 Blenkinsop, Tom  
 Blomfield, Paul  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Borwick, Victoria  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bradley, Karen  
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
 Brady, Mr Graham  
 Brazier, Mr Julian  
 Brennan, Kevin  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Brown, Lyn  
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Buck, Ms Karen  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burden, Richard  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Burns, rh Sir Simon

Burrowes, Mr David  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Cairns, Alun  
 Cameron, rh Mr David  
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Chishty, Rehman  
 Chope, Mr Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
 Coaker, Vernon  
 Coffey, Ann  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Colvile, Oliver  
 Cooper, Julie  
 Corbyn, Jeremy  
 Cox, Jo  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crausby, Mr David  
 Creagh, Mary  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Cruddas, Jon  
 Cryer, John  
 Cummins, Judith  
 Cunningham, Alex  
 Cunningham, Mr Jim  
 Dakin, Nic  
 David, Wayne  
 Davies, Byron  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 De Piero, Gloria  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Dorries, Nadine

Doughty, Stephen  
 Dowd, Jim  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Dromey, Jack  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, Mr Philip  
 Eagle, Ms Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellison, Jane  
 Ellman, Mrs Louise  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Chris  
 Evans, Graham  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh Mr David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Michael  
 Farrelly, Paul  
 Farron, Tim  
 Fernandes, Suella  
 Field, rh Frank  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Fitzpatrick, Jim  
 Ffello, Robert  
 Fletcher, Colleen  
 Flint, rh Caroline  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Marcus  
 Gapes, Mike  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Gauke, Mr David  
 Ghani, Nusrat  
 Gibb, Mr Nick  
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl  
 Glass, Pat  
 Glen, John  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Goldsmith, Zac  
 Goodman, Helen  
 Goodwill, Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, Mr James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Green, Kate  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Greenwood, Lillian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gummer, Ben  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matthew  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Hanson, rh Mr David  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Simon  
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Hayman, Sue  
 Heald, Sir Oliver  
 Healey, rh John  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Hendrick, Mr Mark  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hermon, Lady  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hinds, Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hoey, Kate  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Mr Adam  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Hopkins, Kris  
 Howarth, rh Mr George  
 Howarth, Sir Gerald  
 Howell, John  
 Howlett, Ben  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Hunt, Tristram  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hurd, Mr Nick  
 Jackson, Mr Stewart  
 James, Margot  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Johnson, rh Alan  
 Johnson, Boris  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Graham  
 Jones, Helen  
 Jones, Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald  
 Kawczynski, Daniel

Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kirby, Simon  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lancaster, Mark  
 Latham, Pauline  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Leadsom, Andrea  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leslie, Charlotte  
 Leslie, Chris  
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver  
 Lowell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Brandon  
 Lewis, Mr Ivan  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 Lumley, Karen  
 Lynch, Holly  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackintosh, David  
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Mr Alan  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, John  
 Mann, Scott  
 Marris, Rob  
 Marsden, Mr Gordon  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 Mathias, Dr Tania  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonnell, John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 Meale, Sir Alan  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mordaunt, Penny

Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, Grahame M.  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mowat, David  
 Mulholland, Greg  
 Murray, Ian  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, rh Mr George  
 Owen, Albert  
 Paisley, Ian  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Perry, Claire  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillips, Stephen  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, Christopher  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pugh, John  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Raab, Mr Dominic  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Rimmer, Marie  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Rotheram, Steve  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Sandbach, Antoinette  
 Scully, Paul  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant

Sharma, Alok  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Simpson, David  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Julian  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smith, Royston  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Starmer, Keir  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stride, Mel  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond  
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo  
 Tami, Mark

Thomas, Derek  
 Thomas, Mr Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Turner, Mr Andrew  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Umunna, Mr Chuka  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watkinson, Dame Angela  
 Watson, Mr Tom  
 Wharton, James  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Heather  
 White, Chris  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wilson, Sammy  
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Woodcock, John  
 Wragg, William  
 Wright, Mr Iain  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim  
 Zeichner, Daniel

#### NOES

Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina  
 Arkless, Richard  
 Bardell, Hannah  
 Black, Mhairi  
 Blackford, Ian  
 Blackman, Kirsty  
 Boswell, Philip  
 Brock, Deidre  
 Brown, Alan  
 Cameron, Dr Lisa  
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
 Chapman, Douglas  
 Cherry, Joanna  
 Crawley, Angela  
 Day, Martyn  
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair  
 Durkan, Mark  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Fellows, Marion  
 Ferrier, Margaret  
 Flynn, Paul  
 Gethins, Stephen

Grady, Patrick  
 Grant, Peter  
 Gray, Neil  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hosie, Stewart  
 Kerevan, George  
 Kerr, Calum  
 Lamb, rh Norman  
 Law, Chris  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McCaig, Callum  
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McLaughlin, Anne  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Monaghan, Dr Paul  
 Mullin, Roger  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Nicolson, John  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Oswald, Kirsten  
 Paterson, Steven

Ritchie, Ms Margaret  
Robertson, rh Angus  
Salmond, rh Alex  
Saville Roberts, Liz  
Sheppard, Tommy

Stephens, Chris  
Thewliss, Alison  
Thompson, Owen  
Thomson, Michelle  
Weir, Mike

Whiteford, Dr Eilidh  
Whitford, Dr Philippa  
Williams, Hywel

Wilson, Corri  
Wishart, Pete

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

# Westminster Hall

*Wednesday 28 October 2015*

[MR DAVID NUTTALL *in the Chair*]

## Transforming Rehabilitation Programme

9.30 am

**Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered implementation of the transforming rehabilitation programme.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. It is now almost 12 months since the formal creation of the 21 community rehabilitation companies and the establishment of the new national probation services. It has since become clear that fundamental flaws in the former Secretary of State's thinking are beginning to impact on service delivery. The CRCs were initially created to address new work arising from probation supervision being extended to clients leaving prison after serving less than 12 months in custody. The probation service supported extending statutory support to this group with adequate funding. Had a consultation taken place on how that could be best achieved, I have no doubt that genuine alternative methods could have emerged, but it was unfortunately evident from the outset that the Secretary of State's predecessor was fixed upon the payment-by-results outsourcing model.

Prior to the reorganisation, probation trusts were highly successful, with a good record of reducing reoffending. They had won European-wide awards for public service and all the trusts had been recognised as either good or outstanding by recent inspections. Trusts had established good local partnerships with other agencies, including in the private sector, that had been producing excellent results. In a number of trusts—for example, West Mercia and the Willowdene project—these partnerships have extended into innovative work with the third sector, addressing and supporting the same group of clients whom the transforming rehabilitation reorganisation targeted. Indeed, a major review by the third sector review group indicates that the procurement process was incoherent and meant that third sector providers who were supposed to have opportunities to engage in TR were disfranchised.

**Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): It is not only politicians who have opinions on this subject, but the voluntary organisations themselves. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations sent us a briefing for this debate, which made the point that, despite the warm words of the former Justice Secretary, there is very little voluntary sector involvement.

**Stephen Kinnock:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. The purpose of a consultation is to listen to the experts. In this case, the experts have described themselves as being used as “bid candy” to dress up the bids, rather than being involved in a truly engaged fashion. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend's point.

Significant challenges were immediately obvious. First, the marketplace was not interested in taking over the management of high-risk offenders for the limited profits

associated with managing that target group. Further, the Ministry of Justice had been heavily criticised by both the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office for its poor management of previous contracts in courts, community payback, electronic monitoring and the quality of some provision in private prisons and detention centres. There was therefore limited political support for privatising the whole lot, hence the “split” solution.

Several probation experts argued that splitting the probation service into two distinct groups was a far riskier solution than selling all the service to private providers. The split in the service creates challenges, some of which, with great patience, effort and commitment from all stakeholders, could be managed, but a world full of good will is not going to address the insurmountable structural flaws arising from the split. These include, but are not limited to: local service delivery and management of clients; bureaucracy and inefficiency, with additional processes generated to manage the allocation of cases and accountability; substandard internal communications, especially those founded upon outdated and unstable technology within the National Offender Management Service; and inefficient management of staff due to internal competition, which undermines morale and professional unity.

However, the greatest flaw was rushing the whole programme through to meet a strict political timetable without any adequate testing or piloting. The MOJ also failed to establish workable, sustainable contracts with the CRCs. These are already the subject of significant challenge from the new CRC owners. Equally, in its haste to successfully establish the CRCs, all efforts and energy were focused on the contracts share sale, and very limited evidence emerged of any serious planning or risk assessment of the future management of the newly nationalised National Probation Service.

With no piloting or credible assessment of what the new work meant or involved, the allocation of budgets and staff was largely guesswork. Initially, NOMS stated that 70% of work was expected to be transferred to the CRCs as only around 30% of total clients would be classified as high risk. This was not a scientific experiment, and it quickly became evident that it did not translate. The staffing split soon became 50/50, with ongoing confusion about where some work should sit. Current staffing levels and reliance on expensive agency staff are simply not sustainable, nor value for money for the taxpayer. A case needs to be made to the Treasury for emergency support for the NPS.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that this sounds all too familiar? As with other privatisations led by the Conservatives in government, they privatise the profits and nationalise the debts, and long-term liabilities to the taxpayer become greater than they were before.

**Stephen Kinnock:** I do agree with my hon. Friend. It is important to put a system in place that works. The old maxim, “If it ain't broke, don't fix it”, applies. We absolutely have to be open to new forms of innovation, working in partnership with both the third and private sector, but that was already happening. The new system that has been put in place has unfortunately caused a great deal of confusion. I hope that today we can make some progress on sorting that out.

[Stephen Kinnock]

The contracts allow the CRCs to pass back tough cases and still get paid on a fee-for-service basis. A further problem concerns the additional redundancy costs. The probation unions have recently had cause to lodge formal disputes with the national negotiating council on account of one of the CRC owners—in this case Sodexo—refusing to honour the terms of voluntary redundancy under the national staff transfer and protections agreement. Staff terms and conditions should be honoured, and the MOJ should police this as part of its contract management.

I now want to turn to the report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of probation. It is expected that Ministers will cite the latest report from Paul Wilson as evidence that it is too early to form a judgment about TR and that it will be another two to three years before the public can see evidence of the effectiveness of the reforms. Although not disputing the valuable work of HMIP, we believe this is a wholly unsatisfactory analysis that will assist the Government in their attempts to gloss over the reality that is the failure of TR. I do not believe we can afford to wait two to three years for the situation to resolve itself when the consequences of a failing probation service are so critical to public safety.

A further vital point is about transparency. In a letter written to the Select Committee on Justice, the Minister claimed he was putting measures in place to improve transparency. We fully support the need for the performance of the probation services and the CRCs to be properly monitored and for the results of that monitoring to be made public. As such, we strongly recommend that private probation providers are made to comply with freedom of information requests so that they, too, can be openly scrutinised by hon. Members and the public. We also call on the Government to place the details of the 21 private contracts in the public domain so that they are open to scrutiny.

Finally, I want to raise serious concerns about service delivery. The MOJ is proposing a reduction in the number of full reports delivered to courts and a greater reliance on oral reports. Oral reports by their very nature do not allow for a full risk assessment to be carried out by probation staff, nor for any information that is held by other agencies to be collected. As such, they should be used on low-level first-time offences only. However, the push to use these types of reports in the majority of cases will see them being used for wholly inappropriate offences.

We are already aware that, because of pressures on staff and staff shortages, oral reports are being used for sexual and domestic violence offences. Such cases are complex, and there are underlying risk issues that must be investigated fully prior to sentencing. Children's services and the police should be contacted to see whether there are ongoing risks to children and victims. Without that information, it is impossible to manage the case effectively or safely, or to propose to the court the most appropriate sentence.

I will summarise the seven key recommendations that must be implemented urgently. First, there should be open engagement between the unions and senior MOJ and NOMS management and stakeholders to identify ways to resolve some of the urgent performance issues arising in the NPS. Secondly, there should

be a full post-implementation review of TR and the contracts and performance of CRC providers since 1 February 2015.

Thirdly, the NPS should be properly funded, sustainable and effective at managing some of the most dangerous offenders, and there should be funding for information and communications technology that is fit for purpose. Fourthly, there should be effective contract management, including a full analysis of CRC operating models, to ensure a safe delivery of service that focuses on public protection and rehabilitation, not just on cost-cutting exercises. Fifthly, all CRC owners should be made subject to freedom of information requests, so that their performance can be scrutinised by MPs and the public.

Sixthly, there must be robust and fully open contract management to ensure that providers are adhering to staff terms and conditions as underwritten by Ministers. Seventhly, a mechanism should be put in place to enable those in CRCs who are made redundant to transfer swiftly to the NPS at the same grade as they were prior to the split. That would not only ensure that skilled staff are not lost, but help to reduce the pressures in the NPS caused by staff shortages.

A wise person once said that what matters is what works. It is crystal clear to all concerned that the transforming rehabilitation programme conceived by the coalition Government is simply not working. We in the Labour party are pragmatists. As such, we urge the Minister and his colleagues to remove ideology and dogmatism from this matter in order to enable common sense to prevail. We call on the Minister to listen to the experts and fix this broken system before it is too late.

9.42 am

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I thank the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) for securing the debate.

It is important to get the rehabilitation of offenders right—important for the communities in which offenders settle or to which they return; important to the victims of offenders' actions; important to the offenders themselves; and important because rehabilitation will reduce wider financial and social costs in future. Although we welcome and applaud the Government's efforts to involve charities and the voluntary sector in the effort to reduce reoffending, Plaid Cymru strongly opposes any privatisation of probation services in Wales—and, indeed, beyond. Civil societies can do plenty of things in rehabilitation without managing probation services as profit-making businesses. Indeed, justice services, which are at the foundation of an equitable civil society, are surely ill served by the profit motive, and run the risk of being fundamentally compromised whenever the providers' financial interest is challenged by the complex needs of individuals and the communities in which they live.

I note that rural areas can be particularly difficult to serve given the issues and costs associated with distances and scattered populations. I would expect there to be a particular focus on those areas because they are difficult to reach. The NPS has had problems in my area, Dwyfor Meirionnydd, in the past, so rural areas should have specific focus. On top of that, the Government must ensure that they abide by their own Welsh language scheme. Welsh language services should be available, whether provided privately, through the third sector or through charities. That is a statutory requirement.

If the Government do not do more to address the root causes of crime and the potential for reoffending, the transforming rehabilitation programme will be just another demonstration of their failure to deliver security and justice. The programme will simply be one of those easy neoliberal solutions to which the Government choose to retreat when faced with some of our biggest social problems. Surely the mix of poverty, mental health issues, addiction and low skills should be addressed as a whole.

**Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on securing this debate. He said, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”. In Neath we have an integrated offender interventions programme that is funded by the police and crime commissioner and NOMS. It is a perfect example of a community partnership. Since 2012, it has rehabilitated 800 prison leavers per annum and 600 people who have been referred by the courts. The programme concentrates on breaking the cycle of drug interventions and on an exchange system. Does the hon. Lady agree that such schemes are all the more important in areas of Wales where we rely on the support of the Welsh Government?

**Liz Saville Roberts:** I do. The community approach is important, as are the roles of social services and local authorities. None of these actions is happening in isolation. Local authorities remain under financial pressure, and that is due to increase, which is an additional concern. These issues require co-operation across public sector organisations.

By privatising large parts of the probation service, the Government are failing to carry out their responsibility. Communities expect the Government to nurture and protect a safe social environment where families and individuals thrive, and where there are improved educational standards and reduced levels of poverty. The Government’s abdication of their responsibility to create that safe social environment not only affects communities but opens the path for recidivism. I appreciate that the proof of success must lie in whether offenders reoffend, especially within 12 months of sentencing, but given that aspects of the new arrangements were described by HMIP in May as “rushed and piecemeal”, the Government must commit to a politically disinterested, neutral appraisal of the rehabilitation arrangements, and respond in the spirit of that which best serves the public rather than the privatisation agenda.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr David Nuttall (in the Chair):** Order. I propose to call Bob Neill next. I can see that many Members want to speak; if contributions can be limited to six or seven minutes, everyone will have a chance to speak before I call the Front Benchers.

9.48 am

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. I congratulate the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on securing the debate, as do my colleagues on the Justice Committee. It is a pleasure to see the hon. Gentleman here, because his predecessor but one was a great friend and mentor to me as a young barrister. I am glad that the tradition of an interest in the justice system is being kept on in that constituency.

As Chair of the Justice Committee, I had the pleasure last week of speaking about the progress in transforming rehabilitation to a conference of providers. There were people from a range of providers, including NOMS, the NPS, some of the CRCs, to which I spoke afterwards, and a number of voluntary groups. There was not a word of ideology in the discussion. Although people were frank about some of the work that needs to be done—that work has quite properly been referred to today—I say with every respect that I think the discussion was more nuanced in the picture it painted of the work on transforming rehabilitation, and I think it was fairer.

**Wayne David:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Robert Neill:** I will make a bit of progress first. In the previous Parliament, the Justice Committee published some work, which I imagine some Members have read, that flagged up some issues. I was interested in discussing those issues at that conference and listening to the feedback. Against that background, I will happily give way.

**Wayne David:** If the hon. Gentleman believes that there is no ideological motivation behind the introduction of this system, why does he think it was introduced so quickly?

**Robert Neill:** First, because if one spoke to any sentencer, for example, they would say that the need to have a better approach to those being released from short sentences into statutory supervision was real and pressing. Those people are immediately at risk of recidivism, which leads to lost opportunities for life in every case. Secondly, the need to improve the “through the gateway” services was real and immediate. That is not to say that we should not review and improve the programme as things go along. Of course, that is right and sensible. The Select Committee recognised that point on a cross-party basis, and I think the Minister does, too.

When we drill down into the evidence and talk to practitioners on the ground, although there is recognition that things can be improved, there is also recognition that the scale and objectives of the programme are valuable and, when delivered, represent a real improvement. There is progress on the ground, and we should recognise that as well as the challenges and places where more needs to be done.

**Christina Rees** *rose*—

**Robert Neill:** I will give way once more, but I need to make some progress, bearing in mind your strictures on time, Mr Nuttall.

**Christina Rees:** I read that the pilot schemes were cancelled. Will the hon. Gentleman give us his opinion on that, please?

**Robert Neill:** If the hon. Lady looks at the Select Committee’s website, she will see that we have published our correspondence with the Minister. I am very grateful to him for his detailed response, which goes into three or four pages of detailed text about the pilot schemes. Rather than taking up time here, it is worth referring hon. Members and the public to that. Because the pilots were cost-saver pilots, the view that was generally expressed

[Robert Neill]

was, “It is too early to tell. After all, things such as payment by results won’t come in until 2017.” None the less, there was satisfactory progress, and I think we need to review the pilots in that light rather than taking a sweeping view.

The previous Justice Committee raised several issues, as the Minister recognises. They have been alluded to today, and I hope the Minister can respond to them. One was the issue of IT, which is undoubtedly a real, ongoing problem. To be fair, it was a problem before the transforming rehabilitation scheme was brought in. Public sector IT has been an issue for virtually all my time in public life, but it is pressing because the joining up of information sharing is going to be more and more important, given the dual system between the national probation service and the community rehabilitation companies. It is a critical issue, and I hope the Minister can give us more detail about it.

There was a concern that the laudable objective of statutory supervision could, in the short term at least, place more demand on the system, because if people are found to be in breach, that could put them in a cycle of going back in and out of prison. I would be interested to know, albeit that it is at an early stage, whether the Minister has any evidence about how statutory supervision is working.

The report of the interim chief inspector of probation, which has been referred to, said fairly that there are significant operational and information sharing concerns across the boundaries of the national probation service and the community rehabilitation companies, and continuing frustration with the old case management systems. That was borne out by the practitioners I spoke to, and I hope the Minister can update us about what practical steps are being taken to rectify that issue. On the other hand, the interim chief inspector of probation specifically said that those problems are transitional and can be resolved. He pointed to an urgent and continuing need to support the necessary improvement in the quality of leadership. The point is that those problems are resolvable. To say, therefore, that the system is fundamentally flawed is wrong and not borne out by the evidence. That is not the feeling of those who actually work on the ground.

The issue of the impact on transparency and the local linkages was referred to. A fair point was made about how we deal with the move from the old system of probation trusts to a national system on the one hand, and the CRCs on the other. The CRC people I have met are committed, highly motivated, skilled professionals. I do not regard it as in any way improper to have that sort of private investment in the system. They work well with their colleagues in the NPS, many of whom they have known for years.

There is an issue to consider about join-up, and I hope the Minister can look again at how we ensure that the local linkages are not lost. The ability to work closely with other agencies, including local authorities, criminal justice organisations, social services and the health service—many offenders have multiple issues and will require multiple-agency intervention—requires careful liaison at a local level. I would like to know what

we can do to ensure that that is recognised within the new framework. We need to bring in local granularity and nuance.

Another issue that was raised was about getting the information to sentencers and the courts, which value input from the probation service. There is a question about whether the CRCs, which deal with some offenders, have, in effect, a right of audience when dealing with sentencers, as the NPS does. What protocols can we put in place to deal with that? Can we ensure that the representatives of the service at court, who advise on sentences—I know from discussions with the judiciary that they are much relied upon—are getting the information across fully, and that it is properly fed back?

I am not pretending that there is not work that still needs to be done. I think everybody would agree that there is. Equally, we should not simply adopt a partisan stance. I am convinced of the Minister’s good will, and I am also convinced that there is real potential that should be taken on board. That is why the Select Committee wants to return to the issue in this Parliament. I hope we can get some balance on the progress that has been made and the work that we still need to do.

9.56 am

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Mr Nuttall, for giving me the chance to speak. I congratulate the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnoek) on bringing this issue to Westminster Hall for consideration. I want to give a Northern Ireland perspective and talk about what we have done in Northern Ireland, as I am conscious that this is a devolved matter. I also want to talk about what has been done in Texas—I have spoken to the shadow Minister and the Minister about this—as an example of how we can do things better.

Financially, this country cannot go on with the current system. It quite simply costs too much, so there is a financial issue. We are failing not only financially but socially, with overcrowding and rising levels of violence in prisons and stubbornly high reoffending rates. The levels of drug and substance abuse continue to be a problem. How can we fix this? I want to make a constructive contribution to this debate and talk about the steps we have taken in Northern Ireland.

We all need a fairer, more accessible and quicker justice system that will ultimately benefit all of us. It is time we had a rational debate across party political lines about the direction of justice. I want the Northern Ireland legal system to lead the way, just as Northern Ireland has done with sport—look at the Irish rugby team, the Northern Ireland football team and now the Irish hockey team.

The poverty trap and high levels of crime have a vice-like grip on the populace. Innovation in justice is one of the best ways to break the cycle. Northern Ireland is not limited to piloting modern justice systems; it can become a leader in developing them. It is time to have a bipartisan conversation about whether it is logical and feasible to continue with the age-old way of doing things. Is it just a case of, “Let’s do it this way because we have always done it this way and this is the way we understand,” or can we come together to have a pragmatic discussion? I believe that this Westminster Hall debate will give us the chance to discuss what is best for the country, citizens and ex-offenders.

The Northern Ireland problem is not exactly undocumented. According to the “Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010” report, 30 of the 100 most deprived small areas in Northern Ireland are either in or around interfaces that emerged from the high levels of activity during the troubles. We have had some difficult times, as everyone in this Chamber will appreciate. Despite the promise of a peace dividend, life for people in those areas has not got much better, and for some it has become worse. Moreover, the majority of those 30 areas are also included in the top 30 areas for crime in the Province. There is a connection between deprivation, interfaces and the level of crime.

We need to move the conversation away from patchwork reforms and start talking about serious innovation in justice. Innovation should not be confined to the private sector. We seek to modify many of the pillars of Government and the public sector, not least our chronically outdated justice system. In that sense, it is encouraging to see innovation, or at least an attempt at innovation, from the Minister. Innovation will make it possible to have a positive social impact and make the savings in our public finances that we so desperately need. Mere reforms to patch up a broken system, while saving a bit here and there, are only temporary fixes. In Northern Ireland, examples of potential innovation include early interventions in education and health among the young people most at risk, along with work and education programmes that ensure offenders pay their debt to society and that equip them with skills to help them to turn their lives around once formal rehabilitation is complete. The Government’s rehabilitation programme has some promising aspects, and I am keen to see what we in Northern Ireland can take from it and what others here can learn from the exciting new approaches in Northern Ireland.

The Democratic Unionist Chair of the Committee for Justice in Northern Ireland, Alastair Ross MLA, has created justice seminars that provide the space for the sort of ideas that need to be heard, discussed and critiqued. I am glad that work on such changes has already begun in Northern Ireland. The monthly justice innovation seminars look at new approaches in justice and evidence-based, outcome-driven policy proposals.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): Although we are discussing an exceptionally important matter and its by-products, does my hon. Friend agree that the two central issues for most in the community are that justice is seen to be done whenever an offence is committed and that reoffending is seen to be coming down? If those two criteria are met, these other issues, important as they are, will take second place.

**Jim Shannon:** As always, my hon. Friend’s contribution focuses attention on an issue. With more approaches like the justice innovation seminars, I am sure that we can find the solutions we so desperately need to benefit us all and achieve what my hon. Friend suggests.

We have seen some unexpected champions of justice reform—this is where the Texas connection comes in. Notably, Texas Governor Rick Perry has actively diverted non-violent offenders away from prison and into education and rehabilitation programs. If Members have the time, they should read about that: it is exciting and innovative and it works. Just one example of the success of Perry’s post-partisan reforms is the improved efficiency, reduced

costs and improved outcomes of Texas’s drug courts. When Perry took office, Texas had just seven drugs courts. With poor outcomes from the incarceration of those who needed treatment and needless, astronomical costs, Perry committed to finding smarter ways to reduce crime. By increasing the number of drugs courts to 150 and opening 19 innovative veterans treatment courts, Texas has seen serious results, both financially and socially. Since 2007, an estimated \$2 billion has been saved in new prison spending and three prisons and six juvenile centres have been closed. State-wide crime is at its lowest levels since the 1960s and Perry’s reforms have brought about a 39% reduction in the parole failure rate. Those figures are exciting and achievable, and we must take note of them.

In conclusion, choosing the right interventions saves the public purse by keeping people out of prison and saves society the trauma of high crime rates by reducing offending and reoffending rates.

10.3 am

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on securing this important debate on a central issue in our criminal justice system.

In my early years as barrister before coming to this place, when I practised in the criminal courts, few things were more depressing than the repeat offender. There were of course some people who came into the justice system, had one point of contact with it and were never seen again, but those who came back time and time again were far more challenging. The challenge was summed up by Simon Hughes, former Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark and former Minister of State at the Ministry of Justice, when he said in the Chamber on 17 March that 57% of offenders who received sentences of 12 months or fewer had reoffended within a year. That is the scale of the challenge we face.

As for the forthcoming changes, we have 21 community rehabilitation companies, the resettlement services and the National Probation Service, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon mentioned, deals with high-risk offenders. We must guard against fragmentation in this new environment. We cannot have offenders literally being passed around members of staff. There has to be a member of staff with whom they can build a relationship of trust and confidence. We must also ensure that the staff member with whom they deal is properly briefed about their case and aware of the background, because that relationship is absolutely crucial to the rehabilitation process going forward.

Staff morale is also a great problem. Ian Lawrence, the general secretary of Napo, the association for probation officers, said on 20 October:

“There’s a huge challenge to rebuild staff morale in both the NPS and the CRCs: it’s currently at an all-time low, and that’s not me just saying it ‘because I would, wouldn’t I?’ This is information coming back to us from our members on a daily basis. Certainly those facing the prospect of redundancy as the CRC owners start to implement their target operating models, are feeling let down by the last Government.”

I hope the Minister will take this opportunity to speak of the value that he places on probation officers and those who work in rehabilitation services and to talk about the dignity and respect with which they should be treated.

[Nick Thomas-Symonds]

Another often undervalued aspect of the probation service is the pre-sentence report. While it is important at the sentencing stage—because it provides a background to why the offence was committed, how the offender has responded, whether there is remorse and other issues—the report is also helpful for rehabilitation because it points at particular aspects of the case that could be helpful. The Justice Secretary has already spoken about the concept of earned release and reducing the prison population, and the pre-sentence report can play a part in that and in how rehabilitation is viewed.

Increased transparency in community rehabilitation companies would also be helpful. I see no reason in principle why they cannot be subject to freedom of information legislation. Limits of around five years on contracts would also be a step forward, as would giving the Secretary of State the power to terminate contracts in cases of sub-standard performance. Those are both pragmatic and sensible steps.

The Minister will be aware of the Harris review, which was published on 30 July and deals with the serious issue of deaths of young people in custody. It states:

“For those whose liberty has been removed by the Courts, the primary goal of the prison regime should be rehabilitation. At present, prisons are an expensive failure as far as this objective is concerned.”

That simply cannot remain the case. We have to face up to this challenge. The Government are keen on payment by results, and it is by results that we must justify this policy.

10.8 am

**Kate Osamor** (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) for bringing this debate to Westminster Hall. Effective rehabilitation must be at the heart of the UK’s prison system. The chief inspector of prisons, Nick Hardwick, said in his most recent report that prisons are in their worst state for 10 years. We lock up more people than any other western European country and have a reoffending rate of more than 50% within a year of release. We need a more effective rehabilitation programme.

The recent changes were a missed opportunity for effective reform. I am deeply concerned about the programme’s implementation, including the fact that the changes were rushed through, the model was untested with no evidence provided to support it, and the service appears fragmented. To quote the probation inspectorate report of December 2014, “Transforming Rehabilitation—Early Implementation”, splitting one organisation into two created

“process, communication and information sharing challenges that did not previously exist.”

Many will remain a challenge for some time to come.

I will focus on staff retention and morale—

**Wayne David:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Kate Osamor:** May I first make a bit of progress, please?

On 8 September 2015 my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman) raised in the House the issue of Sodexo laying off 600 staff, many of whom were experienced in providing offenders with suitable

skills and learning placements. I am concerned that offenders are now not being adequately supervised, risk-assessed or monitored. Sodexo is the biggest provider of probation in the privatised service, and has been attacked by Napo for the staffing cuts.

It is not an underestimate to state that staff morale is at an all-time low. There was an overwhelming lack of support for the policy change among staff before its implementation. In September 2014, results from a survey showed that 98% had no confidence in the plans. According to an article published in *The Independent*, at least 1,200 staff will have left by the end of the year as a result of redundancy, retirement or a career change due to disillusionment. As Frances Crook, chief executive of the Howard League, has stated, there were only 9,000 probation officers to start with, so such a severe reduction in numbers raises important questions about the safety of the public—for example, victims of domestic violence.

Following the changes, I am concerned in particular about the morale of black, Asian and minority ethnic staff, 74% of whom were women. In May 2015 Napo’s national online survey of BAME probation service staff highlighted an alarming fall in confidence levels and morale: 80% of respondents experienced a decrease in their confidence in the probation service and 83% reported a decrease not only in the morale of staff, but in the service. A third of respondents believed that the probation service breached official guidelines during the transforming rehabilitation assignment process.

Radical and effective reform does not come through privatisation and autonomy. To prove that, we only need to look at the state of the national health service and education in this country or at a report by New Philanthropy Capital which shows that 28% of charity projects have reduced reoffending, compared with 19% of private companies.

I am deeply concerned about the impact of the changes on staff morale and the effectiveness of the rehabilitation programme as a whole. I call on the Government to respond to such concerns.

**Mr David Nuttall (in the Chair):** For the benefit of new Members, may I say that if they have not written in, it is important for them to rise clearly in their places so that we can see whether they wish to be called? I call Rachael Maskell.

10.13 am

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Nuttall. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) for setting out the importance of focusing on the Government’s transforming rehabilitation programme. The debate is highlighting the risks and confusion that are manifest as a result of introducing an untested programme and reorganisation affecting some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Getting prison and probation wrong fails victims, the public and the offender. The issue is too important. For Labour, therefore, penal reform has to be about evidence-based practice, to ensure that all interventions that are deployed have the highest opportunity of being transformative. Opposition Members will not be heard calling for nothing to be done when reoffending rates sit at about 47.5%—that figure has remained static for many years. Labour is the first to demand intervention.

In June I was the Member in charge of a debate in Westminster Hall that highlighted many of the serious issues in our prisons leading to the failure to help offenders turn their life around. Throughout the debate Opposition colleagues emphasised things that need to be dealt with to stem the reoffending rate. Intervention is vital, but intervention is very different from reorganisation.

The transforming rehabilitation programme has been about more than only reorganisation; it has also been about privatisation. As with health, education and so many public services, the Government's main interests are political rather than purposeful. They have made it absolutely clear that they will be seeking the involvement only of private and voluntary sector organisations in their programme, not of the public sector—not of those with the highest expertise. We have scrutinised so many Government attempts to transfer the accountability of services from the state to shareholders, followed by cuts. That is what we are now witnessing across the probation service. With each such change, we see a shift in risk from the Government, so that when things go wrong they may simply point a finger—but they no longer have a responsibility to lift a finger.

The community rehabilitation company that serves my constituency and the whole of Humberside, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire, Purple Futures, is a combination of Interserve—the main provider, which describes itself as a leading

“multinational support service and construction company”—

and three minor partners, social enterprise and charity P3, Shelter and 3SC, which manages the contract. None of those organisations boasts any expertise in the provision of rehabilitative services for offenders. They have worked together for only a short time and have not built up any evidence to prove that they can transform rehabilitation.

The fracturing of the prison, probation and now rehabilitation services has of course, as with all such arrangements, created serious issues, which also means risk. Predictably, issues of IT, communications—as we have heard—and barriers to information sharing have come to the fore. We have also seen increased bureaucracy. That is why it is so important to be able to scrutinise what is going on, but without access to information and without freedom of information making it freely open to the public, it is hard to scrutinise services and therefore safety.

We have seen the job losses that inevitably follow the privatisation of services. As a result, confidence in the service has fallen, and as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), staff morale has plummeted to only 65%. Again, ideology was put before evidence. I want to contrast that with a successful prison-to-community service just outside my constituency. Askham Grange women's open prison, provided by the state, has a very different story.

The national reoffending rate is 47.5%, but at Askham Grange it is below 6%, the lowest in the country. Askham Grange is an open establishment operating a resettlement regime for women. It provides support for up to 128 women at any one time, including 10 mothers and babies. Its ethos is built on the maintenance of decent and respectful relationships between all who live, work and visit there. Its focus is to provide support in achieving positive family relationships and to provide individual learning programmes that include education, work skills and personal development.

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): I am so pleased that the hon. Lady mentioned family relationships. If rehabilitation is to work, it is essential that while prisoners are in custody their family ties are maintained, so that they have a home to go to when they leave, whenever possible, and the best chance of not returning to detention later.

**Rachael Maskell:** I thank the hon. Lady for emphasising the importance of family. That is why Askham Grange can be held up as a good example, which facilitates such family relationships.

Individual potential is also realised at Askham Grange, with progression through a resettlement regime and into community work and/or paid work placements that reflect the training and skills gained throughout the sentence, as well as those already held. Askham Grange enables women to participate in sport and provides health facilities, a strong chaplaincy service and a wide range of courses, from the Open University programme to creative writing, business administration and employability skills. A range of vocational training opportunities are also on offer, from gardening to service assistant posts, which can lead to City & Guilds qualifications. The Ministry of Justice rated that service as exceptional in all criteria. It is one of only three prisons to have such high commendation.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons provides consistently good reports of the prison. It describes how women feel “safe” there and says that “Askham Grange continues to be an impressive...prison”.

Indeed it is. With such excellent services, the only shocking thing is that the Government want to close the prison. The independent monitoring board described that as “bewildering”.

The Government want to replace just about the best rehabilitation service in the land with an untried and untested programme—can you believe it? If the Government are really committed to the safety of our communities, turning around the lives of some of the most vulnerable women and truly transforming rehabilitation, it is time for them first to announce that Askham Grange will not close and, secondly, to use the 70 years of evidence-based practice at Askham Grange to provide excellence across our prison and probation services.

10.20 am

**Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on securing this important debate. According to the Ministry of Justice, the aim of the reforms was to ensure that offenders were not only punished, but better rehabilitated by offering them greater support in the rehabilitation process, reducing reoffending rates while continuing to ensure public safety.

Is it not the case that the reforms were untried, untested and rushed through at breakneck speed? The former chief inspector published his first inspection of the transforming rehabilitation reforms in 2014, which was critical and found that splitting the probation service caused significant issues with process, communication and information sharing. The major problems were rushed timing, the fact that the model was untested and, as we have heard, fragmentation.

[Gerald Jones]

The speed of the reforms caused real concern and their implementation caused operational problems that could have been avoided or mitigated. Most worrying is the fragmentation, which means that offenders are juggled between multiple members of staff before they finally meet their personal probation officer. Many of the new processes also take longer and are more complex than the previous arrangements. Surely changes are meant to bring more efficiency, not less.

Significantly, in the most recent report from May 2015, the chief inspector of probation said that the picture was “mixed” and that inspectors found that many of the challenges identified in the earlier report remained. The IT systems remain a barrier and a number of tasks at the pre-allocation stage are “time consuming” and “not streamlined”. Those wide-ranging concerns remain unresolved. The Government must take action, and I urge the Minister to address those concerns today.

10.23 am

**Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall, for what I believe is the first time. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) for securing this important debate. Probation can often get pushed to one side in favour of discussing prisons, but I believe that the probation service is the key to unlocking the reduction in reoffending that we all want to see.

Many Members have observed that the implementation of the programme was rushed. There were pilots, which Labour supported. One such pilot took place in Wales, and I think I visited every one of them as they were about to begin. It was hugely disappointing to find that the work put into setting up those pilots was to be for nothing, because the models tested in the pilots were not to be implemented by the Government. Therefore, great time and energy and some expense was wasted, but we are where we are.

The Government were warned by experts—my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon put this well—that we were losing an opportunity by abolishing probation trusts. They were not stodgy, stuck-in-the-past public sector organisations that did not want to change; they were one of the most entrepreneurial public agencies anyone could hope to find, with dynamic, charismatic chief officers and chairs, and boards with strong private sector representation, which were run competitively. They all wanted to be the best. As has been said, they were all good or outstanding. They were working well and had huge capacity to deliver many if not all of the outcomes that the Government sought to achieve through the ridiculous splitting of the service that they seemed determined to embark on.

I want to highlight the observation made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon about the split being born entirely out of political necessity. The Government knew fine well that they could never win public support for the wholesale sell-off of the service when medium and high-risk offenders were to be subject to supervision in the community—where we and our constituents live. The fear was that those offenders would not be properly supervised, and because the Government knew that was

a risk, they invented the ridiculous, artificial split of the service along risk lines, when we all know that risk is dynamic.

Anyone who has ever worked with offenders will know that a low-risk offender does not always stay a low-risk offender. Risk changes. It can change quickly and unpredictably, and the people best placed to make such assessments are probation officers. They have the relationship with the offender and they have proven time and time again that they can spot such changes. When changes occur—they could result from a new relationship, drinking, a mental health issue or losing a job—the triggers must be communicated immediately.

I am getting to be rather fond of the Chairman of the Justice Committee, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill). He is quite an avuncular character, but I would caution him against smothering the Minister with love.

**Robert Neill:** Will the hon. Lady tell me what I have been doing wrong?

**Jenny Chapman:** The point I am trying to make is that the Minister needs to answer some serious criticisms about programme’s implementation. It behoves all of us, from whichever side of the House, to make problems known to him, although I have to give him his due. These are not problems of his making; he inherited the programme, and I like to think that he would not have liked to have seen this nonsense implemented, because I know he cares deeply about what happens in the community and what happens to offenders, and he cares about victims, too.

**Wayne David:** I agree that it is important to learn lessons from the process we have embarked on, but is not one of the key lessons to learn that, when we approach such issues, we must put dogma to one side and look empirically at what works? If that had been done, we would not face many of the problems we do now.

**Jenny Chapman:** That is absolutely right. There was an opportunity to trial the programme. Labour was in favour of pilots, in which so many lessons could have been learnt and problems avoided. Everyone said that there would be a problem with IT—it does not take a rocket scientist to spot that. That was so predictable and so avoidable. With time and training, we could have avoided the problems we are now experiencing.

We cannot just say, “We’ll sort it out as time goes on, but it’ll take a couple of years to put it right.” Problems are being caused now, and problems in probation are a risk to public safety. The Minister needs to get his head around those issues urgently. If necessary, he needs to put in resources to deal with them—because, my God, he will be putting in resources if things go wrong! Let us not wait for that to happen.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor) powerfully outlined the folly of splitting the service. The inspectorate agrees with her, and says that the speed of transition has left staff feeling that they have not been informed about new working processes. Many still do not understand the rationale behind those processes. To their credit, the workforce are hugely motivated and experienced, and have the very best values. They will work incredibly hard to make the

changes work, but we haven't half made their jobs that much harder by going about it in this way. There is only so much that even that workforce can take. I urge the Minister to address the problem of staff morale quickly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones) was right that time is being wasted because new tasks are not being integrated with old systems. Staff in court do not have access to the information they need. Things are having to be done on paper and uploaded later, creating extra tasks and unnecessary administration. Information is having to be inputted repeatedly in different places. All that nonsense could have been avoided. Heaven knows, the IT was bad enough before we started this process and needed to be addressed, but imposing a new structure on a system that was already feeling the strain was simply reckless and unnecessary. The Minister could have got the same outcomes in a safer, better way.

There are significant staffing gaps, but efforts to fix them have been too slow. It is shocking that the service can be restructured at breakneck speed, but the hoped for gains, such as involving the voluntary sector and providing proper, meaningful supervision for short-sentence prisoners, appear to be happening incredibly slowly—so slowly that we cannot see them.

Many new processes simply take longer and are more complicated than the previous arrangements. Every serious case review I have ever read has looked at communication problems as a factor leading to that serious case arising. In probation, communication is not a luxury or something it would be nice to get right; it is at the very heart of it all, and probation officers, workers in the CRCs and anyone else working with an offender must be excellent at communication. They therefore need to be given the right systems and support, but that is not happening. That is dangerous, and the Minister needs to get on to it straightaway.

This debate is not simply a rehashing of previous debates between me and the Minister about how ridiculous this whole project was—it is not our greatest hits. Rather, it is about problems with implementation. The decision on the transforming rehabilitation programme has been taken, so now we must make sure that, however chaotic the system is, we can support the workforce to make the programme work and make it safer for our constituents.

I have asked the Minister many times—as I asked his predecessor, the current Attorney General, when the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 was in Committee—about co-location. I have had many assurances that NPS and CRC staff will be co-located. I thought that would be a good way of dealing with some of the problems with communication, as in the past those supervising an offender would have shared an office or have had a good relationship because they would have been used to dealing with one another. Will the Minister say how often co-location is not happening? I suspect that it is more the norm that staff are sited in differed locations. How quickly does he intend to address that? It is perhaps the key to making the system safer.

There are many current problems. Inspectors often find that they are identifying the same challenges now as in earlier inspections, and that the work to put those right, as was identified in the Minister's letter to the Chair of the Justice Committee, is not having the desired impact. The Government need to do more than they have already said they will to put those problems right.

The pre-allocation stage is not streamlined and so is too time consuming. What will the Minister do to streamline that stage, which is a crucial part of the process? There are now, effectively, two risk screening tools, the case allocation system and the offender assessment system. Many staff in both the NPS and the CRCs are expressing serious doubts about the value of completing the risk of serious recidivism tool at the pre-allocation stage.

That issue has been raised repeatedly with Ministers, including when the 2014 Act was in Committee. Unfortunately, at that stage Members were given no information about the new risk assessment tool and were forced to take it on trust that it would be workable and that we would not need huge investment in training on it. I am not convinced that we were given the most candid or well-informed responses in Committee. The Minister needs to add looking urgently at that risk assessment tool to his to-do list.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) quoted Ian Lawrence, the head of the National Association of Probation Officers—we never know, he might just be listening—on staff morale, which my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton also talked about. Morale is at an all-time low. The system is under huge pressure, with 98% of staff saying that they have no confidence in the Government with regard to administering the programme effectively. That cannot make the Minister feel too good about himself. I am not here to add to his woes, but he needs to consider the burden he is placing on staff in the sector. They have a breaking point, and I do not want to see any more good, experienced staff leaving the service because they have no confidence in the Government's intentions on responsible supervision of offenders in the community. Will the Minister address those points?

Despite the gloss that the Chair of the Justice Committee placed on the mood in the voluntary sector, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations seems to see things slightly differently. The largest membership body for the voluntary sector, it has conducted a survey of how its members feel. We need to take the evidence of that survey very seriously. It found that the pace of change has been slow. Organisations have not been involved, leaving them unsure about whether they will be involved in service delivery at all, and so unable to plan strategically or make decisions on staff. Few voluntary sector organisations have said they have been able to secure contracts to deliver services, which is especially the case for smaller ones. All is not as it seems, and it is certainly not as was promised.

The Government promised to put the third sector at the heart of probation, but the promise was obviously false, as that has not happened. Will the Minister therefore let us know what he is doing to put that right and ensure that the voluntary sector plays a significant role? We want to get the benefit of all the talent in, and experience of, working with offenders that we have up and down the country, but many people who could offer a great deal are, frankly, being shut out. They were not shut out before, because trusts went to great efforts to work with smaller local providers.

I must ask the Minister to respond to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) about Askham Grange prison. I have visited it myself. The best governor I have ever met is running the prison, along with another prison, and is getting tremendous

[Jenny Chapman]

outcomes. We should support that establishment, expand its work and share the good practice there more widely. To close it would be an absolute travesty.

On freedom of information, there is one question the Government have not answered. During the legislation's Committee stage, the Opposition argued for the Government to bring contracted providers within the ambit of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. We know how the Lord Chancellor feels about FOI, having shifted responsibility for it to the Cabinet Office, but I would be interested to hear the Minister's thoughts. In moving an amendment in Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) said we needed extra scrutiny via FOI, but sadly the Government voted that amendment down. Has the Minister considered whether the issue needs to be looked at again and whether these organisations are making themselves as open and transparent as possible? I would suggest they are not.

To conclude, I want to pray in aid the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), who, to his credit, has showed huge interest in all things related to justice. He was a member of the Justice Committee, and he had some quite insightful things to say about the Government's programme. He said:

"The losers are the ex-offenders, the community... all of us... who must pay the costs in reoffending, more prisons and more sentencing. Surely, there is a better way to go about this—one that would show some respect for those who have given their lives to the probation service and who in a decent and professional way try to improve people's lives, rather than working solely for private sector companies whose main interest is making money out of the system."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 13 January 2015; Vol. 590, c. 236WH.]

That was his way of putting it, and I would add that the system we have is simply chaotic. We knew things would take time, but it is dangerous to let too much time to go by without intervening. The plans were poorly conceived, and they have been irresponsibly executed. I therefore encourage the Minister to respond to my questions and to the seven or eight suggestions and requests made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon.

10.42 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous):** As always, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Nuttall. I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on bringing this important issue before the House. I think this is the first Westminster Hall debate he has initiated, and he conducted himself extremely well. I am also grateful to all the other Members who have taken part. I will begin by trying to address as many of the specific points Members raised as I can, before getting on to the bulk of my remarks.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether using oral reports was resulting in more risk. In all cases where a report is undertaken at court, a risk of recidivism assessment—a risk of harm screening—is undertaken.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about FOI requests and transparency. I can tell him and all other Members present—my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), who chairs the Select Committee,

and others also asked about this—that the Government have committed to publishing management information detailing the performance of the CRCs and the NPS. Members will not have to wait long for the next release of that information. We are committed to transparency, because we have to proceed on the basis of results and how we are doing, and we will take corrective action where necessary.

The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) spoke very knowledgeably in a debate we had on prisons earlier this year, and she has a serious interest in all these matters, which I greatly welcome. She asked a number of questions, but particularly about Askham Grange. The women's prison estate is the responsibility of the Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinéage). However, I can tell the hon. Lady that any decision to action the closure of Askham Grange will be taken only when the new resettlement model recommended in the women's custodial estate review has been implemented and we are satisfied that the new arrangements give women the opportunity to demonstrate their suitability for release. Having said that, I acknowledge the outstanding work that is clearly being done at Askham Grange. I also recognise the uncertainty felt by the staff concerned. Where prison establishments have closed, we have always taken good care to preserve skills and keep them in the system, and to give people the opportunity to transfer.

The hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) rightly asked about the Welsh language. The Working Links service directory is being translated into Welsh, which I am sure she will welcome.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones) asked whether there was confusion over the allocation of offenders. The pre-sentence case allocation system is based on a score for the risk of recidivism and harm. That score clearly defines whether an offender is to be allocated to the NPS or the CRC, so I do not fully recognise his description of confusion.

A number of Members asked about possible redundancies in the probation service. CRCs are contractually required to maintain a professional and appropriately skilled workforce to deliver the services set out in their contracts. That is being robustly managed by the National Offender Management Service. Furthermore, any probation staff who were employed as at 31 May 2014 will, if they are eligible for voluntary redundancy, be entitled to the enhanced voluntary redundancy terms, as set out in the national agreement on staff transfer and protections, where a voluntary redundancy situation arises. Those terms stand unless otherwise renegotiated in accordance with applicable employment law.

The hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), in what I thought was a thoughtful and good speech, rightly made the important point that reoffending rate has remained too high for too long. He is absolutely right, and I can assure him there is no divide in the Chamber about that: we recognise that fact, and we are determined to do something about it, working first in the prison system and then in the probation service.

In an intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) rightly mentioned the importance of family relationships, and I want to reassure her that I do get that. My enthusiasm for the issue is shared by the

chief inspector, who highlights it on page 62 of his annual report for very practical reasons. He notes that the majority of accommodation for those leaving prison is provided by family members, as are a lot of employment opportunities. If we keep those family links strong, it will help in rehabilitation.

The Chair of the Select Committee made a very balanced speech, for which I am grateful. He said he had recently attended a conference on these issues. I am sure he will, like all good Select Committee Chairs, proceed according to the evidence. I would not expect him to do anything else or to give me, as a Minister, an easy time. I know he will continue to hold the Government to account, depending on what happens.

My hon. Friend mentioned problems with ICT. It is fair to say that those problems were there before, and I will say a little in my remarks about what we are doing to address them. I have already mentioned the issue of transparency, which he raised.

**Robert Neill:** In terms of being held to account, the Minister has undertaken to give us updated performance data, which I am sure the Select Committee will welcome. One issue the Committee raised was that, given the commitment to largely local delivery, the new arrangements should not disrupt local partnership arrangements that are working well, particularly where CRCs are covering quite wide areas. Will the Minister make sure that we also have up-to-date data on that, and that the issue continues to be monitored closely, because we clearly do not want things that work well on a multi-agency level to be disrupted?

**Andrew Selous:** I am grateful to the Chair of the Select Committee for raising that important point, which other Members also raised. What I would say to everyone here today and to all those who are listening to the debate, or who will be reading it later, is that the voluntary sector is a precious asset. We do not have a right to it. These people have shown good will, and many of them have given up their time and shown a serious commitment to helping us with these issues. We have a duty to nurture and treasure them, and I want to make sure that we use them as effectively as possible—and sometimes perhaps a little more strategically than we have done. However, I do get the importance of valuing the voluntary sector.

I want now to move on to my substantive remarks, about the reason for introducing the reforms. The reoffending rate has decreased by 2.3 percentage points since 2002, to 25.3% at the end of September 2013. However, the group of offenders with the highest reoffending rates remains those sentenced to less than 12 months in custody. Almost 60% of those adult offenders go on to reoffend within a year of leaving prison. They are the one group that previously remained out of scope for statutory supervision and rehabilitation in the community. As many have said and as I am sure we all agree, that statistic is evidence that a new approach was needed. We came to office in the previous Government determined to change that and, as a result, implemented the transforming rehabilitation reforms, better to focus the system on reducing reoffending, protecting the public and providing greater value for the taxpayer.

The key point is that we would not have had the money to introduce supervision for the under-12-month group without the reforms. No Member who has spoken

has mentioned that. We could not have done what everyone has called on us to do without putting in a lot of extra money that was not available.

**Jenny Chapman:** I want to put that right: the proposal that the Opposition made at the time was backed by the chief officers of probation trusts, who were willing within existing budgets to take on that responsibility, and in some cases were already doing so. What has been happening was not necessary.

**Andrew Selous:** I disagree with the hon. Lady that it could have been done within existing budgets, because it meant 45,000 extra offenders a year having probation supervision. That is why we needed to bring other players to the table.

The Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 made a number of changes to the sentencing framework, most notably by providing that everyone released from short sentences will now receive 12 months of supervision in the community, which did not happen before. That, as I mentioned, represents some 45,000 offenders, so we needed to make significant structural changes to both the probation and prison services. Offenders who pose a high risk of serious harm to the public, or who have been convicted of the most serious offences, are being managed in the public sector under the National Probation Service, which sits within the National Offender Management Service. Medium and lower-risk offenders are being managed by the 21 community rehabilitation companies, which remained in public ownership until 1 February, when eight new providers took ownership of them and began running them.

The CRCs are being run by a diverse group, including a range of voluntary sector providers with experience in rehabilitating offenders. Those providers will be remunerated via a system that rewards them for reducing reoffending: payment by results.

**Wayne David:** Will the Minister give way?

**Andrew Selous:** I want to make a little progress, but if I have time later I shall willingly give way.

There was also substantial reform of the prison system. To support improved rehabilitation outcomes, the prison estate was reorganised to facilitate a through-the-gate model, whereby offenders are given help and support from within custody into the community that they will return to on release. We established a network of 89 resettlement prisons in what has involved a large-scale reorganisation and reconfiguration of the prison estate. Short-term prisoners and prisoners in the last 12 weeks of their sentence are being housed in those prisons where CRCs provide a through-the-gate resettlement service, including support to offenders for accommodation needs, employment brokerage and retention, finance and debt advice and support for sex workers and victims of domestic violence.

How is the new probation system performing? We have heard a lot of attacks on it this morning. Members will know that the transition took place on 1 June last year. Based on the wide range of information that we published this July, performance is broadly consistent with pre-transition levels. Probation staff in both the NPS and the CRCs have worked hard to implement the reforms and we will continue to support them as the new ways of working become embedded.

**Jenny Chapman:** Will the Minister give way?

**Andrew Selous:** I want to do something that the hon. Lady called on me to do—to thank the probation staff who have worked very hard through a difficult time. Change is never easy, particularly if it is being applied to people under a new organisation. The staff continue to work hard and to engage proactively with the reforms.

**Jenny Chapman:** The Minister said that we have been attacking the probation service. I want to make it crystal clear that we are not attacking the probation service. We are attacking him.

**Andrew Selous:** I mentioned that the hon. Lady has been attacking the reforms. I was explaining why we needed them, and that performance has been broadly consistent, which is no mean achievement through a period of substantial initial change.

**Liz Saville Roberts:** Will the Minister give way?

**Andrew Selous:** I am going to talk a little about Wales, which I am sure the hon. Lady would like me to, as several Welsh Members have spoken in the debate.

The owners of Wales Community Rehabilitation Company are a shining example of collaborative working. The contract to run the CRC was awarded last December to Working Links, which is a public, private and voluntary company working in strategic partnership with Innovation Wessex, a probation staff mutual. I want innovative responses to causes of crime such as addiction and lack of housing, employment and skills, which the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd mentioned. One of the keys to maximising innovation is through the widest possible participation of supply chain partners. Working Links owns the contracts for three CRCs in total, and in Wales has signed contracts with St Giles Trust and Safer Wales to support their through-the-gate services. Furthermore, Wales CRC has also continued with a number of existing supply chain partners, such as Turning Point and the Pembrokeshire Care Society, which were inherited from Wales probation trust. That kind of cross-industry collaboration will help to build a better justice system through the sharing of evidence and intelligence developed from innovations across the sector to deliver better justice outcomes.

Several hon. Members spoke about employment, training and education and we will continue to focus on those. In Wales a working group has been established to map employability provision across Wales. The group includes the National Probation Service, Wales CRC, the Department for Work and Pensions and other employment, training and education providers. It is another good

example of the collaborative partnership working that the Select Committee Chairman and others have called for in the debate. We want to ensure that it continues in the same way.

I never miss an opportunity to celebrate the excellent work that our probation staff do. They are on the frontline, delivering services that help to keep us all safe. I would therefore like to highlight the fact that the 2015 Probation Officer of the Year award went to a member of staff from Wales CRC, Wendy Hyett, for her excellent diversionary scheme for women offenders. I was pleased to present her with that award.

The transforming rehabilitation reforms have made substantial changes to the way in which offenders get help, in the through-the-gate process and in the community. The reforms are still bedding in, and while they do that we are turning a greater focus on the rehabilitation of offenders in prisons. As the Secretary of State and I have said before, reform of our prisons is a key area of focus, and we have made it clear that our current prison system fails to rehabilitate offenders or to ensure that criminals are prevented from reoffending. Our prisons must offer offenders the opportunity to get the skills and qualifications they need to turn their lives around. That will be a continued focus for us, along with a focus on education and keeping family links strong.

I am grateful to all hon. Members who have taken part in the debate. I will write to those whose specific concerns I have not been able to deal with, and I assure the shadow Minister and all those present that we shall continue to monitor the progress of CRCs robustly. We have very robust contract management for every CRC and will hold them to account on what they have said they will do. We shall carry on publishing the data at quarterly intervals, and the next release of that data will be soon.

10.59 am

**Stephen Kinnock:** I thank the Minister and all hon. Members who have attended the debate, which has been excellent. The fundamental point that the Opposition would make is that there is nothing wrong with experimentation and innovation, but that there is a fundamental structural problem now: the splitting and fragmentation and the proliferation of providers have created lack of clarity and are increasing bureaucracy and inefficiency. The Conservatives are always keen to cut red tape and bureaucracy, but the reforms are having the opposite effect. The Government are applying a false economy and are playing with fire, with the risk to public safety. We urge them, constructively, to create a cross-party taskforce and work in partnership to build a streamlined—

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## Harold Wilson

11 am

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered commemoration of the centenary of Harold Wilson's birth.

I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to introduce a debate on Harold Wilson. I have a great affinity with Harold Wilson, because he was born in my constituency and was educated in Huddersfield. I knew him well towards the end of his life, and I was privileged to have him campaign for me in the 1979 general election. I know many people in Huddersfield who knew him and thought he was a wonderful Yorkshireman and a wonderful national representative of the Labour party as Prime Minister.

Many colleagues have talked to me about the fact that Harold's memory has not been very well documented. Some have said that his contribution to British politics, British Parliament and British life has been neglected, undervalued, underrated and forgotten.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Mr Nuttall. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is paradoxical? Harold Wilson retired only days after beating the then record of Herbert Asquith as the longest-serving Prime Minister of the 20th century. Since then, only Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher have served as Prime Minister for a larger number of days. His Governments brought in great social changes in the 1960s, and the Open University truly changed society. Should Harold Wilson not be a figure who we honour? His "renegotiate and decide" approach to the European Union might be familiar to a modern-day Prime Minister too.

**Mr Sheerman**: I fear my hon. Friend has stolen most of thunder there, but I absolutely agree with him.

To set the scene, this very much neglected man was a great Prime Minister. People might remember the celebrations of Denis Healey's life only two or three weeks ago. Denis Healey lived a vigorous life to a great old age and, in a sense, could look after and defend his record. He did that brilliantly right to the end of his life. I also knew Denis very well, as did some of my colleagues. Harold was cruelly struck down by a wicked onset of illness in his late 50s, when he was in his prime. He had to retire at the age of 60, stunning the political world and most people, who could not quite understand what was going on. He was a very ill man, and the nature of his illness was kept quiet out of respect for his wife, Mary, and his sons, Robin and Giles.

This is our opportunity, because 11 March 2016 will be the centenary of Harold Wilson's birth. My colleague from the other side of the Pennines, my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth), is in his place. We share Harold Wilson between Yorkshire and Lancashire, because Harold was never a Yorkshire Member of Parliament. He was the Member for Parliament for Ormskirk, originally, and then for Huyton.

We have a unique opportunity next year to celebrate Harold Wilson's life. A small committee of Members want to ensure that all parliamentarians are aware of that date and that we honour his memory in a significant

way, not only through lectures or great events. Mr Nuttall, you might remember my campaign three years ago for there to be a proper statue of Harold Wilson in the precincts of Westminster. It failed, because the Speaker's Art Fund turned us down. Let us do it again, because it is quite wrong that in the Members' Lobby there is just a small head and shoulders of Harold Wilson. It is about time we honoured him with a full statue.

**Mr Andrew Smith** (Oxford East) (Lab): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I applaud and will support the work he is doing to commemorate this important centenary. Harold Wilson actually inspired my own lifelong devotion to the Labour party when I heard him speak at Reading town hall in the 1964 general election campaign. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the many remarkable things about Harold Wilson was his combination of high intellect and political skill with the common touch and the ability to inspire the trust of working people?

**Mr Sheerman**: My right hon. Friend, like me, was very much influenced by hearing Harold on the stump when we were young men. He had great repartee. I will come to that in a moment, but first I must remind everyone what a brilliant young boy Harold was.

Harold's father was a works chemist and his mother was a schoolteacher. He went to Royds Hall school. In fact, he had a severe illness when he was a child, which affected his education but did not prevent him from going on to be a brilliant young scholar at Oxford. He started off doing a history degree and switched to philosophy, politics and economics. He became the youngest Oxford don at the age of 21—what a remarkable career. In his first year at university, he was recruited into the Labour party by G. D. H. Cole, one of the great founders of the labour movement. Later on, as a brilliant young academic, Harold, like much of that generation, gets involved in the war effort and becomes a key civil servant in it. He worked in a number of Ministries, including as a researcher for William Beveridge, the founder of the welfare state in so many ways. Harold was working on unemployment and the trade cycle, and worked at the Ministry of Fuel and Power.

When I first joined the House, I tried to look up Harold's maiden speech, but he never made one; he was a Minister on the day he was elected. He was the youngest Cabinet Minister of the 20th century when he became President of the Board of Trade—what a remarkable man. Then, of course, when Hugh Gaitskell died, which was a great tragedy because he was a relatively young man, Harold Wilson, from the left of the Labour party, became the leader of the Labour party.

In that very year, 1963, he makes the "white heat of technology" speech to the Scarborough Labour party conference that transforms how people think about the future of our country's economy. He tells us how unskilled and semi-skilled jobs are going to go, and that the future of our country is in science and technology. He talks about understanding how the future is going to dramatically change and how we must prepare Britain to be a modern country. He says, "Why are only 5% of people going to university? Why shouldn't it be 10%? Why is the country run by a few people who went to public school and posh universities? Why can't everyone

[Mr Sheerman]

have the chance to go to university? Why don't we have more scientists, people who know about stuff and good managers to run our country?" That reminds me of some of the arguments we are having today in the House.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): I was going to make that very point. My hon. Friend makes a powerful speech about the tremendous legacy of Harold Wilson for this country and for Opposition Members. Harold Wilson, when he was first elected, represented Ormskirk, as my hon. Friend mentioned. Much of that constituency is now in my own constituency, and people in that area are extremely proud of the legacy that Harold gave to us. The parallel with today is striking. Does my hon. Friend agree that we have much to learn from Harold Wilson about the need to develop our skills base in this country, not least the management skills he just mentioned?

**Mr Sheerman:** Again, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. I was just going to say that Harold worked with Nye Bevan, his great friend, on the foundations of the health service. However, as well as that, he saw the need in this country, which was ravaged by war, for the houses that had still not been built. He was behind the new towns movement, building new towns such as Milton Keynes and building more housing than I think anyone has ever built in this country. We should remember Harold for that, but people should remember him for the other things that he did, too, such as the cultural transformation in this country in our attitude to homosexuality and the change in the laws on it. There were the changes in our attitudes to divorce and the rights of women in property. He had a very good Home Secretary in Roy Jenkins, and in this House at the time, with that kind of ethos, we abolished capital punishment. So many of the transformational things that made our country what it is today happened under Wilson's watch.

**Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. As the MP for Knowsley, which includes Huyton, I ought to have something to say on the subject. The only thing I want to add to what has been said, all of which I agree with, is that Harold Wilson is remembered very fondly in Knowsley as an outstandingly good constituency MP. To have held the high offices that he did and still be considered so highly as a constituency MP speaks volumes for his ability and commitment.

**Mr Sheerman:** Again, my colleagues are making such good interventions that they are really overshadowing this poor speech of mine. I did not add, before that intervention, the change in the abortion law that took place during Harold Wilson's premiership.

I talked to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman), who told me a story about being in No. 10 with Harold Wilson when Lyndon Baines Johnson rang Harold. My right hon. Friend answered the phone, and Lyndon Baines Johnson begged Harold Wilson to send a token force to Vietnam to show support for the Vietnam war. The conversation went on for some time—these two men were great friends—and eventually, Harold said, "L. B., I will not send a token force, not even a Scottish pipers

band." That was a Prime Minister who kept us out of a war, which is quite refreshing, is it not?

**George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): Again, all congratulations to the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. I want to say, as a Scottish Member, that Harold Wilson is fondly remembered in Scotland across the party divide, both for his humour and for the fact that under his Government the first genuine elements of devolution occurred, with the creation of the Scottish Development Agency and the Highlands and Islands development board, from which everything else has grown. The hon. Gentleman is also absolutely correct to say that the one great thing that Harold Wilson did and should be remembered for is something that he did not do: he did not take Britain into Vietnam. That would have ended not with one pipe band, but with tens of thousands of people from this country dying.

**Mr Sheerman:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, too.

Harold was also a brilliant parliamentarian. People who can still remember his days as Prime Minister—before our time in the House—will know what a wonderful command of Parliament he had in the House of Commons. He had a brilliant ability for repartee, which was exhibited in his great speeches during elections. There was a famous occasion when he thought a Conservative supporter had thrown an egg at him during a speech at a big public meeting. He said, "In five years' time, if the Tories win the election, people won't be able to afford to buy an egg", which although I thought it rather harsh, was very funny. He did not only have funny repartee. He said—these words leap off the page—that the Labour party

"is a moral crusade or it is nothing."

That was matched by him saying:

"The only limits of power are the bounds of belief",

which is absolutely wonderful. This week he is also particularly appropriate for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, because it was Harold Wilson who said:

"A week is a long time in politics."

**Mr David Winnick** (Walsall North) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend know that there was a tremendous amount of controversy about continuing to send arms to the apartheid regime in South Africa? The controversy was in the Cabinet, apparently. A number of Harold Wilson's Cabinet colleagues believed that however much they were against apartheid, arms supplies should continue. Harold Wilson encouraged the signing of an early-day motion by literally hundreds of Back-Bench MPs, of whom I was one. That swayed the argument to a very large extent, and Harold Wilson won the day in Cabinet.

**Mr Sheerman:** My hon. Friend is adding to the treasury of memories that we recall about Harold Wilson.

**Mr Geoffrey Robinson** (Coventry North West) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing an apposite, timely debate. I can confirm the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick); it was Harold's intervention against the supply of arms. In particular, Simonstown base in

South Africa was being used, and only his direct intervention prevented certain other Members of the Cabinet from doing that.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), I am very grateful for the brief intervention by my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith), who mentioned that he was brought into politics through Harold. I had a similar experience in the United States. He was on a tour at the time and I was studying for a graduate degree. He inspired a number of us on that occasion to come back and work for the party, as he put it to us.

Is not really the sum total of the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield is making in this comprehensive review of Harold himself, his career and his Government that now is the time for a major re-evaluation, not so much of his reputation—his personal achievements are fairly well known—but of the Government at the time? It was a very fine Administration, and what my hon. Friend is leading up to is the need for a re-evaluation. May this be the start of it. I congratulate him, in that context, on a timely and correct choice of topic for today's debate.

**Mr Sheerman:** My hon. Friend has deep knowledge of this period of British politics and of Harold Wilson, and I very much appreciate his remarks.

We are opening up a broader debate about Harold Wilson, his contribution, and the effect of this brilliant young man when he got into politics, and having a broad debate will do us a great deal of good in Parliament, because we will celebrate not just a party politician but a great parliamentarian and a great public speaker.

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Sheerman:** I will, in two seconds.

We must remember that we want this centenary to be about more than just saying, "Yes, I have written to the Speaker and to the director-general of the BBC and others, and we are getting this concerted campaign to have a proper response." We want to build something living. For example, the vice-chancellor of the University of Huddersfield, Bob Cryan, is launching 50 Harold Wilson scholarships during the centenary year. I hope that that will be replicated in other parts of the country and in different ways. Later today, I am meeting the vice-chancellor of the Open University, which, again, is something that Harold Wilson started. The list goes on and on.

I give way to my friend from Colne Valley.

**Jason McCartney:** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman—I will call him my hon. Friend—on securing the debate. It is absolutely right that we celebrate and mark the centenary of the birth of Harold Wilson early next year. Does he agree that we should perhaps include his—and my—beloved Huddersfield Town? As a young boy, Harold Wilson stood on the terraces at Leeds Road with his father. We should include the people of Cowlersley in my constituency, as he was born on Warneford Road there, and include Royds Hall school, just on the edge of my constituency, because whenever I visit that school, I know how proud they are of the fact that Harold Wilson was educated there in his early life.

**Mr Sheerman:** I have been blessed by so many interventions from knowledgeable people that I am now running out of time, and we want the Minister, whom I very much respect, to say something too.

Let me finish by saying that this issue is not party political. It is about the ability to recognise a man who was struck down by a vicious, aggressive form of Alzheimer's. These days we are much more open about that challenge to health. There is more understanding of how awful it can be. One of the most brilliant young men of his generation had his mature life in politics snatched away by a form of that cruel disease. We are much more open than we were 20 or 30 years ago when he was ill.

I thank you, Mr Nuttall, for the opportunity today to talk about Harold and his impact on this country. I urge all parliamentarians to join us in celebrating his life on and around 11 March 2016.

11.20 am

**The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr Nuttall. I congratulate the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) on securing this debate and on his excellent speech this morning. The many interventions from hon. Members across the House have made clear the importance of Harold Wilson in parliamentary and public life. Indeed, it seems that he was a key inspiration for many people, particularly Opposition Members, in entering political life.

This country, and indeed this Parliament, have a good record of marking anniversaries in a dignified and relevant way. The pessimists may say, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it", but I prefer the quotation, "Study the past if you would define the future". I hope that Harold Wilson would agree, not least because he said of himself:

"I'm an optimist, but an optimist who carries a raincoat."

This year marks a number of important anniversaries. We have commemorated 800 years since the sealing of Magna Carta in 1215 and 750 years since the Simon de Montfort Parliament in 1265. The 2015 anniversary celebrations have raised awareness of our democratic heritage, with Parliament at the heart of the story. This year also marks other anniversaries, such as 50 years since Churchill's death, 600 years since the battle of Agincourt, 200 years since the battle of Waterloo and 600 years since the appointment of the first Serjeant at Arms. I mention those anniversaries as many hon. Members will have noted the innovative ways in which they have been marked, both inside and outside Parliament.

As the hon. Gentleman said, 11 March 1916 marks the centenary of the birth of Harold Wilson. Born in Yorkshire, in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, he first visited No. 10 at the age of eight and, of course, it later became his home on two separate occasions. I believe that there is a special photograph of his first visit, which was almost a premonition.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned many of Harold Wilson's career highlights, which I will not reiterate in full, but I will note a few historic elements. As Labour leader, he won four of the five general elections he contested. All current parliamentarians will appreciate what a genuine and truly magnificent achievement that was for any party leader.

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

Harold Wilson was a social reformer—reference has been made to that—and enacted reforms in many spheres. He will largely be remembered for abolishing capital punishment in Great Britain.

**Mr Sheerman:** It would be wrong not to have on the record, in this year particularly, that Harold gave the British people a choice in the referendum on the European Union. That was the only time that people in this country had that choice, and he provided it in an adept and clever way. He totally outfooted a man called Benn.

**Dr Coffey:** That was coming up in my speech. The abolition of the death penalty, although it was initially introduced in a private Member's Bill—Mr Silverman's—was put into a permanent Act by Wilson's Government. They abolished the death penalty in Great Britain and later in Northern Ireland.

As has been said, Wilson's Government created the Open University. Dare I say it, but Margaret Thatcher, when Education Secretary, made sure that it stayed open despite a movement at the time to reduce its funding.

It was, of course, Harold Wilson who sought to renegotiate the terms of EU membership and offered the people of this country a referendum. Roll forward 40 years and we could argue about what a different position the Labour party takes on referendums on that matter. Nevertheless, it was significant, and I am sure the hon. Member for Huddersfield appreciates that we will be having a further referendum in a couple of years.

Moving on to popular culture, while Wilson never managed to make the pipe de rigeur, he coined a phrase that has never gone out of fashion:

"A week is a long time in politics".

I believe that the phrase "kitchen Cabinet", although it may have originated in America, described the core of what happened in Downing Street during his time there.

When preparing this speech, I was pleased to discover that Lady Wilson, Harold's widow, celebrated her 99th birthday in January. She is the oldest living spouse of a former British Prime Minister and the last to have lived for two separate periods at No. 10 as wife of a serving Prime Minister. As we look ahead to next year, there is much to celebrate. I wish her well, hoping that she will receive her telegram from Her Majesty this coming January.

There is already much in Parliament to commemorate Harold Wilson. There are several paintings across the estate, and we pass a bust of him in Members' Lobby on our way to the Chamber. In Portcullis House, the Wilson Room was named in his honour. In 2013, the BBC had an evening commemorating 50 years since he became Labour leader, so there may be opportunities there. He was certainly recognised as the first TV Prime Minister.

**Mr Sheerman:** I understand what the Minister is saying, but will she please compare what we have in

Parliament and in Westminster in memory of Harold Wilson compared what we have for other Prime Ministers? Thinking about statues and memorabilia of all kinds, what we have is very small and much less significant. Does she agree that the minimum we need is a proper statue of Harold and a full opportunity to pay tribute to him on the Floor of the House on the day of the anniversary of his birth, or as close as possible to it?

**Dr Coffey:** On the subject of recognition, such as statues and so on, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that it is for the House to make that decision through its committees. We should not denigrate the bust of Harold Wilson because it may be small, but I recognise what the hon. Gentleman says and I am sure that the House authorities will be listening.

As we approach the centenary of Harold Wilson's birth, the hon. Gentleman is right to consider further opportunities to commemorate his contribution to public and parliamentary life. I am sure he will pursue them in his characteristic and engaging way, as he does on other matters. On the subject of further debate in the House, I am not aware of previous debates that have commemorated the centenary of the birth of former Members, but he may wish to approach the Backbench Business Committee.

This has been a worthwhile debate, recognising many of the contributions that Harold Wilson made to the country. As has been said, many of them continue to this day and will shape the future of politics as we move forward. I welcome this debate.

**Mr Sheerman:** May I speak for the last two minutes, Mr Nuttall?

**Mr David Nuttall (in the Chair):** That is not the normal practice, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, but on this occasion I will allow him to sum up this brief debate.

11.27 am

**Mr Sheerman:** Thank you, Mr Nuttall. May I end by saying that I welcome the positive things that the Minister has said? I hope that Members throughout the House will take this anniversary seriously, because Harold Wilson's was a very special retirement on medical grounds and we did not have the opportunity to do anything in previous years. This is a centenary, and there are precedents for special sessions after Question Time, perhaps even on a Wednesday, when we can pay tributes. I hope that the Minister is not closing the door on making a significant contribution and that we will not tuck Harold Wilson's centenary away in some corner. Many of us will campaign for a high-profile event to recognise a man who changed Britain and ushered us into being a 21st-century, modern country.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.28 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Outdoor Recreation

[MR JAMES GRAY *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**David Rutley** (Macclesfield) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the economic value of outdoor recreation.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I know that your interest in outdoor recreation extends to polar regions, and that if you were not in the Chair, you might be speaking in the debate. Thank you very much for all that you have done to support this cause in previous years.

I draw hon. Members' attention to the register of all-party groups and my position as a co-chair of the all-party group on mountaineering, along with the hon. Member—my friend—for Bassetlaw (John Mann), and as secretary of the all-party group on national parks.

This is an important debate. I am delighted to have secured it and very grateful to see so many hon. Members supporting this cause. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister is also grateful for that. It is great to see her in her place. I am grateful for all the support that she provides as well, and we look forward to her response to the debate. The last time we discussed outdoor recreation in the House was in September last year. No doubt there will have been progress on which we can be updated since that time. We look forward to hearing the Minister's views on that. I know that her Parliamentary Private Secretary, our hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Heather Wheeler), would also love to speak in the debate, given her interest in clay pigeon shooting. We all have these great interests that enrich our lives.

It is important to recognise that this is a key moment because the Government are currently reviewing submissions to the sport strategy consultation, which concluded on 2 October. The Minister will no doubt be navigating through many responses to it. She will be acutely aware also that the spending review is under way, so no doubt every penny spent within her responsibilities will be reviewed by the Treasury. If that does not help hon. Members to see the need for a long walk, I do not think anything will, but I am not sure that a long walk is best for the Minister right now—she will know what I mean—so I hope that this debate will help instead. That is not to say that the Minister needs any convincing of the physical benefits of outdoor recreation: she is probably the sportiest Sports Minister ever, given the work that she has done with local sports teams—football teams—and playing football herself. Not the least of her achievements was going up an Ecuadorian volcano with the hon. Members for Bassetlaw and for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland).

Today, I want to highlight to Parliament and in Parliament the economic value of outdoor recreation. It is absolutely key. It is vital for improving physical health, mental wellbeing and of course—

**Karen Lumley** (Redditch) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. Does he agree that, like other such clubs, Redditch Road and Path Cycling Club, one of the oldest in the country, provides great benefits for all sorts of people, but especially the youth of Redditch, such as through the Slipstreamers group?

**David Rutley:** Absolutely. Cyclists have been making great strides—[*Laughter.*] I am mixing my metaphors. They have been making great forward progress anyway in making the case for cycling. I think that this debate is helping to extend that to mountain biking, walking and all other pursuits, but yes, local groups are key.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing a debate on such an important issue. It is wonderful to see such a turnout and it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. My own constituency of Torfaen has wonderful opportunities for outdoor pursuits, including a world heritage site and a wonderful industrial landscape to walk around. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is even more important today that we emphasise the value of outdoor recreation, given the temptations that there are in indoor recreation, such as Xboxes and so on? We must continue to emphasise the value of outdoor recreation.

**David Rutley:** Absolutely. I cannot stress enough how important that is. One issue that I will mention is the importance of engaging young people in this agenda. It is all too apparent that too many young people spend too much time indoors and are not as physically active as they should be, so that was a very good point well made.

We need to highlight the economic benefits of outdoor recreation, not least in our rural economies. That is key in driving domestic leisure and tourism. It is key not just in attracting tourists from within the UK, but in attracting international tourists to Britain. We need to do that beyond the usual magnet of London.

**Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Does he agree that the Government could usefully consider reducing VAT on tourism? That has been allowed for since 2008 in the ECOFIN agreement, and many other countries have reduced the VAT to 5%, with very beneficial effects on the hospitality sector in general.

**David Rutley:** That is a very interesting point. I will not stray too far into that territory, because it is probably best left to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer—it is well above my pay grade—but the hon. Gentleman has made his point and I am sure that others will pay due attention to it.

We now have some very important assets in place. I am thinking of, for example, the creation of the English coastal path. That will be critical to bring people to some of our coastal towns and villages that need increased visits. This week, we heard from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs the announcement of the extension of two of England's most celebrated national parks: the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District. That is very important. It is also important for them, so that they can compete better with my own beloved Peak District for national attention. It is certainly a very positive move. Indeed, our great outdoors is now, rightly, a key attraction in the Government's GREAT campaign. I hope that recreation in our great outdoors will be helped to flourish for the sake of our national health, wellbeing and wealth.

Let us consider participation. According to evidence cited by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, those who play sport are healthier, happier and more

[David Rutley]

likely to be successful in academic study and professional life. Meanwhile, ukactive has highlighted how, in some parts of the UK, more than 40% of the adult population are classed as inactive. Some 12.5 million people in Britain are failing to raise their heart rate for more than half an hour a week over a 28-day period. I am sure that colleagues will agree that that is a real concern.

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this very important debate. There is a lot of focus on spectator sports in this country, so I am glad he is mentioning participation and talking about outdoor recreation. I am thinking particularly of the benefits of cycling. He mentioned the potential for increased longevity through different types of exercise. I understand that regular cyclists can live up to five years longer on average. In my constituency, we have Cyclesolihull and one of the most successful and long established cycling clubs in the country. It has produced many national champions and even Tour de France riders. Will my hon. Friend recognise the central role of cycling in outdoor recreation and health?

**David Rutley:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. Of course I support what he says. Cycling is key; it is central to the whole debate. In Macclesfield we have the Macclesfield Wheelers, and of course Team GB use the area of Cheshire and Dame Sarah Storey lives in the Macclesfield constituency. My hon. Friend is right: cycling is also key to the debate.

Although many would be reluctant to put on a pair of football or rugby boots, some 20 million people said that they would like to participate in outdoor recreation of some kind when they contributed to Sport England's commissioned research "Getting Active Outdoors". Some will need a nudge and others will need to be empowered or enabled to achieve their aspiration, but it will be worth it, because if we can inspire people and get more people off the sofa and active in one or more kinds of outdoor recreation, we can harvest considerable economic benefits in terms of health spending saved and productive value added.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): I join in the congratulations to the hon. Gentleman on the debate. It is similar to a debate that I had in this Chamber last year about childhood obesity. He is coming to the nub of the issue now. Many people would like to become more active, but some of them feel they are the exception rather than the rule. What we really need to do is to get the younger generation, as a group of people, to understand that they are not exceptional or unusual; this is a lifestyle that they need to adopt, for the greater good not just of themselves but of their peers.

**David Rutley:** That is an incredibly strong point. We should look at the work that the Scouts do, for example—it is great to see Scouts and Guides doing so well—because what we want to do, as the hon. Gentleman has said, is encourage people into a healthier, more active lifestyle, which can carry on throughout the whole of their lives.

When I was preparing for the debate, the charity Sense got in touch with me with its excellent paper "The Case for Play", which includes a review and describes the need to emphasise the importance of facilitating

what it calls joyful recreation opportunities for children with often complex needs. That is a lifestyle choice that we have to encourage.

**Mr Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley) (Con): With Christmas coming, I am sure that a lot of youngsters will be demanding that their parents buy them the latest Xbox, or goodness knows what, which plugs into the back of a TV. That would be great exercise for their thumbs, but that is about it. Perhaps instead they should get a Fitbit or trainers and be encouraged to get out and do outdoor activities, to ensure that they are fit not just for one or two years but for the long term. We are living longer, so we want to make sure that people will be healthy when they reach 50, 60 and 70.

**David Rutley:** My great friend is a wonderful example of what a healthy lifestyle can do for a person, and I think that young people in Ribble Valley and far beyond should look at his Fitbit and his healthy lifestyle.

In each of our areas, bodies like Sport Cheshire help to bring together local interests such as businesses and local authorities. Recently, Sport Cheshire changed its name to Active Cheshire to reinforce what we have all been talking about—the importance of encouraging active lifestyles. That change of name signals a change in attitude and approach that we should encourage.

Let me move on to some of the health benefits, having mentioned some of the challenges. A study published in *The Lancet* in 2012 highlighted how inactivity is responsible for 17% of premature deaths in the UK every year and shortens a person's lifespan by three to five years. Other hon. Members have commented on similar studies. The Government-sponsored paper "Moving More, Living More" states that the cost associated with inactivity in the UK is some £20 billion a year.

**Derek Twigg** (Halton) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. I am sure he will recall that when we were out in the peak district a few weeks ago, we had a number of discussions about this. It struck me that although efforts are being made around Whitehall, we need to make sure that Departments work better together—particularly the Department of Health, the Department for Education and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport—so that we can encourage people, for health reasons and for enjoyment, to get out and take part in outdoor activities.

**David Rutley:** The hon. Gentleman makes a strong point. I will come on to the fact that I think we need a more cross-departmental approach. That is heading our way, but there is clearly more that has to be done. Just before I move off health, it is worth mentioning some constructive initiatives—I am sure that similar things are happening in each of our constituencies—such as "Walking for Health", an initiative by the Ramblers and Macmillan. Such initiatives show that real health and mental health benefits come from that very low-cost outdoor recreation.

I am not simply talking about saving money on the health budget. Outdoor recreation makes money as well, and we have to give that proper focus. A workforce that is physically healthy and mentally well is more productive than one that is not, and the outdoor economy

has real direct and indirect benefits. In the UK, world-leading British manufacturers of outdoor gear, such as Berghaus, Barbour and Brompton, are helping people to be active in areas from the highest mountain to the flattest cityscapes. In Macclesfield, we have the UK corporate offices of Mammut and Mountain Equipment.

The tourism sector, which has been referred to, benefits hugely from outdoor recreation. In fact, a great report produced recently by the Sport and Recreation Alliance, “Reconomics”, which I commend to the House, shows that the visitor spend associated with outdoor recreation is an annual £21 billion. That is a huge contributor to the visitor economy and rural diversification. We are always keen to encourage more visitors to the country and to our constituencies. We are fortunate in Macclesfield to have the “walkers are welcome” initiative in Disley and Bollington, which both make a big contribution.

We have come a long way in the past three years, as many of us have worked to make the case for outdoor recreation. A year or so ago, we came forward with six key proposals for Government action, and a broad coalition of support was brought together. I know that the word “coalition” is not necessarily the most popular these days, but we have achieved that in the outdoor space. The British Mountaineering Council, which has given huge amounts of support, the Outdoor Industry Association, the Ramblers, Living Streets, the Youth Hostels Association—YHA—the Campaign for National Parks and the National Trust have all come together in recognition of the importance of the sector.

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): One of the things that we should support is the money side. My hon. Friend has put it quite clearly: we have to get people to take part. My constituency covers Exmoor, and one of the biggest problems that we find with getting people to enjoy Exmoor and the Quantocks is that we have not got the money in the system to enable us to invest in bikes, canoes, yachts or whatever it may be. Perhaps I could add to my hon. Friend’s thoughts the need to ask the Government to come up with some sort of funding that we can ring-fence for areas like his, which are some of the most beautiful parts of Britain.

**David Rutley:** My hon. Friend represents a really beautiful part of the world, and I understand the point that he makes. It is important to make sure that funding is allocated, and the local enterprise partnerships have an important role to play in that dimension. There is also more that we can do to try to encourage more tourism outside London to the areas that many of us represent.

There has been a lot of progress. I know that the Minister, before her well-deserved promotion, played an important part in making progress on this agenda. If she does not mind, I have four small asks. Will she assure colleagues that outdoor recreation will receive the utmost consideration by her Department as she examines the contributions to the sports strategy? Will she pledge that outdoor recreation will be fully integrated in the final strategy, so that it is seen not as an add-on but as an integral part? This might require the Prime Minister’s approval, but could she change her job title to the Minister for Sport, Tourism and the Outdoors? It has a good ring to it, and we would love to see that.

Finally, as the hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) has said, the approach that we take to implement the strategy must be cross-departmental, and it is critical that we see such progress being made. I am sure that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) will reinforce this point, but Northern Ireland, one of the devolved nations, has an outdoor recreation plan, which came into place in 2013, in which 117 organisations were involved.

DCMS does an important job in cross-departmental tourism initiatives to make sure that mechanisms are in place. I simply ask the Minister to ensure that she works closely with the other excellent Ministers who have a keen interest in, and enthusiasm for, the matter, such as the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison), and the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart). The Department of Health has a keen interest in improving public health. In DEFRA, there is Natural England, the Forestry Commission, National Parks UK and others that want to drive the agenda forward. I hope that DCLG will be able to encourage more local authorities to provide funding not only in Exmoor but across all our natural areas that would benefit from such expenditure and investment.

We should not forget that the Infrastructure Act 2015 legally bound the Department for Transport to make walking and cycling integral parts of our infrastructure strategy. Many of the pieces are coming into place to make this happen. The conversation and narrative about the northern powerhouse show that there may be more we can do in a devolved setting as well. Sheffield has been promoting itself as “the outdoor city” and recently hosted the European outdoor summit, which was a huge success, with the support of the Outdoor Industry Association. There is much that many of us could learn from the work that Sheffield is doing in that space.

I am conscious that many Members want to speak in this important debate so let me conclude by saying that I agree with the Minister and her Department, but we now need a fundamental shift in social attitudes to being active so that it is more usual to take part and be physically active than to not participate. We need to interpret sport in the widest sense of outdoor active participation and recreation. It will help to improve physical and mental health and wellbeing, and productivity gains, and, as Reconomics shows, will add a huge amount to our rural economies.

Much has happened in the past year since our previous debate. The summit is in sight, and with the right consideration, co-operation and championing, there is an opportunity for us to make the final push to reach that summit and put outdoor recreation in its rightful place at the pinnacle of the Department’s new strategy for sport. Now is the time to seize the moment to get more people active and outdoors in the clean, fresh air that most of us here enjoy, and to enjoy the excellent hospitality and spectacular scenery of our green and pleasant gym.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr James Gray (in the Chair):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, it is worth noting that quite a number of people are trying to catch my eye. While there are no

[Mr James Gray (in the Chair)]

formal limits on times, it would be helpful to colleagues if people would restrict their remarks to about five or six minutes.

2.51 pm

**John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Mr Gray, I will follow your edict and you will cough loudly if I do not.

**Mr James Gray (in the Chair):** I most certainly will.

**John Mann:** I congratulate the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) on securing the debate and on the way that he put across the case, which he did so effectively that I will attempt not to repeat anything he said. He put his case in very clear terms. His work, particularly in the previous Parliament and into this one, has been instrumental in moving the agenda on, and I am certain that will continue over the remainder of this Parliament. It is partly a tribute to his lead that so many Members from across the House are here. It is quite a remarkable turnout, and one that ought to resonate. I hope that the Minister will tell colleagues in other Departments what a significant turnout we have had from across the House.

On the health costs, a survey was commissioned by a rather excellent charity called StreetGames, which I know very well. It commissioned the Centre for Economics and Business Research to assess the potential cost of physical inactivity among the current generation of 11 to 25-year-olds. The economic conclusion was that “when reductions in healthcare costs and the increase in quality-adjusted life years were considered, the levels of physical inactivity among the demographic concerned will cost the state £53.3 billion over their lifetimes in today’s prices.”

There are many more surveys including statistics, but the statistics correlate—£53.3 billion.

The World Health Organisation states that physical inactivity is

“the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality”

and that physical inactivity is the main cause of nearly a quarter of breast and colon cancer cases, more than a quarter of type 2 diabetes cases and about a third of the coronary heart disease burden. Health Impact of Physical Inactivity estimates that physical inactivity of those aged 40 to 79 in England leads to 37,000 premature deaths every single year. Those are startling figures.

**Julian Knight:** The hon. Gentleman is making many important points. I particularly take his point about longevity. Another issue is whether someone who stays active stays in work longer and pays taxes for longer. In the long run, that makes a massive difference not only to their individual wellbeing, but to the whole country and economy.

**John Mann:** The hon. Gentleman, who is new to the House, makes an excellent point and reinforces the cost to industry, families and individuals and the burden on taxpayers—money that could be better spent elsewhere. Investment in sport and the great outdoors is an investment for society.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): The hon. Gentleman mentions sport. Does he agree that we need to support increasing outdoor recreation as part of sport and also

as part of people’s daily routine, particularly through commuting—walking and cycling—to maximise the benefits to physical and mental health?

**John Mann:** I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman. Part of the case that we have been making in recent years—the Minister is very familiar with it—is that everything that relates to the great outdoors fits within the definitions of sport. Indeed, if one takes the British Mountaineering Council, one sees that there are no spectators; there are only participants, of every age. Sometimes there are people of extraordinary ages—not extraordinary ages for doing something, but people in their 80s and 90s are achieving feats that may be more difficult for some of us here today. It is a lifetime activity, providing mental and physical health benefits, and reduced burdens on the NHS.

Evidence from the University of Reading shows that if people buy a newspaper, they will live longer. Why will they live longer? Because some of the people who buy newspapers on a daily basis walk to buy them and walk home. By doing that, if people buy *The Sun*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Mail* or even *The Daily Telegraph*, they will live longer. I do hope the journalists are listening: that ought to be their banner headlines, because it is true. A bit of activity on a daily basis assists, which is the beauty of the great outdoors.

Getting outdoors is also about broadening people’s horizons. A third of the young people I surveyed in schools in my constituency go on holiday abroad every year. A third go to the seaside—Skegness, Mablethorpe and so on—and a third go nowhere. It is not just about the health benefits of physical activity, but about how people live and their opportunities in life.

I have some asks of the Minister. We have city regions—the hon. Member for Macclesfield mentioned the city of Sheffield, which soon could be the Sheffield city region. Who knows? Bassetlaw may be part of it. Powers and budgets for sport ought to be devolved to those city regions because that would make a significant impact in moving things on. There should be a proper debate across Government about all year 6 pupils, who are in their final year of primary school, having a residential week in the great outdoors. The Youth Hostels Association—I chair the all-party parliamentary group on youth hostelling—would provide the most perfect accommodation and benefits for those young people, showing them what is possible. It ought to be part of the offer to our young people. I encourage all Members present to participate in the events of the all-party parliamentary group on mountaineering, to get more physically active themselves, and to get into those debates. I appeal to the Minister to ensure, cross-departmentally, that outdoor recreation is at the heart of things. It is an investment for the future. She will save other Departments huge amounts of money.

2.59 pm

**Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) for securing an important and, for me, timely debate. It is important, just sporadically, to practise what we preach. Last weekend, I could be found on the mean streets of Portsmouth with my hon. Friends the Members for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) and for Eastleigh

(Mims Davies), running the Great South Run. I think all of us, perhaps, are beyond 40, so we are in the age group that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) mentioned as being most at risk of inactivity.

I vividly remember standing in Mottisfont abbey, a magnificent National Trust property in the heart of Hampshire, some 10 years ago, when I was a local authority lead member for leisure, and listening to the head of our local health authority talking about the health benefits of the great outdoors in our part of the county. She said that she wished she could bottle it and provide those benefits to patients who appeared at doctors' surgeries across Hampshire suffering from depression or stress. We all know that exercise is one of the best remedies for those suffering from a mental health condition. Of course, we cannot bottle it, but I pay tribute to the National Trust, which is the owner of not only great stately homes but massive tracts of countryside such as can be found in the New Forest, a very small corner of which is in my constituency.

Other national parks have been mentioned, so it is important that the New Forest is also discussed in this debate. The New Forest is a fantastic location for all sorts of outdoor activities. Of course, it is one of our most crowded national parks, with seven visitors per square kilometre—I gather that it is the most densely visited national park in the country. The New Forest attracts 13.5 million people each year, and they do not predominantly come for formal recreational activity; they come for informal activities such as dog walking or kite flying. Families are visiting with their children and having picnics.

The New Forest also has some of the slightly competing elements of outdoor recreation: horse riders, trail riders and cyclists. I cannot pretend that those relationships are always easy and happy, but it is an enormous space. We have to ensure that there are opportunities for different recreational activities to happen not necessarily alongside each other, but within the same realm.

Other hon. Members have mentioned their APPG interests. As chairman of the all-party group for the horse, I might be expected to focus several of my remarks on equestrianism. The British Equestrian Trade Association highlights that the economic value to this country of the equestrian industry is some £4.3 billion a year, which is a massive sum. My hon. Friend the Minister has recently made her inaugural visit to the Horse of the Year Show, for which I commend her. I hope she enjoyed it but, much more than that, I hope we will see her at more equestrian events across the country to witness at first hand some of the brilliant sportsmen and women—of course, men and women compete on an absolutely level playing field. We have the reigning Olympic gold medallists in show jumping and dressage; our eventers only secured a silver—I use the word “only” advisedly.

It is not just about competition: some 96% of people who ride do so simply for pleasure. I declare another interest because I am one of those people, although I manage to ride barely once a month nowadays. The freedom and opportunity to enjoy riding, particularly off road, is an important part of people's wellbeing.

**Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): I am pleased that the British Equestrian Trade Association is being pushed. I hope the hon. Lady will also push disabled

riding and donkey sanctuaries—that might not be quite her world of riding. I was in the cavalry a long time ago, so I know that horses are important. We should highlight the fact that riding teaches children the discipline of looking after animals and challenging their fears.

**Caroline Nokes:** The hon. Gentleman is right that looking after and taking responsibility for an animal is crucial in teaching our young people skills that are not readily available in the classroom.

I thank my constituent Rob Powell, who contacted me this morning to point out the economic benefit of trail riding on motorbikes, not horses. I thought to myself, “How on earth could this be part of promoting physical wellbeing?” He educated me by explaining that motorcyclists who ride off road have lower blood pressure, lower levels of cholesterol and are less likely to suffer from heart disease if they ride their motorbike twice a week off the tarmacked road.

It is important that we find spaces that are available and accessible for different types of activity. We are lucky in Hampshire to have the country's second highest number of green lanes available to the public, behind only Wiltshire, but it is the Government's role to ensure that we have good networks available to ramblers, cyclists, horse riders, motorcyclists and all types of outdoor activity.

**Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): As president of the East Lancashire ramblers association, I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising that point. Will she join me in congratulating the Ramblers on its “big pathwatch” initiative, which is keeping an eye on the 140,000 miles of rights of way, including bridleways—this is not just for ramblers—across England and Wales?

**Caroline Nokes:** I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. Like him, I have received emails from constituents highlighting the effectiveness of the “big pathwatch” campaign.

As might be expected, given my interests, I want to conclude by saying that we have to ensure that activity is accessible to all and is available to both genders. I hope that the Minister will commend the This Girl Can campaign, which has been reinforced across Hampshire. Our sports partnership in Hampshire and on the Isle of Wight has done a great deal to promote keeping young girls active once they leave school. The biggest drop-off in female physical activity occurs when they leave school and go to college, which is when most girls hang up their trainers and stop taking part in the team sports they took part in at school. It is imperative that we find pathways into sport for young girls. I commend the work of the This Girl Can campaign, which has made it less of a stigma to get hot, sweaty and physically active. We have to keep pushing that agenda.

3.6 pm

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) on securing this debate. I think of him as a hillwalking friend, and I am pleased to be part of the all-party group. I can go one better than him, because I have shared a tent with the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) at 10,000 feet. I also shared a mountain hut with him and the Minister at about 15,000 feet. We may not necessarily wish to repeat those experiences, but they were incredibly valuable none the less.

[Greg Mulholland]

On Saturday I was on the top of Skiddaw above Keswick at 3,000 feet. I have been going there with a group of friends for 25 years—it was our silver jubilee Keswick. Some of those friendships have developed as a result of that love of hillwalking. Those trips are very special. We spend money when we are there. We have meals in the local fish and chip shop or the local curry house. We go to cafés and have the necessary many cups of tea and coffee. Hillwalkers are hungry people, and we even pop into one or two of the local pubs, which might surprise colleagues. On Sunday afternoon I was delighted to have a pint with Alan Hinkes OBE, the only Briton to have conquered all of the world's tallest mountains. He is a big friend of the all-party group.

My friends and I spent significant amounts of money, which is important to many areas of all the nations of the United Kingdom. Such spending is important to my constituency, which borders North Yorkshire. We have beautiful countryside in Leeds North West. We have the medieval market town of Otley, which is on the edge of the Nidderdale area of outstanding natural beauty. I say gently to the hon. Member for Macclesfield that the Peak district is wonderful, and part of it is in Yorkshire. Indeed, Yorkshire has two complete national parks and part of a third. When the wonderful expansion of the Lake district and Yorkshire dales happens, Yorkshire will contain parts of four national parks and will be the only county with anywhere near so many. Hillwalking is hugely important to the Yorkshire economy.

I am proud of the work of the Carnegie Great Outdoors faculty of Leeds Beckett University in my constituency. The faculty led with great distinction and patience the expedition on which the hon. Member for Bassetlaw, the Minister and I travelled. The expedition supported the excellent Royal British Legion's Battle Back centre, a wonderful national facility that works to rehabilitate our servicemen and women who have been injured in conflict. We were all delighted to support that wonderful charity by going out in the conditions we did. It is hard to overestimate the social values, the sense of wellbeing and the social cohesion that people can get from such an experience. Our expedition was led with great distinction by the wonderful Dave Bunting MBE.

The debate is about the economic contribution of outdoor recreation, and Carnegie Great Outdoors, which offers days in the outdoors, makes a significant contribution to the Leeds and Yorkshire economy. There has been a huge growth in hillwalking and climbing, which is very welcome, but we want to see even more. I was delighted when the BMC asked me to do a Sport England fellowship and to become its hillwalking sports fellowship ambassador. I am still working with the BMC on that, and I am pleased to walk with its members; indeed, we did a wonderful walk in the Yorkshire dales to Simon's Seat.

Again, that is an example of the economic contribution made by outdoor recreation, because we had to travel there and we spent money there. People have said, "Wasn't it wonderful?" and they want to go back. The walk was part of the two-week Otley walking festival, which brings people from all around the country. The figures show that 210,000 people aged 14 and upwards now go walking once a month, while 84,000 people go

once a week, but we can do more. The more we can encourage people to get out, despite their busy schedules, the better, and we have heard about the economic and other benefits.

I have a few asks of the Minister. First, I think the best title for her would be "Sport and Recreation Minister", which would cover the outdoors and other forms of recreation, and I would ask for that title to be seriously considered. Secondly, will she convene a meeting between the DCMS and DEFRA, because those two Departments need to be absolutely locked together in bringing forward a strategy? Thirdly, I was pleased to support the cycling investment strategy and the Infrastructure Act 2015, but will the Minister accept that infrastructure should also extend to outdoor access and maintenance, which are important? Finally, will she liaise with Ofsted, which should include outdoor and adventurous activity when it looks at what schools are doing? I hope the Minister will take those things away.

3.12 pm

**James Heapey (Wells) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) on securing this important debate. I should declare a new interest, because I was recently appointed the chair of the all-party group for the UK events industry. This is a hugely important debate. I say that not only in my capacity as the chair of the all-party group, but as the MP for Wells. I have the pleasure of having the Mendip hills, the Somerset coast and the Somerset levels in my constituency.

There is enormous economic benefit to be had from outdoor recreation, and there are enormous health and wellbeing benefits as well. As a former Army officer who organised plenty of adventurous training for his troops, I would add that there are also values that come from outdoor recreation, which we should note in this debate: confidence, independence and a respect for nature and the environment.

The tourism industry in Somerset is worth £1.3 billion per annum. Some £623 million of that is made from day-trippers. Some come for the food and drink, some for the shopping and some for the attractions. Many of those are outdoors, such as Cheddar gorge and Wookey Hole. Many people come for the hills, the coast, the waterways and the caves. That is a hugely important part of our economy, and it is important that the Government support it.

The hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) said that nearly a quarter of a million people go hillwalking and climbing every month. That is worth £2.3 billion a year to the UK economy. I am therefore pleased to support the Walkers are Welcome campaign in Cheddar, and another that is getting under way in Burnham-on-Sea. Those will be really important initiatives as we seek locally not only to access some of the £2.3 billion walking and climbing economy, but to grow it by opening those activities up to new participants.

I make a plea to the Minister to push on with the investment in the south-west coast path. From the numbers I have seen, I understand that it might cost barely £500,000 a year to maintain, but that it would generate £435 million of economic activity. Those are encouraging statistics, which I hope the Minister recognises.

There are more activities beyond climbing and walking, all of which are worthy of mention. There are active cycling and sporting activities communities in my constituency and across Somerset. There is mountain biking, caving, sailing, pony trekking, fishing, canoeing and all sorts of other things besides. All those activities are relatively inexpensive for the Government or local authorities to support. Invariably the equipment is owned by individuals, clubs or businesses, but the Government and local government can play a role in meeting the small cost of marking routes, helping to market those activities and providing support, for example through local authorities' various economic development and tourism departments, so that we recognise the outdoor recreation offering and promote it to the best of our abilities. If there is a way of incentivising businesses and clubs to commercialise further what they do, so that they can grow those industries, all the better.

When individuals or families come to Somerset to cycle, walk, climb or cave, that is great—that is two, three or four people who will buy a meal and perhaps stay overnight. However, the events industry is hugely important. When the Ten Tors is taking place on Dartmoor, every bed and breakfast and hotel is full; when the Three Peaks is going on, there is business across Wales, the Lake District and Scotland. Regularly, in my part of Somerset, there are amateur cycling sportives, which bring hundreds of cyclists from across the south-west to thrash themselves up Cheddar gorge—I know not why, but they do, and they spend money once they have finished. Such events matter enormously to communities and economies across the country, and I am keen to be an advocate for all they offer in my role as the chair of the all-party group.

It is important to mention the vital role played by search and rescue organisations, many of which are voluntary. In my constituency, the members of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Burnham area rescue boat, the coastguard, the cave rescue and the Mendip mountain search and rescue teams all make a commitment to keeping people safe without being paid, and they turn up at all hours of the day and night, in all weathers and in all terrains to do so. I admire them greatly for all that they do, and it is important, as we speak about the value of outdoor recreation to our economy, that we recognise that those people underpin others' ability to pursue outdoor sports.

I commend to the Minister—I am sure she has already seen it—the “Reconomics” report, which is an excellent study of what outdoor recreation could mean for our economy. Outdoor recreation is hugely important financially and for our public health. As I said earlier, it is also about giving people values— independence, confidence and a respect for nature and the countryside. This is a pan-Government issue, and it would be great to see DEFRA working with the Minister to make sure that our AONBs, national parks and other areas of countryside and coast are properly resourced to meet the needs of the outdoor recreation industry. The bottom line is that we will get back far more than we spend, so this debate is hugely important, and I hope it means the Government will invest in this vital industry.

3.18 pm

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I, too, thank the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley)

for securing this debate, which is of great significance to my constituency and to the wider leisure economy of Wales and Britain.

I would like to invite the Minister and Members to visit Blaenau Ffestiniog if opportunities allow—perhaps next year, during “Wales 2016: Year of Adventure”. In Blaenau, a combination of home-grown initiatives and far-sighted investors has excelled in adapting the town's extraordinary backdrop of former slate quarries into a high-adrenaline adventure landscape, complete with downhill biking trails, zip wires and trampolines spanning cathedral-like caverns—I hope Members will forgive me, because caverns are not technically outdoors.

Wales has first-class mountain biking facilities—not only those managed so ably by Antur Stiniog, but also Coed y Brenin and the Mawddach trail, also in my constituency. There are many others throughout the nation. The longest continuous path along a nation's coastline, the 870 mile-long Wales coastal path, has played a major role in extending the valuable visitor season beyond the traditional summer months. Nefyn golf course, like many of Wales's outstanding courses, is located on the coast, and plays its part in the golf economy, which contributes almost £38 million to Wales.

On a different tack, I want to take the opportunity to assess the value of the equine industry, for personal reasons. Sometimes I wonder whether it is the fact that it is an activity with a strong gender bias—almost 75% of riders are women and girls—that means that that leisure pursuit perhaps does not get its proper appreciation. I understand from the same report that the hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) mentioned earlier that average spending on a horse comes to £3,600 a year; but I do not want my husband to know.

**Caroline Nokes:** I can assure the hon. Lady that I have been trying to keep that figure from my father all my life.

**Liz Saville Roberts:** Indeed.

Wales is ideally placed as a location to promote horse riding. Our native breeds of Welsh cobs and ponies are in great demand as show and riding horses across the world. We have excellent off-road opportunities, and surely we can safely accommodate Lycra-clad mountain bikers and more sedately dressed horse riders in the forests and mountains of Wales, alongside, of course, hillwalkers and mountaineers.

None the less, the competitive potential of Wales is undermined by the requirement to levy 20% VAT on attractions and hospitality. Reducing VAT to 5%, which is a long-standing Plaid Cymru policy, would give us a more level playing field compared with France, Ireland and beyond. Attractions and hospitality directly contribute 20% to the local economy in Dwyfor Meirionnydd and employ 4,400 people. My constituency would get an economic boost of more than £6 million from such a change, and the value to Wales as a whole has been estimated by campaigners at £167 million. That would be of benefit to young people, who are particularly likely to be employed in the sector, and it might prove an incentive to employers to pay above the minimum allowed by law.

I want to point out how great a role the public sector plays in promoting the leisure economy in Wales, and, given the non-statutory nature of those services, how

[Liz Saville Roberts]

vulnerable they are at a time of continuing public cuts. The prospect of a European referendum that might result in the UK leaving Europe would be disastrous to the Welsh economy as a whole, and also to initiatives such as Antur Stiniog, Plas Heli in Pwllheli and many others. Those employment-generating ventures would simply not exist without regional development funding.

Finally, I ask the Minister to consider how best to encourage overseas visitors, and perhaps home visitors too, to venture beyond the capital cities of England and Scotland. Search engines need to be able to direct potential visitors to outdoor recreation activities, events and attractions in locations across the United Kingdom, and thus encourage people to explore and spread economic value to areas where its impact is proportionately far more significant. The adventure, excitement and scenery of Blaenau Ffestiniog need to be accessible to people who do not—yet—know how to spell the name of the town.

3.23 pm

**Simon Hart** (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): I draw the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, particularly the item about outdoor learning, which has been a lifelong professional as well as personal interest of mine.

If nothing else, the debate secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) has shown that although we are of course delighted to have the Sports Minister here, her place could easily have been filled by a Minister from the Department of Health, the Department for Education or the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Chancellor, indeed, could have attended, because most of what has been said this afternoon has shown that, as the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) put it, the issue is to do with investment that brings a healthy return, which the Treasury perhaps even more than any other Department should take seriously.

I want to make some observations, rather than raising concerns, about two areas. First, much as I welcome, admire and champion the adventurous theme of some of the speeches, and the emphasis on fit, active people, I think that the challenge for the Minister is to ensure that outdoor recreation and access to the outdoors is accessible to everyone—an 80-year old as well as an eight-year-old, a wealthy person as well as someone on lower wages, and families as well as individual mountaineers such as those we have heard about. That is a big challenge. There is compelling evidence that everyone gets some health benefits from access to the outdoors. Let us make sure that the Government see it not just as something for the fit and healthy, but something to which everyone can have access and that everyone can afford and benefit from.

Despite widespread support from the Government and non-governmental organisations, and colleagues on both sides of the House, and after all the years of agreement, it seems that there are still areas of barriers and conflict. The world of education is one that I have taken great interest in, and it seems that there is still some confusion, particularly in parts of the teaching

profession, between outdoor education and outdoor entertainment. As long as teachers still believe that outdoor activity is a sort of alternative to education, we shall never make the progress we would like. It needs to be seen as just as important an element of a young person's education and upbringing as work in a classroom or laboratory.

Perhaps the Minister can help us with the fear—sometimes justified, and sometimes not—of the consequences of litigation if something goes wrong when children are taken on some kind of outdoor experience. There is the refrain of “It's health and safety; it gets in the way, causes added hassle and adds cost to the trip,” but sometimes it is not health and safety that is the problem but the litigation element, which may be a consequence of health and safety restrictions or of breaches, inadvertent or otherwise. The Government can help in those areas, and I hope that the Minister will help us as part of the pan-departmental approach.

The result of what I have described is the charitable sector and private enterprise soldiering on, doing fantastic work in the outdoor recreational arena, sometimes despite rather than because of Government. Many hon. Members have quoted examples from their experience, and in my part of the world we have a competition called Ironman Wales. It happens in my constituency and involves 43 countries. There are 2,000 athletes and 40,000 spectators. It does not happen only on one weekend a year in the county, because there is training throughout the year. It has spawned an enormous triathlon-based industry in west Wales, reaching way beyond the people in Lycra whom we all slightly aspire to look like but are probably never likely to. I restrict myself to the other private venture fitness effort in west Wales—actually, it happens across the UK—called parkrun. Almost everyone can do 5 km on a Saturday morning followed by a croissant and a cup of coffee. I recommend everyone to experience that, as I do, every weekend. The point is that the economic benefit from those events extends way beyond the weekend or day when they happen. It has a 365-day life that brings prosperity and jobs to an area.

In the area of education there are numerous charities involved. We all know which ones they are, but in my part of the world organisations such as the Field Studies Council now have compelling evidence that if children struggle to perform to their maximum capability in traditional classroom scenarios, taking them out of the classroom and educating them in a different, novel, adventurous and intuitive way not only brings them the pleasures of the great outdoors, and brings alive the world of nature that is often denied to them, but has positive benefits for the rest of their development. When they go back into the classroom they find that because they excelled outside, they begin to excel inside. It should not be left to the charitable sector to champion that approach, yet often that is what seems to happen. My plea to the Minister is to grip the Secretary of State for Education and say, “This isn't just a pleasurable add-on; it is an essential investment that the Government can make, for which there are huge returns.”

Anyone who knows me will know that I am of course also going to ask for recognition of the country sports community's enormous work and its value to the nation. Angling, which so far has not had a mention, is the biggest participation sport in the UK. I think that there

are more than 100,000 jobs, or full-time equivalents, in the industry, and that is not to be sniffed at. It is not a question of what we can afford to do; it is more a question of highlighting the things that we cannot afford not to do.

**Mr James Gray (in the Chair):** We have 10 minutes left for three Back-Bench speeches, so great brevity will be a courtesy.

3.29 pm

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** First, I thank the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) for securing this debate. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in it.

The great outdoors is a great British tradition, and spending quality time outdoors has shaped us in many ways. Today's debate is timely as the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has just concluded its consultation on a new strategy for sport, and the Government's spending review is currently under way. We are all aware of the great opportunities of outdoors recreation from a physical point of view, but there are also economic benefits. As the Minister knows, I am one of those who enjoy country sports; the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart), who spoke before me, does too. I do not hunt or fish; shooting is my sport and the one that I want to speak about today.

However, I also want to quote Dr John O'Kelly, chairman of the Royal College of General Practitioners Northern Ireland and an active GP. He has said:

"GPs are definitely seeing growing numbers of both children and adults who are overweight and obese. It is just passing on to another generation. We are already seeing a significant increase in Type 2 diabetes and expect that to increase. It also has huge ramifications on the health budget."

We are ever conscious of that situation; the cost of dealing with obesity in Northern Ireland is £370 million a year. With that in mind, we must encourage many people, young and old, to participate in physical activity, in order to address the growth in type 2 diabetes and obesity.

I will speak very briefly about country sports, to which the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire referred. I have engaged in country sports since I was about 18, or perhaps even younger. Shooting is a sport that gives me the chance to enjoy the country air, and to chase up pheasants; usually, my dog thinks it can catch them before I can shoot them, but that is just one of those things.

What I see in country sports is a great opportunity. I know that the Minister and I have different opinions about country sports—we both know that—but I ask her to consider the great benefits of country sports. Some 600,000 people in the UK participate in shooting sports; 74,000 jobs are created as a result; and in Northern Ireland 60,000 people are involved in country sports, with 12,000 people involved in angling and hunting. There are benefits for the countryside, with 3.9 million days of conservation and 16,000 jobs created as a result of country sports, which is worth £250 million to the economy. Those are the facts and figures about country sports, such is their appeal.

The benefits of country sports are not always physical; they can also bring peace of mind. Angling is too slow for me, but that is just my opinion; it gives other people great recreational opportunities.

I just hope that the Members here in Westminster Hall today clearly recognise that outdoor activities are not only physical activities such as mountain climbing, walking, cycling, motorcycling, quad biking or whatever they may be, but country sports as well, and I hope they recognise the benefits that country sports bring to all of us. Hopefully the Minister can appreciate that, even if it is from a different point of view to my own, and understand that country sports are very important, even integral, to the countryside and who we are.

**Mr James Gray (in the Chair):** Admirable and characteristic brevity from the hon. Member from Strangford.

3.33 pm

**Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con):** Thank you, Mr Gray, for calling me to speak. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) on securing this debate. He is a great man and he made some powerful points.

In Britain, we are blessed with some of the most beautiful countryside and outdoor spaces in the world. Perhaps because of that, outdoor recreation is the UK's favourite pastime. Four out of five adults in England regularly visited the natural environment in 2013-14. I am a keen amateur sportsman, participating in parliamentary football games, rugby games, cricket matches and tug-of-war events; I think people will get the general idea. And if I can do it, anybody can do it; there is hope for us all.

I am also the chairman of the all-party group on running. I encourage all Members to apply for the London marathon; if anyone is interested, they can see me later. I am also the father of three children, and I am keen for them to learn the benefits of sport at an early age. My hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) mentioned parkrun. My children and I are keen, enthusiastic parkrunners every Saturday morning. I am interested to know whether my hon. Friend turns up to parkruns for the croissant and coffee, or whether he actually participates in the run.

Worryingly, I have learned in this fantastic debate that it costs £3,500 to keep a horse. My daughter, who is eight, keeps on talking about "having a horse, daddy", and now people can see why I have got her into parkruns, because running is far more cost-effective than horse riding in my view.

In particular, I am keen for more people of all ages, shapes and sizes to take up running, or even walking in the hills. There are initiatives such as the excellent parkrun, and there is also the NHS's excellent "Couch to 5K" scheme. I encourage colleagues to consider that scheme for their constituents.

Recently, I abseiled; I was persuaded to do so by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield, the great man. Although I am a keen sportsman, I had never thought about mountaineering before. If anyone knows Helsby hill, they will know that it is a famous rocky

[Graham Evans]

outcrop on the M56 that is in the shape of a face; some people say it is in the shape of a female face, but I am not sure. I did as I was told when abseiling, and I am most grateful to my hon. Friend and to the British Mountaineering Council, which is an amazing outfit that puts safety first. I had never abseiled down a mountain before, but I felt relatively safe, and my 12-year-old son took to abseiling like a fish to water. I know that is not a very good analogy, but he abseiled down the hill perfectly, unlike me.

The countryside is a real opportunity for the local enterprise partnerships. I think the countryside's power of attraction is underestimated; it could be important for our constituencies and for the regional growth fund areas. I do not think that people pay enough attention to the countryside's potential to attract tourists from outside the local area.

Regular outdoor exercise is proven to provide both social and personal benefits, as well as to improve physical and mental health and wellbeing. The World Health Organisation and all four chief medical officers in the UK rate physical inactivity as the fourth largest risk factor for chronic diseases. Outdoor recreation can make a significant contribution to tackling the £10 billion cost of physical inactivity, crucially saving our NHS money, a point that was very well made by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann). Outdoor recreation also drives the visitor economy, with an estimated £27 billion spent on visits to the great outdoors, providing vital investment in what are often our most rural communities.

3.36 pm

**Chris Heaton-Harris** (Daventry) (Con): Thank you for calling me to speak, Mr Gray. It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) on securing this debate.

I think it is a given that there is an excellent positive impact from outdoor recreation; I guess the question is how we can boost that economic impact. So I will concentrate on a theme that has come through in all the speeches that we have heard today, which is the cross-departmental work that is going on and which probably needs to be augmented in the future.

Many different Government Departments have an impact on how people can participate in outdoor recreation. There is the Department for Transport; we have heard about its cycling and walking infrastructure strategy. There is also the long-term preservation of our nation's paths, trails, waterways, country parks and coastlines, which involves the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We have also heard about the national park extensions. DEFRA really should be given a key remit to provide more co-ordination of the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission, to see what they can do to improve access to and participation in outdoor recreation.

There is also the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, because we benefit massively from tourism. The "Reconomics" report by the Sport and Recreation Alliance, which many hon. Members have referred, mentions "staycations". Just one element of "staycations" struck my eye—overnight trips involving outdoor recreation

by domestic visitors were worth more than £10 billion to the UK economy in 2013. That is quite an astonishing figure. We should be broadcasting more to the world about the wonders of Great Britain and any of the countries within it, because people can go to any part of Great Britain and find some fantastic things to do outdoors.

The Department for Communities and Local Government has a vital role in planning, conserving the existing outdoor environment that is used for physical activity and ensuring that places for such activity exist in any new-build environment, be they roads, estates or town developments.

Education is also important. Schools play a vital role in introducing people to new pursuits, and we need to encourage teachers to deliver a range of activities both inside and outside the curriculum, including learning outdoors. Hopefully we can allow school facilities to be available for community use, too, which is a problem that many academy trusts are struggling with at the moment. Ofsted was mentioned earlier, and it should recognise and encourage good practice in that field.

However, the most important Department in this regard is the Department of Health. My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield mentioned many projects, and the mental health benefits of activity are just phenomenal. It also helps to tackle our obesity and diabetes problems. We need to move to a more holistic view of what sport and outdoor activity can do, to make the Treasury realise that it will get much more bang for its buck by investing in this area.

3.39 pm

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) on securing the debate. When I first came to London in May, two things struck me: first, every flat I went to see seemed to offer the opportunity of a gym as part of the complex; and, secondly, London has a lot less greenery than Glasgow. Of course, Glasgow means "dear green place", and it is well known for that.

Glasgow, of course, also benefits from its proximity to the outdoors. In my previous life I was a teacher, and it is great to hear so many Members talking about the benefits of the outdoors to young people. One of the best parts of the job for me was to get young people out experiencing what we have to offer in Scotland. I did that in two main ways. First, I was heavily involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme, which built up their confidence and showed them lots of skills. It definitely developed their employability skills, which have not yet been mentioned. I believe that education should not be confined to the classroom, so I agree wholeheartedly with the comments that hon. Members have made about that.

One of the lessons that the young people learned was, "Don't wear jeans." Another was, "Don't hang jeans on a fence in Scotland in April if you have got them wet, because you will have to chip them off the next morning." As a teacher taking young people away, one of the great things was that unlike on other school trips, when they are in the great outdoors there is no danger of them not going to sleep at night.

The second thing I did with young people was skiing. Skiing in Scotland is quite an experience. It teaches great technical skills, especially when the snow cover is not as good as might be hoped. Avoiding rocks, grass and the occasional sheep certainly builds up one's technical ability. When we have good snow cover, the five major resorts of Glenshee, Glencoe, the Lecht, Nevis Range and Cairngorm can definitely compete with the best in Europe.

Scotland is definitely waking up to its potential. I was in the highlands a couple of weeks ago. Unfortunately we do not have the technical facilities for me to share my holiday snaps, but I stayed in a hotel that I had stayed in before. It was October, and the hotel would normally be quiet, but it was bustling. The manager told me that the hotel was going to be busy right through into the new year, which was fantastic to hear. Scotland has so many activities to offer: walking, climbing, sailing, fishing, canoeing—I could go on. There are also the activities for adrenaline junkies, one or two of which I may have tried.

The economic benefits to Scotland are massive. Some 82% of Scotland's adult population have done some activity in the outdoors in the past year. Tourism in Scotland is worth £12 billion to Scotland's economy and offers employment for 211,000 people, but I echo the remarks of other Members that VAT reductions would make a massive difference. One of the big issues that we have in Scotland is land ownership. Half of Scotland is owned by fewer than 500 people, and many of them are overseas landlords. Some are responsible, but others are not working for the benefit of the community. In the mountains north of Ullapool, there have been recent reports of signs on footpaths saying, "Mountain closed". That is a challenge to the ancient right to roam, and we need to be aware of that. The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, which is currently going through the Scottish Parliament, is about ensuring that communities living on the land have a greater say in how it is used and allowing them to reap the economic benefits of their land. The relationship between people living in Scotland and the land of Scotland is of fundamental importance, and the economic benefits are crucial to us.

I ask two things of the Minister and everyone else here. First, come and visit the great outdoors in Scotland. It is spectacular and has so much to offer. Secondly, can we look at the transport links to Scotland to allow better accessibility? To conclude, when I was looking at flats in London, I thought, "I don't need a gym; I've got Scotland as my gym."

3.45 pm

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) on securing this debate. The number of Members here and the good-natured tone of the debate are a tribute to his work and that of the all-party group, and I hope not to undermine that tone too much. Let me start by declaring a personal interest in outdoor recreation. Growing up in a city with the glorious town moor at its heart, in what is undoubtedly the most beautiful county—Northumberland—with the most stunning coasts and the glorious Cheviot hills, how could I not have that interest?

Despite the beauty of our countryside, which several Members emphasised, we have an inactivity crisis in the UK. My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) gave many examples of the cost and consequences of the crisis. Together with the hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), he highlighted some of the many mental and physical benefits that come from activity. It can reduce risks of cardiovascular disease and diabetes, and address moderate mental depression and anxiety. That helps to reduce pressure on the NHS and helps people to live longer, independent and healthier lives, as well as reducing the cost of days lost to the economy. In addition, physical activity can improve academic performance and educational attainment, as the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) illustrated, and that can help to tackle youth unemployment. We cannot overestimate the benefits that come from the great outdoors, and we must not lose this opportunity to consider the social and economic benefits that come from sport.

We should also remember the many major tournaments and sporting events that we have hosted in the UK. The rugby world cup, which reaches its climax this weekend, has been a huge triumph for the organisers. It is predicted to generate up to £2.2 billion of output into the economy and has supported 41,000 jobs across the country. Sadly, it has not been such a resounding success for the home nations on the pitch, but—moving quickly on—the benefits of the 2012 Olympic games continue to flow, with the visitors to the UK and the businesses attracted to locate and trade here. More recently, the Yorkshire Grand Départ of the Tour de France provided a £128 million boost to Yorkshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex and London. I hope that a Grand Départ in Northumberland will one day provide a similar boost there. All those events help to inspire people to take part in pursuits, as well as generating economic activity.

Outdoor recreation is the UK's favourite pastime. Along with tourism, it is a key economic driver, particularly in rural areas, as emphasised by the hon. Members for Wells (James Heapey), for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) and for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts). Just this weekend, I set out on a red ramble with 23 of my Newcastle Labour comrades around Ovington in the Tyne valley, and afterwards we contributed something to the local economy in the local pub.

Whether it is walking, mountaineering, angling, canoeing, off-road cycling, horse riding or any of the other outdoor pursuits we have discussed this afternoon, we need to ensure that more people take advantage of the opportunities afforded to us. The hon. Members for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris) and for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans) emphasised that point. Expenditure in the sector supports landowners such as the National Trust, retailers and manufacturers, outdoor clothing and equipment shops, and outdoor centres. It supports many in different sectors and brings economy activity to areas where it is much needed.

It is essential that the Government deliver a strong, coherent and joined-up sport and physical activity strategy, which is what the Labour party and those working in the sector have been calling for. According to the most recent data from Sport England, there are around 400,000 fewer people taking part in sport once a week than there were in 2011-12, including 275,700 fewer women. That is of particular concern. Also, the percentage of those

[Chi Onwurah]

in the lowest income groups who participate has fallen from 29.3% to 25.7%. Those figures are an indictment of the Government's approach to sport, from removal of ring-fenced funding for school sports two years prior to the games to the decision to water down protections for playing fields.

I encourage the Minister to look at Labour's "More Sport for All" policy document. I am encouraged by the Government's recent consultation on sport, and I hope it signals a change in intent that the Minister will elaborate on. I hope she will take this opportunity to confirm a timeline for implementing a new sports strategy and let us know what commitments she has received from colleagues in other Departments to deliver a joined-up sports strategy going forward, and I hope she will respond to the many questions raised by hon. Members in this debate. I look forward to her responses to the proposals and to hearing how the Government look to address them in the upcoming sports strategy.

3.51 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) for securing this debate, and for the constructive and interesting contributions that he and others have made today.

As I look around the Chamber, I realise that I have spent far too much of my recreational time with many of my colleagues here today, often with little economic benefit. A couple of hon. Members have mentioned that I climbed volcanoes in Ecuador—in the place of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield—with the hon. Members for Bassetlaw (John Mann) and for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland). It has scarred me for life, in both a good and a bad way, but I can assure my hon. Friends that what goes on on tour stays on tour, including who was sharing which tents when.

This issue is clearly of great importance to our nation's economy and to the health and wellbeing of our citizens. I will try to respond in my speech to all the points made, but given the time limitations, hon. Members must forgive me if I do not. If I miss anything, I am happy to write. As a courtesy to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield, who secured this debate, I will pick up on his key asks first, which were running themes throughout other Members' contributions.

The first theme was about how outdoor recreation should be an integral part of Government strategy. The sports strategy is forthcoming—it will be published before Christmas—and the consultation in the run-up to it had 10 chapters, only one of which had a foreword from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, so I can absolutely reassure hon. Members that this is an important issue for all Government Departments, so we need to work together if we are to deliver an effective sport and physical activity strategy going forward.

Another issue that was raised on numerous occasions was about adding "outdoor recreation" to my ministerial title. I am actually the Minister for Sport, Tourism and Heritage, as well as for gambling and a whole host of other things. When I was originally asked to put "heritage" in the title, the early suggestion was that I would be the

Minister for Sport, Heritage and Tourism. That was quickly vetoed for obvious reasons. Having sport, heritage, outdoor recreation and tourism in the title would make me the Minister for SHORTs, and I am not sure that would go down too well either. However, I can reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield that I will look to see if I can add outdoor recreation to my overall responsibilities that are listed formally. There is however one confusing aspect to this, which is that, as many other Members have mentioned, both DEFRA and the Department of Health have outdoor recreation in their portfolios, so it is important to discuss that with those Departments.

Today we have heard in particular about the economic value of the outdoors. We know that the outdoors market is vast and brings real opportunities to the local and national economy. It brings jobs and supports spending. This can be particularly important for the economy of rural communities. The Reconomics report highlighted the value of the sector to be some £1.43 billion in 2013. It also showed more than 26,000 people directly employed in outdoor education, recreation, development training and outdoor sport development. That is a huge number of people whose very livelihoods depend on the outdoors, and it is my job, and that of Ministers across Government, to ensure that they have the opportunity to work in the industry they love, which offers so much to our country—it is absolutely correct to think of this as an industry; it is a massive part of the future of the British economy.

Indeed, the outdoors is a vital part of our tourism offer—another area of responsibility that I have. According to data from VisitEngland, the estimated spend by visitors undertaking long walks, hiking or rambling is around £1.8 billion a year. The figure for cycling or mountain biking is £520 million a year, while for fishing it is £274 million and for sightseeing or exploring the coast or countryside it is more than £2.5 billion a year. These numbers are a huge boost to the economy, and we need to ensure that we make the most of this important opportunity. The Government are committed to supporting the sector, and I was particularly delighted to see the launch of the three-year Countryside is GREAT campaign earlier this year, designed to grow international visits, as well as the Adventure is GREAT campaign. Such campaigns are re-energising international perceptions of the British countryside and encouraging overseas visitors to explore different parts of Britain.

Our five-point plan for tourism is all about getting people out of London, exploring and experiencing our great outdoors beyond these city walls. It will help to support the wider recreation industry, including in Somerset, Hampshire, Lancashire, Nottinghamshire, the south-west, Wales, Northern Ireland, Cheshire, Northamptonshire, Scotland, Northumberland and, of course, my own county of Kent.

Although the economic impact of the outdoors is of course important, we should not forget that outdoor recreation has many wider benefits and plays a huge part in delivering a more active nation, which the hon. Member for Bassetlaw and others spoke passionately about. The outdoors provides millions of people with the opportunity to participate in a diverse and interesting range of activities. It improves their health and, most importantly, it is fun.

I work closely with the public health Minister—the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison)—not least because sport and physical activity is undoubtedly valuable for everyone throughout life. As we grow older, getting active can be even more important, helping to tackle social exclusion and loneliness, as well as leading to better health and self-confidence. As my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) said, no speech about the outdoors would be complete without mention of our inspirational national parks. They are a vital part of our heritage, not only providing beautiful landscapes for us all to enjoy, but helping to sustain many rural businesses.

National parks receive 90 million visitors every year, supporting 68,000 jobs and generating £4 billion for the economy. The Lake District and Yorkshire Dales national parks are to be extended next year, which can only be seen as good news. I want us to encourage those who would benefit most to get out and explore the great outdoors. It should be accessible to everyone, regardless of age, gender or ability. As my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) said, accessibility is an essential part of delivering that.

I am pleased that Sport England has already invested significantly in outdoor recreation so that people can engage in a variety of activities. To respond specifically to two colleagues who mentioned horse-related activities, Sport England has agreed a £6 million investment in the British Equestrian Federation to attract and keep more riders.

A cross-departmental approach is essential, but a joined-up approach at all levels of Government and governance is also essential. Clinical commissioning groups, local authorities, recreation facilitators and local enterprise partnerships all need to work together.

We have had a fascinating debate today. The potential for outdoor recreation is massive. I will publish the sport and physical activity strategy for the country by the end of the year. It is a cross-departmental strategy. I am keen that it takes into account the issues raised today and the potential that outdoor recreation has to deliver a much wider agenda, including the educational, environmental and health aspects raised in this afternoon's debate. We are at a unique moment in time, and it is important that all Departments join together to recognise the importance of sport and physical activity to everyone.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the economic value of outdoor recreation.

## Living Wage (Farmers)

[ANDREW ROSINDELL *in the Chair*]

4.1 pm

**Gordon Henderson** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the effect of the living wage on farmers.

Last week, on 21 October, it was apple day, a day on which we could celebrate the wealth and variety of apples available in the United Kingdom. I am a proud man of Kent, a county that produces a high percentage of the fruit grown in Britain, including 60% of its apples. I fear, however, that Kent's status as the garden of England might be under threat from a Government policy with which, ironically, I agree: the introduction of the national living wage.

I called for this debate so that I could set out some of the worries of farmers in Kent, particularly those who grow soft fruit, top fruit and stone fruit, but I will begin by making a couple of things clear. First, agriculture and horticulture are not low-wage industries, as is often suggested. Indeed, only a very small proportion of farm workers earn at the level of the national minimum wage.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this important issue before the House. I declare an interest as a member of the Ulster Farmers' Union, which shares my concern that the living wage has the potential to put farmers off employing those under 25 who do not have experience, which will have a knock-on effect. Does the hon. Gentleman feel that we should take that issue on board as well?

**Gordon Henderson:** Yes, and I will come on to discuss how we might resolve that later in my speech.

The second thing I want to emphasise is that, like me, farmers in my constituency and beyond support the principle of a living wage. Nevertheless, they are concerned that, because of a number of challenges unique to their industry, they will be forced out of business, not by the national living wage directly, but because they will be unable to compete with cheap imports from countries where farmers will not have to pay their workers as much as their British counterparts.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend from Kent for calling for this debate and setting out the case very well. Fruit farmers in my constituency are also worried about the effect of the living wage, although they also very much support it and often pay experienced workers well above it. They are worried that it will increase their labour costs by perhaps 11%, when they make margins of only around 1% or 2%. I feel strongly on their behalf that the Government must look at mitigating the impact if we want to maintain a successful British fruit industry.

**Gordon Henderson:** I am pleased that my hon. Friend and fellow Kent MP has raised that important issue, because I will be dealing with it later in my speech.

Another problem faced by farmers is foreign competition, which has made things worse. Their main customers are supermarket chains that are notoriously hard-nosed

[Gordon Henderson]

when it comes to price negotiations: they always look for the cheapest suppliers, whether or not they come from this country. It is inconceivable that supermarkets will, without protest, allow farmers to pass on the increased labour costs they will be forced to pay. The supermarkets will simply buy cheaper, imported produce.

Many of the workers employed by farmers are seasonal. Traditionally they were students who, because they were generally under 25, would not be covered by the national living wage, but the supply of home-grown student workers dried up and was replaced by foreign workers, many of whom came to this country under the seasonal agricultural workers scheme. Sadly, two years ago the Government scrapped SAWS, a decision that will exacerbate the problems faced by farmers if they are forced to pay the living wage.

Some farmers will look into introducing even greater mechanisation in order to reduce their labour costs. There is little doubt that such a move will inevitably lead to fewer staff, so it is highly likely that an unintended consequence of the national living wage will be a rise in unemployment among farm workers. Of course, some farming sectors do not lend themselves to mechanisation, and horticulturists such as soft, top and stone-fruit farmers are in that category, which is why they face the biggest challenges. As I said earlier, some of those challenges are unique to farmers. For instance, they have to deal with the vagaries of the supermarkets, which, in addition to demanding unsustainably low prices, have been known to reject a delivery of perfectly good crops as imperfect, simply because they still had some of that crop in stock from a previous delivery.

Farmers have to contend with unpredictable weather, which can decimate their crops. They also have to contend with the additional costs associated with the sale and delivery of highly perishable products and, as I have pointed out, competition from foreign imports from EU countries such as France that are becoming even cheaper because of the fall in value of the euro against sterling.

Farmers are not like widget manufacturers: they cannot just buy in components to produce goods; they have to plant crops, nurture them and eventually harvest them. Top-fruit farmers face a particular problem, because when they plant trees they are unlikely to have a saleable crop for three or four years. When considering whether to invest in new trees, a farmer needs to be confident that he or she will be able to sell the eventual crop of fruit profitably. Such farmers believe that the national living wage will make that very problematic. There are farmers in my constituency who planted fruit trees last year based on the understandable assumption that, over the next few years, their wage costs would be in line with the trend in the minimum wage seen over recent years. Imposing the new living wage on those farmers, without consultation or warning, will put their financial stability in jeopardy unless mitigation is forthcoming from the Government.

I accept that it was announced in the summer Budget that the cost to employers of paying the living wage would be offset by changes to corporation tax rates. The problem is that in the horticultural industry a reduction in corporation tax will not have the beneficial impact that the Government suppose, because 95% of producers

are sole traders or partnerships, for whom corporation tax is not payable. Similarly, although the increase in the employment allowance will reduce employers' national insurance contributions, that will have little effect on horticultural businesses because, typically, they employ relatively large numbers of workers, and the change to the employment allowance applies only to a business, not to the number of workers employed.

Although horticultural businesses employ large numbers of workers, they are, in the main, low-turnover small and medium-sized outfits.

4.9 pm

*Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.*

4.24 pm

*On resuming—*

**Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair):** Order. The debate will now resume and will conclude no later than 4.45 pm.

**Gordon Henderson:** As I was saying before we were so rudely interrupted, while horticultural businesses employ large numbers of workers, they are in the main low-turnover, small to medium-sized outfits, which leaves them exposed to the impact of the living wage. As my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) pointed out, profitability levels in the industry are low and having to pay the living wage will push many producers over the edge and out of business. Unless the Government step in and help farmers, we are likely to see the loss of British-grown produce and an increase in imported food, which would have serious long-term consequences for not only the British economy but our country's food security.

Farmers also face a couple of other problems. Accommodation provided by an employer can currently be taken into account when calculating the national minimum wage. It is not clear, however, whether that arrangement will continue under the living wage. If it does not, many employers who provide accommodation will face rising wage bills without the benefit of a reduction in the amount that they pay to subsidise that accommodation. It might help if the Minister confirmed whether and how the living wage will differ from the national minimum wage in that respect.

Another problem is that the introduction of the living wage comes at a time when farmers, like other businesses, are facing increased costs from other employment legislation, including pension auto-enrolment and an increase from 1% to 2% in the employer contributions that will come into effect in 2017. Farmers believe that the rise in wages under the living wage will lead to a growth in contributions to auto-enrolment pensions. Assessing a complex, changing workforce and calculating contributions for short periods for seasonal workers who stay with a business for just over the current 12-week postponement period will add to farmers' costs.

To help British farmers in general, and my local farmers in particular, I want the Government to consider several possible mitigating measures. First, supermarkets could be encouraged to work with farmers to help ensure that they receive a fair price for their produce. Ministers could do that by convening a meeting between the management of our major supermarkets and farmers' representatives to put together a long-term plan for the

industry. Secondly, the exemption from the living wage for workers under-25 could be widened to include seasonal workers. Thirdly, employment allowance could be changed so it is based on individual workers and not a business. Fourthly, we could introduce staged increases for the level of accommodation offset that counts towards an employer's payment of the national minimum wage and, presumably, the living wage. Fifthly, the cumulative and disproportionate administration burden associated with auto-enrolment duties could be reduced by extending the current three-month postponement period to six months to help capture seasonal workers in the postponement period.

Sixthly, the starting point for national insurance could be aligned with the starting point for income tax. In 2011-12, the class 1 NI threshold was set at almost 95% of the income tax starting threshold. Today, it is just 76%. Finally, the review cycles for the national minimum wage and the living wage could be aligned to reduce complexity. As I asked earlier, will the Minister perhaps confirm whether and how the living wage will differ from the national minimum wage? In addition, will he provide clarity on how the two wage rates will co-exist and whether the various rates can be simplified?

Agriculture and horticulture are important to Britain. They are particularly important to Kent, which, in addition to being the garden of England, just happens to be God's own county.

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): My hon. Friend speaks for many of us who represent some of the fantastic areas of the kingdom of Kent. I am delighted to hear his comments, which forcefully express the importance of agriculture to our region. In my constituency is Hugh Lowe Farms, which grows the strawberries for Wimbledon, and the community there has done a great deal to develop not only the farm but the economy around it. Marion, who runs the farm, raised the possibility of considering the Australian piece rate, which is a concept that would see the average employee wage be 25% above the minimum. If my hon. Friend is not going to come on to that point, will the Minister consider it anyway?

**Gordon Henderson:** I welcome that intervention because I was not going to mention the concept, so it is just as well that my hon. Friend did.

In conclusion, I want to see a thriving farming industry in Kent that provides food security for future generations. To achieve that, however, we need the Government to back British produce.

4.29 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson) for putting this important issue on the agenda. Food and farming is a vitally important industry; it is our biggest industry—bigger than aerospace and automotive put together. I am conscious that horticulture makes an important contribution, with an output of about £9 billion per year and employing some 12,000 people, many of whom are casual workers and many of whom are in Kent, the garden of England.

I declare an interest, because I spent 10 years as a strawberry farmer. As my hon. Friend described some

of the challenges for soft fruit producers, I got flashbacks to difficult problems that I, too, encountered. He made the valid point that we are discussing perishable products. There are immense challenges in getting the crop harvested without the pickers bruising the fruit, getting it into a cold store so that the field heat can be removed and we can preserve the shelf life, getting the right orders at the right time, and getting the fruit on a lorry without someone tipping over the pallets on the way, so that it arrives in good condition. Those are daily challenges for soft fruit producers.

My hon. Friend also mentioned that producers can have problems with supermarkets. Again, he is absolutely right, and I have seen that happen. If there is a rainy day and sales in the supermarkets go down, supermarket buyers will look for excuses to reject consignments of soft fruit. That is a hazard of the industry. Another risk is weather, which I will come on to later. The risk has been reduced, but it is still there, in particular in the top fruit and stone fruit sector.

The biggest challenge of all is staffing. In the farm that I ran, we had 50 acres of soft fruit and employed about 300 people. Half of them were local people and the other half came from a number of different countries, mainly European Union ones, but also some Commonwealth countries such as South Africa, Australia and New Zealand—students who were on a work visa. So I know the challenges that farmers encounter with staffing.

I am, however, more optimistic than my hon. Friend on a number of fronts. He claimed that supermarkets will not pay a premium for fruit, but the evidence does not bear that out. English soft fruit has always commanded a premium. Consumers are tired of Spanish strawberries by March and April and are looking for quality, English glasshouse-produced strawberries. Those glasshouse and then tunnel-produced strawberries command a premium not only over Spanish fruit, because we have superior varieties, but even over Dutch strawberries. The Dutch use similar varieties to us, predominantly Elsanta or more recent ones, but even so English and Scottish fruit command a premium over foreign imports. I am more optimistic than he is about supermarkets paying a premium.

Another development of recent years has been the changes to production systems—a big transformation, which was starting 20 years ago when I was still in the industry. In fact, I was one of the first producers of glasshouse strawberries, and we used to be the first to supply the supermarkets, normally in time for Easter. We have had a huge change in production, so the season is no longer four weeks in the middle of summer, with Wimbledon fortnight smack in the middle; we now have production from March right through to Christmas.

We have also seen the development of table-top systems, which have lower labour costs. Few commercial soft fruit farms now produce strawberries in traditional beds, growing in the soil; most of them grow in a coir substrate, basically on a table top, which makes the fruit much easier and much cheaper to pick. The other advantage of moving to such systems is the advent of the so-called Spanish or French tunnel—temporary tunnel structures, which hon. Members can see in their Kent constituencies for most of the year and which protect the fruit from the weather. That has had a major impact in reducing weather risk. In fact, the greatest

[George Eustice]

weather risk is now probably the effect on demand, with problems such as sales collapsing in the middle of summer because of a wet week.

There have also been big changes in the top fruit industry. Again, over the past 20 years the advent of new, more intensive systems, such as apples grown in spindle or bed systems, has lowered the cost of picking. They are now generally grown on M9—dwarfing—stock, which keeps the size of the tree down, makes the apples easier to pick and keeps the picking costs down. We have also seen big innovation in the top fruit industry with new varieties. In the case of stone fruit, who would have thought that this country would have seen a huge expansion in the production of apricots? However, we are seeing apricots and cherries grown in this country like never before.

The changes in production systems have made it easier for soft fruit businesses to manage their staff. In my day, we had to build from nothing to 300 staff within about 10 days. By the time all the staff issues had been sorted out—such as supervisors who could not do the job, endless recruitment or problems with training—and things had been perfected, it was time to start shutting everything down, because the season was over. Every soft fruit business used to have that challenge. The big change is that it is now possible for a soft fruit farm to offer employment from March right through to December.

Two years ago I visited one of our largest soft fruit producers, Hall Hunter, near Guildford, as part of the open farm Sunday project. The people there explained to me that about 60% of their staff are retained from the previous year. That was unheard of 20 years ago—every soft fruit business had to start from scratch each year—so now soft fruit enterprises are getting the bulk of their staff returning from one year to the next, and they do not have those huge costs of retraining.

I am aware of the concerns in the industry about the impacts of the national living wage, such as the potential increase in costs. We have to put that into perspective, with the coalition Government having abolished the Agricultural Wages Board. Twenty years ago I was campaigning for that, along with some of the larger enterprises. Strangely enough, at the time it was the National Farmers Union that stood in the way of the then Conservative Government, who were ready to sweep away that anachronistic organisation, and it did not happen. However, we have now scrapped the board. It is worth noting that in 2012, the final year of the Agriculture Wages Order, the level for a grade 1 standard employee was £6.96, so the change we are seeing is not so dramatic.

My hon. Friend was absolutely right when he said that we should not perceive the agriculture industry as only a low-wage one. In fact, it employs about 500,000 people. Our rough analysis suggests that the number of those affected by the national living wage will be fewer than 20,000—so the vast majority of those 500,000 are already earning more than the national living wage.

The other thing that we have to bear in mind is that the national living wage will apply only to those over the age of 25. As my hon. Friend pointed out, many soft fruit farms still rely on student labour—not only from the UK, but typically from other European countries—and they will be exempt from the national living wage. The national minimum wage rates will apply instead.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) mentioned concerns about the treatment of piece rates, but there will be no change. We already have an approach that allows for a fair piece rate to be set, which is a mean average of the output per hour that a farm's staff can achieve, divided by a coefficient of 1.2, to ensure that those only a bit slower than the average will still hit the minimum wage. The provision of a fair piece rate, which is still used in many sectors of horticulture, including the flower and soft fruit industries, means that with staff who work intermittently—they might work for two or three hours and then want to take a long break before starting again—instead of having to record every minute that they are sat in a hedge having a cup of tea, there is the ability to set a fair piece rate. That will not change.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey invited me to make a whole load of policy commitments that he well knows are issues for other Departments, such as aligning tax thresholds with national insurance thresholds or extending the employment allowance so that it applies per employee rather than per business. He understands that I cannot give such commitments on behalf of the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, but officials from BIS are present, so I am sure that some of my hon. Friend's points will be taken into account.

I want to pick up on a number of issues that my hon. Friend raised. First, he commented that horticultural businesses typically will not benefit from the change in corporation tax. I am not sure whether that is largely correct. Even when I was in the industry 20 years ago, about 10 major enterprises controlled about 70% of UK soft fruit production. That has not changed; if anything, even larger businesses have come together. My hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling mentioned Marion Regan on Hugh Lowe Farms. I know Hugh Lowe well and I know Marion well. It is a strong, enterprising business, and there are others such as Angus Davison's business in the west midlands. We have got some very large businesses that are limited companies and will benefit from the change in corporation tax.

Smaller businesses—perhaps not those in horticulture but those in broader agriculture sectors—will in the most part benefit from an increase in the employer's allowance from £2,000 to £3,000. A small dairy farm owner who has perhaps only one or two staff helping them out on the farm will benefit from that increase in the employer allowance. That will help to offset any additional costs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey mentioned the seasonal agricultural workers scheme, which was discontinued a few years ago. I am keeping a close eye on this, but, in the conversations I have had with soft fruit enterprises, most tell me that they have not had difficulty in sourcing labour so far. Most still find that they manage to get all the staff they need from countries such as Bulgaria, Romania and other European Union countries. We must bear in mind that the scheme was brought in to enable students from Poland and the Czech Republic to come to the UK when we had only about 12 member states in the European Union. Now that those countries are in the EU and we have an EU of 28 member states, the rationale for it has somewhat diminished.

My hon. Friend asked about the accommodation offset. In October 2015—just last month—the offset was increased to £5.35 a day, which is a rate recommended by the Low Pay Commission. The rules for the accommodation offset will also apply to workers aged 25 or older who will receive the national living wage from 2016. The rules are therefore broadly the same, and the rate will be set by the Low Pay Commission. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs will assess complaints regarding the accommodation offset for national living wage cases, just as it does now. There is no change: the offset will be based on a recommendation coming from the Low Pay Commission.

I am far more optimistic than my hon. Friend that the industry can cope. This is a vibrant industry that has seen huge growth in production and huge innovation in the past 20 years. That innovation has changed how it employs staff and means that, in my view, it will cope with the coming change far better than he fears. The industry in Kent has a bright future. I was the most westerly outpost of Kentish Garden, the forerunner to Berry Gardens, and I spent many years in my 20s in Kent trying to deal with some of the challenges the industry faced. I believe that it has a strong future.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Chagos Islands

4.45 pm

**Dr Paul Monaghan** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Chagos Islands.

Thank you, Mr Rosindell, for the opportunity to consider the many issues that confront the UK Government in respect of the Chagos islands. It is my privilege to serve under your chairmanship as a member of the all-party parliamentary group on the Chagos islands.

It would be remiss of me not to begin the debate by highlighting the presence of the Chagossians, other interested parties and Members from all political parties who have taken the time and trouble to be present here today; it is rare for a humble Westminster Hall debate to be so well attended. The interest in the debate reflects the widespread concern, and high levels of interest, from across the world for the people of the Chagos islands. Many here today have worked tirelessly to highlight the injustices perpetrated on the indigenous people of the Chagos islands over many years by a nation state that, quite bluntly, should know better.

On 8 November 1965—almost 50 years ago to the day—Harold Wilson, the then Prime Minister, authorised the creation of the British Indian Ocean Territory. That act was far from benign. The establishment of that territory was nothing less than a cynical and calculated plan to annex the Chagos archipelago, expel its indigenous people and deploy resources for military advantage.

The plan hinged on shameless exploitation. During a five-year period from 1968 to 1973, every single Chagossian man, woman and child was forcibly removed in secret from the islands. None has since been allowed to return. For the past 50 years, Chagossians have lived in poverty. To the utter shame of every UK Government and the 17 Foreign Secretaries since, that ethnic cleansing of an entire people has been variously ignored, glossed over or actively misrepresented.

The purpose of the annexation was to facilitate the leasing of the largest island in the Chagos archipelago, Diego Garcia, to the United States to allow the construction of an enormous military base. The base remains today. We now know that, in return for annexing the archipelago and expelling its people, the UK Government received a cash discount of £11 million on Polaris nuclear missiles, which is equivalent to about £200 million today when adjusted for inflation.

The story of Chagos has been a chronicle of abuse, naked greed and bullying on a grand scale. Indeed, it is a narrative of the hideous abuse of power and trust perpetrated against a humble people and an account of the success of a plan that hinged on the reprehensible neglect of a people's inalienable human rights. Many believe that abuse of power falls within the International Criminal Court's definition of a crime against humanity. That may be so, but we can be certain that human rights were sacrificed by the UK Government in a sordid deal to secure weapons of mass destruction. I am sure the Minister agrees that that is an appalling legacy.

Before 1968, more than 2,000 people lived on the Chagos islands, with many having family histories dating back almost 200 years. Chagossians had a thriving society, with numerous villages, schools, hospitals, churches

[*Dr Paul Monaghan*]

and businesses, and a unique way of life. Unknown to Parliament, and in clear breach of United Nations charters, the UK plotted to deliberately destroy that society. The truth about the cleansing of the Chagossians, and the Whitehall conspiracy to deny that there had ever been an indigenous population, did not emerge for almost 20 years, until files were unearthed at the Public Record Office in Kew by the historian Mark Curtis, the journalist John Pilger and lawyers acting for the former inhabitants of the islands, who were campaigning for a return to their homeland.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): I am not familiar with the geography of Diego Garcia, but is there enough room on the island for the military base to remain and the people to return?

**Dr Monaghan:** The islands are an archipelago. There are hundreds of islands and more than enough space for everyone.

In 1982, when the truth leaked out, the islanders exiled from Mauritius were awarded derisory compensation of less than £3,000 per person. Those exiled to Seychelles were awarded no compensation. It was noted then that it had been

“entirely improper, unethical, dictatorial to have the Chagossian put their thumbprint on an English legal, drafted document, where the Chagossian, who doesn’t read, know or speak any English, let alone any legal English, is made to renounce basically all his rights as a human being.”

Was the annexation improper? Certainly. Unethical? I have no doubt. Dictatorial? Absolutely. Those are strong words, but that is exactly how the UK Government have treated and continue to treat the people of Chagos. That is what the Minister is here today to explain.

I understand that Diego Garcia remains the United States’ largest military base outside north America. There are two runways, over 30 warships, more than 4,000 troops and a satellite spy station located on the island. The base has been used as a launch pad for invasions, including those of both Afghanistan and Iraq. It is still in use, and that use is still encouraged by the UK Government.

In 1966, terms for the lease of Diego Garcia were agreed at \$1 a year. On expulsion, the indigenous population were allowed to take just one suitcase each. They were forced into the hold of the SS Nordvaer and transported to Seychelles, where they were held in prison cells before being transited elsewhere, many to Mauritius. Wherever they were sent, they were left without financial support.

A Foreign Office memo on the subject at the time, from Sir Paul Gore-Booth to diplomat Denis Greenhill, stated:

“We must surely be very tough about this. The object of the exercise was to get some rocks which will remain ours; there will be no indigenous population except seagulls... The United States Government will require the removal of the entire population of the atoll.”

Denis Greenhill replied in August 1966:

“Unfortunately, along with the birds go some few Tarzans or Men Fridays whose origins are obscure and who are hopefully being wished on to Mauritius etc. When this has been done I agree we must be very tough and a submission is being done accordingly.”

It is impossible for the UK Government to hide behind that correspondence. The casual disregard for human life it evidences is chillingly calculated, unambiguous and staggering. Nevertheless that “tough” action provoked legal action that has ultimately led to all of us being here for this debate today.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): It was estimated in 2007 that the litigation costs to the UK taxpayer for Government action against the Chagossians had amounted to over £4 million; that has no doubt increased after more recent legal proceedings. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is hypocritical of UK Governments to spend money in that way when many Chagossians have been denied fair compensation from the UK?

**Dr Monaghan:** My hon. Friend has raised a valid point that I will come to shortly.

In 1975, a former resident of the Chagos archipelago, Mr Michel Vencatassen, initiated a claim for compensation in the courts of England against the UK Government. The claim was settled in 1982 in an agreement under which the United Kingdom would pay £4 million into a fund for the former residents of the archipelago. Together with a previous payment of £650,000 made to the Government of Mauritius in 1966, that £4 million was later held as

“full and final settlement of all claims”

arising from the removal or resettlement of the population of the Chagos archipelago—despite the fact that many Chagossians have received no compensation at all.

Other verdicts in the English courts went in favour of the Chagossians, in 2000, 2006 and 2007. But in 2008 the House of Lords overturned them all and ruled in favour of the UK Government. That bizarre ruling argued that the Chagossians were deprived of their right of abode lawfully. The ruling resulted in the formation of the all-party group on the Chagos islands, which has since met over 50 times and has attracted members of every single political party represented at Westminster. Full cross-party representation on such a group is very rare indeed.

Undaunted by the 2008 ruling, a group of Chagossians continued to pursue their claims before the European Court of Human Rights. In December 2012, the European Court judgment *Chagos Islanders v the United Kingdom* held that the claim was inadmissible, on the grounds that in settling their claims previously in 1982 and accepting and receiving compensation, the applicants had effectively renounced further use of legal remedies. Following the ruling, the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), then Attorney General and speaking for the UK Government, said:

“we regret very much the circumstances in which they were removed from the islands and recognise that what was done then should not have happened.”

Fine words on a flawed judgement—flawed because, I note again, not all Chagossians were compensated.

Five weeks before the general election in 2010, parallel to the actions on deprivation of right of abode, the then Foreign Secretary, David Miliband—now, it is worth noting, president and chief executive officer of the International Rescue Committee, where he oversees humanitarian relief—ignored the advice of diplomats

and rushed through the establishment of a marine protected area around the UK-controlled Chagos islands. That declaration was another significant, desperate and cynical attempt to anticipate legal claims on right of abode and to continue subverting the human rights of the Chagos people.

At The Hague on 18 March 2015, in its judgment *Chagos Marine Protected Area Arbitration (Mauritius v United Kingdom)*, the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled in favour of Mauritius against the UK Government concerning the declaration made on 1 April 2010 by David Miliband on behalf of the UK Government. The tribunal found that consultations on the marine protected area were characterised by a lack of information and an absence of sufficiently reasoned exchanges between the parties involved. It noted in particular that the UK Government engaged far less with Mauritius about establishing the marine protected area than it did with the United States. We need not speculate why.

More recently, on 4 August 2015, the UK Government announced a three-month consultation exercise on purported resettlement of Mauritians of Chagossian origin in the Chagos archipelago. That consultation period ended yesterday, when Mr Pierre Prosper, chair of the Seychelles Chagossians Committee, told me that although all Chagossians have responded to the consultation stating that they want to return, all have refused the terms of the UK Government's offer, "which reduces us to cheap labour for the military base, with no rights at all".

Considering that consultation on resettlement, the Minister should know that the proposed conditions of resettlement amount yet again to a gross violation of the Chagossians' most basic human rights.

The Prime Minister of Mauritius has also rejected the premise of the UK Government's consultation and has demanded that Chagossians who wish to resettle on the archipelago should be able to live in dignity and enjoy their basic human rights. I support that view. The Prime Minister of Mauritius stated earlier this month at the United Nations General Assembly:

"The Chagos archipelago was illegally excised by the United Kingdom from the territory of Mauritius prior to its accession to independence, in breach of international law and resolutions of this Assembly."

In the wake of that illegal excision, the Mauritians residing in the Chagos archipelago at the time were forcibly evicted by the British authorities, with total disregard for those people's human rights. Most of them were moved to the main island of Mauritius. The Government of Mauritius are fully sensitive to their plight and their legitimate aspiration as Mauritian citizens to resettle on the archipelago. Mauritius welcomes the award of the arbitral tribunal delivered on 18 March 2015 against the United Kingdom under the United Nations convention on the law of the sea:

"We welcome the tribunal's decision that the 'marine protected area' purportedly declared by the United Kingdom around the Chagos archipelago was established in violation of international law."

That is an excellent summary of the current situation.

The current resettlement proposals offer no right of abode and stipulate that Chagossians must return to their islands as "contract workers", with no right to buy land or property. Moreover, the resettlement is intended to be for a trial period, beginning with a two-year pilot, after which resettlement may be cancelled. During the

pilot period, Chagossians will not be allowed visitors on their islands, despite hundreds of wealthy tourists visiting the islands each year, mooring their yachts, living in Chagossians' abandoned homes and spending their time on the islands largely unmonitored. Similarly, unlike with Tristan da Cunha and Pitcairn, the UK Government's resettlement proposals advise that no education services will be provided, thereby effectively excluding families with children from returning to their islands.

In short, the consultation and the terms of resettlement are transparent, unsatisfactory and quite obviously designed to scare the indigenous people and ensure that resettlement on the Chagos islands fails. The refusal of the consultation document to guarantee support for Chagossians if resettlement is cancelled after two years means that Chagossians face an unenviable dilemma, and an unattractive and very insecure future. Furthermore, many Chagossian groups in Europe—for example, in Switzerland and France—have not been consulted on the resettlement proposals at all. As an exercise in engagement, the consultation is therefore effectively worthless and should be viewed and condemned as such.

To be clear, the UK Government's consultation fails spectacularly to address the key issues and should be roundly dismissed. It is, of course, welcome that the UK Government are considering how to make Chagossian resettlement a reality, but the terms of resettlement must be fair to Chagossians. The current proposals are not.

The basic premise advanced by the UK Government of there being "uncertainty" over both resettlement costs and demand is simply inaccurate. Indeed, recent freedom of information requests reveal that KPMG, which evaluated resettlement options and developed the costings, has described its own estimates as having been made with "pessimism". It remains unclear who instructed that pessimism, but I am sure we will find out at some point. To put that pessimism into context, one estimate suggests "capital and training" costs of £267.5 million over six years to resettle 1,500 people. Another scenario is costed at £4.04 million per person to meet the capital costs of "resettlement and security" over the first 10 years.

**Bob Stewart:** The hon. Gentleman mentioned a figure of 1,500 Chagossians. Roughly that number of people were dispossessed in the first place. I would have thought the number was greater now, given everything that has happened with families. Is it still 1,500?

**Dr Monaghan:** It is not 1,500. I think the number of Chagossians and their dependants is now approaching 5,000, but one of the scenarios put forward in the consultation document suggests that 1,500 people might be resettled.

There is, in fact, no consistency and no credible explanation for the overly high cost estimates of resettlement in the consultation document, but perhaps the Minister will take this opportunity to explain the pessimism included in the figures. KPMG's pessimistic estimates suggest resettlement costs could start at £64 million over three years, which represents a tiny percentage of the Department for International Development's budget. It is certainly far less than the £200 million cash discount achieved by the UK Government on the leasing of Polaris nuclear missiles in 1966. Indeed, £64 million seems a bargain by comparison.

**Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab):** Clearly, the report said there was no fundamental reason why the Chagossian people should not return to the Chagos islands. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that given the injustice, money should not be the reason for not giving these people the right to return? Money should not be an issue in this case.

**Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair):** Before the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Dr Monaghan) rises again, I point out that we only have between 15 and 20 minutes for the six Back Benchers who would like to contribute to this debate. The hon. Gentleman might consider that in his remarks.

**Dr Monaghan:** Thank you, Mr Rosindell. This is clearly a complicated and important debate for the many people who are in the room today. I absolutely agree with the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey): this is not and should not be a debate about money. There are moral imperatives attached to the resettlement of the Chagos islanders.

As the UK-US agreement on the use of Diego Garcia approaches expiration on 30 December 2016, the UK Government find themselves at an opportune point to renegotiate the terms of the lease for a further 20 years. The relationship began with the UK Government abnegating their responsibilities, accepting a discount on Polaris nuclear weapons and implementing a programme of forced expulsion of the Chagossian people. It should end on 21st-century humanitarian terms. Will the Minister ensure that the United States support for the resettlement of the Chagos islands is a prerequisite for extending the current agreement? If the United States had fundamental concerns about sharing Diego Garcia with Chagossians, it would not have allowed resettlement to be considered in the first place.

Will the Minister confirm that Mark Simmonds's statement on 19 November 2013 remains the position of the UK Government and that resettlement can be made compatible with the security needs of the base, as is the case with all other United States military bases around the world? If not, I am sure the Minister will want to take this opportunity to explain what differentiates the Chagos islands and requires the continued marginalisation of Chagossians and subversion of their human rights, because it is frankly absurd to claim that Chagossians are a serious security threat.

Beyond all that, however, there is a human, moral imperative to resettlement. I have already noted that there are Chagossians here today. Some of them want to return to their homeland to live out their lives. Some younger Chagossians want to live and work in the land of their parents and grandparents. All of them want to see their homeland grow and prosper again. All of them want their right of abode reinstated, and, in respect of their right of abode, the decision of the Supreme Court is awaited. Regardless of the Supreme Court's ruling in respect of the 2008 majority Lords verdict, all right-minded people must continue to argue for the most fundamental and basic human rights to be restored to the Chagossian people.

I urge the Minister not to rise at the end of this debate to recount yet another pitiable series of excuses as to why the UK Government should not, cannot or will not act to resettle the Chagos islands. Excuses, and

we must be very clear on this point, are not acceptable. The UK Government's continuing human rights abuses perpetrated upon the Chagos islanders are simply unacceptable. All of us in this room today know the truth about Chagos. We know what the islands are used for. We know who uses the islands. We know the ecology of the islands and the ecology of the ocean surrounding the islands. We know the rainfall pattern of the islands and that the islands are not dangerous, uninhabitable or sinking. We know the social history of the islands. We also know the true scale of the wrongs that have been perpetrated and the true cost of resettlement.

Rise today, Minister, and tell us—all of us here and those watching at home—what you are going to do now to right the wrongs inflicted upon this people. Rise today, Minister, to apologise to the Chagos islanders and to explain to all of us what you and your Government intend to do now to compensate Chagossians, particularly those in Seychelles. Explain how you will work to support the resettlement of all Chagossians, and how you will reinstate the vibrant society that they once maintained and which the UK Government so casually destroyed, and continue to deliberately and wilfully subvert today.

Minister, return to the Chagossians their human rights, as codified in the universal declaration of human rights, including their right of abode. Provide clarity on their citizenship status and their right to develop economic activity. Chagossians offer no threat to the operational activities of Diego Garcia, and I urge you to use the period in which the terms of the UK-US agreement on the use of Diego Garcia are being renewed to agree that both Governments will support the Chagossian people.

**Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair):** We only have 12 minutes left for six Back-Bench speakers, so I ask Members to keep their remarks as short as possible. I call Henry Smith.

5.13 pm

**Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship once again, Mr Rosindell. I congratulate the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Dr Monaghan) on securing this important debate.

There are more Chagos islanders in this Grand Committee Room than exist on the Chagos archipelago; that great injustice is visible here today. I first came across the issue of the Chagos islands when I was a teenager, reading a book about the remaining British overseas territories, and I was appalled then by what happened under the Wilson Administration in the late 1960s. It was the sort of appalling colonial abuse that one would associate with what happened 150 or even 200 years ago. Little did I know that, later on, I would have the honour and privilege to represent in my constituency the largest Chagos islands community anywhere in the world, first as leader of West Sussex County Council, where we were pleased to do what we could to support the community arriving at Gatwick and into this country. Latterly, over the last five-and-a-half years as a Member of Parliament, I have also been pleased to be a member of the Chagos islands all-party group and to advocate on behalf of the Chagos islanders.

The hon. Gentleman has set out many of the arguments, which I will not repeat because of the constrictions on time. However, it is important to state today that we

cannot turn back the clock, but we can do the right thing now. He mentioned that people live next to airbases all around the world, and it should be no different in the Chagos islands. I commend this Government and the previous coalition Government on at least starting the process of a consultation, which of course finally ended yesterday evening. With the anniversary of the creation of the British Indian Ocean Territory in a couple of weeks' time, now is the moment that the Government should follow through and agree to the resettlement. Funds are available, such as European Union funds or the international aid budget. We have one of the most generous international aid budgets anywhere in the world, and we should be using it for the benefit of these British citizens and their right of return to their homeland.

I want briefly to mention those Chagos islanders who would prefer to stay living in this country, although I absolutely accept the need to acknowledge that the majority rightly wish to return. I appreciate that this is an issue for the Home Office, but further work needs to be done on passports and visa issues, which are something that many of my constituents grapple with. I thank members of the Chagos community in this country for the respectful way in which they have fought for their rights, given the appalling injustice that has been done to them.

On sovereignty, I would probably disagree with the hon. Gentleman. I believe that the ideal solution is that the Chagos islanders should be allowed to return to their homeland and then, just like every other overseas territory, it should be up to them to decide under which sovereignty they wish to live in the future. I could say much more, but given the time, Mr Rosindell, I will finish, because I would like to encourage other Members to contribute as well.

5.16 pm

**Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): I did not actually come to speak in this debate, but I would fully agree with what has just been said. We have to find a middle ground. Let me say to the Minister that the duty falls on us to find a way to get the Chagossian people back to their homes—a way that works with them there, living with schools, with their own religions and with their home around the base. That is all I want to say.

5.17 pm

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): It is delightful to have you chairing this particular debate, Mr Rosindell, as I know you have been involved with this issue in the past.

I pay tribute to all the members of the all-party group, who, over a period of time, have really tried to keep this issue in the spotlight. In particular, I pay tribute to the new leader of my party, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), who chaired the all-party group for many years through thick and thin. He has done a huge amount, and I know that he would like to have been here today, but I do not think he can be.

To me, it is unbelievable to think that what we did to those people 50 years ago could happen today. We would not have let it happen, and the fact that it did and that they are still waiting for their human rights to be restored so many years later is shameful for all of us. Now is the perfect time to get this return-fare package,

50 years on, particularly with the negotiations with the United States coming up next year. We just have to be absolutely firm: this will not be renegotiated unless we have a fair return for all the islanders.

I have already spoken about the cost, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Dr Monaghan) on securing the debate and on outlining the history of the situation so clearly. Anyone who reads the history cannot be anything other than moved by the injustice of what happened to those people. We now have an opportunity, 50 years on, to really make their return happen. Money should not be the issue. It is there, and if the Government were to work with the people themselves on how they want this to happen, once we have made the decision that it is going to happen—I hope that has now been accepted, with the report from the independent study stating that there is no reason whatever why they could not go back—we have to make it happen as quickly as possible.

However, we have to work with the Chagossian people to make sure that when they go back, they do so under terms that they are happy with, and that they will not be misled again or sign up to all sorts of agreements that afterwards cannot be carried out. I am very supportive today of that return happening, and I again pay tribute to all the Chagossian people, who have shown such dignity over many years about this dreadful thing that happened to them 50 years ago.

5.20 pm

**Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): I, too, commend the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Dr Monaghan) for bringing this very important matter to our attention. I also commend my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) for his contribution. I just want to add that I consider it a gross injustice to remove 1,500 people against their will. It is a gross injustice then to have an airbase, with a very questionable history in this century, on their land. It is a gross injustice to create a marine protected area without consulting the people who should be there, in their homeland.

I did not know about this matter when I was younger; I wish I had known. I owe thanks to my constituent, George Beckmann, who brought it to my attention. I am honouring a promise that I gave him as a candidate that I would stand up for the Chagos islanders. You deserve your home; you deserve reparation and an apology; and I am very privileged to be in the same room as you today.

5.21 pm

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. As a member of the all-party group on the Chagos islands, I am pleased to be able to speak in this debate, but it would clearly be better for everyone concerned if there was no need for a debate to be taking place after all these years.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Dr Monaghan) that the history of this starts in 1965-66. It was in 1966 that the agreement was made about the US naval base. That was before I was born, so I tried to imagine what drove the thinking at the time. There was the cold

[Alan Brown]

war. Did people believe that the actions were justifiable at the time? However, even if I try to put myself in the position of people then, there is no way to justify what happened—clearing the people from their homeland and trying to cover that up and justify it as involving only contract workers. Worse than that, we have had 50 years of cover-up and blocking since then. That is what is truly shocking.

I will give a flavour of the timeline. In 1971, the UK Government issued an immigration ordinance prohibiting return to the islands. In 1982, compensation was paid, whereby it was obviously hoped that the matter would disappear, but the compensation was paid only to Chagos islanders in Mauritius and not to those living in the Seychelles. That obviously forced the issue into the courts. In 2000, the High Court ruled that the ordinance was illegal, which the UK Government seemed to accept, but then decided not to accept—another shameful outcome. In 2004, new orders were issued prohibiting a return, which forced the matter back through the courts. In 2006-07, the Chagos islanders won in the High Court and then the Appeal Court, but unfortunately in 2008 the UK Government took the matter to the Law Lords and got a decision favourable to them, on a split decision.

The year 2009 is also very significant. The European Court had suggested that a friendly out-of-court settlement could be pursued, but that was not taken up by the UK Government. At the same time, the UK Government said that they had a moral responsibility to the Chagos islanders that would never go away. The Government actually said that the moral responsibility would never go away, but at the same time, behind the scenes, they were working on plans to create the marine protected area, so that was more double-dealing. Also in 2009, an immigration Bill was passed. The UK Government refused to accept an amendment that would allow special consideration for the Chagos islanders, so their dependants are not entitled to British citizenship. That is another strand of the story and it is very important now, because some of the people who were forcibly moved from their islands settled in the UK, but are now being told that UK descendants are not entitled to British citizenship.

In March 2015, it was ruled that the marine protected area violated international law. Unfortunately, we also discovered—from WikiLeaks of all things—that the MPA was, as was suspected, just a mechanism to prohibit the islanders from returning. That is more shameful deceit in recent times by a UK Government.

My hon. Friend touched on the KPMG report. At least, as was said, the recent Government commissioned a feasibility study in relation to allowing the islanders to return, but it is pessimistic about the costs. The estimates are £23 million for housing and public buildings for 150 people and £10 million for housing for a pilot involving 50. There is no doubt that those costs are designed to scare the Government and give them an excuse not to do that.

I will quickly conclude—apologies for having gone on. The Government now need to sort out three key issues: allowing a claim for resettlement; citizenship for dependants, who now, understandably, perhaps do not want to move back because they have been displaced for

so long; and the future sovereignty of the islands. We need to get this matter sorted and remedy the wrongs of the past 50 years.

5.25 pm

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell; I know that you take an interest in these matters. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Dr Monaghan) on securing a debate on an issue to which he has long been committed and which is highly topical. I welcome the work of the all-party group and the various hon. Members who have spoken. I note that the honorary president of the APPG, the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn)—I do not know whether he is right honourable yet—is with us. I welcome him to his place; it is a very commendable show of support and solidarity.

In his maiden speech in the main Chamber, my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross highlighted both the cause of the Chagossian people and the historical experience of people in his own constituency who were affected by the highland clearances. In my constituency, the clearances are commemorated by, among other things, a plaque on the wall of the Lios Mor bar. The plaque names some of those most responsible for the forced removal of people and what it calls a form of ethnic cleansing. I will leave it to hon. Members to visit my constituency to determine exactly where in the bar the plaque is located, but it is in a place where it invites male visitors to pay those whom it names the respect it says they are due. Whether exactly the same attitude should be applied to those responsible for the forced removal of the Chagossians is not necessarily for me to say, but what is clear is that the situation is an injustice for which a resolution is long overdue.

**Bob Stewart:** Having had some experience of it, I would say that this looks like classic ethnic cleansing, and the human rights commissioner of the United Nations should take more interest in it.

**Patrick Grady:** That is a very fair point well made. We will perhaps have the Minister's response to it.

The Scottish National party has for many years expressed its solidarity with the Chagossian people, and I want to take this opportunity to do so again today. At our spring conference in 2015, we agreed a resolution expressing frustration with the ongoing approach of the UK Government in relation to the Chagossian people and agreeing that the behaviour of the UK Government has consistently been contrary to well established laws on decolonisation and self-determination. These are, admittedly, complex areas of international law, but certainly the tradition in Scotland is that sovereignty should lie with the people, so irrespective of territorial claims by the United Kingdom, Mauritius or any other third party, the fundamental right to live and work on the Chagos islands should lie with the people who lived there until their forced removal at the hands of a UK Government.

We can welcome what slow progress there may have been, but the terms and conditions of the pilot resettlement proposal are minimalist to say the least. My hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross

went into that in considerable detail and highlighted the views of the Chagossian community. I hope that if the Chagossians, supportive organisations or any other people come forward with alternative suggestions or proposals, the Minister will listen to those, and that what is in the current consultation will not simply be presented as a fait accompli. I know that the APPG has suggestions about possible sources of funding for resettlement and has questioned the cost of resettlement highlighted in the KPMG report. The highest cost that I can find is £267 million over six years. Although that is not a small amount, I imagine that it pales in comparison with the amounts spent on building, maintaining and running a US defence base—a defence base, of course, that the Government admitted was used for rendition of prisoners. That only compounds the injustice that has happened in that part of the world.

Time is extremely short, so I cannot go into all the detail that I wanted to. That shows that this matter deserves time on the Floor of the House, once the Government reach a decision—or, indeed, before then—so that the whole House can have its say. The debate raises a huge number of wider questions about the sovereignty of peoples and the role of current and former colonial powers—questions of geopolitical and military-industrial significance. If so-called developed countries can trample on the rights of small nations and communities out of military or political expediency, it makes it difficult for those countries to lecture so-called less developed countries or encourage them to smarten up their act on respect for human rights and the rule of international law. There are far too many historical—and current—examples of forced removal and migration of peoples, with the impact that that has on culture, economies, ways of life and the environment.

In the case of the Chagos archipelago, there are clear paths to restoration and the chance to right an historic wrong. If the Government can show some political will and make the kind of progress that has been called for, not only will some kind of justice be done to the Chagossian people, but there will be hope for other communities in similar situations elsewhere. If they cannot, the only conclusion that can be reached is that attitudes that should have set with the sun at the end of the British empire are, in fact, still stubbornly and unnecessarily at work at the heart of Government today.

5.30 pm

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I should let hon. Members know that I took on my new role only this morning, but I have long been familiar with the historic injustice done to the Chagos islanders. I defer to the expertise and passion of others, not least my hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, the president of the all-party group, about whom my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) spoke. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Dr Monaghan) for his powerful, personal and thorough exposition of the appalling treatment of a people.

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend believe, as I do, that the debate is timely as all hallows' approaches? For 50 years, the Chagossians

have not been able to mourn the souls of their dead adequately, because there has been no right of return.

**Stephen Doughty:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. We have noted many historical dates, and that tragic celebration is an apposite time to have this debate.

The hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) spoke passionately about his constituents and gave a stark illustration of the injustice that has been done to them. I have strong sympathy with his views on sovereignty: that fundamental choice in the future must lay with Chagossians. My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall made a similar and powerful point. The people of Chagos must be at the heart of decisions about their future, and they have shown great dignity throughout the long decades of struggle on this matter. I commend many of the other comments that have been made.

I have absolute and deep regret, which I know is shared by the official Opposition, over the way in which the Chagossians were forcibly resettled in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I, for one, cannot justify those actions or excuse the conduct of a previous generation and previous Governments, whether they were Labour or otherwise. In my view, the UK Government have a fundamental moral responsibility towards the islanders that will not go away. I urge the Government to do all that they can to seek a resolution.

Hon. Members attending the debate will know that that is a view shared throughout the House, including by the Leader of the Opposition. Let us be frank; this is not the only episode of regrettable action or events in the turbulent process of decolonisation. Members will be aware that I have long supported the cause of Somaliland, which is also a former British colony. The difficult fact is that, as in that case, we as successor generations often find ourselves left with complex legal and practical conundrums involving other sovereign states, international bodies and treaty obligations, which often conflict, or at least appear to conflict.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the original actions, the fact is that the base on Diego Garcia exists and there are agreements between the US and the UK, based, as we know, on the 1966 exchange of notes. I fundamentally believe that there must be a way of resolving that, and that is a common view among those who have contributed to the debate. The all-party group has said that any renewal of the 1966 agreement must be conditional on a commitment to facilitate and support Chagossian resettlement. I note what the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross said to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) on that point. There is a practical possibility of that happening, so why do we not get to it?

I have a series of brief questions for the Minister before I allow him to reply; I am sure that we all want to hear from him. First, will he update us on the status of the negotiations with the United States on the renewal of the 1966 notes and any views on the US's amenability to resettlement alongside any base that might remain? Secondly, what is his reaction to the legitimate concerns raised by the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross about whether the current proposals for resettlement are adequate for the Chagos islanders? Thirdly, what is the UK Government's position on the judgment on 18 March of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea regarding the marine

[Stephen Doughty]

protected area? Do the Government accept that judgment, and how do they intend to deal with it? Finally, we understand that the Supreme Court heard core arguments in June about the 2008 decision, and that it has reserved judgment. I do not have a deep familiarity with the proceedings of the Supreme Court, but does the Minister have an update on when we might expect a decision? I think that is something that we would all like to know.

I finish by expressing my great sympathy with the concerns of the Chagos islanders. That is certainly the view of the Official Opposition, and we seek to work with the Government to find whatever solution can be found to achieve the resolution of their desires and hopes for resettlement, and to right the historic wrongs.

5.35 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (James Duddridge):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell, particularly on this subject, in which I know you share a great interest. The fact that so many people have turned up to the debate shows the passion behind the views on this subject. I wager that this is the first time for a very long time—if ever—that the Leader of the Opposition has turned up to a Westminster Hall debate. I will be challenging the House of Commons Library to disprove that hypothesis. It is good to see him here alongside my new opposite number, the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty). I look forward to working closely with him on a number of issues.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Dr Monaghan) on securing the debate, and particularly on getting it today, which is timely for the consultation. He built on a passionate view of the Chagos islands and particularly reflected on the situation in the highlands. I was not there for his maiden speech, but I have read it and it was powerful. It was echoed in the comments by the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) about the parallels between the problems in both situations.

The all-party group has historically been very active on these challenging issues, and I am grateful for its ongoing contributions. Although I have met members of the group informally, other Foreign Office colleagues have met the group formally in my absence, and quite rightly so.

In response to the debate, I would like to focus on the resettlement of the islanders and recognise the very real problems of their removal in the late '60s and early '70s. I begin by reassuring the House that I am considering the matter carefully, and that I plan to travel to the islands to see for myself the situation, to probe some of the issues that were raised during the consultation and to overcome some of the problems that are in the KPMG report, so that I am as informed as I can be before making recommendations and taking decisions on the subject. I hope to do that very soon, because I am acutely aware that this is a long-standing problem.

**Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab):** I apologise for not being here for the earlier part of the debate. I am doing what I have condemned many others for doing by turning up late and taking part. Please forgive me.

I declare an interest as the president of the Chagos islands all-party group and as someone who has been a passionate advocate for the Chagos islanders for a very long time. I am delighted that the Minister will be travelling there and meeting the islanders. I hope that he will—I am sure he will—understand the humanitarian hurt that the Chagos islanders have suffered, the justice of their right to return and the real possibility that that could be brought about.

I hope the Minister will agree, as soon as he returns from that visit, to meet the all-party group and have a serious discussion with it and the islanders, so that we can finally put to bed this horrible period in British history when a group of islanders, wholly innocent of anything, were so abominably treated and so brutally removed from their homes. They have suffered for so long and fought so valiantly for their human right to live where they were born and grew up.

**James Duddridge:** I would certainly be happy to meet the all-party group after my visit, and, if time allows, perhaps meet one or two members of the group informally before then to gain some understanding of the issues involved.

A number of points were made, and I will try to move swiftly and cover as many as I can. This Government, like successive Governments before them, have made clear their regret over the wrongs done to the Chagossian people over 40 years. I will not seek to justify those actions or to excuse the conduct of an earlier generation. What happened was simply wrong. In the words of the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, it is an appalling history. Therefore, it was right historically to pay substantial compensation. The British courts and the European Court of Human Rights have confirmed that that compensation has been paid in full and final settlement. Quite rightly, we are here today in the middle of another process.

Decisions about the future of the British Indian Ocean Territory are difficult. Occasionally, they are presented as being slightly more simplistic. Although cost is not the main issue, it is one of many issues and we should consider it. Successive Governments have opposed resettlement on the grounds of feasibility and defence. The House will recognise that there are fundamental difficulties, but we should look to how those could be overcome.

In 2000, the Labour Government looked at the practical challenges of returning Chagossians to the territory permanently and concluded that that would be precarious and entail expensive underwriting for an open-ended period. However, in 2012 under the previous Foreign Secretary, the then right hon. Member for Richmond, the policy review was announced, including the new study into the feasibility of resettlement, which concluded in January this year with the KPMG report. That independent study showed that resettlement could indeed be practically feasible, but that significant challenges remained. I hope that some of those challenges will be picked up in the consultation, in the work that Ministers have commissioned subsequently and by me in my visit and subsequent meetings. In March 2015, Ministers at Cabinet level carefully considered the KPMG study, which brings us to where we are now. We will continue to look at those issues in detail.

The consultation that ended yesterday was well received. More than 700 written responses have been received, and officials met more than 500 Chagossians in their own communities in the UK, the Seychelles, Mauritius, Switzerland, France and as far afield as Tasmania. It is important that we consult as widely as possible. While we know that many Chagossians do want to go back, it is important that we recognise—as shown in the independent feasibility study and more recently—that some Chagossians are more interested in securing other forms of support in the places where they live. We should assess what we can do for everyone, not just those who are returning.

The consultation looked at options that fall short of full resettlement. If it turns out that we cannot do that, we should not simply do nothing. There are other issues—financial, legal and social—and the question of the ability of the military facility on Diego Garcia to operate unhindered. The US Government have expressed concerns about operating alongside a community, but I recognise the points that have been made by strong advocates, some of whom have met people on the doorstep, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias), and some of whom are long-standing advocates, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Henry Smith), who has been bending my ear on the subject from probably the day I was appointed and will continue, quite rightly, to do so.

**Bob Stewart:** Will the Minister give way?

**James Duddridge:** I will not give way, as I only have one and a half minutes left and I will probably not manage to cover all the points that have been made.

A number of issues about the Supreme Court were raised. I do not want to get into critiquing ongoing legal cases, but my understanding of the issue around the United Nations convention on the law of the sea is slightly different from that presented to the House. While UNCLOS found for the UK Government on sovereignty, it was only on the process of the consultation that it said the consultation with Mauritius was not sufficient. I encourage the Mauritian Government to engage in resettlement discussions with us but, to date, they have unfortunately refused to do that. It would be incredibly helpful.

I take my responsibilities as Minister very seriously on this matter, which is why I am allocating a lot of time to it. I have read every single word of the KPMG report. I will do so again on what I understand will be a very long journey out to the islands. If time allows and I am able to, I will try to get to the outer islands; that is an important element so that I can look at all the options before taking recommendations to more senior Ministers and before the Government come to a decision. In conclusion, it is an important issue, and I sincerely thank the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross and everyone here for their time.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the Chagos Islands.

5.44 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 28 October 2015

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b> .....	327	<b>INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT—continued</b>	
Climate Change .....	327	Topical Questions .....	334
Foreign National Offenders .....	333		
Migration.....	330	<b>PRIME MINISTER</b> .....	337
Occupied Palestinian Territories .....	332	Engagements.....	337
Refugee Camps: Winter .....	328	Engagements.....	348
Refugees (Registration of Children).....	331	West Midlands Combined Authority .....	346

No proofs of the Daily Reports can be supplied. Corrections which Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked in the Daily Report, but not telephoned, and *the copy containing the Corrections must be received at the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than  
Wednesday 4 November 2015**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE  
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF THE VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their Speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), on application to the Stationery Office, c/o the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons, from whom the terms and conditions of reprinting may be ascertained. Application forms are available at the Vote Office.

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

DAILY PARTS

*Single copies:*

Commons, £5; Lords, £4.

*Annual subscriptions:*

Commons, £865; Lords, £600.

LORDS VOLUME INDEX obtainable on standing order only. Details available on request.

BOUND VOLUMES OF DEBATES are issued periodically during the session.

*Single copies:*

Commons, £65 (£105 for a two-volume edition); Lords, £60 (£100 for a two-volume edition).

Standing orders will be accepted.

THE INDEX to each Bound Volume of House of Commons Debates is published separately at £9.00 and can be supplied to standing order.

*All prices are inclusive of postage*

---

## CONTENTS

Wednesday 28 October 2015

**Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 327] [see index inside back page]**

*Secretary of State for International Development  
Prime Minister*

**Commons Financial Privilege [Col. 349]**

*Answer to urgent question—(Chris Grayling)*

**Regulation of Enforcement Agents (Collection of Council Tax Arrears) [Col. 360]**

*Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Yvonne Fovargue)—agreed to  
Bill presented, and read the First time*

**Opposition Day [8th allotted day]**

**Steel Industry [Col. 363]**

*Motion—(Ms Angela Eagle)—on a Division, negatived  
Amendment—(Stephen Crabb)—agreed to  
Motion, as amended, agreed to*

**Junior Doctors' Contracts [Col. 419]**

*Motion—Heidi Alexander)—on a Division, negatived  
Amendment—(Mr Jeremy Hunt)—agreed to  
Motion, as amended, agreed to*

**Corporate Boards (Diversity) [Col. 469]**

*Debate on motion for Adjournment*

**Human Rights (Joint Committee): Nomination of Committee [Col. 477]**

*Motion, on a deferred Division, agreed to*

**Westminster Hall**

**Transforming Rehabilitation Programme [Col. 115WH]**

**Harold Wilson [Col. 139WH]**

**Outdoor Recreation [Col. 147WH]**

**Living Wage (Farmers) [Col. 172WH]**

**Chagos Islands [Col. 180WH]**

*General Debates*

**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

---