

Thursday
21 April 2016

Volume 608
No. 147



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 21 April 2016

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr Speaker: On the front page of today's Order Paper, it is noted that, on 23 April 1916, Lieutenant and Adjutant the Hon. Michael Hicks-Beach, Viscount Quenington, Royal Gloucestershire Hussars Yeomanry, Member for Tewkesbury, died of wounds received in action at Quatia in Sinai, Egypt. We remember him today.

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport was asked—

Local Authority Plans for Culture

1. **Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): What steps he is taking through the culture White Paper, published in March 2016, to ensure that culture forms a core part of local authorities' plans and priorities. [904597]

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): May I begin by wishing Her Majesty the Queen a very happy birthday today? I know that the whole country will be celebrating.

I am delighted to have published the first culture White Paper for more than 50 years and I am also very pleased that at the core of that White Paper stands our Great Place scheme, which is exactly designed to encourage local authorities to put culture first.

Neil Carmichael: I join the Minister in wishing Her Majesty the Queen a very happy birthday.

Does the Minister agree that devolution combined with the possibility of an elected mayor, as we hope to have in Gloucestershire, would be a really good thing, providing more scope, more leadership and more resources for culture, media, music and everything else that a good community needs to have?

Mr Vaizey: Yes, I do agree with my hon. Friend. It is quite clear that local leadership plays an absolutely crucial role in ensuring that the power of culture makes a real impact on local communities.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): The Minister's Government have implemented £685 million of cuts to Lancashire County Council, resulting in massive library and museum closures. When will his Government take responsibility for this attack on our heritage and culture,

which amounts to treachery when we lose them forever? It is disgraceful. When will his Government take responsibility?

Mr Vaizey: The amount of cash going to local authorities is going up. The hon. Gentleman should look to his own Benches first, because it is Labour local authorities that are overwhelmingly closing local libraries, and it is Conservative ones that are keeping them open.

Mr Speaker: Order. Members should not be standing while the exchanges take place. I can perfectly well see them, and I may or may not come to them in due course.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I join the Minister in wishing Her Majesty a very happy birthday.

"Even if councils stopped...maintaining parks, closed all children's centres, libraries, museums, leisure centres...they will not have saved enough money to plug the financial black hole they face".

That was a quote from Lord Porter, the Tory chair of the Local Government Association. That black hole is of the Government's making and local cultural institutions lose out doubly, because councils can no longer afford to match-fund European, Heritage Lottery or Arts Council grants. Our creative industries generate £84 billion per year. They are drivers of growth, economic regeneration as well as inspiration, hope and future jobs. Why are this Government starving their local roots?

Mr Vaizey: I certainly do not agree that we are starving local roots. We are increasing the amount of national funding that is going out of London, which is something that the last Labour Government never did at all, and I see examples of success all over the country. Hull, for example, is preparing to be the City of Culture next year. The Great Exhibition of the North the year after will celebrate our culture rather than doing it down. I ask the hon. Lady to have a word with her colleagues in Labour local authorities and ask them to stop closing their libraries.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Where is a sense of reality from the Minister? My local authority, Kirklees, is desperately fighting to keep libraries open and to keep the museums going, and it is a very tough call indeed. I know that there are problems—I am not making a cheap political point—but is it not about time that we put more resources into local government and also into universities so that they take their local communities more seriously in terms of innovation and the arts?

Mr Vaizey: The hon. Gentleman's point about universities is very well made. Universities play an increasingly important role in local cultural provision. That is something that they themselves have driven, and it is very welcome. They are very important partners.

Leveson Inquiry

2. **Simon Danczuk** (Rochdale) (Ind): What progress is being made on implementation of the Leveson inquiry recommendations. [904598]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): Around half of Sir Brian Leveson's recommendations focused on press regulation and we have implemented those via the royal charter. The Government have delivered, or are in the process of delivering, the majority of the other recommendations directed at them.

Simon Danczuk: The Secretary of State must realise that press abuse victims want him to implement section 40. Indeed, even the Prime Minister personally promised victims of press abuse and this House that it would be enacted. Why is the Secretary of State breaking the Prime Minister's promise?

Mr Whittingdale: I have considerable sympathy with the victims of press abuse and have had a number of meetings with some of them and with others who are rightly following this matter with great interest. Having had my faith tested perhaps to the utmost, I still believe that press freedom is a vital component of a free society and we should tread very carefully. Some of the recommendations of the Leveson report have been implemented and the new system is coming into effect. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the exemplary damages provisions of section 40 have now been enacted. The remainder are still under consideration and we do not yet have a recognised press regulator in place, but we will continue to consider these matters very carefully.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State believe that we have sufficient press regulation or would he like to see further regulation of the press?

Mr Whittingdale: We now have two potential press regulators, both of which are independent, running self-regulatory systems with sanctions, and certainly represent a considerable improvement on the Press Complaints Commission, which went before. It is still early days and obviously we will watch carefully to see how the new system operates and whether it is delivering the proper protection that we all want to see to ensure that the abuses that have taken place in the past do not happen again.

John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): We all support freedom of the press and broadcasters, but in the case of the BBC we also expect our national broadcaster to reflect the society in which we live. I am sure that the Secretary of State will have seen highlights of the House's recent debate on BBC diversity. All sides were in complete agreement that there is a striking shortage of black senior managers, an inexplicable lack of openly gay and lesbian presenters in high-profile news and current affairs roles and a shocking absence of older women on screen anywhere. The House agreed that the time for BBC studies and targets had passed and that action was overdue. Has the Secretary of State had a chance to pass that on to the director-general?

Mr Whittingdale: I have quite a lot of sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's comments. Obviously, we are still in the process of drawing up the new BBC charter but I can assure him that this issue will feature in the White Paper when we publish it, I hope quite soon. It is something we take seriously. I do not believe in instructing

the BBC or setting quotas for the number of ethnic minority faces, older female faces or, indeed, Scottish faces that appear on screen or behind the camera, but all those groups, and others that are currently underrepresented, need better representation and that is what we are working to achieve.

Grassroots Sport

3. **Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con):** What assessment he has made of the potential effect of his Department's spending review settlement on funding for grassroots sport. [904599]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr David Evennett): The Department secured a very positive spending review settlement last year. Over this Parliament we will invest more money in grassroots sport than ever before. The settlement reflects the Government's continued support for the positive outcomes that sport can bring and will be spent in line with the new Government strategy, Sporting Future, which sets out how we will encourage more people from every background to engage in sport and physical activity.

Mims Davies: What assessment has the Minister made of councils intervening and affecting grassroots sports participation, such as Parkrun, by insisting on charging for wear and tear?

Mr Evennett: This is obviously a matter for the council and Parkrun, but the decision to charge for an event that is free in locations across the UK and around the world is one that we, as a Government, think should be reconsidered. We want to remove barriers to participation and encourage more and more people to get involved in sport. That is the key message that the Government want to get across.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): If my hon. Friend were to speak to our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, he would become aware that in Chelmsford there is thriving grassroots sport in the form of ice hockey. Does the result of the spending review offer any hope of benefits for ice hockey at a grassroots level?

Mr Evennett: Obviously, decisions on local authority budgets are decisions for those authorities. We welcome what is happening in Chelmsford and I know how assiduous my right hon. Friend is in speaking up for his constituency. There are many examples across the country of local authorities spending on sport. For instance, Central Bedfordshire Council continues to invest in sport and physical activity provision. We encourage that.

Press Regulation

4. **Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab):** What factors he has taken into account when deciding whether to commence section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013, on reform of press regulation. [904600]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): As I indicated a moment ago, no decision has been taken regarding commencement

of section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013. The matter is under consideration and I am meeting a variety of interested parties with different views to discuss the issue.

Paul Farrelly: I thank the Secretary of State for taking us no further forward. Implementation of the costs incentives was promised by the then Culture Secretary, the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller). They were promised as a key part of the Leveson reforms specifically by the Prime Minister, not only to Parliament but to the victims of press abuse, including the family of Madeleine McCann, so in signalling already that he has no intention of taking that step, has the Secretary of State reflected at all that he is thwarting the will of Parliament, breaching a cross-party agreement, and breaking clear, firm and unequivocal promises made by the Prime Minister and his colleagues?

Mr Whittingdale: I have not indicated that I have no intention. I simply said that I was not minded, which means that the matter is still under consideration and my mind and that of my colleagues is open on the matter, which is why we are continuing to have meetings. Only this week I had a meeting with some of the hyperlocal publishers who have signed up with the Impress regulator and they made some interesting comments, and we will continue to listen to all those with an interest. We will in due course make a decision. However, section 40 and the costs provision will not come into effect fully until there is a recognised regulator, even after the order is signed. There is not yet a recognised regulator so we are not yet in that position, and we will continue to consider the matter.

Mr Speaker: We trust that the Secretary of State's minded state was nevertheless intentional.

First World War Commemoration

5. **Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure the greatest possible engagement by children and young people in the commemoration of the first world war. [904601]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): The three key themes of our first world war centenary are remembrance, youth, and education. We know that to date around 1.5 million young people have taken part, including via schemes like the Battlefield Tours and Legacy 110 programmes, 14-18 Now, and protecting war memorials. We are ensuring that young people are visibly catered for and involved in all our national commemorative and cultural events.

Mark Pawsey: It is important that children and young people understand the sacrifice made by earlier generations, so will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating pupils at Newbold Riverside Academy in my constituency, who were given the opportunity to name a fantastic new recreation facility in their area and chose to call it Newbold Centenary park to reflect the commemoration of the start of the first world war?

Mr Whittingdale: We should perhaps be relieved that the name chosen was not Parky McParkface.

I join my hon. Friend in congratulating pupils of Newbold Riverside Academy on deciding to commemorate all those who gave their lives in the first world war by choosing the name of the park. As I said, there are hundreds of projects taking place and it is particularly important that young people have the opportunity to visit the first world war battlefields. It is extraordinarily encouraging that young people have shown such enthusiasm and interest in marking this very important centenary.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): These matters are obviously extremely important, but the Department is also responsible for protecting children online. This morning the Internet Watch Foundation said that child abuse images are appearing behind adult pornography sites. Can the Secretary of State explain to the House why he personally intervened to block the Tory party manifesto promise to enable internet service providers to block websites where there is not a proper age verification system—

Mr Speaker: Order. No. That is a very serious matter and could properly be raised at topical questions, but it is something of an abuse of the main thrust of this question. I let the hon. Lady finish because I did not know quite where she was headed and I wanted to give her the benefit of the doubt, but having given her the chance, I am afraid, if I may say so, she was hanged by her own rope. We had better move on to Mr Rob Marris.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): On Tuesday this week, Mr Speaker, I had the great pleasure of attending your State Rooms to celebrate the Sikh festival of Vaisakhi, and I thank you for your generous hospitality. You know, sir, that Sikh soldiers made huge contributions to our country in two world wars, and many people now want a permanent monument in central London to commemorate that sacrifice. Will the Minister today promise the Government's support in principle for this project?

Mr Whittingdale: We do have memorials to a number of the different communities that contributed in the first world war, many of whose members lost their lives. A few weeks ago, on Commonwealth Day, I was privileged to attend the ceremony that took place at the Memorial Gates, which mark the contribution of the Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities in the first world war—that contribution was extremely important and perhaps does not always achieve recognition. We will of course keep an open mind. To some extent, this would also be a matter for other authorities, but if there are specific proposals, I will of course look at them.

11. [904609] **Christopher Pincher** (Tamworth) (Con): I was grateful to William Pritchard and Billy Green from The Rawlett School, who laid a wreath in memory of my great-grandfather, who was killed on the first day of the battle of the Somme in 1916. In this, its centenary year, may I ask my right hon. Friend to encourage school visits to the Somme battlefield memorials, to remember the men who made such a sacrifice all those years ago?

Mr Whittingdale: My hon. Friend illustrates what has become very clear: that almost every person in this country will have had a relative who served in the first

world war, many of whom died. I am delighted to hear about the tribute that was paid to my hon. Friend's great-grandfather. It is incredibly important that young people learn about the first world war, which is why we put in place the school battlefields tour programme, under which two pupils and one teacher from every state-funded secondary school in England can visit the first world war battlefields. More than 3,500 pupils and teachers have already been on that programme.

UK Anti-doping Agency

6. **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Whether he plans to reform the UK Anti-Doping agency. [904602]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): I have no plans to reform UK Anti-Doping, but following *The Sunday Times* allegations, an independent review has been launched into UK Anti-Doping's handling of the information that it received. It is important that we allow that review to conclude before considering what action must be taken.

Gavin Newlands: Last week, the Prime Minister suggested that doping in sport could be criminalised in the UK. Has the Secretary of State had any discussions with other Departments about the criminalisation of doping in sport?

Mr Whittingdale: It is a matter that we are considering very actively. The allegations that were printed in *The Sunday Times* suggesting that doping may be taking place among UK sportsmen are very serious and something that we want to examine very carefully, but also urgently. If it becomes clear as a result of that that further action needs to be taken—possibly including the criminalisation of doping in sport—we will not hesitate to act.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Does the Minister agree that we should be leading the way on anti-doping? Does he also agree that sportsmen and sportswomen have a responsibility to be honest and clean, particularly as they inspire so many young people? What is his Department doing to work alongside the agency to promote clean sport and to inspire our young people?

Mr Whittingdale: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman: it is absolutely essential that sport is seen to be clean. That is something for which we in this country have, until now, had a very good reputation, and I hope that we will still have a good reputation. We are talking to all the UK sports bodies, and we intend to draw up proposals, which I hope all of them will adopt. Beyond that, we are taking a lead internationally. The Prime Minister is holding an anti-corruption summit next month, and this is one of the issues that will be discussed.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): The Prime Minister said that his forthcoming anti-corruption summit will consider whether doping in sport should be made a criminal offence, but before anyone can be convicted, we have to have an effective testing regime in place. Despite the billions that go into sport through TV rights and sponsorship, precious little money is going to fund research into sports science, which would keep us ahead of the cheats. Will the Secretary of State join me in

calling on the Prime Minister to discuss research funding at his summit, with the aim of setting up a funding body that is independent of sports governing bodies, so that we can have effective testing in place and stay ahead of the cheats?

Mr Whittingdale: I agree that this is a very important matter, which is why the Government invest more than £5 million per annum in UK Anti-Doping; and by the end of this Parliament that sum will have gone up to £5.4 million. National governing bodies of sport are doing quite a lot. For instance, I visited the British Horseracing Authority recently to hear about the work it has been doing to ensure that its sport remains clean. Other sports are also investing in this area. Of course, there is more that we can do, and I certainly join the hon. Gentleman in urging the national governing bodies of all our sports to give the issue the serious attention it deserves and to invest more if required.

Night-time Industries

8. **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support (a) restaurants, bars and live music venues and (b) other night-time industries. [904605]

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): I was delighted last month to work with my hon. Friend the planning Minister and the Music Venue Trust to get planning regulations changed so that we can protect our music venues. It is very important that we recognise the huge economic contribution they make to the night-time economy and that we take action where required.

Nigel Huddleston: According to figures recently released by the industry body, the Night Time Industries Association, the UK's restaurants, bars, pubs and music venues employ 1.3 million people and serve millions of Britons and tourists every year. Will the Minister join me in recognising the important role played by this sector, which contributes £66 billion to our economy each year?

Mr Vaizey: Yes, I will. Its contribution is not only economic, but cultural. In the light of the visit of the President of Indonesia this week, I note that Indonesia counts food and restaurants as part of its creative industries. I think that that is something we should consider very seriously.

First World War Commemoration

10. **Byron Davies** (Gower) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that events to commemorate the centenary of the first world war take place in all regions and constituent parts of the UK. [904608]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr David Evennett): We recently launched an appeal to encourage communities, businesses, organisations and individuals across the UK to mark the centenary of the battle of the Somme on 30 June and 1 July. We will continue to find ways to encourage commemoration of this most poignant first world war event through media activity and direct approaches.

Guidance is available on the Government website, and special information has been published by the Royal British Legion, which contains information on hosting a Somme remembrance event.

Byron Davies: The first world war was, of course, an enormous UK-wide effort, where millions of men and women served our nation with distinction. What additional advice can the Minister give the Welsh Government so that the people of Wales, in particular young people, can mark and honour the great sacrifices made in the first world war?

Mr Evennett: The Wales Remembers 1914-18 programme was launched in January by the First Minister. It shows details of the commemorative events taking place in Wales and further afield during 2016. There will be an overnight vigil at the Welsh national war memorial in Cardiff on 30 June to commemorate the centenary of the battle of the Somme, and Caernarfon castle will host the “poppies weeping window” from 11 October to 20 November.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): On 25 June the armed forces day national event will be held in Cleethorpes. Does my right hon. Friend agree that armed forces day is an opportunity not only to mark the continuing bravery of our armed forces, but to link it to the sacrifices of the past?

Mr Evennett: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. We are so grateful to those who continue to serve in the armed forces for what they do, but we must never forget those who gave sacrifice in the first world war.

Nuisance Calls

12. **Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con):** What steps the Government is taking to reduce the number of nuisance calls. [904611]

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): Since we published our action plan two years ago, we have taken a range of measures, including lowering the threshold for what constitutes a nuisance call and increasing co-operation between the two regulators, namely Ofcom and the Information Commissioner’s Office.

Bob Blackman: Despite Government action, nuisance calls are a real concern to residents all over the country. What further steps can my hon. Friend take to ensure that we bar nuisance calls and prevent elderly people in particular from having to suffer this curse?

Mr Vaizey: This is a very important issue that annoys a great many people and frightens the elderly and vulnerable in particular. We have announced a fund to allow call-barring equipment to be given to the elderly and vulnerable, and we are about to announce the results of our consultation on calling line identification.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): There is a real danger that increasing the small claims limit in civil court cases will lead to yet more unwanted nuisance telephone calls from claims management companies.

Will my hon. Friend liaise with Ministers in the Ministry of Justice to ensure that steps are taken to prevent that from happening?

Mr Vaizey: My hon. Friend takes a close personal interest in this issue, and he has been very supportive. He makes an extremely important point. In my view, when Government are considering the impact of changes in legislation in any Department, they should consider the potential knock-on effect on nuisance calls. I will certainly take up his point and see whether we can make progress.

BBC Governance

13. **Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab):** What his policy is on reforming governance of the BBC. [904612]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): The Clementi review reported on the governance and regulation of the BBC on 1 March 2016. Sir David’s ideas for the principles of simpler governance structures and streamlined regulatory arrangements that have public interest and market sensitivity at their heart are ones that it would be difficult for this, or indeed any, Government to overlook. The Government hope to set out plans for the future of BBC governance in a White Paper next month.

Daniel Zeichner: A recent YouGov poll commissioned by 38 Degrees, which is doubtless the Government’s favourite campaigning organisation, showed that 62% of over-60s had no confidence in the Government to protect the BBC during charter renewal, and that more than half of them felt that the BBC was the most trusted source of news. In the light of that, how can increasing the level of government control over appointments to the new board possibly increase confidence in the independence of the BBC?

Mr Whittingdale: We do take the views of 38 Degrees, and, indeed, all others who have submitted responses to our consultation, seriously. Certainly, the BBC’s reputation for integrity and impartiality is one of the key things to protect and enhance as a result of the charter renewal. In terms of governance, Sir David Clementi made very specific proposals about this. It is a matter that we are currently discussing with the BBC, and I hope that we will be able to announce agreement about that in due course.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): The BBC’s 39 local radio stations face the prospect of further cuts as part of the corporation’s attempt to meet the £700 million cost of free TV licences. Regional radio is a unique and greatly valued public service that tackles issues close to the hearts of its listeners, who feel a very long way from the London-centric national news coverage. Will the Secretary of State oppose any cuts to BBC local radio, particularly in the north-east?

Mr Whittingdale: It is not my job, or the job of the Government, to tell the BBC how to allocate the resources available to it, but I completely agree with the hon. Lady that BBC local radio is one area of BBC activity that is hugely valued and that would not be delivered by any other means. I am less familiar, obviously, with

BBC local radio in the north-east, but I have no doubt that she is right to praise it. I am a big fan of BBC Essex and I would be very sorry if it suffered any cuts. I do not think that is necessary within the generous funding that the BBC receives.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): The BBC promised us that it was going to learn from the mistakes of the past. Has the Secretary of State had any opportunity to assess or question the logic of the BBC bosses who decided to appoint a sex offender who has recently been released from jail to front a prime-time youth talent show on the BBC? What were they thinking in that appointment?

Mr Whittingdale: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. It is, of course, a matter of editorial judgment for the BBC, but the BBC has a duty to set an example and behave responsibly. I simply say that I am sure that the senior editorial management of the BBC will have heard what he said, and I encourage him, if he has concerns, to express them directly to the BBC.

Tourism

14. **Mr Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): What plans his Department has to increase tourism in England from domestic and foreign visitors. [904616]

The Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury (Mr David Evennett): The Prime Minister's five-point plan for tourism sets out how this Government will grow the tourism industry in England and across Britain. I am pleased to say that in 2015, we saw a 10% increase in the number of domestic overnight visits in England compared with the previous year. To boost English tourism further, the Chancellor announced a new £40 million Discover England fund at the latest spending round. The fund will support visitors to discover even more of England's hidden gems.

Mr Mak: Alongside Government action, community groups such as the Emsworth Business Association in my constituency play a key role in increasing tourism. Will the Minister join me in congratulating it, including on its work on the Great British Food festival, which attracts visitors from around the world?

Mr Evennett: My hon. Friend makes a very powerful point, with which I agree. Yes, the recent British food fortnight has been a tremendous success. I wholeheartedly join him in congratulating the people in his constituency on what they have done. This year is the great campaigns year for Great British Food, during which we are highlighting our really great British food and drink, and showing the world that we are a great food nation.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: No, no. May I say to the hon. Gentleman that he consumed his dish with question 8 and cannot have a second helping now? He can always have a go during topical questions, but it is one question per segment of Question Time. That is a very useful lesson for new Members to learn. We are extremely grateful to him.

Topical Questions

T1. [904577] **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): Since the last oral questions, my Department has published the first cultural White Paper in 50 years.

Sadly, we have seen the passing of a number of distinguished figures, including the “voice of Cornwall” Ted Gundry, the playwright Arnold Wesker, the architect Zaha Hadid, and the national treasures Ronnie Corbett and Victoria Wood. On a happier note, we saw England reach the final of the men's T20 cricket world cup and the semi-final of the women's competition, and Danny Willett become the second Englishman to win the Masters in Augusta.

We warmly congratulate Her Majesty the Queen on her 90th birthday today. We look forward to commemorating the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death on Saturday, and we look forward to the London marathon on Sunday, in which I understand that eight hon. Members of this House will be participating.

Mr Speaker: And we note that Jamie Murray is now the world's No. 1 doubles player.

Patricia Gibson: The Department has indicated that it wants the BBC to allocate £100 million of its annual budget for local news and children's TV to outside suppliers. Which outside suppliers are meant, and what impact assessment has been made of that?

Mr Whittingdale: At the moment, the BBC is subject to the 25% independent production quota. It is not specified which particular genres that should cover, but there is a general requirement for 25%. The extent to which the BBC offers up the rest of its schedule to competition from outside independent producers is a matter we are considering very carefully. I do think there are some very good independent production companies in the sectors she mentions, and I hope that the BBC will take maximum advantage of competition to ensure that we have the best possible programmes available to the licence fee payer.

T3. [904579] **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): My constituents in Crawley appreciate lower prices and improved service, so will my right hon. Friend tell us what his Department is doing to improve competition in both the telephone and broadband markets?

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): While we are on anniversaries, may I congratulate Charlotte Brontë on her 200th birthday, which falls today? [*Interruption.*] I do not see anything wrong with congratulating her. [*Laughter.*] Shall I get on with it, Mr Speaker?

We have done a lot. I want to welcome Ofcom's digital communications review and to congratulate Ofcom on it. The review is not 200 years old; in fact, it is extremely fresh—straight out of the box. It will promote competition, and we have issued a very clear statement that we will back Ofcom all the way on this.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): I am starting to realise why this Department is known as the Ministry for fun.

We all know that the Secretary of State has been distracted from doing his job as Culture Secretary lately by his extracurricular activities. I am talking about his moonlighting for the leave campaign. Last November, he promised the UK music industry that he would support clarifying EU law to level the playing field between online platforms and content providers, which would hugely boost the benefits to the UK of the digital single market. He reiterated that undertaking in writing earlier this year. Why has he allowed his Department to renege on that promise this month?

Mr Whittingdale: That is something to which I attach great importance. I discussed that matter with Vice-President Ansip of the European Commission not that long ago. I was reassured that he shared our concern that action should be taken to ensure the music industry receives the returns it is entitled to from intermediaries that are currently underpaying. I have to say that that is not something from which my Department has backed away. Indeed, I am determined that we will continue to press the European Commission on it.

Maria Eagle: UK Music has written to the Secretary of State about this. I have the letter here—it has fallen into my lap. After expressing surprise and concern about this turn of events, it seeks

“your explicit confirmation that the UK Government remains committed to a clarification of EU law on the liability of online intermediaries and the use of safe harbour provisions.”

Is it not true that he has spent more time running around arguing that Britain should walk away from the biggest single market in the world than he has looking after the interests of UK creative industries in these crucial negotiations?

Mr Whittingdale: The answer is no. Whether we will be subject to the regulations and directives under the digital single market, and indeed any other measures of the European Commission, is something that the British people will decide in two months’ time. In the meantime, I assure the hon. Lady that I discussed the matter on Tuesday evening with the chairman of UK Music. I reassured him that in no way had we reduced or diminished our support for the UK music industry, and that we share its determination to make sure that, if proper clarification of the rules on this point was necessary, we would be pressing for that.

T6. [904584] **Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): In times of community crisis, challenge or indeed success, listening to the local BBC radio station and watching local TV are vital for many of our constituents. Having worked in local broadcasting, I can say that it sometimes feels like a Cinderella service. Does the Minister agree that BBC and local commercial radio play a crucial part in the life of our communities and both should be supported, promoted and funded appropriately?

Mr Whittingdale: As I indicated a little earlier, local radio plays an absolutely vital role in communities. I know that my hon. Friend has particular experience in this area and speaks with that knowledge. To give a single example, during the recent flooding crisis in the

north of England, both BBC and commercial local radio played a vital part in ensuring that communities were kept aware of what was happening and were given advice as to what to do about it. That is where local radio becomes incredibly important. I of course want to see it sustained and maintained.

T2. [904578] **Simon Danczuk** (Rochdale) (Ind): Like the Secretary of State, I have had my experience of the press tested, but—and this is not about politicians or celebrities—the years are rolling on, so when should victims of press abuse expect him to make his mind up on deciding to protect them?

Mr Whittingdale: We covered this a little earlier. As I said, I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that people who have not chosen to enter public life but who find themselves the subject of press abuse deserve protection most. That is why the Government were extremely keen that a new, independent and tough regulator should be put in place. Two regulators are now being established, and we will see how effective they are. We have already implemented part of the provisions of section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013. We are keeping an open mind about when to implement the remaining provisions. I accept that we will need to reach a decision about that relatively soon, and I will ensure that the House is kept informed.

T7. [904585] **Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): It is good to see the hon. Members for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly), for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) and for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) in their places, because they have turned out for the Commons and Lords rugby club, which has distinguished itself this season by actually winning a game. In addition to engaging with other Parliaments, the club has raised substantial sums of money for charity. Will the Minister join me in congratulating its members on the sums they have raised, in particular for the Rugby Football Union’s wonderful Injured Players Foundation?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr David Evennett): I of course would like to join my hon. Friend in congratulating not only him on all the work he has done for rugby—*[Interruption.]* Football is my game. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) always likes to make fun from a sedentary position—

Mr Vaizey: Come on, Palace!

Mr Evennett: I shall be supporting Crystal Palace on Sunday, because they are my local team, unfortunately for the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) on the work he has done, as well as the parliamentary rugby team on all its charitable work, and on winning a game. I hope the team has more success in future. I also offer my good wishes to all those participating in the London marathon on Sunday, particularly those who are Members of this House.

T4. [904580] **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): The Responsible Gambling Trust has indicated that it received £7 million from the betting industry as a

voluntary donation. How much annual funding does the Department provide for research, education and treatment for gambling-related harm?

Mr Whittingdale: This is an important matter. It is already a requirement on all gambling licence holders to make an annual financial contribution to one or more organisations that perform research into the prevention and treatment of gambling-related harm. The vast majority choose to make that contribution to the Responsible Gambling Trust, which raised £6.5 million from the British-based gambling industry in 2014-15. I entirely agree that we need research into this matter, and we must take decisions based on the evidence.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): As always, I appreciate your patience and guidance, Mr Speaker. On the occasion of Her Majesty's 90th birthday, will the Minister join me in acknowledging the Queen's vital contribution to the UK tourism industry?

Mr Evennett: I would be delighted to add my congratulations to Her Majesty on her birthday, and I commend the tremendous service that she has given to the country in so many fields, including tourism.

T5. [904583] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): The UK video games industry is a fantastic UK success story, thanks in no small part to access to a huge European market. If we stay in the European Union, we will influence the future digital single market, which rules over app stores, for example. What say would we have if we walked away from the table?

Mr Vaizey: What can I say? I think it would be a disaster if we left the European Union. Thanks to the fantastic support for our introduction of tax credits and putting coding in the national curriculum, and our backing for e-sports, Britain is forging ahead in the video games industry. However, we must work with our European partners.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Last night you and I, Mr Speaker, attended the 10th anniversary of *Asianlite*, an Asian newspaper that is online and in print. Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State join me in congratulating it on 10 years of wonderful publication, and in looking forward to at least another 10 years of its celebrated works?

Mr Whittingdale: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating *Asianlite*. I have had several recent meetings with representatives of Asian media organisations to talk about how we can support them and work with them in tackling problems such as extremism. It is essential that those communities have thriving media, so I am very happy to hear about this latest edition and wish it every success.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The Conservative manifesto pledged

“to stop children's exposure to harmful sexualised content online, by requiring age verification for access to all sites containing pornographic material and age-rating for all music videos”.

Why did the Secretary of State exclude that from the consultation document on child safety online, which he published in February?

Mr Whittingdale: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for advance warning of her question, and she is right to say that this is a serious matter. We think that age verification should be in place for adult pornographic websites. Images of child abuse are absolutely illegal and we must take every measure to counter them, and I share the hon. Lady's alarm about the figures today. However, there is a big distinction between those sites, and sites that are legal for adults but where we need to increase protection for children. The manifesto was clear that we will introduce measures to ensure age verification, and I hope that we will bring those forward very soon in legislation in the next Session.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

The Leader of the House was asked—

Reform of Standing Orders

1. **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): What plans he has to bring forward proposals to reform the Standing Orders of the House. [904587]

6. **Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): What plans he has to bring forward proposals to reform the Standing Orders of the House. [904593]

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): The Government have implemented significant change to Standing Orders since the beginning of this Session. On 22 October 2015, the House voted to approve new Standing Orders to implement English votes for English laws, delivering on a key Government commitment by giving England and Wales more control over decisions by which they alone are affected. Standing Orders undergo frequent revision. The Procedure Committee, the Clerks and the Government monitor their use to ensure that they reflect how business in the House is conducted in practice.

Patricia Gibson: The Procedure Committee, on which I sit, published a report this week on private Members' Bills, calling for amendment to the Standing Orders because the present procedure has been brought into total disrepute due to the frequency with which Bills are talked out. Does the Leader of the House agree that the procedure is in total disrepute, or does he think that filibustering is democratic?

Dr Coffey: In this case, he is a she. We debated this last week in Westminster Hall, as the hon. Lady will be aware, as she participated in the debate. It would be remiss of me to answer before the Government published their response to the Procedure Committee's report. We will publish our response in due course.

Peter Grant: The Deputy Leader of the House referred to English votes for English laws. It is clear that we will not make the Government see sense on the fundamental wrongness of that measure. The Government will not budge on what they want to achieve, but does the Minister not appreciate that the way this is being done is unworkable? It has managed to make this House's

procedures even more intractable. They made a significant change to the constitution of the House on a Wednesday afternoon as if it were a minor change to the spelling in the Standing Orders. Will she tell us when the issue of the Standing Orders will be brought back before the House, so that at least if the Government are going to do the wrong thing, they do it right?

Dr Coffey: The Government implemented their manifesto commitment, which referred to the Standing Orders of the House, in this process. I think the procedures are perfectly workable, and I pay tribute to the Clerks and the Speaker for applying them appropriately.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): My hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House referred to the excellent report on private Members' Bills by the Procedure Committee, on which I sit. When will the Government bring forward a response, and when can Members have a debate and take a decision on reforming private Members' Bills?

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend should be aware that it is usual for the Government to respond within two months of a report being published, and we intend to stick to that timetable.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): I wonder whether the Government will, in retrospect, look at private Members' Bills in a dispassionate way. In 1987, the late Enoch Powell wanted to introduce a Bill—and nearly got it through—to ban all stem cell research. I discovered on the morning that I could move the writ for Brecon and Radnor, and I spoke for nearly the whole day. Every time I hear on the BBC about stem cell research saving people's lives, I know that that filibuster was not a bad thing at all.

Dr Coffey: The hon. Gentleman talks about filibusters, but I am sure that if he really had been filibustering, the Speaker of the day would have brought him to order. He nevertheless found a way at that time to use a device so that business that he felt was inappropriate did not make its way through the House.

Mr Speaker: Pete Wishart. No? I thought the hon. Gentleman wished to intercede on this matter, but apparently not. No doubt we will hear him speak with force and eloquence at the appropriate time.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): As my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) made clear this week, we welcome and support the Procedure Committee's recommendations for changes to the private Members' Bills procedures. As the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) has said, the majority of Members of this House, as well as interested members of the public, will be disappointed to hear that the Government have not yet committed to providing time to debate these proposals, because Bills on far too many issues that people care about, such as hospital parking charges for carers or cheaper cancer drugs, have been talked out by the filibusterers. Will the Government follow the Procedure Committee recommendations and allow us to debate this matter on the Floor of the House?

Dr Coffey: As I have just said, the Government will respond in due course, within the expected time. I argued in the debate last week that private Members' Bills can provide an important means of raising issues. They used to be the only way a Back Bencher could get a debate on any particular matter. We now have many more ways to raise these issues. Important pieces of legislation have both gone through this House as private Members' Bills, and have, as private Members' Bills, been stopped in highly appropriate ways that are allowed by the procedures of the House.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—

Family-Friendly Parliament

2. **Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): What progress the Commission has made on making Parliament more family-friendly. [904588]

3. **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What progress the Commission has made on making Parliament more family-friendly. [904589]

8. **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): What progress the Commission has made on making Parliament more family-friendly. [904596]

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Commission is committed to making the House family-friendly to the extent to which that rests within its remit. It is for the House itself to decide on, for instance, sitting hours and the annual parliamentary calendar, which I understand the Procedure Committee is to address shortly. The Commission's diversity and inclusion strategy builds on earlier initiatives such as the opening of the House of Commons nursery in 2010. The recently introduced formalisation of flexitime for staff offers one example of family-friendly policies in action.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: The staff of this place are often asked to work very long hours at extremely short notice; moreover, the Government have taken to, on occasion, releasing recess dates at extremely short notice. Has the Commission received any representations on how that might affect the family lives of the staff of the House?

Tom Brake: Those are important matters that, as I have said, are for both the Commission and the House. The Leader of the House is present, and has heard what the hon. Lady has said about the short notice that is given of recess dates.

Gavin Newlands: Given that a number of Members are parents of young children and are often called on to work unpredictable and long hours, a crèche facility might be more suitable than a nursery. Will the Commission consider following the example of the Scottish Parliament

in that regard? Will it also consider providing assistance for Members with school-age children whose school holidays fall almost entirely within parliamentary Sessions?

Tom Brake: As I said earlier, the nursery was opened in 2010 following consultation with Members and other stakeholders. It was decided to set up a nursery rather than a crèche because of the difficulties that arise as a result of the short notice that is given when children need to use the crèche. However, I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman's concerns are passed on, and I am sure that the nursery governance committee will want to consider them.

Carol Monaghan: Many workplaces are taking steps to ensure that employees on maternity or paternity leave are able to keep up to date with their work. Is the Commission taking any steps to ensure that Members on maternity or paternity leave can continue to serve their constituents, such as allowing remote electronic voting?

Tom Brake: That, I think, is another matter that is as much for the House as for the Commission. Clearly the House can ensure that this place is as accessible to Members who are away as to those who are present by means of, for instance, the IT provision, but I think that issues such as e-voting need to be considered by a much wider range of organisations than just the Commission.

House Employees: Training

4. **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): What steps the Commission is taking to ensure that there are sufficient opportunities for training and retraining of House employees. [904590]

Tom Brake: The Commission takes the learning and development needs of staff seriously. The House of Commons Service is an investor in people, and it invests significantly in training to ensure that all staff have the skills that they need to do their jobs and develop their careers. House staff should agree a development plan with their managers each year, and they are able to select from a wide range of learning opportunities including online and face-to-face training, coaching and mentoring.

Mr Sheerman: As my right hon. Friend knows, we benefit from fantastic and dedicated staff. Over the years, I have observed our capacity for enabling people to start on quite a lowly grade and then progress to senior management, but I am afraid that I now look around and see very talented people who are unable to follow that track. Can we ensure that if there is talent, we give it a chance to grow?

Tom Brake: I echo what the hon. Gentleman has said about the dedication of House of Commons staff. I am sure that he will be aware of the training opportunities that are regularly publicised through the "Learning News and Activities" brochure. Staff have plenty of opportunities for promotion and, for instance, retraining, if that is something that they wish to undertake.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I want to put on record my support and gratitude for the amazing work that the House employees do for us all. We are grateful to them, and we should do all we can to support them in any ventures in which they want to take part. Does the

right hon. Gentleman agree that it should be a priority to provide further training opportunities for employees who want to progress, both in the House and outside it?

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. If he is aware of any staff who have put in a request for a particular type of training that is not currently available, I would certainly like to know about that, and I would be happy to pursue the matter.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

The Leader of the House was asked—

Private Members' Bills

5. **Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of procedures for dealing with private Members' bills. [904591]

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): I have now received a copy of the Procedure Committee report, which I shall study carefully. I obviously want to respond constructively to it, and I think the House would expect me to take a little bit of time to consider what it says.

Mr Nuttall: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for his reply. Some of the recommendations in the report are more controversial than others. As my observant right hon. Friend will have noticed, there are 67 private Members' Bills listed in the future business section of today's Order Paper that stand no chance at all of being given further time for consideration. As one of the proposals in the report relates to private Members' Bills, may I urge him to introduce measures to deal at least with the uncontroversial parts of the report as soon as possible?

Chris Grayling: I have sympathy with what my hon. Friend says. Members of the public looking at that list of private Members' Bills will believe that those measures could still make progress, but we know that, given where we are in the Session, that is not now possible. There is a lot that is good in the report, and I can give him an assurance that we will respond carefully and thoughtfully to it. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), who chairs the Procedure Committee, for the excellent work that he and his team have done on the report. I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall) that it will get a proper response.

Departmental Question Times

7. **Mr Graham Allen** (Nottingham North) (Lab): If he will make an assessment of the effectiveness of departmental Question Times in holding the Government to account. [904595]

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): Departmental Question Times are a valuable opportunity for Members to scrutinise the Government.

Topical questions add an opportunity for pressing events of the day to be covered, and of course the Prime Minister is here weekly to answer questions from any Member of the House.

Mr Allen: I want to try yet again to stem the growing blight of planted questions from Members on both Front Benches, which has now reached oppressive levels. Back Benchers are treated as though they are in bazaar in Marrakesh, having questions thrust at them—this operates on both sides of the House—and then getting emails to remind them to ask those questions. Parliamentary questions are meant to enable Back Benchers of all parties to hold the Government to account, not to enable games to be played between the two Front-Bench teams. This practice is now extending to planted Adjournment debates and planted Westminster Hall debates and, if we are not careful, my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) will be seeing planted Back-Bench debates very soon. Will the Leader of the House meet the Speaker and the Chair of the Procedure Committee and have another look at this, so that what should be Back-Bench time can once again be as much about Back Benchers as about Front Benchers, as it was when I first started in this House?

Dr Coffey: I do not think that the Government should interfere in what Members can or cannot submit as questions. That is for Members to decide—

Mr Sheerman: It is the Government! It's the Whips!

Dr Coffey: I can honestly say that I have never been handed a question by a Whip. Dare I say that, on today's Order Paper, the Scottish National party has tabled two sets of the same question? Members will want to work together in this way to pursue a particular theme. I do not think it is right for the Government to try to tell Back Benchers what questions they can or cannot submit.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Perhaps the most dysfunctional departmental question session is Scottish questions. We have English votes for English laws, but Scottish Question Time is still very much dominated by English Members of Parliament. I have written to the Leader of the House with a few modest reforms that we could perhaps work on, given that we now have English votes for English laws, including the proposal that a little part of that session be devoted exclusively to Scottish Members, to enable us to ask our departmental questions. Has the Leader of the House had an opportunity to consider these modest reforms, and is he in a position to respond to them?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Gentleman opposed the proposals for English votes for English laws. The Government strongly believe in the United Kingdom, and therefore it is absolutely appropriate for any Member to ask a question on matters that are not devolved to the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government. That also applies to Welsh and Northern Ireland matters—and, indeed, any matter for which this United Kingdom Government are responsible.

Business of the House

10.35 am

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): The business for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 25 APRIL—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Immigration Bill, followed by debate on a motion relating to education funding in London. The subject for this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

TUESDAY 26 APRIL—Remaining stages of the Policing and Crime Bill (day 1).

WEDNESDAY 27 APRIL—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Trade Union Bill.

THURSDAY 28 APRIL—Debate on a motion relating to world autism awareness week, followed by debate on a motion on Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' "Building our Future" plan. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 29 APRIL—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 2 May will include:

MONDAY 2 MAY—The House will not be sitting.

TUESDAY 3 MAY—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Housing and Planning Bill.

I remind the House that on Tuesday 3 May we will be sitting according to the normal Monday timetable.

Chris Bryant: Today is the birthday of a towering figure in British public life who has served the country for decades and is a pillar of the constitution, so may I wish the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee a very happy birthday? May I also pay warm tribute to Victoria Wood? I do not know what your favourite line was, Mr Speaker, but mine was her definition of middle age, which is when you walk past a Dr Scholl's shop and think, "Ooh, those look comfy." Perhaps it was her sitting at the piano belting out,

"Let's do it,

Let's do it...

Not bleakly,

Not meekly,

Beat me on the bottom with a *Woman's Weekly*",

which sounds like a good time had by all at last week's Tory party away day.

I had expected that the Leader of the House would have had some kind of musical accompaniment when he arrived today. After all, when he bounced up on the stage at the leave rally in Stoke on Tuesday, the theme tune from a Hollywood western was being pumped out. I must confess that I thought it was "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly", which is a bit unfair on the Leader of the House, but it turns out that it was "The Magnificent Seven". I presume that Nigel Farage thinks of himself as Vin, played by Steve McQueen, and that the Leader of the House sees himself as Chris Adams, played by Yul Brynner—he has the head for it. I can just imagine the two of them—the only ones alive at the end—sitting

on their horses on 24 June, the day after the EU referendum, acting out the final scene. Chris gets the final words:

"We lost. We always lose."

I hope that that will be the case.

Incidentally, did you hear the sound of silence that evening, Mr Speaker? It was the great silence that descends on the leave campaign when it is asked what Brexit would look like. The Lord Chancellor spluttered on Wednesday about the great free trade area that apparently runs from Iceland to Turkey. His solution is that we be like Bosnia, Serbia, Ukraine and Albania—Albania! The Lord Chancellor seems to think we can have free trade with the EU without free movement. Let me point out that in the 500 years since the former Lord Chancellor, Sir Thomas More, published "Utopia", no one has ever actually found it.

As we have heard, the Procedure Committee has published its report on private Members' Bills. Its Chair is quite right when he says that the system is completely bust and that the Government are in the last-chance saloon. I note that the Deputy Leader of the House seems hesitant about reform, while the Leader of the House seems a bit more inclined towards it, so will the Leader of the House guarantee that the House will get a proper chance to debate changes to the Standing Orders? I do not mean just some insubstantial debate, but a proper one that can lead to change.

The Leader just announced that we shall be considering Lords amendments to the Trade Union Bill on Wednesday. The Trade Union Political Funds and Political Party Funding Committee, a cross-party Lords Committee, has made some important suggestions and I urge the Government to act on them. Otherwise, fair-minded people might conclude that that Government are engaged in a nasty, partisan attempt to hobble anyone who disagrees with them.

Will the Leader of the House clarify the Government's position on genocide and the Yazidi Christians? The deliberate massacre of thousands upon thousands solely because of their religion and their ethnic origin is an evident barbarity. The hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) put her case admirably yesterday and carried the Division unanimously, with 278 votes, but surely the Government should act upon it. Mysteriously, the Government sat on their hands last night, and they have a habit of ignoring such unanimous motions. Will the Leader of the House pledge that just this once the Government will take the voice of the House of Commons seriously and act?

Do the Government have any plans at all to reform the House of Lords? The bizarre Lib Dem hereditary by-election on Tuesday brought back Viscount Thurso, a man who is clearly a master of the parliamentary hokey-cokey. He was a hereditary Member of the House of Lords and then an elected Member of this House. Then he was thrown out, and he will now be an elected hereditary peer for life. We have now had 29 hereditary peerage by-elections. My favourite was last September's, when the ninth Duke of Wellington won, meaning that there are four times as many dukes in Parliament today under Elizabeth II as there were 450 years ago under Elizabeth I. Wellington defeated, among others, the seventh Earl of Limerick, who might well have written:

"There was a hereditary peer.

Whose attitude was very queer.
He stood for election.
Considered defection.
And ended up sitting in here.”

I am particularly disappointed in the Leader of the House because this Saturday is the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death and, apart from a production of *Richard II* in the Members’ Dining Room on Saturday evening, this House will barely acknowledge it—or, for that matter, St George’s day. That is profoundly unpatriotic and the Leader of the House should hang his head in shame.

Let me use the words of the bard to couch my message to those “strange bedfellows” Boris and Nigel on the EU. This is not “a foregone conclusion” and I do not want to “lay it on with a trowel”, but if we leave the EU, we will be “in a pickle” and all their talk of freedom will be “cold comfort” to those who lose their jobs when companies leave the UK, “bag and baggage”. I say this “more in sorrow than in anger”, but their “pomp and circumstance” offers “a fool’s paradise”, because “that way madness lies”. “More fool you”. Nobody wants the UK to leave the EU more than President Putin of Russia, so it is Brexit, “pursued by a bear”.

Chris Grayling: Shakespearean words from the Bottom of the Labour party.

The Prime Minister will be in the Chamber shortly to speak on behalf of the Government on this occasion of the Queen’s 90th birthday, but what I wish to say today is that as the Lord President of the Council—the person who presides over the Privy Council—and previously the Lord Chancellor, I have had extensive dealings with Her Majesty over the past few years and she is a fantastic lady. She is an example to us all. She has done amazing service for our country, and I am sure I will be joined by the whole House in wishing her a very happy birthday.

May I also echo the happy birthday wishes to the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, and wish everybody a happy St George’s day this weekend? It would also be appropriate for me to wish all the very best to the eight Members across this House who are running the London marathon this weekend. It is a feat of endurance, to say the least. They are raising good money for charity and we should be proud of all of them, on both sides of the House.

Chris Bryant: Why aren’t you running?

Chris Grayling: I am not sure that the shadow Leader of the House is running either.

Let me deal with the specific points that the hon. Gentleman raised. On private Members’ Bills, the report is thoughtful, as I said earlier, and welcome. It gives us a lot of food for thought and we will respond in due course. I want to read it carefully and decide how best to respond. I have already indicated to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall) that I am very sympathetic to many of its proposals, particularly if we can do things such as cleaning up the Order Paper so that we do not raise false expectations for the public. I will respond properly in due course, as the shadow Leader of the House would expect.

On the Trade Union Bill, it is worth reminding the House that it does two things. The first is protecting workers who find their lives disrupted when strikes are organised by a minority of transport workers. It is right and proper that we should not allow our citizens’ lives to be disrupted by inappropriate strike action. It is also about choice when making contributions to political parties. The people who donate to the Conservative party choose to do so, but many of those who donate to Labour do not, which is wrong and something that should change.

On the point about genocide, everyone in the House would recognise that the events in northern Iraq have been horrendous. We have seen scenes of brutality that are inexplicable and indefensible, and which should be unreservedly condemned. I am certain that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will consider carefully what was said yesterday and take account of the views of the House.

On Lords reform, as I said last week to the former First Minister of Scotland, we have to defend endangered minorities, including the Liberal Democrats, but I remind the shadow Leader of the House that it was the Labour party that put in place this system of elected peers back in the late 1990s, when it reformed the House of Lords. Labour was in government—with a majority of about 250, if I recall rightly—and it was Labour that put in place the reformed system.

On Europe, I will never take seriously the views of a man who, a few years ago, was expressing such dismay at Britain not joining the euro. I will never take his views seriously, having listened to what he said then.

The shadow Leader of the House gave an interview a few days ago in which he accused me of telling the same joke five weeks in a row. I can only say that when I kept asking why he was still on the Labour Front Bench, I was not joking. He represents a party that wants nothing to do with Britain’s largest provider of apprenticeships; a so-called democratic party that apparently supports direct action to bring down the Government; a party that wants to dismantle our nation’s defences; a party led by a man who believes we have not had enough immigration into this country already; and a party that, despite his own wise words, for which I pay tribute to him, is clearly riddled with anti-Semitism. The people of principle in his party now sit on its Back Benches; the fact that he is still on the Front Bench speaks volumes.

Mr Speaker, there is perhaps good news for those people of principle on the Labour Back Benches. You might not have seen the advert that appeared yesterday for the position of media spokesperson in the Leader of the Opposition’s office, but regarding the duration of the post, it said:

“Fixed-term contract for the period only that Jeremy Corbyn is the leader of the Labour Party, or until 31st December 2016, whichever is sooner.”

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the status of foreign politicians visiting this country? I am not referring to Barack Obama. The Maldivian high commissioner has told me that members of the Maldivian Democratic party who are visiting this country face very serious criminal charges at home. I simply do not understand what they are doing here.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I will make sure that his concerns are drawn to the attention of the Home Office and the Foreign Office. When we admit people to this country, it is obviously right and proper that we understand the context of their arrival, who they are and what they are doing.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I also thank the Leader of the House for announcing next week's business and join him in acknowledging the Queen's 90th birthday. I know we spend the opening parts of business questions looking for significant events from history, but there can be nothing more significant. I know we are having the formal debate later, but may I wish her now a very happy birthday and recognise her lifetime of duty and service?

It is good to see the Leader of the House back as a solo act following his laugh-a-minute duo with Nigel Farage—not so much “The Two Ronnies” as “The Two Groanies”. I am pretty certain that following the referendum, when the day of reckoning comes, it will be good night from him. The debate around the EU referendum has been utterly appalling. For most people in Scotland, it seems like two bald Tories fighting over a comb. As we go forward, can we drop “Project Fear” and the UKIP-ification of the leave agenda, and instead have a rational, sensible debate so that we can do justice to something that is critical to this nation?

I welcome our newest parliamentarian, the noble Lord, Viscount Thurso, who won a stunning victory when he secured all three votes among the massed ranks of the Liberal aristocracy. Labour Members drone on about the House of Lords, but may I gently ask them what they are doing about their Labour peers? Labour has the second biggest group down there, and there are Labour aristocrats, too—do not let us forget that. The minute Labour joins us in trying to address this, we will start to make progress. Viscount Thurso is practically politically indestructible. Booted out of that place and booted out of this place, he is still here, as an unelected parliamentarian. Is there no way to get rid of these people? I now appeal to the Tories: join us in ridding this place of these aristocrats, Church of England bishops, donors, cronies and unelected Liberals. Let us get rid of the whole embarrassing circus and bring democracy to this country. Let us deal with this place, and let us hope the Labour party can join us, too.

Lastly, can we have a little debate about political ambition in this country? Two weeks from today, the Scottish people go to the polls to elect a new Scottish Parliament, and there is a fight to the death among the UK parties not to win, but to see who can be the best-placed loser, such is their ambition in that election and such is their acknowledgement of the impressive record of the SNP Government. They have more or less flung in the towel when it comes to trying to win and are battling it out over who can be the Opposition. I appeal to the Blairites, the Corbynites and the Tories to perhaps come to Scotland, add a little fortification to their colleagues up there, and do something to encourage them to at least take this contest seriously.

Chris Grayling: May I start by thanking the hon. Gentleman for his kind words about the Queen? Notwithstanding the fact that we have very different

views about the future of the United Kingdom, one view we definitely share is about the importance of the devotion to her duty that Her Majesty has shown over 90 years. All of us celebrate today's happy occasion.

The hon. Gentleman talked about me sharing a platform earlier in the week. It is worth saying that I also shared a platform on Monday night in Stoke-on-Trent with somebody whom the Labour party would regard as a dangerous right-wing extremist: the hon. Member—Labour Member—for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), who stood alongside me and made an impassioned speech.

On the election in the House of Lords, I think that we have to be kind. We have two Liberal Democrat colleagues in the Chamber, who are sitting in rather diminished numbers, and we should not be unduly unkind to them about the election in the House of Lords. The reality is that the House of Lords is overwhelmingly made up of people who have either made a significant contribution to the public life of this country, or developed great expertise in their fields. I am afraid that I am a defender of the House of Lords—I think it adds something to our democratic process—even though I know the hon. Gentleman does not agree—[*Interruption.*] Clearly the shadow Leader of the House does not agree either.

On Scotland, may I say that we have clear political ambition there? My view is that Ruth Davidson would be the best First Minister for Scotland. If the SNP is successful in May, it will be interesting to see how it adapts to having the powers that it will have to wield and the decisions it will have to take, including tax decisions. So far the SNP has studiously avoided taking tough decisions in Scotland. It has demanded more powers, which it seldom uses, and tried to convince us that somehow it can rise above the practicalities of government, but being in government means having to do tough things. If the party is successful in May, we will see whether it is really up to governing; I suspect we may find it wanting.

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): This week E.ON signed up to support my constituent Jackie Woodcock's Dying to Work campaign, an initiative that would change the law to stop employers from extending the criteria for dismissal on the grounds of capability to terminally ill workers. May we have a debate on what more can be done to encourage businesses to sign up to this much needed law change?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point, which I know she has raised before. The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills will be in the House in 10 days' time. I will alert him to the fact that she has raised the issue today and she might want to bring it up with him, as it is a matter for that Department.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): May we have an urgent debate on the junior doctors contract? On Monday, the Secretary of State for Health said that he was defending two legal cases against him. Now would be a good time to suspend the imposition of the contract. After all, the Secretary of State is not above the law.

Chris Grayling: This matter was debated and discussed in the House on Monday.

Valerie Vaz: It was an urgent question.

Chris Grayling: It was, but the Secretary of State for Health was here and he did take questions, and I have no doubt that he will be back in the House to address the issue in due course. It is simply my hope that a resolution can be reached. He and his colleagues in the Department of Health have put in extensive efforts and have held something like 75 meetings with junior doctors' representatives. None of us wants to see a strike, particularly not one that involves emergency services. I would call on all doctors not to take industrial action next week and I hope a resolution can be reached quickly.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Just weeks after the co-chairman of the Oxford University Labour club stepped down, saying that a large proportion of both the OULC and the student left in Oxford "have some kind of problem with Jews",

I am sure my right hon. Friend will be incredulous to hear that students who attended the National Union of Students conference in Brighton yesterday debated boycotting Holocaust Memorial Day and then went on to elect as its president someone who described the University of Birmingham as "something of a Zionist outpost"

in British higher education. May we have a Minister come to the Dispatch Box to set out measures that the Government will take to counter the rise in anti-Semitism that is being fomented on university campuses?

Chris Grayling: That is simply unacceptable in our society. The views expressed yesterday are not acceptable. The shadow Leader of the House was absolutely right when he talked about anti-Semitism in his own party. All of us from all political parties should work to stamp it out across our society, as it is simply unacceptable.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Will the Leader of the House make time available for a debate in which we can hear the views of those who have decided to support our membership of the EU, such as President Obama, and indeed the views of those who have recently decided to support the campaign to come out, such as Marie Le Pen from the Front National, the far-right party in France? We could also use it as an opportunity to hear the views of the members of the Scottish National party, who, as far as I can tell, want Scotland, but not the United Kingdom, to stay in the European Union.

Chris Grayling: The right hon. Gentleman and I will have the opportunity to debate these matters in my constituency shortly, and I am grateful to him for taking part in that debate. It is of course a lively discussion across our society, and one on which, no doubt, the people will reach their decision on 23 June.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): Local parish councils are invaluable for bringing together communities, and for representing communities at that very local level. May we have a debate on the rare but concerning occasions when one person sits on multiple parish councils as well as on district or borough councils, thereby reducing broad and effective participation on those local parish councils?

Chris Grayling: As ever, my hon. Friend makes an important point. I am aware of the situation in her constituency. I pay tribute to her for the work that she is doing in Eastleigh. She is right to say that those who enter public life should take their responsibilities seriously, commit to the organisation of which they are part, and be active in the community according to their responsibilities, particularly on a parish council where it is very much the smallest local matters—they are often essential matters to small communities—that are the focus of its work.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House for their birthday wishes. I am in the fortunate position of sharing a birthday with Her Majesty every year. I am afraid to say, though, that we are getting to the state of play where the candles are costing more than the cake. May I just point out to the Leader of the House that, on occasion, Members from across the House ask him for a debate in Government time, and he almost always refers them to the Backbench Business Committee, but some of those requests come from Members who are not Back Benchers, and that makes it rather difficult for us to deal with those requests. Will he bear that in mind for future business? On a personal note, I represent the constituency of Gateshead, and I live in the heart of the community of Gateshead where there is a very orthodox and learned Haredi Jewish community, which I am very proud to represent.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to make that point, and I support him in making it. On the allocation of time, the challenge for the Government is that we have now allocated to the Opposition and to the Backbench Business Committee around half the time in a particular week, but it is about ensuring that the Government can also pursue their business. Opposition Front Benchers will typically have a substantial block of time each year, and the Backbench Business Committee has time each year for Back Benchers, so we do attempt to achieve the right balance according to the Standing Orders agreed by this House.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend arrange a statement about the efficiency and speed with which visas are granted to business people from African countries? We are trying to expand exports in that area and often find that its business people are delayed for weeks in coming here, when often their own embassies in this country issue visas to business people from the UK within a matter of days.

Chris Grayling: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will have heard my hon. Friend's words. There are exciting economic developments happening across the Commonwealth and it is really important that we are able to maximise those opportunities to trade, to do business and to invest. I will certainly ensure that she is aware of the concerns that he has raised.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): May we have a debate on the importance of the teaching of science, technology, engineering and maths in school? Porthcawl Primary School has a team called the Porthcawl Power Formula 1 team, made up of five girls and one boy who

[Mrs Madeleine Moon]

have designed and constructed a Formula 1 racing car using their skills in STEM subjects. They got second place in south Wales and are going forward to the UK-wide competition in Coventry. Does not such creative work make possible the creation of the scientists, mathematicians and technicians of the future that this country so desperately needs?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady makes an important point, and what a great project. I congratulate the young people involved, who will no doubt go on to great things and to make some great innovations in the future, as well as competing in the near future. I absolutely agree on STEM subjects, which are of paramount importance to us. I am proud of the work that the Government have done to encourage the teaching of STEM subjects and that is something that we all, on both sides of the House, should encourage for the future.

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): On Tuesday, I will be co-hosting an event with my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns), along with Brian May from Queen, to promote the Amazing Grace hedgehog challenge. This, along with my petition to save the hedgehog, will go a long way to raise the profile and plight of Mr and Mrs Tiggy-Winkle. May I urge you, Mr Speaker, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and other Members to join us at 10 o'clock in the Attlee suite on Tuesday?

Chris Grayling: You might be able to, Mr Speaker, but unfortunately I will be in Cabinet at the time. I send all my best wishes for the event. The work that my hon. Friend has done is tremendous and I see that the petition is now past 30,000 signatures. My one slight concern is that he might remind Brian May that occasionally badgers kill hedgehogs.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): The Government have recently opened a consultation on aims to reform the civil service compensation scheme. The proposed changes would see the average compensation payment for voluntary redundancy drop by more than £16,000 and for compulsory redundancy by nearly £7,000. It will affect every single civil servant and is yet to be subjected to an equality impact assessment. Will the Leader of the House encourage Ministers from the Treasury and Cabinet Office to conduct these assessments and allow time for a debate on these worrying reforms?

Chris Grayling: The situation we inherited in 2010 with civil servants' severance agreements was a million miles away from what would be the norm in the private sector. What we inherited from Labour was enormous pay-offs, and sometimes people taking enormous pay-offs and coming back as consultants soon afterwards. We have tried to put in place a system that is realistic for the taxpayer and that is consistent with what would happen in the private sector. I think that that is right for the job we do in stewarding the money of the taxpayers of this country.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): In view of the anticipated intervention by the American President into the EU referendum, will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement by our Government, setting out their preferred candidate for the American presidency and who they would like to win the election in November?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend tempts me, but it is my view that this country should and will work with whoever becomes President of the United States. They are our closest and longest-standing allies and are a beacon of liberty in the world. I am absolutely certain that we will work with them regardless of who is their President, and that they will work with us regardless of whether we are inside or outside the European Union.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): The civil servants at the Cabinet Office took a very unusual decision last year when they publicly published their advice saying that Ministers should not give a grant to Kids Company, run by Ms Batmanghelidjh, the poster girl of the big society. Ministers defied that advice, gave £3 million to Kids Company and the charity collapsed three days later. As that money has been lost, presumably irretrievably, should not this matter be reported to the adviser on Ministers' interests, who is responsible for dealing with such egregious breaches of ministerial conduct?

Chris Grayling: The matter has been investigated in detail by the appropriate Select Committee, and any Member of this House and any member of the public is free to lodge any complaint they wish to lodge.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): May we please have a full day's debate in Government time on the Treasury's analysis of the effect of the UK leaving the European Union? That will give all Members the opportunity to explore the various forecasts made in that document—the opportunity, for example, to explore the likely accuracy of a prediction as to how well the UK economy will be doing in 15 years' time.

Chris Grayling: As my hon. Friend will know, there is a debate in Westminster Hall on Government communications about the referendum on 9 May, and I am sure the Chair of that debate will be happy to allow him to debate those matters as well.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): May we have a statement or a debate on the availability of life-changing drugs to members of the public? I have constituents who are having great difficulties in getting those drugs because of a lack of funding.

Chris Grayling: As the hon. Gentleman knows, through the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, we provide access to new drugs. Through the cancer drugs fund, we provide specific funding centrally for new drugs, but it is right and proper that the health service considers the merits of each new drug as it comes on to the market and forms a view as to whether it can make the difference that its originators claim.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Further to the question by my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), the United States would rightly never cede its sovereignty to a supranational body, so may we have a

debate on the protocol that international leaders should not involve themselves in commenting on domestic elections?

Chris Grayling: I suspect that President Obama will have picked up the different sides of the current debate before he arrives. We will all wait with interest to see what he has to say.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Before Christmas, this House debated and agreed a nuclear agreement with Iran. One of the conditions was that human rights, including religious freedom, would be preserved and protected. In January 2016 a revolutionary court in Golestan province in Iran reportedly sentenced 24 Baha'is to a total of 183 years in prison in connection with the peaceful exercise of their faith. Another 80 Baha'is were reportedly detained on 31 December 2015. The Government said that followers of the Baha'i cult enjoy citizens' rights pursuant to the country's laws, and that allegations presented to the contrary in the report were baseless. Clearly, that is not the case. May we have a statement or a debate on the subject?

Chris Grayling: It was the view of the Government that it would be better for us to engage with Iran to try and address the nuclear issue, but by engaging we can also try and influence Iran on human rights matters. Of course there are human rights concerns, and of course the Foreign Office and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary would always raise concerns on human rights matters with countries where such concerns existed, but I think the Government are right to say that we are better to engage than stand away from Iran, in the hope that we can influence improvement there.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Further to the question by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord), it is ironic that the Holocaust Educational Trust was holding a reception and information session in this place at the same time as the National Union of Students was debating a motion to boycott Holocaust Memorial Day, and that speakers in favour of that were applauded for saying that Holocaust Memorial Day was not inclusive enough. Clearly, there is a great deal of work to be done on education to combat the scourge of anti-Semitism, so may we have a debate in Government time on what action we are going to take to root that out once and for all among all political parties and among all sections of society?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend is right. We are seeing that happen time and again—statements about the Jewish population in this country, statements about Israel, that are unacceptable in a democratic society. Of course, there are legitimate debates to be had about the future of Israel and Palestine and the peace process, but some of the anti-Semitic views that are appearing in our society are simple unacceptable. [*Interruption.*] Labour Members mention Islamophobia. I have stood at the Dispatch Box time and again and condemned Islamophobia in this country, but that is not a reason for not paying attention to the issue of anti-Semitism, which is becoming more and more of a problem and must be addressed head-on now by all those in public life, including the Labour party.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): My constituent Munir Butt arrived in the UK as an eight-year-old child with his parents and siblings 48 years ago, in 1968. He has lived his whole life in the UK: he has been educated here, and he has married and has two grown-up children. When applying for a new job last year, he was asked to produce a passport—something he never had before—and he was then told that he is here illegally. I have written to the Home Secretary about the issue, and I have yet to receive a response. The Home Office approach seems to centre on my constituent's parents' marriage certificate from rural Kenya in the late '50s. All his siblings have passports. My constituent has no income now and cannot apply for benefits because he is believed to be here illegally.

Mr Speaker: Order. I say very gently to the hon. Lady that I recognise this is an extremely serious matter, but—this is by way of a tip to her and other Members—it is always a good idea, whatever the matter at hand, to get in the request for a debate or a statement early in one's inquiry. In any case, I feel modestly optimistic that the question mark is on its way.

Carol Monaghan: Thank you for your tip, Mr Speaker. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate on the residential status of historical immigrants?

Chris Grayling: I clearly cannot give details now about the case concerned, but if the hon. Lady would like to write to me with more details about her constituent, I will make sure they are passed directly to the Home Secretary. I understand the concern she raises, and I am sure this is a matter we would all want to resolve quickly.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I associate myself, on my behalf and that of my constituents, with the birthday congratulations to Her Majesty the Queen? I was going to ask for a regular debate in the House about manufacturing after the silly remarks on the "Today" programme saying that manufacturing in our country is finished. However, after the unfortunate remarks by the Leader of the House about the Labour party being riddled with anti-Semitism, may I ask, as someone who has fought anti-Semitism in the Labour party and in this country all his life, whether we can have an early debate about that issue? That is so important on a day when the people who want to take us out of Europe have invited Marine Le Pen to come here and speak.

Chris Grayling: On the issue of anti-Semitism and the Labour party, I would encourage Labour Members to have a debate. The shadow Leader of the House is absolutely right to have written the article he did, saying that anti-Semitism is not acceptable, but, of course, his words have to be turned into action by the Labour party.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): One of my constituents, Ewan Gurr, would be delighted to become unemployed. Why? Well, he is Scotland's network manager for the Trussell Trust. The latest figures he has published show that over 133,000 people depend on food banks—they would twice fill Murrayfield stadium—and we have seen a 20% increase in my constituency in the last year

[Chris Law]

alone, due to the recent benefit cuts and sanctions. One constituent has just been sanctioned for an appalling three years—three whole years—and is depending on £36 a week. May we have an urgent debate in the House to discuss that Dickensian situation and to make food banks a thing of the past so that Ewan Gurr can move on to new employment?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman's constituent can have been sanctioned for three years only if he has turned down three reasonable job offers and so has basically refused to work. In a society that is compassionate but believes that people should get back to work, that is simply unacceptable. On food banks, there are some fantastic projects around the country linked to churches, where people are doing really good work in our community. It is worth saying that the use of food banks in this country is much lower than in other countries, such as Germany. However, I pay tribute to those who work on behalf of people going through hiccups in their lives, and it is right and proper that we have a strong voluntary sector that does that.

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): May we have a debate about the time it is taking the Department for Work and Pensions to determine whether to include Dupuytren's contracture on the list of prescribed diseases covered by industrial injuries disablement benefit? The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council gave the Department its recommendation on 14 May 2014—nearly two years ago—and a Minister said in correspondence that a decision would be forthcoming within a year. It is now April 2016. Will the Leader of the House advise that Minister that there are only 12 months in a year, and can he see whether he can speed up the decision to give the necessary support to the former miners in my constituency?

Chris Grayling: I will happily give a nudge to the new Secretary of State on that subject. I am sure he will not want to miss a promise made. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. Members have got to determine their own priorities in these matters. I say to the House that somebody who wants to contribute to the next series of exchanges, which are rather important, is apparently supposed to be serving on some Statutory Instrument Committee. Well, I know what I would do if I wanted to speak in the debate: the SI Committee can wait till another time, another century.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): There is huge excitement in Yorkshire that local hero and world champion Lizzie Armitstead is lining up in the women's Tour de Yorkshire a week on Saturday. Just as significantly, it will be the most lucrative women's cycling race in the calendar, and the whole event will be televised. May we have a debate on how we can do more to support women's sport, to give it parity of coverage and financial reward with men's sport?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We congratulate Lizzie Armitstead on her extraordinary success in the sport. She is a pride of our nation and of Yorkshire, and I hope she will go on to achieve success at this summer's Olympics.

Cycling has made an extraordinary impact across society over the past few years. I represent the constituency next door to the Olympic cycling course, which is full of cyclists every weekend, following the same route as Olympic cyclists. The sport has contributed to fitness in, and is bringing money into, this country. We should all be proud of that.

Mr Speaker: I am not sure what is wrong with the microphones, but I could not hear the right hon. Gentleman as well as I would have wanted. I know he was banging on about cycling and it sounded very interesting, but I wish I could have heard it properly.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): My constituents in Neston have to pay more than £13 for a return fare to Southport, but if they leave from just a few miles down the road at Hooton station they pay less than half of that for a far superior service, so may we please have a debate on what can be done to create a more equitable system of rail fares in this country?

Chris Grayling: I have tapped the microphone and it is working, Mr Speaker.

The Transport Secretary will be here next Thursday. I know that he is very concerned to make sure that we have a transparent system of fares on our railways, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will raise that important point with him.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): In January I asked the Leader of the House why the Government had allowed disability discrimination to take hold in the civil service. Recent analysis by Keele University has found that in all Departments disabled staff were less likely to receive "exceed" performance ratings than their non-disabled colleagues. That means that, on average, disabled workers are 74% more likely to be in the bottom performance management category, which puts their jobs at risk. Will the Leader of the House please now push for a statement to explain why his Government are content to allow disability discrimination to continue?

Chris Grayling: Whatever the research may say, I simply do not accept that. I have been a Secretary of State in one Department and a lead Minister in another, and my experience of the way in which we work with people with disabilities and of the role they play in our Departments is nothing but positive. We have some fine disabled civil servants who are role models to others with disabilities and who make a real difference to this Government, and I hope they will continue to do so in the years ahead.

90th Birthday of Her Majesty the Queen

11.18 am

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty to offer the heartfelt good wishes of the House on the occasion of Her Majesty's ninetieth birthday, expressing its deep gratitude for Her Majesty's lifelong commitment to the service of the country and the Commonwealth, and praying that Her Majesty may long continue in health and happiness.

That Mr Speaker, the Prime Minister, Chris Grayling, Jeremy Corbyn, Chris Bryant, Angus Robertson, Mr Nigel Dodds, Tim Farron, Hywel Williams, Dr Alasdair McDonnell, Danny Kinahan, Caroline Lucas and Mr Douglas Carswell do wait upon Her Majesty with the said Message.

The motion stands in my name and those of the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Scottish National party.

Today we celebrate the 90th birthday of our country's longest reigning monarch. Her Majesty the Queen—our Queen—has lived a life of service that began long before her accession to the throne. In 1940, at just 14 years old, the then Princess Elizabeth made her first BBC radio broadcast, to bring comfort and hope to children who had been evacuated from Britain's cities during the war. At 18, she became the first female member of the royal family to join the armed forces, joining the Women's Auxiliary Territorial Service, training as a driver and a mechanic. At just 21, she made the exquisite and defining broadcast from Cape Town in which she uttered the famous words

"my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service".

Never has such an extraordinary promise been so profoundly fulfilled.

As I said when we gathered in September to mark Her Majesty becoming our longest reigning monarch, for all of us in this Chamber who seek to play our part in public service, it is truly humbling to comprehend the scale of service that Her Majesty has given to our country over so many years. If we think of the vital landmark in completing our journey to democracy when everyone over 21 was finally given the vote in 1928, it means that Her Majesty has presided over two thirds of our history as a full democracy. In that time, she has met a quarter of all the American Presidents since independence. She has provided counsel to no fewer than 12 Prime Ministers, and that is just in Britain. She has worked with well over 150 Prime Ministers in her other realms. If anyone can come up with a collective noun for a group of Prime Ministers, it is probably Her Majesty. I think I will leave it her to make some suggestions.

I know that, like me, every Prime Minister has found Her Majesty's counsel an incredibly valuable part of the job. Her perspective and length of experience are unique and utterly invaluable. Her first Prime Minister, in 1952, was Winston Churchill. Like him and all those who have followed, I can testify that she is quite simply one of the best audiences in the world. There is no one else in public life to whom any Prime Minister can really speak in total confidence, and no other country has a Head of State with such wisdom and such patience. There are some who suspect that, at times, I may have put her patience to the test. In the play "The Audience", the character who portrays me goes on and on about

Europe so long that she falls asleep, but I can guarantee that that has never happened. I may not have kept my promise not to bang on about Europe in every forum, but this is certainly the one where I try the hardest.

As some have pointed out, Her Majesty is now entering her 10th decade and starting to take things a little easier, which is why in the last year alone she has only undertaken 177 public engagements. In 90 years, Her Majesty has lived through some extraordinary times in our world, from the second world war, when her parents, the King and Queen, were nearly killed as bombs were dropped on Buckingham Palace, to the rations with which she bought the material for her wedding dress; from presenting the World cup to England at Wembley in 1966, to man landing on the moon three years later; and from the end of the cold war to peace in Northern Ireland.

Throughout it all, as the sands of culture shift and the tides of politics ebb and flow, Her Majesty has been steadfast—a rock of strength for our nation, for our Commonwealth and, on many occasions, for the whole world. As her grandson, Prince William, has said:

"Time and again, quietly and modestly, the Queen has shown us all that we can confidently embrace the future without compromising the things that are important."

As Her Majesty said in her first televised Christmas broadcast in 1957, it is necessary to hold fast to "ageless ideals" and "fundamental principles", and that requires a "special kind of courage... which makes us stand up for everything we know is right, everything that is true and honest."

In this modern Elizabethan era, Her Majesty has led a gentle evolution of our monarchy. From the first televised Christmas Day message, more than three decades before cameras were allowed into this House, to the opening up of the royal palaces and the invention of the royal walkabout, she has brought the monarchy closer to the people while retaining its dignity.

Her Majesty's role as supreme governor of the Church of England has also been incredibly important to her. She has often said that her life is inspired not only by her love of this great country but by her faith in God. As she has said,

"I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give of my best in all that the day brings, and to put my trust in God."

In standing up for Christianity, she has been clear that the Church of England has a duty to protect the free practice of all faiths in our country.

Her Majesty always performs her constitutional duty as Head of State impeccably, but as head of our nation she is held in even higher regard for the way in which she represents the United Kingdom. It has rightly been said by some constitutional experts that Her Majesty the Queen is the only person born in the United Kingdom who is not English, Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish; she is all and none of those things and can represent all the nations of the United Kingdom on an equal basis in a way that no President ever could.

The Queen has also constantly represented the nation when abroad. Foreign leaders from President Truman to Nelson Mandela and Ronald Reagan have all testified to her extraordinary ability both to represent this country and to understand the world. On her hugely important and healing state visit to Ireland in 2011, Her Majesty began her remarks in Irish and spoke about the history of the troubled relationship between the UK and Ireland.

[The Prime Minister]

She did so with a kindness as well as an authority that went far beyond anything that would be possible for an elected politician.

As a diplomat and ambassador for the United Kingdom, the Queen has represented our country on 266 official visits to 116 different countries. As I saw again at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Malta last year, she has made an extraordinary contribution to the future of our Commonwealth, growing it from eight Members in 1952 to 53 today. In doing so, she has helped to build a unique family of nations that spans every continent, all the main religions, a quarter of the members of the United Nations and nearly a third of the world's population. The reach of Her Majesty's diplomacy is without parallel—so much so that, as a result of a visit to Balmoral, she can claim to be the only woman ever to have driven the King of Saudi Arabia around in a car. I have that story sourced from both the participants.

Through it all, Her Majesty has carried herself with the most extraordinary grace and humility. When people meet the Queen, they talk about it for the rest of their lives. She understands that, and she shows a genuine interest in all she meets. They can really see that she cares. As the constitutional historian Vernon Bogdanor has said, Her Majesty understands what might be called “the soul of the British people.”

Her Majesty has done so much throughout her life that when it comes to her 90th birthday, there cannot be much that is new for her to try, but I am pleased to hear that she will be sampling the orange drizzle birthday cake baked by the winner of “The Great British Bake Off”, Nadiya Hussain.

As she lights the first in a chain of 1,000 beacons, Her Majesty will be joined, as ever, by her family, including her son the Prince of Wales and her husband the Duke of Edinburgh, who has stood by her side throughout her extraordinary reign. They have both served this country with an unshakeable sense of duty, and their work, including the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme and the Prince's Trust, has inspired millions of young people around the world. As we see in those delightful birthday portraits released this week, family has always been at the heart of Her Majesty's long life.

Mr Speaker, we are uniquely blessed in our country. Her Majesty's service is extraordinary, and it is a joy for us all to celebrate, to cherish and to honour it. In June, the whole country will share in this special milestone, with a service of thanksgiving in St Paul's cathedral and a wonderful royal street party. But today, I know the whole House and the whole country will want to join me in wishing Her Majesty the Queen health, happiness and, above all, a very special 90th birthday.

11.27 am

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to second the Humble Address. Many people across the country today will be wishing Her Majesty a very happy 90th birthday, and we on the Labour Benches send our warmest greetings to add to them. May I say, as a relatively young whippersnapper, that I am fully in favour of our country having leaders of a finer vintage?

Today, we are talking about a highly respected individual who is 90. Whatever differing views people across this country have about the institution, the vast majority share an opinion that Her Majesty has served this country, and has overwhelming support in doing so, with a clear sense of public service and public duty, as the Prime Minister has indicated.

Her Majesty has carried out that duty with great warmth. My dear friend Mildred Gordon, the former Member for Bow and Poplar, who recently died aged 92 and whose funeral is tomorrow, met the Queen at the opening of the docklands light railway. The Queen asked Mildred how she was getting on as a newly elected MP, and Mildred replied, with the devastating honesty with which she replied to everything, by saying that she felt she had very little power to help her constituents. The Queen took her on one side and said, with her customary wit:

“Once they find out you lot can't help them, they all write to me”.

Her Majesty was born less than a month before the general strike. A first daughter, who would later unexpectedly become heir to the throne, she was born two years before all women in Britain got the vote, as the Prime Minister pointed out. Her childhood was during the mass poverty of the long slump of the 1930s and she had her teenage years during the brutal carnage of the second world war. At war's end, she experienced people's joy first hand, as the young princess walked through the streets of London; I am pleased that this morning Radio 4 replayed that very moving oral history of our time and lives—indeed, of before the time of most of us in the House.

Her Majesty became Queen at just 25, following the death of her father, and has reigned for nearly 64 years. She is the longest reigning monarch in our history. In that time, our country has become a better and more civilised place. We have enacted equality legislation, ended colonialism and created the national health service, the welfare state and the Open University. As Head of the Commonwealth, she has been a defender of that incredible multicultural global institution. We are all very grateful for the way in which she has stood up for the Commonwealth; she has visited every Commonwealth country, I think. The Prime Minister was quite right to draw attention to her historic visit to Ireland in 2011, and her speaking in the Irish language at the reception held for her in Dublin during that visit.

Today I am welcoming two nonagenarians from my constituency to Parliament. Both have a link with the celebrations that we are conducting today. They are Iris Monaghan and George Durack. Iris was born in what is now the Republic of Ireland, but was then part of Britain. She came to London in 1951, before the coronation, and was a Crown civil servant in the Inland Revenue. She has helped to collect taxes since 1951, keeping us all in the state to which we are accustomed.

George fought in the second world war, serving in the 1st Battalion of the Rifle Brigade, attached to the 7th Armoured Division. He had a daily close affinity with Her Majesty throughout his working life, as he worked for the Royal Mail, delivering Her Majesty's head through letterboxes all over north London.

Yesterday, I was present at the graduation of a 91-year-old constituent who has just completed her third degree—a master's no less—at Birkbeck, University of London. That proves that it is never too late to take up a new career and learn something else.

It is their generation—that of the Queen and of my parents—that defeated the horrors of fascism in Europe, endured the privations of the post-war era and built a more civilised and equal Britain. We have much to be grateful to them for.

On the day of her coronation in 1953, Her Majesty was driven through Upper Street in my borough. But her crowning achievement in Islington was to come some years later—you will enjoy this, Mr Speaker. In 2006, she was due to open the new Emirates Stadium in my constituency, but had to pull out due to an injury. Unfortunately, that is a fate that has afflicted far too many of Arsenal's squad in subsequent years, so we must congratulate her on her prescience. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) was then leader of Islington Council. As the Queen could not attend the opening, the whole squad was invited to Buckingham Palace to meet her, and my hon. Friend accompanied them. We know that the Queen is absolutely above politics. She may be above football, too, but many locals harbour a quiet, secret view that she is actually privately a gooner.

In her reign, the Queen has seen off 12 Prime Ministers. I recently attended my first state dinner; she has received over 100 state visits, and, as the Prime Minister indicated, visited well over 100 countries on our behalf. I admire her energy and wish her well in her continuing and outstanding commitment to public life. I wish her a very happy 90th birthday.

11.34 am

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): May I associate myself with the excellent tribute paid by the Prime Minister to the Queen, and on behalf of myself and my constituents, may I congratulate the Queen on this great milestone in a life of service and punctilious duty, dedicated entirely to her people in the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, and as the most formidable ambassador to the rest of the world that this country has ever had? It has been a life of devotion, fortitude, good judgment, selfless duty, great good humour and uncomplaining hard work. In all that, she has been supported by a loving family, and blessed with a happy marriage to a remarkable consort who has done so much for her and for our country. The Queen was crowned in the same abbey church as William the Conqueror, and at the age of 26—the same age as Queen Elizabeth I had been 400 years earlier. She embodies all the best qualities that are most important to our country, and lends such distinction to our nation.

The Queen brings to our national life an experience and knowledge of government and events, and of men and women all over the world, which is truly unrivalled by any other person in the land. Throughout her long reign, she has displayed judgment of the first order, great tolerance, and absolute neutrality at all times. When she ascended to the throne, her first Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, was of an age to have charged with the 21st Lancers at the battle of Omdurman in 1898, armed with a sword and a pistol, yet her current Prime Minister was not even born in 1952. Such is the scale and breadth of the life that she has so triumphantly lived through. During those extraordinary 90 years of some of the most tumultuous social, economic and technological change that Britain has ever seen, she has provided a very firm hand on the tiller.

The Queen is a source of powerful influence for this country throughout the world. She is the Queen of 16 countries, including Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and the Head of the Commonwealth—a greatly undervalued organisation that includes more than a quarter of the world's population. She thus brings a vital and often unrecognised addition to our efforts and influence overseas, and the House should pay great tribute to her work down the years in that remarkable organisation since 1949.

Every country needs someone who can represent the whole nation. That may seem primitive—and indeed it is—but if nationhood is to mean anything, it must have a focus. In our case, for many years that focus has been and remains the Queen. Nations have values, and they should be proud of them and willing to express that pride. That is what we are able to do with our monarchy and our Queen.

It is my firmly held belief that the Queen is the single most important, respected, admired and loved public figure in the world today, and if I may, I will conclude with a vignette that I have told in the House before but that bears repeating. On the night of 4 April 1955, on the eve of his resignation as Prime Minister, Churchill gave a dinner at No. 10 in honour of the Queen. It was agreed between the private offices that there would be no speeches, but the Queen, greatly moved by the impending retirement of her first Prime Minister, whom she had known since she was a very small child, rose in her place and lifted her glass with a toast to “My Prime Minister”. And Churchill, a very old man in the full-dress evening uniform of a Knight of the Garter, completely unprepared, pulled himself to his feet, and this is what he said to the Queen:

“Madam, I propose a toast to your Majesty which I used to enjoy drinking as a subaltern officer in the 4th Hussars at Bangalore in India in the reign of your Majesty's great-great-grandmother, Queen Victoria. I drink to the wise and kindly way of life, of which your Majesty is the young and gleaming champion.”

For 90 years of her life and 64 years of her reign, she has always been the same. God save the Queen!

11.40 am

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): It is an honour to co-sponsor today's motion with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, and to follow the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) who spoke so eloquently.

I would like to take the opportunity to put on record the appreciation of Her Majesty by the people of Scotland, with whom she has had a lifetime connection and a commitment to the country. While she has managed to serve as Head of State to a remarkable 32 independent countries during her unprecedented and successful reign, her association with Scotland is enduring and it is special.

Just last year, the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh marked the day she became the UK's longest-reigning monarch with a steam-train ride from Edinburgh to the opening of the new Borders Railway. When the Queen was born, she was delivered by a Scottish nurse, Nurse Barrie, and since then she has made regular visits north of the border. Her youngest days were spent at Glamis in Angus, where her mother and grandparents were from, and much of her childhood was spent at Balmoral, while part of her honeymoon was at nearby Birkhall.

[Angus Robertson]

On becoming Queen after the death of her father King George VI, one of her first official tasks was to plant a cherry tree at the Canongate Kirk in Edinburgh, the parish church for the Palace of Holyroodhouse. After her coronation, crowds lined the streets of the Scottish capital as the Queen received the honours of Scotland: the Scottish crown, the sceptre and the sword of state. Notwithstanding concerns from some in the 1950s about how Her Majesty could be Queen Elizabeth II of Scotland when we have never had a Queen Elizabeth I, an elegant solution was found on postboxes north of the border, where there is a Scottish crown rather than the ERII royal cypher.

Throughout the decades of her reign, the Queen has been a regular visitor across Scotland. For me, the most remarkable events have been in recent years, including the 1999 re-opening of the Scottish Parliament after a recess of nearly 300 years. Who could forget the entire chamber, all MSPs of all parties, the public gallery, Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh all singing “A Man’s a Man for A’ That” by Robert Burns?

As Head of the Commonwealth, the Queen attended the Glasgow 2014 games opening ceremony and, always good at keeping up with the times, Her Majesty went viral on Twitter following a trip to the Glasgow national hockey centre after appearing to “photobomb” a selfie by an Australian player by smiling in the background.

While the Queen’s official visits and functions in Scotland are well received, there is an appreciation that it is at Balmoral that she likes to be most. Queen Victoria described Balmoral as her “heaven on earth”, while the current Queen is said to be “never happier” than when spending her summer break at the north-east estate, her private home which was handed down through generations of royals. The usual two-month stay in August and September traditionally includes a visit to the nearby Braemar Gathering where the Queen is Chieftain of the Highland games event and attends Crathie Kirk as a member of the Church of Scotland.

Her Majesty also has a love of the Hebrides and cruising around the islands and coastline. One story I particularly recall is from 2006 when the royal party was moored by the island of Gigha off the west coast of Kintyre. The Queen wanted to see the famous Achamore Gardens. However, no advance arrangements had been made, so Princess Anne apparently cycled to the local newsagents to see if there was a way for her mother to be transported around. That duly happened in the newsagent’s people carrier by the newsagent—now that must have been a sight to behold.

There is a legion of stories of tourists and visitors encountering a lady bearing a striking resemblance to Her Majesty walking her dogs alone on Arthur’s Seat in Edinburgh by the Palace of Holyroodhouse, or being offered a lift as she drove her Land Rover on Royal Deeside. I am sure that, if he is able to catch your eye, Mr Speaker, my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Stuart Blair Donaldson), whose constituency includes Balmoral, will have more stories of that kind to recount. Her Majesty’s connections with Balmoral and the north-east of Scotland are abiding. She is a reader of the Aberdeen *Press and Journal*, and we have learned in recent days, from an interview with her cousin, that she is an accomplished speaker of the

Doric, which is no mean feat. The Queen’s connections with the north of Scotland are also highly prized by leading small and large companies and businesses, including Speyside firms Walkers of Abelour, Baxters of Fochabers and Johnstons of Elgin. More than 80 Scottish companies hold royal warrants, and no doubt many others would like to be warrant-holders as well.

A 90th birthday is a remarkable milestone for all who reach it, but particularly for our Head of State and her ongoing lifetime of public service. We wish her, the Duke of Edinburgh, and all her family well, and look forward to many further years of outstanding public service.

11.46 am

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me, on what I think is a momentous day, to celebrate the birthday of our longest-serving monarch. I have to say that it is also today that I celebrate my birthday, although I am a little younger than Her Majesty. I feel that a Beatles song would be most appropriate if I find it among my birthday presents.

I have always been tremendously proud to share the date of my birth with our monarch. When I was very little, in Cardiff, my father always used to kid me that the 24-gun salute in Sophia Gardens was, in fact, for me, but I found out fairly soon that it was for a much more important lady.

Like many who are here today, I am a modern Elizabethan. We have never known any other monarch, and we are staunchly proud to live in the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. She is truly a beacon and an exemplar of dedication to the people of the United Kingdom, and an exemplar of devotion to duty. She is also a wonderful role model for women not just in this country but around the world, particularly as women try to take their place in public life and to have a voice in the Governments of their countries.

In this House and in Parliament, we know about public service, but none of us will ever equal what our Queen does as a matter of course in caring for all the people of this kingdom and across the globe, in the countries of the Commonwealth. The Queen’s achievement in drawing all those countries together for their mutual support and benefit is truly magnificent. It is a notable achievement in this day and age, and one that is a testament to her gentle guardianship and powerful advocacy.

The poet John Milton lived for a while in Chalfont St Giles, in my constituency, and his cottage is still there, preserved as a monument to his work. He was a parliamentarian and a person who argued against the restoration of the monarchy—a servant of the then Commonwealth—but I would like to think that had John Milton known our monarch, he would have altered his view. As it is, I turn to the words that he wrote about Shakespeare, whose 400th anniversary we celebrate in two days’ time. He wrote that the poet and playwright needed no monument, because

“Thou in our wonder and astonishment

Hast built thyself a live-long monument.”

Throughout the ceaseless work of a long life, with the welfare of her people always at the heart and centre of her being, Her Majesty the Queen has created such a monument.

This place is often described as “the mother of Parliaments”, but Her Majesty is truly the mother of our parliamentary democracy, and easily commands our love and respect. Long may the Queen rule over us, and, your Majesty, a very happy birthday too.

11.49 am

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): This morning, when I was buying my muffin in Portcullis House, I noticed Elizabeth II on the coin with which I paid. However, today is not about the Elizabeth on our coins; it is about the Elizabeth in our hearts. She is of course Her Majesty the Queen, but today is not a royal occasion, even though it is an occasion about a royal. Turning 90 is a marvellous signpost in life, as I hope to experience myself before long. Not long ago, one of my sisters turned 90 and we had a huge family celebration. Today, the national family is celebrating, and that very much includes those in this House.

I remember the celebrations of King George V's silver jubilee. I was five years old at the time, and I was in hospital recovering from having my tonsils out. I remember the ceremony of the jubilee being broadcast on the wireless throughout the ward. It was very impressive, even to someone of my age. It was respected, but it was remote. Over the generations, Her Majesty the Queen's family has had its share of vicissitudes, some of which have been handled with greater adroitness than others. However, over the years, Her Majesty the Queen has sustained and increased the potency of the monarchy. That emerges from her own personality and from the fact that she has been brought up to serve and that it is her instinct to serve and to associate.

The basis of these celebrations today is that Her Majesty the Queen has turned the nation into a united family in a way that has never been achieved, or even attempted, by any previous monarch. We are all together, and that is why people feel so strongly about the celebrations and so happy about them. As shown in the photographs of a recent visit by Her Majesty to my constituency, which I have in my house, people are not only honoured to meet the Queen but delighted to do so. They are honoured by the position, but they are delighted by the person, and that is the reason that we celebrate so gladly today. It is not just “Congratulations, your Majesty”; it is “Happy birthday, Elizabeth.”

11.53 am

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): Two of my best memories of seeing the Queen are at schools and academies. In 1999, she came to the Durrington High School in Worthing, and it was a delight to see the young people and all the staff—academic staff and support staff—so pleased by her recognition of what they were doing together.

On 26 October 2012, she came to the Drapers Academy in Harold Hill, and I do not think I have ever seen young people chatting so amiably during their school lunch as they did with her when they got her talking about her experiences during the war.

I look on the Queen as someone who provides a focus for voluntary service, the civil service and the military service. One of my best friends was very proud to have held her warrant as a police constable. That is something he had in common with chief constables; they are all

equal in serving their country through the Queen. My father held her appointment as an ambassador and, previously, a royal warrant as a second lieutenant in the Army.

To be in a country where we can change our Prime Minister during a war without everything falling to pieces, as we did during the great war and the second world war, shows the value of having a monarchy that is accepted by people on all sides.

There are many other things that one could say, but I shall be brief in adding my congratulations to those offered by Members who have spoken already. They have set a tone that will be welcomed by the Queen. If we can live up to her example, we will be doing pretty well for the country. She has helped to lead this country through difficult times and good times. Most of all, she has given a great deal of pleasure to those who are trying to do their duty to others.

11.54 am

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): We gather today not only to rejoice in the Queen having lived a long and glorious life, but to celebrate the reign that encompasses so much of it as well as the lives of almost everyone over whom she rules today.

We must remember that the Queen was not born to this role. She was not an heir and not expected to ascend the throne. Instead, with her mother, father and sister, she was part of a loving and contented family, growing up in devoted respect for her grandfather, King George V, and in the shade of her glamorous uncle, the Prince of Wales. That peaceful life came to an end for the Duke of York and his family with the trauma of the abdication. With the support of Elizabeth, later the Queen Mother, and their loyal daughters, His Majesty King George VI ensured that the Crown remained at the heart of its people's affections. Together, they embodied our will to defeat the supreme evil of living memory and win the war that ensured that civilisation, decency and democracy prospered, rather than perished, in Europe and across the world. Her Majesty, iconic and perpetual as she sometimes seems, is not a symbol; she is a reminder to us all of the generation who did great things and stopped terrible things being done to us. The great history of our nation, of which we can be truly proud, is not something that our Queen merely symbolises; it is something that she and her generation lived for us. Thank God that she and they did.

In deserved and romantic fashion, the Queen saw a dashing young hero enter her life after the war. In her choice of husband, Her Majesty has kept us all alert, invigorated and—more than once—amused. Their life together, rising to some 70 years, is a tribute to the character of both our Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. Only yesterday, we saw the wonderful picture of Her Majesty, the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Cambridge and the young Prince George all together—continuity and change in one loving and beloved image. The gift of the Queen's long life includes seeing the future that assuredly lies in store. We in the Commonwealth that she has done so much to sustain see that the Crown rests securely on a sure line of succession.

In a country such as ours and in the other realms over which she reigns, the crown worn by the Queen embodies our unity. In my corner of this kingdom, Northern

[Mr Nigel Dodds]

Ireland, it will never be forgotten how steadfast the Queen was in her support for and affection towards our afflicted Province. From my time as Lord Mayor of the great city of Belfast, I can personally attest to her compassion and concern for those affected by the violence. Those dark days are, we pray, now over, but Her Majesty's enduring interest and contribution towards peace in Northern Ireland continues. Her frequent visits and those of other members of the royal family are always warmly received right across the community. For that and so much more, we from Northern Ireland are immensely grateful.

Like most, I have known no other sovereign. We have been blessed through the generations to have one so dedicated to the service of our country and the Commonwealth. The nations of the Commonwealth are joining with us today in our tributes to the Queen. As we have been reminded, the Commonwealth is a powerful expression of the unifying and inspirational spirit of its great Head. It is but one of Her Majesty's enduring legacies. She has been the rock upon which this country has continued to flourish and built a modern democracy so envied across the world. Her shining faith has been a constant and unwavering inspiration through times of national celebration and national occasion. In times of personal sadness, Her Majesty has exhibited the great grace that comes with great faith.

We are thankful for the wonderful life that God has given us in His servant Queen Elizabeth, and may He in his great wisdom and His great mercy be pleased to grant Her Majesty and we her people the continued blessing of having her reign over us for many, many more years to come. We wish her a very, very happy birthday. God save the Queen.

11.59 am

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): Mr Speaker, thank you very much indeed for calling me, and I hope that in the event that the Whip on duty on the delegated legislation Committee that I am supposed now to be attending chastises me, you may come to my aid. I am delighted to join my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in, once again, saluting Her Majesty's extraordinary, dedicated service to the nation and to the Commonwealth, and in wishing her many happy returns on her 90th birthday.

I do so as the Member privileged to represent Aldershot, home of the British Army, and I am authorised by the most senior officer in Aldershot, Lieutenant General James Bashall, to associate the garrison most warmly with today's tributes. Her Majesty is head of her armed forces, Colonel-in-Chief of 17 British Army regiments and of 24 Commonwealth regiments. Soldiers, sailors and airmen, like Members of Parliament, swear an oath of allegiance to the sovereign. It is she they serve, and that bond between the sovereign and the men and women of the armed forces is a very special one, not least because in her is personified the ideal of service and duty. Although King George II was the last sovereign to lead his forces into battle—in the battle of Dettingen, in 1743—Elizabeth II has led from the front by example, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, not least in upholding her commitment to defend the faith, our Christian faith. My own modest commission in the

Royal Air Force volunteer reserve hangs prominently on my study wall, to remind me of the duty I owe to my sovereign.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister knows how important the support of a spouse is as he discharges his duties, and I am sure that he obtains advice, welcome and sometimes perhaps unwelcome, from his spouse—I certainly do. It is therefore right today that we should reflect also on the support that His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh has given the Queen throughout her life. Although we have not been privileged to know the nature of any advice he may have had the temerity to proffer to Her Majesty, we can be sure that his immense reservoir of common sense and capacity for candid, plain speaking, which has so endeared him to the British people, will have been an added blessing to her.

As others have said, not least the Leader of the Opposition, Her Majesty does have a wonderful sense of humour. I recall the story, as many others may do, of the Privy Council meeting where, unfortunately, a Cabinet Minister's telephone had not been switched off. When it rang, the Cabinet Minister took the phone out of her handbag and duly moved away to answer it. When she had finished the call, Her Majesty turned to her and said, "Somebody important, was it?" [Laughter.]

Finally, Mr Speaker, I conclude with the admirable editorial in this week's *Country Life*, which has just relocated to Farnborough in my constituency: It said:

"Often accused in the past of being too traditional, it is now her old-fashioned values and steadfastness that have made her someone to be admired and emulated the world over. Her long reign and vast accumulated wisdom have helped to stabilise relations across the world, especially within the Commonwealth."

We owe Her Majesty a great debt of gratitude. God save the Queen.

Mr Speaker: In the extremely unlikely event that the hon. Gentleman is chastised, he can always advise the Whip to sample the joys of riparian entertainments—it is something I often did myself in years past.

12.4 pm

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth), and I am grateful to be able to contribute to this collective greeting. I just wish to relate three experiences from my period as the Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household between 2003 and 2005. I see that another former Vice-Chamberlain, the right hon. Member for Guildford (Anne Milton), is in the Chamber. As colleagues will know, the Vice-Chamberlain, who traditionally is a senior Government Whip, has a variety of duties to fulfil, three of which are: to design a daily message to send to Her Majesty outlining what is happening here; to act as hostage during state openings of Parliament; and to take to Her Majesty treaties to be signed and presented to the House of Commons.

I was first presented to Her Majesty in 2003. When I asked her what she would like to see in the message—the same question, I am sure, that all my predecessors and successors have asked—she answered, "That which generally does not make the papers will be of interest." In other words: "Just give us the gossip—that which is not fit to

print.” Given how we are reported in today’s media, that was a pretty high bar, but I managed to achieve it at least once.

The second duty is to act as hostage. Since our predecessors executed Charles I in 1649, every time the monarch comes to visit us, we have to send a senior MP to act as a hostage, which I did on two occasions. I felt like Patrick McGoohan in “The Prisoner” and that I was not allowed to leave, although I never actually tried. The Buckingham Palace officials were very generous and hospitable. They said that I could watch television, read the paper, have a coffee or a gin and tonic, or walk about, but I was not leaving. When I expressed my anxiety at this experience a short time later to the then head of our armed forces, Sir Mike Jackson, he said, “Jim, you shouldn’t have worried.” I said, “Shouldn’t I, Mike?” and he said, “No, if anything had happened to Her Majesty, we would just have shot you.” He was not kidding, as I am sure that Members know.

One Easter, when we needed a document to be signed and then presented to the House, the civil servants in the Whips Office contacted Buckingham Palace, which responded that Her Majesty was not at Buckingham Palace, but at Windsor. Our officials said, “Well, Fitzpatrick will go to Windsor to get the document signed.” The message came back from Her Majesty, and the officials looked at me and said, “Her Majesty said, ‘If Mr Fitzpatrick is coming all the way to Windsor, ask him if he would like to stay to lunch’”. My civil servants said, “Do you want to stay?” I said, “Bite her royal hand off”—except I do not think that I used the word “royal”.

When I was being driven down in the Government car to Windsor castle, on a beautiful, sunny Easter Monday, I wondered, “How many people does Her Majesty entertain to lunch on an Easter Monday?” There were six of us: her private secretary, three equerries, me and Her Majesty. I was totally unprepared. It was a measure of the dear lady’s humanness that for an hour and a half she commanded the conversation around the table and included everybody. Not having known her before, I saw her charm, generosity and regality.

I am grateful for the experience of being Vice-Chamberlain for two years and am pleased to add my and my constituents’ greetings to Her Majesty on this auspicious day.

12.7 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Her Majesty the Queen came to the throne in the year I was born, so she is the only monarch I have ever known, and because of the way she has fulfilled her duties, I am a staunch royalist. In my time in this place, we had one Prime Minister who increasingly behaved as if he was a president, and that certainly confirmed me in my view of how blessed we are to have a monarch rather than a president.

I have seen at first hand the joy that the Queen brings to people’s lives. I will never forget her visits in 1999 to the two constituencies I have represented. Residents were spontaneously thrilled with her visits, which is something that we politicians struggle to achieve. I represent the highest number of centenarians in the country, and I am constantly attending centenarian birthday parties. My own mother, who is 14 years older than the Queen, was thrilled to receive her telegram, and I have told her that the good Lord needs to spare her for another year if she is to receive her second

telegram. When I had the good fortune of being invested at Windsor castle last year, I was in awe of how a woman of nearly 90 could stand for over an hour and, with her conversation and manner, make the occasion so special and memorable for each of the recipients.

I should say that Her Majesty has made only one mistake in her life, and that was when she observed that I had been a Member of Parliament for a long time and asked me whether I had seen many changes. Her eyes glazed over as I went on and on about all the changes I had seen. You and I know only too well, Mr Speaker, what a challenge it can be to be nice to people morning, noon and night. Well, Her Majesty certainly succeeds in that regard, unlike myself.

This wonderful and gracious lady has served our country with integrity, charm and dignity all her life, through the upheavals and tribulations our nation has faced. Her personal life, with all its tragedies and sorrows, has never been allowed to come between her and her subjects. She has been a constant example to us all, rising above party politics, and the ebb and flow of public opinion. She has been faultlessly impartial and loyal to her people. The natural warmth and empathy that she has shown throughout her long reign have endeared her to even the most hardened republican, and she is now more loved than she has ever been. So yes, long may she reign over us. God save the Queen. And, Mr Speaker, can we please all have a piece of this birthday cake we keep hearing about?

12.11 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): As a hardened republican, I think I have been introduced by the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), for which I am grateful.

I believe that possibly the most momentous moment of the Queen’s reign, and certainly of her visit to Ireland, was when she stood dressed in green in Croke Park and bowed her head in penitence because of the terrible massacre that took place there. It was an act of humility and majesty that had, and will continue to have, an enormous symbolic effect on relations between the nations of these islands.

I want to say a special word of thanks to Her Majesty on behalf of those—a quarter of the country—who regard themselves as proud republicans. My affection for her goes back a very long time, although I did know another monarch in this country, and until today she was a fellow octogenarian. She teaches us a great lesson—an example that this House should take. We have done well on diversity as far as ethnic minorities and women are concerned—we have done nothing like enough, but we are improving—but we are still dreadfully under-represented by octogenarians in this House. She has led with a splendid example of continuing service. The speech made by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition reminded me of Mildred Gordon who, when she became an MP, followed Ian Mikardo. He stood down because he felt he was too old, but then the wise people of the Poplar Labour party chose Mildred Gordon, who was older than Ian Mikardo. She served with distinction in this institution.

There is a distinction between respect for Her Majesty and criticism of the institution of monarchy. She has continued the institution, giving it new life and meaning,

[Paul Flynn]

because of her personality and her decision not to be embroiled in any way in affairs that are political. The late Member for Cambridge, Robert Rhodes James, wrote an article describing what might have been a crisis in his party when Mrs Thatcher was about to leave office. She was more popular in the country than she was in the House or her party at the time. The fear that Robert Rhodes James expressed was that if she had decided to call a general election, the Conservative party could not have stopped her, and neither could Parliament, the Cabinet or anyone else; but the Queen could. I believe that was an example of where, because of her personality, the Queen would have acted in the interests of the country, rather than in the interests of a Prime Minister, and that is the supreme job of any monarch in this country.

As a republican, I am happy to speak for a city where the last attempted revolution to set up a republic took place, in 1839. It was interesting that last week Mr Mark Reckless, who is known to us in this place, came to Newport to launch his campaign and paid tribute to the attractions of Chartism as a forerunner of UKIP-ism. People have suggested that that was opportunist, but I do not think it was, because I believe that if he had stood in Coventry, he probably would have arrived in the constituency naked on a horse.

It is a great privilege to have been called in this debate. I share 81 years of life with Her Majesty and I have watched her with great interest all that time. Those of us who wish to have a new system for our Head of State can say with deep sincerity, “Happy birthday, ma’am.”

12.15 pm

Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): Having caught your eye, Mr Speaker, I want to pay tribute to Her Majesty as one of her five Members of Parliament, representing Sandringham, alongside those who represent Buckingham Palace, Windsor, Holyrood and Balmoral. However, first I want to endorse what the Prime Minister said. From the moment Her Majesty stepped off that flight back from Kenya on 7 February 1952 to return to a nation in mourning, her life has been one of relentless, selfless and dedicated duty to our nation and also Britain’s dependencies, our overseas territories and our realms.

I am very glad that the Prime Minister and, indeed, my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) mentioned the Commonwealth, because that ceaseless service also applies to the Commonwealth. As has been pointed out, it started off as a loose association of a small number of countries, but has grown into an incredibly important organisation that includes 2 billion-plus people—30% of the world’s population. The Commonwealth is a truly global organisation that I believe has led to countries within it co-operating and collaborating as never before. Her Majesty can be proud of the way the organisation has moved forward.

This extraordinary length of ongoing service to our nation stands in stark contrast to the cult of youth that seems to have taken over so many democracies, including our own—although obviously the Leader of the Opposition is an honourable exception to that, and has given my generation a lot of hope in the process.

I want to say something about Sandringham. Her Majesty could easily be excused from coming to her beloved Sandringham to get away from London and the pressures of work and to relax with her family, her horses on the two studs and her dogs, but every year without fail she carries out numerous local visits. Many are to the same organisations, but every year she will go and visit new organisations—for example, opening new village halls or a new ward at the Queen Elizabeth hospital in King’s Lynn, or some of our local museums or local businesses. What I have noticed on those visits is that once she has met the dignitaries—the mayor, the lord lieutenant and the MP—she always makes it clear that she wants to go and meet real people. She shows to those people unfailing courtesy, good humour and a deep knowledge of west Norfolk. Time and again, she has brought untold joy and happiness to my constituents on so many different occasions.

Her Majesty personifies the dignity and civic spirit that are the very best of Norfolk and also the very best of British. As has been pointed out, very often beside her is her consort the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip, who has been an indefatigable rock of support. We celebrate the birthday of a remarkable person, but we also celebrate something else. We celebrate the covenant between the monarch and the people, which under her stewardship has made the monarchy stronger than ever. Long may she reign over us.

12.19 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me to speak, especially as I managed to make it into the Chamber only when the Prime Minister was concluding his remarks—my apologies to him. On this occasion I am convinced that, not having heard one of his remarks, I would have agreed with them all.

It is a massive honour to give praise and to acknowledge the service of Her Majesty on her 90th birthday. Unlike many people in this place, I have spoken to Her Majesty on only a limited number of occasions. It was on one occasion really, as a very new Member of Parliament. She was asking me how I was getting on as a new MP and how I was coping with the correspondence. I did confide that, on occasions, people would come up to me in the street and say thank you, or acknowledge a letter that I had written to them, and I would sometimes just go blank. I am sure that colleagues share that sensation and think, “Right, what are they talking about? I can’t quite remember the detail.” Her Majesty said, “Yes, that happens to me all the time. I always say that it is the least I could do”. Perhaps we should all cling on to that as a good get-out-of-jail card.

Her Majesty has had occasion to visit formally my part of the world—Westmorland—on two occasions in her reign. The first was in 1956, which was 14 years before I was born. It was the year of the Suez crisis; the year of the Clean Air Act; and the year that the United Kingdom turned on its first nuclear power station. The second occasion was three years ago, when I was privileged to meet her in Kendal as the Member of Parliament for Westmorland and Lonsdale. In the 57 years between those two visits, and indeed since she assumed the throne, so much has changed for all of us. Much, much more has changed for Britain and the world in which we live. The Elizabethan age will be reviewed by history as

a vast, transformational and tumultuous era, during which our Queen has provided immeasurable constancy, which will be looked back on as the thread that runs through all of it, and that has made change possible without the uncertainty and instability that could have come about otherwise.

In Her Majesty's time, Governments have indeed come and gone. She has seen them lead Britain into the European Common Market, and then seen her people vote to remain—that was when I was five years of age. She has seen Britain lead the world by becoming the first G7 country to commit 0.7% of GDP to international development aid. She has seen Britain become a world leader in renewable energy and make great strides in tackling climate change. She has seen technological advances race ahead from when a telegram or a radio programme was a thing of great excitement to the prevalence of satellite television, the iPhone, letters being supplanted by email and playground conversations by tweets and Facebook status updates.

Through all those years of change and upheaval, Her Majesty's selfless service to Britain has remained a constant. She is admired at home and around the world for her constant and consistent advocacy of Britain at its best. I am bound to say—others have reflected on this—that she embodies the value of a constitutional monarchy. She is a neutral person who is above politics and who is the foundation of our constitution. She is someone to whom all of us, whatever our political views, can look, and with whom we can share an allegiance. That is an immeasurably valuable thing.

Even as we contemplate the monumental things that have occurred during Her Majesty's reign, it is worth remembering that birthdays are very personal occasions. They are opportunities to celebrate the lives we lead and give thanks with friends and families. Hers has been an extraordinary life and she is an extraordinary example to all of us in public life of the meaning of public service. As we and others pay tribute to her example, I hope that she, who has so many friends, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren and a loving husband, experiences the same joy and pleasure that we all do when we get together to celebrate with those whom we love. On this wonderful and historic day, on behalf of my party and my constituents in Westmorland and Lonsdale, I pay tribute to Her Majesty, to her dedication, to a lifetime of public service and to her faith, and wish her a very happy birthday and many more to come. I thank God for her service. Long live the Queen.

12.24 pm

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I am honoured and humbled to be able to follow right hon. and hon. Members and the Prime Minister in congratulating Her Majesty the Queen on her 90th birthday, and indeed on 90 years of tremendous service to her country and the Commonwealth.

How fortunate we are in this complex modern age to be British, and to have a Head of State who is admired and respected throughout the world. The contribution Her Majesty has made to the standing of the United Kingdom in the world is hard to overestimate. From my own view, the Queen's greatest contribution has been as a steadying influence in British life through good times

and bad. She is the one guaranteed constant in all our lives. In many ways, she has become the nation's grandmother.

At the age of 45, I am precisely half the age of the Queen. Yet when I was born she had already been Queen for 18 years and she had been a public figure for many years before that. Indeed, like so many members of the royal family, the Queen has led her entire life in the public gaze. She sat for pictures almost from birth, and she made her first solo public appearance when she was a mere 16. Indeed, she has been a lady of so many firsts. She was the first British monarch to visit China, Australia and New Zealand, the first to address the US Congress and the first Head of State to have opened not one but two Olympic games. She made the first televised Christmas broadcast in 1957, and was the first monarch—and one of the first people in the world—to send an email in 1976.

It is to Her Majesty's credit that, while being a figure of great stability, she has also moved with the times. As we entered the digital age, the royal email address was launched in 2007, as was the royal channel on YouTube. The royal Twitter account went live in 2009 and the royal Facebook page in 2010.

Today, the British monarchy has 2.2 million followers on Twitter—and growing—and 2.7 million likes on Facebook. That is a number of which many of us in this place will be rather jealous. A Google search for “Queen Elizabeth II” returns more than 21 million results, and “the Queen” returns 214 million results—and while many others, both past and present, can claim that rather generic title, the Queen, one has to go to page 6 of the search results before one comes to any topic other than Her Majesty—incidentally, and not surprisingly, that is indeed a public house.

The Queen is probably the most recognisable figure in the world and yet, as we have heard, one of her former protection officers, Richard Griffin, has shared a most endearing story this week. I recognise that the Member who represents Balmoral is here today, so I will not share the punchline or the details of that story, but it shows how gracious Her Majesty is. So many people have personal stories of their own interactions with Her Majesty. She has met hundreds of thousands of her subjects; and millions have seen her face to face at one of the many great festivals and events that she attends each year. In 2012, during jubilee year, many residents of Worcestershire met Her Majesty when she opened the Hive library and history centre in Worcester and when she attended a reception at the Guildhall.

Such personal interactions are one of the main reasons why the Queen is so incredibly and enduringly popular. Opinion polls show that, despite considerable competition, Britons consider Queen Elizabeth II to be our greatest ever monarch. She has reigned over a new Elizabethan age, and we are fortunate to have shared that age with her. On behalf of my constituents, the loyal people of the faithful city of Worcester and all the people of Worcestershire, I wish Her Majesty a very happy 90th birthday.

12.27 pm

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to join in the celebration today. I am looking forward to returning home this evening to my husband and four children for our own celebration,

[Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh]

because today is the birthday of not only Her Majesty, but my daughter, Shansée. I remember 21 April very well. It was a particularly long day a number of years ago. My daughter has prepared her own birthday wish list. I do not know whether Her Majesty has done the same, but perhaps they may share some of the same aspirations for the future. I am delighted to wish them both a very happy birthday.

For the benefit of the House, I should add that I have just returned from the Council of Europe where I was a member of the UK delegation. I can assure Members that they will be celebrating Her Majesty's birthday in the normal manner just about now.

For the past 64 years, Scotland has enjoyed Her Majesty's leadership. Indeed, in 1999, she said that our country has

"a special place in my own and my family's affections."

I know that Scotland feels the same in return. We very much look forward to her opening the new Scottish Parliament after the elections next month.

The people of Strathearn in my constituency of Ochil and South Perthshire are very proud of their royal connections, especially our association with the Queen's grandson, the Earl of Strathearn and his wife, the Countess.

Few 26-year-olds would have been equipped to cope with the daunting role Her Majesty inherited in 1952, but it has been clear to all that she has provided exemplary leadership over the past 64 years and, hopefully, for many to come. Over and above that, to have been seen to conduct herself in such a decorous and dignified manner in an era of unprecedented public scrutiny has been an example to all of us in public life.

I am proud to have been honoured for my work in business and in Scotland's Asian community by receiving an OBE. One of my deepest regrets is that my dad passed away just two weeks before I received that award in Holyrood palace. He believed that the honour was not just a personal one but, in part, a commitment to the whole of the Asian community, reinforcing our valuable place in its fabric. How lovely it is that the lady preparing the birthday cake for Her Majesty is also a member of the Asian community; I have no doubt that Nadiya Hussain's cake will be a masterpiece.

The recognition I received from Her Majesty symbolised for me and my father the fact that those of us with Pakistani heritage had all been accepted into the heart of this country. That is a gift that could only have been bestowed by someone who conducts themselves in an arena above politics and who acts overall in the national interest. I was fortunate enough to be presented with the OBE by Her Majesty herself, and what I remember most about the conversation I had with her was that she spoke so knowledgeably about the work in which I had been involved and the achievements of the organisations that I had supported. I remember thinking at the time that carrying out those duties for every single recipient she met that day with such skill and insight must have taken considerable personal commitment and preparation on her part.

By committing herself so diligently to her public duties at home and abroad and by carrying them out with such dedication, Her Majesty has shown herself to

be a model and modern constitutional monarch. She has not only acted as our Head of State but has been a great servant to our democracy. I am glad to have had this opportunity to thank her once again for her public service and to wish her a very happy 90th birthday today.

12.31 pm

William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): I am delighted to support this Humble Address on this splendid day, celebrating the landmark 90th birthday of our beloved Queen Elizabeth. It is also an historic day on which we celebrate the life, achievements, service and dedication of our Queen, who is both Britain's oldest and longest reigning monarch, two records that she continues to extend with each passing day, which I, for one, hope that she continues to do for many days and years to come.

On the subject of ages, Mr Speaker, I observe that when I entered Parliament last year I was a similar age to Her Majesty when she ascended to the throne. It was a great honour to swear allegiance to her on taking my seat on these Green Benches and in so doing I hope that I reflected the highest regard in which Her Majesty is held across the generations of our country, both old and young.

As we remember the Queen's popularity here at home, we should also remember her role throughout the world and as the head of the Commonwealth, an organisation of 53 countries, while remaining the sovereign Head of State of 15 realms in addition to the United Kingdom. Her Majesty's sense of duty is never stronger than when it comes to her dealings with the Commonwealth and now, as ever, is a fitting time to remember just how much Britain owes to the Commonwealth and how much its members and citizens have supported us in times of difficulty.

Apart from such far-flung travels around the Commonwealth, some of Her Majesty's duties have involved visits to my constituency of Hazel Grove. The Queen last visited the constituency in 1977, as part of the national celebrations for her silver jubilee. She opened Hazel Grove railway station, a fine example of Britain's 1970s urban design, which is still there today. It was also my great pleasure as a councillor on Stockport Council to propose that the road currently under construction between Hazel Grove and Manchester airport be named the Queen Elizabeth II Way in her honour. If Her Majesty were keen to come and open the road on its completion, I am sure that she would be warmly welcomed by me and my constituents.

I regret to remind the House, however, that my constituency has not always enjoyed such a happy relationship with the monarchy. The town of Marple was the home of John Bradshaw, the lead judge at the trial of Charles I, who later became an MP for Cheshire. Charles I was the great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great—that is eight greats, for the benefit of the *Hansard* stenographer—grand-uncle of the current Queen. The assessment of my predecessor was that the then monarch was a tyrant, traitor, murderer and public enemy, but let me reassure the House that no such republican tendencies arise in me. Nor have I detected them among my constituents.

Indeed, the country has truly taken our current monarch to our collective hearts and she is much loved. I was interested to read some polling figures in the *Evening Standard* last week that found that 67% of respondents held the Queen in high favour. The Queen, of course, is above all this, and I understand that she is a much bigger fan of the *Racing Post* than the *Standard*. We can be sure that there are hon. and right hon. Members, including even some of my right hon. Friends, who would yearn for such popularity. In addition, her grandchildren the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry were reported to receive similar high favourability ratings, suggesting that the monarchy is in good shape for generations to come. That is great news and having a monarchy in the form we do, we are also spared the prospect of a presidential Head of State. The Queen is above politics. She is steadfast in her beliefs and resolute and she executes her duties faithfully, as she promised that she would, and she will continue to do so. In my opinion, the secret of the Queen's success over the past 60 years and more is that she believes in what she is doing and is dedicated to the service of Britain and our place in the world. Long may she reign, God save the Queen and happy birthday, Ma'am.

12.36 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): All over loyal Ulster today, Her Majesty will be receiving the best birthday wishes. It is a huge and humbling treat to join my constituents in expressing those wishes. At prayers this morning, Mr Speaker, your chaplain prayed for Her Majesty the Queen with the words, "May she have long life and everlasting felicity." That prayer asking for a long and joyous life is answered daily for Her Majesty the Queen and we thank God for his mercy to her as she enters her 91st year and for her faithfulness to not just this nation, but her religion.

It is with great joy that we extend to our gracious sovereign many happy returns and wish her many, many more in the future. Indeed, I would like to see the constitutional dilemma arise of how the Queen gets over the hurdle of sending herself a birthday card when she reaches her century, God willing. I look forward to the many celebrations in churches and civic locations across County Antrim this year. Just this week, the Lord-Lieutenant of the county invited me to a service of thanksgiving for the Queen, which I will, of course, most certainly attend.

The people of Northern Ireland are always abuzz when they learn of a royal visit. During her time as Princess Elizabeth she visited Northern Ireland on three occasions, and has made a further 20 official visits as Queen. These many visits throughout her reign have always been successful in their outreach and engagement, despite the at times very real personal threat to herself and to the royal family. On one occasion, the IRA made the very sinister threat that they would give her a visit to remember. The same IRA, of course, murdered Lord Mountbatten in Ireland. Today, she is witness to a remarkable change in which she has played no small part, including a change in attitude. Indeed, the very man who was second-in-command of the IRA at the time of that murder and that threat is now the Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland and in law accepts the Queen as his Queen, so much so that every piece of legislation he signs commences with the words, "Be it

enacted by her gracious Majesty the Queen." What remarkable change the Queen has reigned over, and that is no small success on her part.

Today, the Prime Minister referred to the Queen's landmark visit to the Republic of Ireland, and what a success that was. Who knows, perhaps Her Majesty will see the 55th nation join the Commonwealth and we will see Ireland play a considerable part in trade and in the relationships within that wonderful organisation. Anyone who has met Her Majesty the Queen remembers every aspect of that meeting—the conversation and the circumstance, and the happy memories that flow from it. Indeed, tonight the Queen will light the first beacon to mark her birthday in Windsor Great Park. I am delighted that 17-year-old Army Cadet Emma-Lee Wray from Carnlough in County Antrim will be at her side representing Northern Ireland. That will be an inspiring moment for Emma-Lee that she will cherish for the rest of her life.

The release today of the stamps of Her Majesty the Queen, her son, her grandson and her great-grandson is a real inspiration to us all and emphasises the sure line of succession and the ever-increasing popularity in which the monarch is held. Long may she reign over us. Many happy returns, Ma'am, on behalf of the people of North Antrim.

12.40 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): As other hon. Members have said, it is a great honour to be able to pay tribute to Her Majesty the Queen today on the occasion of her 90th birthday and, as others have said, what an amazing and inspirational 90 years those have been. Her Majesty's commitment and dedication to our nation and to public duty throughout her life, through the good times and the bad, are the envy of the world.

There are two businesses in my constituency that have been inspired as a result of receiving awards from Her Majesty. Ilkeston-based technical textiles company Baltex received the Queen's Award for International Trade in 2009, and Long Eaton-based Douglas Gill International, renowned for its sailing clothes, received the Queen's Award for Enterprise as a result of increasing export sales to 75% of its total revenue in 2011. Those awards are treasured and displayed with immense pride in those businesses.

Sadly, my constituents have never had the honour of a visit from the great lady. The last time a monarch visited Erewash was more than 100 years ago in June 1914, when Her Majesty's grandfather, King George V, opened Ilkeston County Secondary School. Standing in the marketplace, the King pressed a button which opened the school gates a good half a mile away and well out of sight. The story goes that an explosive charge relayed the success of the operation back to the assembled crowds in the town centre. It is reported that the King passed by the school in his car on his way out of town and had a few words with the headmaster.

I would like to add to the list of invites that my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (William Wragg) has given and take the opportunity to invite Her Majesty to Erewash during this celebratory year to officially open the new Ilkeston train station. She will be able to alight at the station and not be half a mile away when she opens it. Despite her great years, hon. Members will

[Maggie Throup]

know that Her Majesty is a very modern lady. As she probably will not have time today to listen to the tributes being paid in this House, I am sure she will catch up on YouTube later, so I hope that in that way she will get the invitation to open Ilkeston station.

On behalf of Erewash constituents, may I wish Her Majesty a very happy birthday and may she enjoy birthday celebrations for many years to come.

12.42 pm

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to participate in the debate today. I was on these Benches 10 years ago, when I participated on behalf of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru in the Humble Address on the Queen's 80th birthday, as did only five other speakers, one of whom has spoken already today, having advanced, as is often the case, from being Leader of the Opposition then to being Prime Minister today. I, meanwhile, am on the same Bench as I was on 10 years ago. The Humble Address then had, as I said, six speakers and took about 15 minutes in total. Given the advance in time today, I look forward to the length of the Humble Address in 10 years' time, if we are all spared.

The Queen is six years older than the SNP. That is not her only SNP connection. Her private secretary's first cousin is an SNP councillor in Stornoway, and a very good councillor indeed is Rae MacKenzie.

Mentioning Stornoway gives me the opportunity seamlessly to mention one of the Queen's great passions— islands, particularly the Outer Hebrides. Looking back on my speech 10 years ago in this place, I praised her good sense in her choice of holiday that year—sailing round the Hebrides—to mark her 80th birthday. As was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), she visited Lewis, Harris, North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist, Barra and Vatersay, where she has come many times, mostly informally. Since then I have met the Queen and asked her about the trip, and I can report happily to the House that she found it to be a very splendid occasion indeed.

In the intervening period many others have followed her example and visited the islands and have had a right royal time in other ways, I am sure. I encourage many others to follow the Queen's example and I welcome those who come back for a revisit. I certainly hope Her Majesty has the chance to return to the islands that she has visited so often. I clearly remember seeing the royal yacht Britannia with its three masts from behind Vatersay as a youngster from my grandmother's house in Castlebay. Clearly, the Queen's enjoyment of the Hebrides is more than formal—it is very personal.

People in the Gaelic-speaking Hebrides were very pleased when the Queen, in Ireland, spoke in Irish Gaelic, which was a great gesture on so many levels. Therefore, as I did in the debate 10 years ago, I will end in Scottish Gaelic, the language of Eden, and say, "Co larna breith dhan Bhanrighinn Ealasaid".

12.45 pm

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): I should like to associate myself with the congratulations offered by the Prime Minister and others to Her Majesty. Following on from the comments of my hon. Friend the

Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) when he said that, perhaps, Her Majesty the Queen is the nation's grandmother, I might add that with her commitment not only to serving our nation, but to serving God, she is the nation's godmother too. I am delighted to add the heartfelt good wishes of the people of North East Hampshire.

We have heard from all corners of the United Kingdom, so there is not much for me to add in respect of our country. I shall therefore focus my contribution on Her Majesty's lifelong commitment to the Commonwealth. Many countries around the world share a common history, and a shared history leads to a shared language, shared values and, I hope, a shared future. To harness this shared history, Her Majesty has overseen the creation of the Commonwealth in its current form as a force for good—a force for good for the future, given that the Commonwealth is home to 2.2 billion people, of which more than 60% are under the age of 30.

As chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on Sri Lanka, I would like to observe that, as Head of the Commonwealth, Her Majesty's reign has overlapped with the tenures of all 14 Prime Ministers of Ceylon and, now, Sri Lanka, since the country's independence. Her Majesty and I have at least—perhaps only—one thing in common: we have both visited Sri Lanka only twice. A former British High Commissioner said following Her Majesty's second visit:

"Her Majesty has fond memories of her first visit to Sri Lanka in 1954...As part of official engagements during the visit, Her Majesty also addressed the nation from the historic studios of Radio Ceylon, now known as the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation."

He continued:

"Her Majesty came back to Sri Lanka in 1981 as Head of the Commonwealth and people I have met travelling around the country fondly recall memories of her second visit."

Not only do those excerpts highlight the mutual delight in each other's involvement in the Commonwealth, but they demonstrate the strength afforded by the changes that have occurred. Her Majesty has helped make sure that Britain and Sri Lanka have continued to enjoy a long association, which has remained cordial throughout the various constitutional changes of recent decades.

That is true of the wider world. The United Kingdom's relationship with Australia, Canada, India and other Commonwealth countries has changed, and is stronger for it. Thousands of Commonwealth students study in the United Kingdom each year at our world-class universities. The prestigious Foreign and Commonwealth Office-supported Chevening scholarship provides post-graduate study at Britain's top universities to outstanding individuals who demonstrate leadership qualities. This provides real hope for the future. Tomorrow's leaders across the world are being provided with the tools to create and sustain a Commonwealth that is mutually respectful, resilient, peaceful and prosperous; a Commonwealth that cherishes quality, diversity and our shared values; a Commonwealth that Her Majesty has created, is committed to and, if I may be so bold, is rightly proud of. God save the Queen.

12.49 pm

Stuart Blair Donaldson (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (SNP): It is a pleasure to be called to wish Her Majesty a happy 90th birthday. As the hon. Member

for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine, I have the privilege to represent the royal residence of Balmoral. That royal connection, begun under Queen Victoria, gives the area I grew up in the name Royal Deeside. It also gives the local whisky the name Royal Lochnagar, and it means that Ballater, near Balmoral, has one of the highest concentrations of royal warrant holders anywhere in the UK. Ballater has had a tough year, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the royal family for their support and to remind everyone that Ballater is open for business.

It is fair to say that, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) mentioned, the royal family and Her Majesty are most at home in Royal Deeside—something I am proud to say I have in common with her. Residents of Royal Deeside, and indeed many visitors, often recount stories of encountering a kindly lady who is often wearing a headscarf and often driving a Land Rover, and they talk of engaging in light-hearted conversation or of being offered a lift. Who is to say who that kindly lady is? However, it is nice to think that it is Her Majesty.

Perhaps I could finish my brief remarks with a story, and I thank the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) for not recounting it. While walking near Balmoral castle, Her Majesty encountered a group of American tourists. They asked whether she was local, to which she replied that she had a house nearby. They then asked whether she had met the Queen. “No,” she replied, and gesturing to her protection officer, she said, “But he has.” I wish Her Majesty a very happy 90th birthday and many happy returns.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Yes, all right. I call Mr Michael Ellis.

12.51 pm

Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): Thank you for that enthusiastic endorsement, Mr Speaker.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Stuart Blair Donaldson). It is a great honour to be in the House, and it is particular honour to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. Her Majesty is someone we can all look up to as an exemplar of duty and public service. I wish her a happy 90th birthday and many happy returns. I hope, and confidently expect, that she will reach her 100th birthday, and more birthdays after that. It is widely acknowledged around the world that Her Majesty has shown the most extraordinary and selfless devotion to duty and public service—for 64 years now.

The Houses of Parliament marked Her Majesty's silver jubilee in 1977 by placing a rather special fountain in New Palace Yard, in the shadow of Big Ben. It is still working today and it gives great pleasure to many visitors and those of us here. The Houses also recognised Her Majesty's golden jubilee in 2002, when they placed a sundial in the ground in Old Palace Yard, outside the House of Lords. More recently, in 2012, Members of both Houses of Parliament—on both sides of the political divide and both sides of the aisle, I am pleased to say—recognised Her Majesty's diamond jubilee by placing a very special stained glass window in the north end of Westminster Hall, and it is hoped that that window will be there for many hundreds of years to come. That window shows Her Majesty's coat of arms, and it is

almost directly opposite the world war two window, which was put in in around 1950—the original Victorian window was blown out by enemy action during the war. That means that the coat of arms of Her Majesty's late father, King George, is directly opposite her coat of arms across Westminster Hall—that ancient edifice, which is nearly 1,000 years old. It is a suitable honour for this House and the country that they have been served so well by Her Majesty and Her Majesty's late father.

We are only five and half years from the platinum jubilee, and we need to keep that in mind. I have no doubt that both Houses of Parliament will mark it in an equally special way—and, I might add, without recourse to public funds, as also happened with the diamond jubilee, when the work was funded entirely from private donations from these Houses.

It is interesting to note that during the preparations for the window, sketches were made of the design to be used. There was some to-ing and fro-ing, and some precision work was needed, as Members can no doubt imagine. The heralds wanted to look at the exact intricacies to make sure that everything was in order. We got to the very last drawing, which was going to be signed off and sent to the glaziers for manufacture in the ancient way—the way stained glass has been made for 800 years. The drawing had been seen by the then Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister and everyone who needed to see it. However, it was noticed just in time—not by me, I hasten to add, but by one of the experts in heraldry—that the chain on the unicorn was the wrong way round, so the design was changed.

Later, when Her Majesty came to Parliament and saw the window in situ, I mentioned to her that the unicorn's chain had nearly been the wrong way round, and Her Majesty smiled broadly. I will not indicate the conversation that we had, but perhaps I can say that somebody later remarked that it was always important to ensure that a unicorn's chain is the right way round. I dread to think what might have happened if it had been the wrong way round—the story would no doubt have been told for a long time to come.

Mr Speaker: Particularly by the hon. Gentleman.

Michael Ellis: In fact, even though things did not go wrong, I still tell the story.

One other point I would like to make before closing is that His Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, who has been Her Majesty's consort for nearly 70 years, has been a steadfast support to Her Majesty, as is clear to everyone. By being such a steadfast support to our sovereign—his wife—he has been a steadfast support to this country, for which I thank him. I wish Her Majesty a very happy birthday and many happy returns. God save the Queen!

12.58 pm

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to speak briefly in this really special debate.

On behalf of my constituents, I congratulate the Queen on reaching her 90th birthday. I remember the last time the Queen and Prince Philip were in North Tyneside, when she officially opened Tyne tunnel 2—it

[Mary Glendon]

was 45 years after she opened the first Tyne tunnel—and she was welcomed on that beautiful day by many schoolchildren and our air cadets from Longbenton, who played music for her. It was a wonderful occasion.

That took me back to the day in 1967 when the Queen came to Tyneside to open the first tunnel. It was a school day for me—I was at St Cuthbert's Primary School in North Shields. We knew the Queen was coming, and we were all excited because one boy in our class, David Bell, who happened to live near the Tyne tunnel, was going to join the crowds and see the Queen. We were all in awe because we were stuck in school. I never dreamed on that day that, in 2012, I would be at the Tyne tunnel to meet the Queen as the local MP.

I was brought up in a royalist household. My parents were very proud of the Queen, as were many of their generation who were contemporaries of that part of the royal family. Over many years, our family enjoyed watching all the royal events on TV, including the royal weddings and the annual trooping the colour. We always got into the spirit of the occasion and felt very patriotic, alongside many others who are so proud of everything our Queen has achieved. I know that, were my late mother alive today, she would be both thrilled and particularly humbled to see me standing here, on behalf of North Tyneside, wishing our Queen not only a very happy birthday, but very many happy returns.

1pm

Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con): In the Windsor constituency, the history of the monarchy runs deep and wide—from Royal Ascot to the Great Park, the barracks, the charities, good causes, hospitals, schools and way beyond. The magnificent Windsor castle is at the heart of local activities and can be seen by people nationwide. In many ways, Her Majesty runs an open home and an open life. Very few people have not paid a visit to Windsor castle, and it would be unusual not to see her and her family out and about around the constituency.

The great affection shown to the Queen is not undeserved. She has been a consistent force for social cohesion in her entire 90 years. She has been a beacon for civilised people both at home and abroad. Few features of our national life have brought such consistency, stability, happiness, joy and celebration over such a long period of our history. As the Head of State, her role is more than symbolic. She is more than a figurehead. She has been a warm and consistent presence in an often harsh and changing world.

On behalf of myself, the country, my constituents, the Commonwealth and the world, I send my heartfelt congratulations on her 90th birthday. Long may she reign, and long may she rein in the forces that seek to divide us.

1.1pm

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to wish Queen Elizabeth a very happy birthday, and to do so on behalf of my hon. Friends the Members for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) and for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards). I also add the good wishes of my

hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), who regrets that she cannot be here today for this very happy occasion.

As has been said, the Queen has a remarkable record of service, throughout which she has shown model devotion to her duty and to dignity in public life. That is particularly instructive these days, when so many feel a compulsion to reveal all. It also, of course, acts as a caution in respect of our activities here, as she has outlasted and probably outgunned so many “here today and gone tomorrow” Prime Ministers—and Leaders of the Opposition, for that matter.

Professor Dewi Seaborne Davies was once my parents' MP. He was a Liberal MP for the very short period between Lloyd George moving to the other place as the Earl of Dwyfor, and the post-war Dissolution and the landslide that swept him and the Liberals away. Many years later, he and some other gentlemen of a similar vintage were standing on the square of my hometown in Pwllheli. They were approached by a younger man, who said, “You three, standing there: Duw, you're looking good. You're looking good.” Seaborne Davies replied, “There are four ages to man: when you're young, when you're middle aged, when you're older, and when, Duw, you're looking good!” The Queen is looking good. That is not only a statement of fact, but symbolic of the personal respect and affection that she enjoys so widely. Today is a public celebration but, more importantly, it is also a joyous family occasion. I will close by saying, “Penblwydd hapus iawn i chi ac, ar eich penblwydd yn ddeg a phedwar ugain, dymuniadau gorau at y dyfodol.” I wish her a very happy birthday and, on her 90th birthday, best wishes for the future.

1.4 pm

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for your indulgence. As promised, I rise momentarily to wish Her Majesty the Queen many happy returns on behalf of my constituents in St Helens North, one of whom, Norah Collins, also celebrates her 90th birthday today. She is originally from County Galway and I thought it was appropriate that I spoke to her this morning, because Her Majesty the Queen has done so much to further good relations between Britain and Ireland. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the Irish in Britain, I know that the community here felt special pride at her state visit to Ireland and the reciprocal visit here by the President of Ireland. On behalf of the all-party group and the community here I say, “Breithlá sona duit a Banríon.” Happy birthday to Her Majesty the Queen.

1.5 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Of course, as you know, Mr Speaker, it will be you who properly summarises this debate, because it is for you to choose the appropriate words from it when you go to the Palace with 12 of us. This is not really a summing-up speech, but more a contribution of my own, and I am grateful for that opportunity, not least because I think I am the only Member of this House who has ever sworn the Oath of Allegiance to Her Majesty and her successors both as a Member of Parliament and as a clerk in holy orders. I would therefore like to thank her enormously for the faithfulness she has shown to the Church of England

and, for that matter, the Church of Scotland. She manages to be ambidextrous in that, as in so many other things.

I am delighted to be here. It reminds me of the time when Norman St John-Stevas, who was simultaneously Leader of the House and Arts Minister, greeted Queen Elizabeth, the then Queen Mother, at the foot of the stairs of the Royal Opera House. As they climbed the stairs, the large crowd burst into a spontaneous round of applause, at which Her Majesty was distinctly heard to say, “Lucky things: two queens for the price of one.”

I cannot pretend to know Her Majesty well—or, indeed, at all—but I once canvassed the staff at Balmoral in the Kincardine and Deeside by-election. We did not get very many supporters—in fact, I think we came fourth in the by-election.

My father Rees, however, played an important part in the coronation in 1953. He was serving in the RAF in Lytham at the time, but when 31 Group, which was based in Hawarden in north Wales, decided to send 40 male and female RAF officers to march in the coronation, it was decided that somebody had to brush up their marching skills, so my 19-year-old father was sent for. He was flown up to Hawarden in a tiny aeroplane and spent a few days with the officers. Apparently my father was so good at shouting at people that he was not needed for the coronation itself.

I make that point simply to underline quite how many people’s lives Her Majesty has touched. She has visited the Rhondda many times. Indeed, a photo of her at Plas Horeb in Treherbert in 1989 was used for the 24p stamp to celebrate her 40th anniversary in 1992.

When Her Majesty came to the Rhondda in June 2002, I was asked to walk with her past the great number of people who had lined the streets of Treorchy, all of whom were singing, “She’ll be stopping in Treorchy when she comes”. I knew that my office manager, Kevin Morgan, was going to be there with his two young sons, Sam and Owen, so when I saw them waving their little Union flags, I gently steered Her Majesty towards them. The two boys were very young at the time and rather shy, so as we approached I said, “Go on, then—say hello.” Unfortunately, Her Majesty thought I was talking to her: “All right, young man!” she barked back at me, so she will probably not read this speech later.

The truth is that Her Majesty has had to put up with an awful lot in her time. She has had to suffer a phenomenal stream of politicians—she will be getting another 13 in a few days’ time—and 160 Prime Ministers in all her dominions.

Living with change is one of the most difficult things in the world, especially when you are almost powerless yourself to affect it. Yet that is exactly what she has done, in admirable style. Technology has changed faster than in any other generation, including television, computers, mobile phones, Twitter and so on. Social attitudes have changed dramatically, too. It is strange to think that in 1952 there were just 17 women in Parliament—18, I suppose, if we include her—but today there are 191 women MPs and 201 women peers. That is still not enough, but it is better than it was.

It seems incredible today, but in 1952 parents of children with cerebral palsy found it impossible to find anyone to educate their children, which is why three

parents set up the Spastics Society, which became Scope. Since then, we have made enormous strides: the first Minister for Disabled People, the Disability Discrimination Acts, the Disability Rights Commission and so on. Quite often, the royal family have played a dramatic role in changing those attitudes by the way in which they have reached out. Likewise, when the “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders” was first published in 1952, it classified homosexuality as a mental disorder, yet very few today would hold that view, and one can even get married in Parliament in a same-sex ceremony.

When we think about what the Queen has lived through—the second world war, the cold war, the Falklands, the end of empire, the troubles and then the peace in Northern Ireland—it is difficult not to feel, in Shakespeare’s words from the end of “King Lear”:

“The oldest hath borne most: we that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.”

For all the pomp and circumstance, regalia and deference, the reason why our constituents—republicans and monarchists alike—admire and respect the Queen is because of her fundamental decency, her manifest commitment to doing her duty and her ability to keep her counsel. At the end of Thomas Hardy’s novel “The Woodlanders”, the courageous peasant girl Marty South pays tribute to Giles Winterborne in very simple terms as “a good man” who “did good things”. I think we can all agree that we could surely say the same of Her Majesty: a good woman who does good things.

1.11 pm

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): It is my privilege and honour to conclude this debate and commend the motion to the House. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister singled out the importance of faith to Her Majesty. Earlier, Mr Speaker, your Chaplain led us in extra special prayers, to which I will add one that used to be sung weekly in Catholic churches, “Domine, salvam fac reginam nostram Elisabeth, et exaudi nos in die, qua invocaverimus te.” Almighty God, we pray that Thy servant our Queen Elizabeth, who by Thy mercy has undertaken the government of this realm, may receive increase of all the virtues; so fittingly adorned, may she be enabled to avoid all foul temptations, overcome her enemies, and with her Prince Consort and the royal family, may she at the last be welcomed by Thee, who art the way, the truth and the life.

We have heard from many hon. and right hon. Members from all parts of the United Kingdom, speaking in all languages: Gaelic, Welsh, Irish—

Chris Bryant: Latin.

Dr Coffey: Yes, Latin—as well as the Queen’s language. Hon. and right hon Members paid tribute to Her Majesty, citing individual stories and stories from their constituencies, and reflected widely on her service to the nation and to the Commonwealth.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister pointed out, the influence of our Queen started long before she was crowned. We have heard of her special children’s

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

broadcast during the war, and her service in the ATS. I understand that as a young girl, she reminded her father of the poem “God Knows”, also known as “The Gate of the Year”, part of which he recited in the 1939 Christmas broadcast:

“And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

‘Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.’

And he replied:

‘Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.’”

This world is uncertain, but Her Majesty brings to it a constant, calming presence, full of good counsel for all the Prime Ministers and, indeed, for our Parliament, the nation and the Commonwealth. She has especially shown that in her leadership as Head of the Commonwealth, which has brought her and the country many challenges but also many joys.

As has been pointed out, the Queen has seen much change in her 90 years. I have always thought of her as timeless and as a steady hand, but also as keeping up with the times. Technology is being used to commend her today. The hashtag #HappyBirthdayYourMajesty is trending on Twitter, and the Google icon is “Happy 90th Birthday, Ma’am”.

As the Father of the House pointed out, many people are excited and overjoyed to meet the Queen. I recall a few years ago, when the Queen opened the new Broadcasting House at the BBC, she memorably and deliberately walked into shot during the live broadcasting

of the news. Even the cool kids of the BBC newsroom were running and climbing on desks simply to catch a glimpse of their very special visitor. She really does touch all hearts.

Up and down the country tonight, people will join in a traditional form of celebration, the lighting of beacons, and I will make it back to celebrate one of those events in Suffolk Coastal. We have already heard about further celebrations that will continue later this year. I, for one, hope that the Queen will enjoy time with her family as well as with the wider nation. For now, I conclude with part of the national anthem:

“Thy choicest gifts in store,

On her be pleased to pour,

Long may she reign!

May she defend our laws,

And ever give us cause,

To sing with heart and voice,

God save the Queen!”

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved, nemine contradicente,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty to offer the heartfelt good wishes of the House on the occasion of Her Majesty’s ninetieth birthday, expressing its deep gratitude for Her Majesty’s lifelong commitment to the service of the country and the Commonwealth, and praying that Her Majesty may long continue in health and happiness.

That Mr Speaker, the Prime Minister, Chris Grayling, Jeremy Corbyn, Chris Bryant, Angus Robertson, Mr Nigel Dodds, Tim Farron, Hywel Williams, Dr Alasdair McDonnell, Danny Kinahan, Caroline Lucas and Mr Douglas Carswell do wait upon Her Majesty with the said Message.

Common Fisheries Policy (Article 17)

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Guto Bebb.)

1.15 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I am pleased to have secured this debate, because it provides the opportunity to examine how the Government are getting on in implementing article 17 of the reformed common fisheries policy, which came into operation on 1 January 2014. Article 17 presents the opportunity to regenerate the fishing industry in ports such as Lowestoft in my constituency, and it has the potential to bring significant economic and social benefits to coastal communities all around the UK. It will help the Government to achieve their objective of rebalancing the economy away from London and the south-east and facilitating the much-needed regeneration of coastal areas, where communities feel that they have been neglected for far too long. There is a concern that, although the Government have introduced some initiatives in order to comply with article 17, they do not have a coherent, long-term strategy in place to ensure that its important objectives are met.

Put simply, the way the common fisheries policy works—perhaps I should say should work—is that an overarching policy framework is laid down centrally in Brussels, and it is up to individual states to pursue their own initiatives to ensure that the mutual objectives in the framework are met. Under the previous regime from 2002, member states were given very wide discretion, and the equivalent policy framework was loosely worded. Article 20(3) from 2002 stated:

“Each Member State shall decide, for vessels flying its flag, on the method of allocating the fishing opportunities assigned to that Member State in accordance with Community law. It shall inform the Commission of the allocation method.”

Member states were given wide discretion to do what they wanted, but they had to tell the Commission what they were doing. That article has been replaced by article 17, which is more far specific:

“When allocating the fishing opportunities available to them, as referred to in Article 16, Member States shall use transparent and objective criteria including those of an environmental, social and economic nature. The criteria to be used may include, inter alia, the impact of fishing on the environment, the history of compliance, the contribution to the local economy and historic catch levels. Within the fishing opportunities allocated to them, Member States shall endeavour to provide incentives to fishing vessels deploying selective fishing gear or using fishing techniques with reduced environmental impact, such as reduced energy consumption or habitat damage.”

I should highlight some of the important requirements of this more targeted policy strategy. First, there is the need for transparency, which is particularly welcome. For too long, domestic and, indeed, European fishing has been unnecessarily complicated and opaque. A good example of that was the difficulty of finding out who held fishing quota. That was shrouded in mystery until my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), the former Minister, introduced the register that had to be published. Before that register existed, all manner of urban myths developed about who held fishing quota. Was it car companies, or even football clubs?

Secondly, in allocating fishing opportunities, the Government are required to consider the three criteria—environmental, social and economic factors. That means

maximising the economic and social benefits to UK coastal communities, but at the same time minimising the environmental impact of fishing, which is the activity that has the greatest ecological impact on the UK’s precious and vital marine ecosystem. It is crucial that the allocation of fishing opportunities is based on the targeting of these multiple and diverse objectives. If it is not, as history has shown time and again down the ages, fish stocks will decline, market forces will push inextricably towards industry concentration—fishermen will be muscled out as small businesses—and coastal communities will be weakened and undermined, with their economies often taking decades to recover.

Thirdly, article 17 encourages member states to pursue a variety of methods of allocating fishing opportunities. No longer should they be one-trick ponies relying just on catch history; they should consider a whole package of measures and issues, such as the impact of fishing on the environment, the history of compliance, the contribution to the local economy, the incentivising of fishing vessels to deploy selective fishing gear, the promotion of fishing techniques with reduced environment impacts and the reduction of energy consumption and of habitat damage.

The Government have signed up to a policy that can help to bring back prosperity to our coastal communities, and they have been provided with a number of tools in the box to do so. I have two questions: first, are they using all reasonable endeavours in pursuit of this policy; and secondly, are they using all the tools in the box? It is vital that the Government do so, as fishing communities all around our coast are in urgent need of support.

In the past, those communities—the fishermen and the people working in the industry—have delivered so much to this country not just by putting good, wholesome food on our plates, but by providing jobs in the supply chain, which stretches far and wide inland. What has happened in Lowestoft in my constituency in the past 40 years is a vivid illustration of how the policy makers have got it terribly wrong. Now, as a matter of urgency, we need to do things to right the mistakes of the past.

Lowestoft was built on fishing. It was the fishing capital of the southern North sea. In years gone by, one could cross the water from one side of the Hamilton dock in Lowestoft to the other by walking from boat to boat. Today, the dock is virtually empty of fishing boats. In the past four decades, Lowestoft has been hit hard by overfishing, wrong decisions by politicians and the vulnerability of the very make-up of the industry, whereby the large trawlers used to help to sustain the smaller boats.

The way the quota is allocated has been a major factor in Lowestoft’s decline, as it has taken away the trawlers that were the cornerstone of the industry. The six affiliated vessels in the Lowestoft producer organisation have a fixed quota allocation of 80,419 units this year. This is a significant amount of fish, but none of it is landed in Lowestoft: 68% of it goes to the Netherlands and 32% to Scotland. Those boats—Wilhelmina, Ansgar, Margriet, Hendrik Brands, Sola Fide and Soli Deo Gloria—bring very little, if any, economic and social benefit to Lowestoft.

Today, the Lowestoft fleet is made up of small boats, known as the under-10s—the under-10 metre fleet—which get a raw deal in terms of quota. Nationally, the under-10s comprise 77% of the UK fleet and employ 65% of the workforce; yet they receive only 4% of the total quota

[Peter Aldous]

available. As from 1 April many of these boats in Lowestoft are able to catch only 100 kg of skate and 2 tonnes of cod per month. That is not enough for skippers to sustain a business, let alone to earn a living. This story is not unique to Lowestoft; it is the tale all around our coast. It is being repeated all around the UK, and it is the reason why we cannot delay in properly and fully implementing article 17.

It is fair to say that, from a legal perspective, the Government are complying with the requirements of article 17. That was the conclusion that Mrs Justice Andrews reached in determining Greenpeace's judicial review this January. The Government have carried out some welcome initiatives, such as the permanent transfer of underused quota to the under-10s. That was worth an extra 678 tonnes in 2015. The inshore fleet will also benefit from an extra 1,000 tonnes this year.

However, one can argue that although these initiatives are very welcome, they are piecemeal allocations. A clearly articulated and overarching framework for the full implementation of article 17 is still lacking. We need—dare I say it—not just a long-term economic plan, but a long-term economic, social and environmental plan. The Government can be criticised for adhering to a system that is too restricted, relying excessively on catch history and not making full use of the other initiatives that article 17 positively endorses and promotes. As I have already said, there is a need to use other tools in the box.

Other Governments are doing so and are pursuing a course that I suggest the UK Government should seriously consider following. Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany and Sweden are all moving away from systems for the allocation of fishing opportunities based exclusively on historical catch levels. In Belgium, there is a requirement to contribute to the local economy. In Denmark, there is an objective of aiming at best economic performance and investing in energy consumption reduction measures. In France, market orientation and socioeconomic equilibrium are considered alongside historical catch records. In Germany, historical catch levels likewise remain important, but measures have been introduced to reduce the impact of fishing on the marine environment and to reduce discards and bycatch. The contribution to society and local communities is also taken very seriously there. In Sweden, economic criteria are of importance in pelagic and industrial fisheries, while environmental criteria are pursued in demersal fisheries.

The policies being pursued in Ireland are particularly innovative. I urge the Minister to look at them very closely to see how they can be applied in the UK, as the fishing industries and fishing communities in our two countries have a great deal in common. In Ireland, quota is assigned to vessels, and if it is not used, it is returned to the state for reallocation. Inshore fisheries operate under a community quota system. There is a monthly catch allocation for stocks under pressure. A specific Irish measure that we should seriously consider adopting is that of consultation with those actively involved in local fishing communities—the people in Ireland, as in the UK, who ultimately know their industry and their waters best. There was a consultation in Ireland when the allocation policy framework was set up, and when amendments are made to the framework, they are always consulted on.

It is also appropriate to look outside the EU. In Canada, British Columbia now has one of the most comprehensive, integrated and successful catch share programmes in the world, which takes full account of economic, social and environmental consideration. The starting point for setting up the system there was likewise a public consultation, with an independent arbitrator submitting recommendations to the Government, who then adopted them.

In conclusion, we need a clear and well articulated framework in which the UK's fishermen and allied industries can work, invest in their businesses and make a fair living. That will lead to a healthier industry and benefit coastal communities all around the UK. With the allocation of fishing opportunities coming up in 2017, there is now a real chance to put such a system in place. Will the Minister give us an assurance that he will look at doing so with his colleagues and officials?

Last May, Geoffrey Melton, skipper of the *Serene Dawn* from Lowestoft, lost his leg aboard his boat. He has been given a prosthetic limb and is about to return to sea. We owe it to people like Geoffrey to do all we can to ensure that he has every chance of earning a decent living and bringing some prosperity back to the community in which he lives.

1.30 pm

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) for the opportunity of speaking on this subject, and pay tribute to him not only for bringing this matter to the House but for his long commitment to the fishing industry in Lowestoft and beyond. I got to know him well before the election at which he joined us in this House. The fact is, if he was simply doing things for political purposes, there are probably more newsagents in his constituency than there are active fishermen. His commitment to those fishermen is a credit to him and his love of his town and community.

I will take the opportunity to add a little to what my hon. Friend has said. Although it may not seem like it for some members of the fishing industry, there is at last some good news, with rising stocks in our seas. The iconic species that people use as a measure of the health of our seas is cod, and the biomass of cod in the North sea is rising quite substantially. There is still more to do, but it is a credit to the fishermen, scientists and those in organisations such as the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and others, who are not always the fishermen's best friends. They have relentlessly tried to find new methods of conservation of stocks, and are starting to see those work.

The sea is a very complex ecosystem, and what might assist one stock could damage another; we do not have the time to go into that today. However, the element of my hon. Friend's speech to which I really want to pay tribute is that he talked about people. When these matters are discussed in Government, among policymakers, in non-governmental organisations, and in the chancelleries of Europe, if that is all that happens, we fail, because we have to engage those whose livelihoods depend upon the health of fish stocks. That does not mean simply the—sadly few—fishermen left in my hon. Friend's constituency. This is about the very heartbeat of coastal communities. It runs very deep in the psyche of the

British people, whether they live in coastal regions such as his, or about as far from the coast as is possible, in constituencies such as mine.

Combining the three legs of the stool of sustainability—economy, environment and social factors—is very important. I well remember the negotiations on article 17, some of which took place through the night. Indeed, I remember being prevented from getting in to make the case for sustainability by a blockade by Greenpeace, which was a rather strange irony.

Looking forward, the Minister needs to take this important point away with him. One of the great wins in reform of the common fisheries policy was not that on the headline issue that concerned most people, the absurd necessity for fishermen at that time to throw away perfectly edible fish, although we were all, quite rightly, affronted by that and its reform was welcome. The ending of discards is starting now, although we are not yet there. For me, however, the great win was a legally binding commitment to fish to maximum sustainable yield.

We have recently discovered that 50% of stocks in British waters are still not fished sustainably. If we want to see the glass as half full, we could say that half are, which is certainly a big improvement on the situation just a few years ago. However, there is still so much more to do. The political effort of the next few years is needed in the Council of Ministers. The resolve remains in the European Parliament, in this Parliament, in the devolved Administrations and Parliaments, and in the Commission, but to carry through the bold ambitions for reform of the common fisheries policy that were agreed unanimously will require continued great leadership by our excellent Fisheries Minister and others, to try to drive through reforms and make them effective.

I have been as rude about the common fisheries policy, and its folly and failures, as anyone—I bow to no one in that—and reforming it was something I enjoyed doing. I felt that we as a Parliament were united in achieving that. But we should not kid ourselves that the common fisheries policy is the only problem. In fact, if we look at Professor Callum Roberts's very interesting graph of the decline of fish stocks since the late 19th century, there are two peaks in North sea cod stocks, one between 1914 and 1918, and one between 1939 and 1945; I will let hon. Members work out what was going on at those times. In the early 1970s, there is not even a blip.

As a society, we have gained ever more technological advantages in harvesting wild fish. Parliament and regulatory authorities have always been behind the curve. Now, perhaps, we have more regional control and the understanding that we have to involve catchers as well as scientists and others in achieving our aims. It is vital. I applaud the way in which my hon. Friend looked abroad for good practice. The catch share schemes in north America and elsewhere offer great opportunities for fishermen to buy into a rise in biomass and have something of value. By helping to increase the harvestable surplus of a stock, fishermen increase the value of their right to fish it. That gives them something to hand on to their children or else to sell to another fishermen when they want to retire.

There is cause for optimism. It is not easy, and there is much more to do in complex sea environments such as those around our shores. It requires political will and

resolve, and needs people such as my hon. Friend, who represent the places around our coastline, to continue to be great champions for the health of our seas and those whose livelihoods depend upon them.

1.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): The Minister of State responsible for fisheries unfortunately cannot be here, but it is a great privilege for me to be here to hear those speeches, which revealed just how much care, affection and thought my hon. Friends the Members for Waveney (Peter Aldous) and for Newbury (Richard Benyon) have put into the issues of complex fisheries. I will reply quite briefly, as this is the Minister of State's subject rather than mine, but I will make a couple of observations on DEFRA's behalf.

First, we absolutely accept the importance of the inshore fleet. Its economic value is not just the amount of fish it catches but its contribution to ports and to fleets in general. The selective fishing done by inshore fleets—the under-10 metre vessels—is often more environmentally friendly and sustainable. It is less likely to have by-catch or disrupt spawning stocks. It is also much less likely to have issues with carbon emissions. Generally, it ticks almost every box for a sustainable fishery.

As my hon. Friends both pointed out very well, it is also true that this is not simply an issue of economics or the environment. Fishing is the lifeblood of the ports. We love to go to coastal communities and see fishing boats. Those boats simply will not be there if we do not protect the under-10 metre fleet. There is also a connection with our maritime heritage as a nation. It inspires us as a country to know that those vessels can continue to operate. It connects to tourism, the wider economy and the environment. For all those reasons, we need to pay attention to those fleets.

We must balance that, of course, with the interests of the offshore fleets. They catch far more of the fish we eat—about 666,000 tonnes are caught by the offshore fleets compared with about 42,000 tonnes caught by the inshore fleets. Of the 42,000 tonnes caught by inshore fleets, only about 5,000 are within the quota stock range.

About 5,500 people are supported by the offshore fleets. We know more and more about the benefit and fantastic nutrition that we get from fish, and about how good it is for our health and what a fantastically delicious and healthy food it is, and that depends on the offshore fleet as well as the inshore fleet. We need to consider how to get the balance right and swing the pendulum back.

The Government's gut instinct is probably that the pendulum has swung too far in favour of offshore fleets, and we have now begun to push it back. As my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney acknowledged, we have recently allocated another 1,000 tonnes to inshore fleets. We have begun to use the opportunities provided by getting rid of discards to allocate more, and 10% of that quota goes to inshore fleets.

The challenge is to have a good strategic study to consider the 25 or 30-year future. Rather than my pontificating from the Dispatch Box on a subject about which I do not know a great deal, I would like my hon.

[*Rory Stewart*]

Friends the Members for Waveney and for Newbury to sit down with our officials and talk in great detail through the issues that have been raised, and particularly the fantastic work that the hon. Member for Waveney has done on comparative studies, such as Swedish fishing methods, and the French, German and Canadian approaches.

Our current process is fantastic, and it is not only processing people but retailers, the industry, fish salesman, and coastal communities who are discussing what more we can do for the inshore fleet. To do that, we need from my hon. Friends details of how much more of the quota it makes sense to give that fleet, how much more it feels that it can catch, and how that will deliver economic benefit.

I have two small pieces of reassurance. First, it is true that we are already incentivising more sustainable ways of catching fish, and European Union grants are available

to upgrade the type of nets that are used to get more sustainable catches. Secondly, we are already emphasising the economic links with people who possess those quotas in terms of providing jobs for coastal communities.

In conclusion, let me pay tribute to what was a serious and impressive piece of research that contained stimulating ideas. We must take up the challenge of thinking forward over a 25-year environment plan, and we must consider how to integrate fish and coastal communities into that. In addition to protecting this precious piece of maritime heritage, we must think about the fish themselves, because they are a finite and precious resource.

Question put and agreed to.

1.42 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 21 April 2016

[ANDREW PERCY *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Clean Water and Sanitation (Africa)

1.30 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered clean water and sanitation in Africa.

It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. Let us be honest: Thursday is often referred to in the Backbench Business Committee as the graveyard slot. We are approaching the end of the Adjournment debate in the House, which gives us an idea of how business is moving forward. We in Westminster Hall will be the ones who stay the longest today, because the House will have risen before this debate finishes.

Why have I brought this matter to this Chamber for consideration? Very simply, the reason why we are all here to speak is that we want to improve water aid and sanitation throughout Africa. Right hon. and hon. Members, and the Minister and the shadow Minister, are here to speak, to respond and to take on some of the comments that we make. It is a massive issue in my constituency, probably off the back of the churches and charitable givers. A number of churches in my area are keen to support the digging of wells, for example; we have a charity in Northern Ireland that does nothing else. I will mention some of the groups that we work with, because it is important to at least try to acknowledge all those who participate and help.

Poverty in Africa begins with a lack of clean water. Some 650 million people live without safe water, the equivalent of one in eight people on the planet. That gives an idea of the magnitude of the issue. Some 2.3 billion people, or one in three of the world's population, do not have access to adequate sanitation. Around 500,000 children under five die every year from diarrhoeal diseases caused by dirty water and poor sanitation. That is more than one child every moment, or 900 children every single day. Clean water sources are often miles from villages, so many able-bodied members of a community are forced to spend hours each day simply finding and transporting water. We know that the impacts go beyond location to the safety of the young girls and ladies who must go to gather water. The trips sometimes take five or six hours and involve long distances, which can leave them vulnerable to attacks, never mind the burden of carrying the water.

The scouts in my constituency in Strangford have been involved in water, sanitation and hygiene projects, which I know others will probably want to mention as well. They have raised money and awareness, participating from afar in the issue of water in Africa. I will also mention the work of one church in my constituency—Movilla Abbey Church of Ireland church—and its Uganda team, although there are many churches there doing such work. The abbey's primary school, in partnership with the abbey, raised £5,542.38. The children collected

pencils, sharpeners, rubbers and rulers, and made loom bands for the pupils whom they would visit at Namansa primary school in Uganda's Nakasongola district.

The combined amount raised by the project, which also involved the church, climaxed at £22,222.09, a magnificent contribution from the schoolchildren, the church and the local community. We had a wonderful opportunity to hear some of the schoolchildren whom the partnership had helped come to the school and to sing some of their songs. I cannot say I am proficient in the language of Uganda, but we have practised the Ugandan handshake. The Fields of Life project also managed to deliver much-needed equipment for the construction of a kitchen, textbooks, exercise books, hand washing basins and other simple things to help, such as soap. In this debate, we will find out the importance of soap. We wash our hands with soap every day, and probably take it for granted. In Africa, soap could do away with a lot of diseases.

The Sunday school children at the church delivered 232 Bibles. The children came to the school and sang Ugandan songs. One of the phrases that they used was "Webale nnyo". William McCartney led and supported the team, and Fields of Life made the whole project possible. It was done with the school, the church and the community.

The typical container used for water collection in Africa, the jerry can, weighs more than 40 pounds when completely full. The social and economic effects of the lack of clean water are often the highest priorities when African communities speak of their own development. The World Health Organisation has shown us the issue in economic terms. Every \$1 invested in water and sanitation yields an economic return of \$3 to \$34. More people have a mobile phone than have a toilet. Globally, one third of all schools lack access to safe water and adequate sanitation. In low and middle-income countries, one third of all health care facilities lack a safe water resource. Every 90 seconds, a child dies from a water-related disease.

In Africa and some parts of Asia, women and children can end up walking an average of 3.7 miles a day just to collect water, spending almost six hours finding water and bringing it back—and we waste water back home by letting the taps run. Of course, in Northern Ireland, water is never in short supply, as we have a regular abundance of rain, but in a majority of African countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, less than 50% of the population has access to improved sanitation. I know that the Minister will respond to questions when he replies to the debate. Although some progress has been made, it has mostly been frustratingly slow. Those figures are in stark contrast to the running water that is virtually universal throughout the United Kingdom, and putting them together makes us appreciate how lucky we are.

In the background information provided by officials from the Department for International Development, we can clearly chart some improved water access. The map of Africa on the first page shows a lot of improvement, which is wonderful. In most parts of Africa, access to water has improved, which we welcome. The second page, unfortunately, shows that access to improved sanitation has not matched access to water. We must look towards that as well. Water is an important and scarce commodity in Africa, but it must be matched by sanitation. In his response, will the Minister give us his thoughts on how best to address that important issue?

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this incredibly important debate. Does he agree that there is nothing more important than access to clean water? It is a disgrace that, in 2016, the lack of it is the biggest killer of children in sub-Saharan Africa. They are 14 times more likely to die of things such as diarrhoea and pneumonia than children in developed parts of the world. It is time that something is done about it.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing that to our attention. I will touch on those issues now, as they are vital. When we consider water and sanitation, we must consider disease as well. I want to underline some of the issues addressed by the all-party parliamentary group on child health and vaccine preventable diseases, which was formerly chaired by Jim Dobbin, who passed away. Those of us in this House who knew him, even for a short time, were aware of his magnificent contribution. He outlined the issues from his personal experience of visits to Africa with vaccine programmes, where he witnessed at first hand deplorable hygiene and water facilities in hospitals. People can vaccinate and do all sorts of other things, but if they do not have water and sanitation, it is not going anywhere.

The scale of the problem is massive. In 2014, the lack of access to adequate water is estimated to have killed some 3,500 children under five years of age every day. The latest figures show that every year some 600,000 children lose their lives to diarrhoeal diseases, to which the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O’Hara) referred. Most of those deaths are of children less than two years of age in the poorest countries of the world.

Rotavirus is the most important cause of diarrhoeal mortality in children; it is associated with 28% of the deaths from diarrhoea. Despite the advances in treating water poverty, which have saved millions of children’s lives by protecting them against diarrhoeal disease, rotavirus remains the second leading killer of children worldwide.

We have to implement a combination of health, safe water, sanitation and hygiene solutions, and then we can do what the hon. Gentleman said—save more lives. That is part of the purpose of this debate. We can save the lives of children who are still at risk with simple interventions: improved safe water; sanitation; hygiene; exclusive breastfeeding; and vaccines that prevent rotavirus.

I will pose a couple of questions at this stage to the Under-Secretary of State for International Development, the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd), and to his officials who are here. The United Kingdom has a very proud history of providing expertise, resources and global leadership to improve children’s health worldwide. It continues to provide leadership and support to build upon the positive trends. Perhaps the Minister can tell us how we can build upon the success that we have had so far in order to try, with others, to close the clear gap that exists? Can the UK continue to invest in a package of life-saving tools and services, which includes the vaccines, the medicines, the water, the sanitation, the hygiene and the nutrition, too?

What priority and weighting are given to the water, sanitation and hygiene, or WASH, strategies in the upcoming bilateral aid review, which we all know about and which the Minister will hopefully speak about in his

response to the debate? Where do the Government sit regarding ongoing support and commitment to the Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Pneumonia and Diarrhoea, which was introduced by the WHO and UNICEF? How do the Government intend to ensure that

“sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”,

as outlined in sustainable development goal 6, is achieved? What fall-back do they have if that goal is not achieved? Let us consider what happens if we do not get there. What action does the Department for International Development intend to take—I am conscious that this may cross departmental boundaries—in the Nutrition for Growth summit in Rio in August? Has DFID discussed that with stakeholder organisations? If it has, what has been the outcome? Is the Minister yet in a position to state the level of funding that will be provided through the Ross Fund for health interventions, and whether WASH will benefit from the fund? Those are the questions that I wish to pose at this early stage.

Although this issue goes back as far as we can remember, the United Kingdom’s commitment to dealing with it could be significantly better. Investment in water, sanitation and hygiene is extremely cost-effective. According to WaterAid, for every £1 spent we can get £4 in return. In fact, the World Bank has declared that hand-washing with soap is the single most cost-effective intervention. As I mentioned earlier, the Movilla church in Newtownards has sent bars of soap over to Africa, because that is one of the small ways in which we can make a difference.

The lack of sanitation services is estimated to cost the world more than US\$250 million per annum. The United Kingdom currently spends some 2% of its bilateral aid budget on water and sanitation, compared with around 13% on education and 19% on health. However, we need to be careful that we are not jumping the gun on this one, as access to clean water and sanitation can often be a prerequisite for success in other development areas such as education and health, and we must acknowledge the overlap between these issues.

Yesterday I had the chance to speak to representatives of some organisations who were keen to add their comments, to help with this debate. When we consider health, water and sanitation, we also have to consider the environment. I will just mark up one thing. Management of habitats is important; it can lead to better water access or worse water access, and to better or worse sanitation. I heard a comment yesterday about Madagascar, where people’s access to water is threatened by habitat destruction over huge areas. The destruction of the African wetlands deprives people of access to drinking water, and threatens livelihoods that depend on water, such as fishing, and the core survival of some people, including some tribes. In Madagascar, deforestation and erosion threaten almost every wetland, and as a result many thousands of people are in trouble and many species could be lost for ever.

I will just mark something else up; it is completely off the line of this debate, but is none the less important. The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust is trying to help to save the Madagascar Pochard, or the “Mad Pochard” as it is called, which is the world’s rarest duck; I am not sure whether calling it “mad” is a compliment or not. In any case, there are only a few dozen left. The point that I am trying to make is that if something is not done about the water and wetland where that duck lives, it

will not be able to provide drinking water for the local people or be used for sanitation, and it will not have any fish living in it either. Again, 6,000 people benefit from that clean water; many livelihoods go with it. That is just a reminder that conservation of nature goes hand in hand with looking after people who depend directly on the natural world.

As I have said, the United Kingdom currently spends some 2% of its bilateral aid budget on water and sanitation, compared with around 13% on education and a large percentage on health. For example, the delivery of quality healthcare in Africa has been seriously hampered by the lack of access to safely managed water. That is why I gave the example from Madagascar.

Sanitation and hygiene also affect practices in healthcare facilities. The WHO and UNICEF estimate that 42% of healthcare facilities in Africa do not have access to a safe water source within 500 metres. According to the WHO, 50% of malnutrition is associated with infections caused by a lack of access to water, sanitation and hygiene.

Globally, malnutrition accounts for some 45% of child deaths, of which a large proportion are within Africa. Children in sub-Saharan Africa are more than four times as likely to die before the age of five than children in developed regions. And after the first month of life, pneumonia and diarrhoea are the leading causes of the death of children under the age of five. Both pneumonia and diarrhoea are inextricably linked to a lack of water, sanitation and hygiene.

We have not had a debate on water aid or sanitation in this Session of Parliament. That is why we have asked for this debate today. First, we aim to raise awareness; secondly, the debate gives hon. Members a chance to participate and add their contributions; and, thirdly, we aim to highlight the issues that we feel are so very important.

Approximately 800,000 children aged between one month and five years died from pneumonia in 2013. Around 1,400 children die every day from preventable diarrhoea, and 58% of diarrhoeal deaths are caused by unsafe water, poor sanitation and poor hygiene. That is incontrovertible evidence that access to clean water and sanitation is essential if we are to see any meaningful development in other areas.

In conclusion, I will just give two examples of what I have talked about; nothing better illustrates the case I am trying to prove than case studies. The first involves child health. The name of the mother is Peggy Mpundu. She is 36 and part of the Mwashia village in Lubwe in Zambia. Peggy recently gave birth to twins, Kapyia and Mpundu, in hospital. Two days later, they were discharged as healthy babies. However, one day after returning home, both babies started having problems breathing. Their parents, Peggy and her husband Sylvester, rushed them back into hospital, but tragically they both died that day. Peggy said:

“I was then told that water from shallow wells was harmful for babies.”

That was the same water that she had used for years. She continued:

“Having bathed my children using water from a shallow well just left me with a feeling of guilt and regret. I wish I knew that water could be so harmful”.

That is the true story of Peggy Mpundu.

The second case study is about opportunities for girls. The name of the girl involved is Erika Makalli, from Tanzania; I know that the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), who is here today, has particular knowledge of that country. Erika, who is 12, lives in Mbalawala village, in Tanzania. Like so many young girls, she was responsible for collecting water for her family, leaving her little time, if any, to go to school. The Tanzanian Government estimate that 58% of the country's rural population do not have access to a safe water supply.

Discussing her old routine, Erika said that previously: “I had to get up at 4 am and walk a long distance to find water. It took two hours and I could only collect a small amount of water to take home. That meant that Mum had to spend most of the day finding water so that we'd have enough to drink and cook with. I used to try and rush to get to school and wouldn't be able to wash or have any breakfast beforehand. Most of the time I missed school altogether because I was sick or just exhausted. There were so many diseases in this village.”

I am very pleased that two officials from WaterAid are here in Westminster Hall today; they have helped me in preparing for this debate. WaterAid started working in the Mbalawala village two years ago and now there is a tapstand 15 minutes' walk from Erika's house and in her school. Erika now attends schools with her friends. Get the water right, get the health right, get the education, give them opportunities—those things follow on from each other. She is a prefect. Discussing the transformation in her life, she said:

“If I still had dirty water I wouldn't be going to school anymore. I probably wouldn't have had any real education at all. Also, most of my friends would probably also have died from the diseases we used to get. Life would be miserable. I feel I can at last look forward to a brighter future. Perhaps I will be a health and hygiene teacher when I leave school.”

WaterAid, this House, our Government and all the many other organisations—whoever they may be, and whether they are Churches, individuals or groups—have enabled that to happen.

Dr Lee Jong-wook, the former director general of the World Health Organisation, said:

“Water and Sanitation is one of the primary drivers of public health. I often refer to it as ‘Health 101’, which means that once we can secure access to clean water and to adequate sanitation facilities for all people, irrespective of the difference in their living conditions, a huge battle against all kinds of diseases will be won.”

I conclude with a question for the Minister. I am convinced that his response will be positive and helpful; I have no doubt about that. The contributions we all make show how united the House is on the issue. I will say it again: in this House, we are fortunate to have access to water for all purposes, whether that is washing, cleaning, sanitation or regular showers. Many of us have a shower every morning, but many people elsewhere would just love to have that water. We have it every day. We have to be the voice for the voiceless. We have to speak here on behalf of those who need help, wherever they may be in the world. Can the Minister give us some idea of the Government's bilateral and multilateral aid reviews? Will he set out and prioritise water and sanitation in the reviews? We need to be ever mindful of the fact that if we start with water and sanitation, then health, education and opportunity follow.

Andrew Percy (in the Chair): The Front Benchers will be called at the usual time. There is plenty of time for the debate, so there is no need for a time limit or anything like that.

1.52 pm

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): It is a delight to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Percy. I did not know that you had been made a Chairman. I am delighted to see someone from our intake—you are possibly the first—become a Chairman in the House.

Andrew Percy (in the Chair): Some have greatness thrust upon them.

Pauline Latham: Absolutely. Congratulations.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing the debate. It is a shame it happened to come on a Thursday afternoon when everyone is desperate to get home, but it is an important debate. I apologise if I repeat things that he said, but I am completely deaf in one ear and 50% deaf in the other since I had a really bad cold. I cannot clear it. Although I listened as much I could, I did not hear very much of what was said, so my apologies if I repeat anything.

Jim Shannon: Is it my accent?

Pauline Latham: Just this once, it was not the hon. Gentleman's accent that confused me, but the fact I could not hear. That is my problem, and I apologise.

Clean water is one of the fundamental things that we expect to have. In this country, we have had it for donkey's years, but we recently saw the problems in the north-west when water was contaminated for some time. One suddenly realised how much we take it for granted in this country that we can wash and use the washing machine and probably the dishwasher. We can have a shower or bath or clean our teeth with no worries at all. That incident showed the population of Britain that we use a huge amount of water without thinking about it.

For those in a developing country—we know that almost a third of the global population lack access to sanitation facilities and more than 660 million people lack access to clean water—it is a daily problem that they have to live with and deal with. We see so many young people dying under the age of five because they do not have access to clean water or sanitation. We and many other countries accept water as something that we can use at any time, and we should be looking to help the countries affected. Other countries have to look themselves at improving clean water facilities, but it is incredibly difficult. Where does a President or a Government start if people have no decent housing, no clean water, no or few sanitation facilities, no education and no good health facilities?

Without clean water, people cannot have access to education or decent healthcare. I have seen some hospitals where there is no running water—how can a hospital facility have no running water? How can things be kept clean? Even in the Crimean war, Florence Nightingale understood that the one thing needed in a hospital is cleanliness and sanitation. That was a very long time ago, but some countries in Africa do not have that facility, and that is totally shocking.

I am pleased to see that sustainable development goal 6 is the aim of achieving universal access to safe water and sanitation by 2030, but 2030 is not very far away—only

14 years. We have been involved in international development for many years, as have many other countries, non-governmental organisations, charities and individuals, along with diaspora communities that send money back. Why do some Governments appear to have little will to install decent water facilities? It is not difficult to do; it just needs a comprehensive plan.

As a member of the Select Committee on International Development, I have visited many countries in Africa where I have been shocked by the poor facilities that people have to live with. For instance, when we went on a visit to Burundi, we were embedded in a house right out in the sticks for 24 hours with no water and no sanitation. The only place to go to the toilet was where they had literally dug a hole specifically for me to go in. I found that rather embarrassing—not for me, but for them to have to do that. They did it, though, and the joke was that they made a wooden box for me to sit on so that I would not have to squat. They thought that as a westerner, I would not have been able to cope with that. It would not have bothered me, but they have to deal with that all the time, and I do not know that things are that much better now in Burundi. There are a lot of other problems there, but when there is conflict in an area, it makes things harder still, and not just for the people living there. How do Governments, if they are in conflict and there is a civil war, or whatever the situation is, deal with the country's problems with water and sanitation?

I have spent a lot of my time in Uganda with a friend of mine who was a Member of Parliament there. Sadly, he lost at the last election; I do not think it was quite fair. He was very keen on helping his community have sanitation and water as well as decent health. He is a doctor, so he is very keen on health facilities, but he was struggling. I was able to go to Uganda at the beginning of this year, and I saw for myself the problems with malaria. There is no clean water. I went to a hospital that had no sheets on the bed. The parents and family members who had to go to that hospital with their children had nowhere to go to the loo. It was a state-run hospital, and I think that situation is pretty appalling. Some of the children who were in the hospitals I went to did not have malaria. They might have had dysentery or diarrhoea, which are relatively easy to cure if there is clean water and the right medication.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The hon. Lady made an interesting reference to the pit latrine that she encountered in Burundi, but does she agree that those are the least of the problem? Within memory, people in this country had to use toilets at the bottom of their garden or chamber pots. Part of the problem is that there are too many parts of the world where people are still accustomed to defecating in the open, in fields, with all the hygiene problems that that causes.

Pauline Latham: I was going to mention that problem. I well remember living in Lincolnshire as a child and having to go down the garden to the toilet. There was a large seat for the adults and a small seat for the children. I did not mind doing that, because I had not known anything different. Of course, at night we had a chamber pot, and when it was freezing cold it was frozen in the morning. That is not that many years ago; I know I am

old, but I am not as old as the Queen, although I suspect she never went down the garden to the loo. Nevertheless, I remember doing that, and it was something that one lived with. I remember having a tin bath in front of the fire with everybody around me—there was no hot water upstairs. I was tiny, but I do remember it. It has not been that many years since we solved the problem, but we have solved it.

As the hon. Lady says, one problem is open defecation. I described the hole in the ground in Burundi, and it was a tiny hole just for me, not for anyone else. The problem with open defecation is that people have to go into the bushes to get some privacy, so they are at risk of rape and all sorts of violence. Of course, when the rains come, all the sewage is washed through the villages, which is one of the biggest problems in many places. When the Select Committee went to South Sudan, we saw that was happening. The people in the refugee camp who had been told to leave Sudan and go to South Sudan—although they and previous generations had never lived there, they were considered South Sudanese, so they had to go and had walked there—had no toilet facilities and no water. People can go to collect water, but toilet facilities are a basic human right and everybody should have them. It is a huge problem.

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): The hon. Lady is making a number of interesting points. Interesting though this trip down memory lane is, for most of us these are memories, either distant or otherwise, because we recognise the need for proper sanitation facilities. Is it not right that the focus of the debate is on how we can work with others to ensure that everyone has access to those same facilities?

Pauline Latham: Yes, they should have access to those facilities.

The WHO and UNICEF joint monitoring programme has drawn up a ladder of WASH—water, sanitation and hygiene—facilities, ranked according to their degree of safety. The facilities fall into the following categories, from the most to the least safe. The safest are “safely managed” facilities, which include

“drinking water sources that are located on premises, and are free of faecal and chemical contamination. Private sanitation facilities where excreta are safely disposed are also included.”

That was what I had, because the night soil men used to come once a week to clear it out. That was absolutely safe, but it was still pretty basic, and people would not want to be doing it now. “Basic” facilities include

“piped water sources, protected groundwater sources (such as standpipes, hand-pumps and protected dug wells) within a 30 minute round trip of a household. ‘Basic’ sanitation facilities include flush, or pour-based toilet systems connected to a piped sewer or septic tank and contained pit latrines. Hand washing facilities with both soap and water are counted as basic”—

but without them, how can there be any sort of hygiene?

“Unimproved” facilities include

“unprotected groundwater sources, water provided by tankers, or water sources that are greater than 30 minutes-walk from a household. Shared sanitation facilities, uncontained pit latrines and handwashing facilities with no soap are also included.”

“Open defecation”, which is the worst and the least safe, is where

“human faeces are disposed of directly into the open environment”,

as the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) mentioned earlier.

When there is a move towards proper, contained pit latrines—not open pit latrines—that are emptied regularly, it is important that girls and boys at schools have separate facilities, because many girls say they cannot go to school because they are in danger of being raped in the toilets. If they cannot go to the toilet in private, that is horrific. Not only that, but if they have to share the facilities, they cannot go when they are menstruating because they find it embarrassing and are likely to be made fun of, so they need better facilities than most schools, particularly those in rural areas, currently have. They need that protection so that they feel safe and have privacy and can go to the toilet during menstruation and at other times without feeling threatened. That is not the only reason why girls do not go to school, but it is quite a large one.

Diarrhoea kills many under-fives, so there should be better testing and better, quicker medication. Mothers often think it is malaria when it is not. There are rapid diagnostic tests, but we all know that in some places in some African countries, the rapid diagnostic tests and medication do not get to pharmacies or health facilities. Better access would help many children to live much longer.

The Department for International Development is providing funding to the SHINE—sanitation, hygiene and infant nutrition efficacy—trial. People will have poor nutrition if they do not have clean water for mixing bottles or whatever. Mothers without clean water will also have problems before they have children. Many children either die before birth—stillbirths or spontaneous abortions—or have low birth weights or stunting. Children who have been stunted never catch up, so access to clean water is needed. I am pleased that DFID is providing £7.2 million of funding to support the SHINE trial that is currently under way in Zimbabwe, because that is another problem that children without clean water face—they seem to have one thing piled on top of another.

As I said earlier, I have worked very closely with a friend who was a Member of Parliament and a medical doctor. In his former constituency is a place that I know only as a landing site. It is on the lake between Kampala and Jinja. The people there spend their whole lives on the lake, because they are fishermen, fisherwomen and indeed fisherchildren—many of the children have to go out fishing and are exploited by their employers. They have water, but because it is not clean there is a lot of disease and stunting. They have very poor livelihoods. They drown in the water because they cannot swim—they are not allowed to, because the water is too heavily contaminated. They need their own borehole, because they have to walk miles to get to one, so of course they do not bother. More places should have at least a simple borehole so that people can access clean water.

I know about the importance of boreholes from my experience with a charity called Free The Children, which the Minister will know. I went out to Kenya with Free The Children staff to see what they were doing there. They are building health facilities and schools in communities, and they put a borehole next to schools so that the children—particularly the girls—can go to school and take water home in the evening. That saves an awful lot of worry for the parents, because they know that the water is clean and that their children are

[*Pauline Latham*]

in school, so they are safe and getting an education. There are health facilities nearby to which the mothers can go for pre-natal classes and monitoring, so they are helped too.

There was something that I did not appreciate until I did it for myself. We walked a kilometre with the yellow cans that people put on their heads, although we had them on a rope band around our heads. I could not lift the large, 20-litre ones; I could not even get them off the ground. I managed to get a 10-litre one off the ground, but I could not physically manage to get it all the way back, so somebody had to help me. That was a lesson for me. I have been to countries where women and children walk miles to collect their water, but I had never thought of the weight. Not only is it not good for people to have it on their head, because it affects their neck muscles—although they are obviously more used to it—but the sheer weight of the can means that getting it home is problematic. Sometimes people have to do that 10 times a day to get clean water for their family. A big lesson for me was not just the distances that people have to walk but the weight that they have to carry. We have to encourage children to go to school; that has to be done better. If they have to have a water facility that requires them to carry the water like that, it is incredibly important that it is close to a school and/or a health facility. I am very pleased that DFID is doing a lot of work in that area.

We have to concentrate on water facilities and work with the charities that do such a good job of providing them, but we have to monitor them to ensure that they are being used and that people have access to spare parts. In some parts of the world, a facility can be put in, but unless the spare parts are easily available and simple to install, it will go into disuse. I have seen that happen in Africa. The International Development Committee went somewhere where there was a borehole and a pump, but the pump was broken so the people could not use it and had to go to the next one.

There are many things that can be done to help people in sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the world to access water, but we need to act fast. If we are serious about giving everybody access to water by 2030, we have got only 14 years left, which is not very long at all. I thank the hon. Member for Strangford for securing this debate on this important subject. I am delighted that I have been able to take part in it.

2.12 pm

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Mr Percy. I apologise to you and the Front Benchers for not being able to stay for the whole debate. I have a meeting in my constituency later, so I have to get the train. As Members know, my constituency is quite a way away, so it will take me a few hours to get there. I congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing this debate.

The UN defines access to safe water and sanitation facilities as basic human rights. Promoting hygiene is widely regarded to be one of the most cost-effective ways of improving public health. Poor water and a lack of sanitation have a wide range of negative effects. For

example, they are major causes of infectious diseases; they have knock-on effects on educational attainment, public health and economic productivity; and they exacerbate the impact of disease outbreaks, such as Ebola and the Zika virus. That is why this debate is so important, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing it to the House.

Given the amount of time we spend in Parliament discussing access to healthcare and education, it is interesting that we do not spend enough time discussing access to clean water and sanitation. Those issues underpin people's life chances, so it is extraordinary that we do not look at them in more detail and more often. I hope that today we will be able to set out a clear way forward, which will enable us to return to this issue in later months.

Brendan O'Hara: On that point, will the hon. Lady join me in congratulating organisations such as WaterAid on their great work? They not only educate the wider public but come directly to parliamentarians to give us knowledge about what they do. WaterAid works in 37 countries around the world. I pay tribute to the work that it and other organisations do.

Dr Blackman-Woods: I was going to acknowledge WaterAid's work later in my speech, not least because Northumbrian Water, which is based in my constituency, does a lot of work with it. Northumbrian Water has been very energetic in getting MPs in our region to take note of the sort of issues that WaterAid gets involved with.

Since 2000, there have been two rounds of UN-sponsored global international development goals. The first was the millennium development goals, which ran from 2000 to 2015 and aimed to halve the number of people without access to improved drinking water and sanitation. Interestingly, the water target was met but the sanitation target was not met by a considerable amount—about 700 million people. The headline figures mask large geographical variations among countries and between rural and urban populations.

The MDGs have been replaced by the sustainable development goals. SDG 6 relates to what we are talking about this afternoon. We need to take on board the lessons learned from the MDGs, which showed that a donor-led approach on its own is not enough. Work has to be done in partnership with the recipient countries. There can be too much of a focus on short-term targets, rather than long-term viability. The hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) touched on that point when she said that the facilities that are put in might not be appropriate or sustainable. It is really important that there is some sort of community partnership. There was a failure to exploit links with the private sector fully. The focus was on absolute numbers, so the poorest were often neglected because they were not picked out as a group for targeted intervention. I will talk more about SDG 6 in a moment, but it is interesting that it was informed by the lessons learned from the MDGs.

Globally, one in 10 people still has no access to a safe water source, and one in three has no access to proper sanitation. In parts of Africa, a third of the population does not have access to clean water. In Ethiopia alone, 42.2 million people have no access to safe water. There is still a significant problem, which is a big problem for

the new SDG goal to meet in 14 years. Yet we know that it is really important. There cannot be societal transformation without proper access to clean water and sanitation. We know that from our own experience. It was only when the UK recognised, from its public health problems, that we needed properly piped water that we got the economic development that moved us on. There was a transformation in our public health, and that is what we want to see in other countries.

We are not only talking about health, because research has shown that, for every \$1 spent on water and sanitation, \$4 would be generated in increased economic opportunity. It has been estimated that, if everyone had universal access to water and sanitation, there would be \$32 billion in economic benefits each year globally, from reductions in healthcare costs and from increased productivity as a result of reduced illness.

Interestingly, more than a quarter of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa are poorer now than they were in 1960. Therefore, foreign aid is going in, but if it is not directed in the right way, we do not necessarily get the development that we would want. The lack of access to clean water and basic sanitation is among the reasons given for the lack of economic development flowing from aid. Some of the biggest challenges are in sub-Saharan Africa: only about 30% of individuals have access to improved sanitation services; and nearly half of all people who use unimproved sources live in the region.

We have already heard this afternoon about some of the health impacts. According to the World Health Organisation, 50% of malnutrition is associated with infections caused by a lack of access to water, sanitation and hygiene. Globally, malnutrition accounts for 45% of child deaths, of which a large proportion is in Africa. A truly stark figure, also mentioned by the hon. Member for Strangford, involves children in sub-Saharan Africa, who are over 14 times more likely to die before the age of five than children in developed regions. The figures speak for themselves and are clear: there is an urgent need to improve access to clean water and good sanitation.

Another thing we have heard this afternoon is that limited access to clean water and good sanitation disproportionately affects women and girls, who are more than twice as likely as men to be responsible for water collection. On average, women and girls in developing countries walk 6 km each day to collect water—time that could be spent in school or at work. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, each day, women spend a combined total of at least 16 million hours collecting drinking water. That is a truly staggering figure.

Additionally, more than half of girls who drop out of primary school in sub-Saharan Africa do so because of a lack of separate toilets and easy access to safe water. However, the issue is to provide not any sanitation, but the right sort of sanitation. I have visited villages in Asia and Africa where money has come through for new sanitation in schools. Toilet blocks were put in, but the schools might as well not have bothered, because the toilets were communal ones, could be too easily accessed by a wide range of people, or had doors that did not close properly—people could look over the top. There was a complete lack of consideration about what actually needed to happen to make the toilets a secure, safe place, in particular for girls, enabling them to stay on at school. So, alas, despite new sanitation facilities, the girls could not continue at school anyway, because

they still did not feel safe. So many girls leave education at puberty. Obviously, therefore, co-operation with the local community is necessary, and water sources should be as close as possible to the people who need them.

I will now outline some of the things for which WaterAid is calling, before finishing with a few questions for the Minister. As we know, world leaders committed to reach everyone, everywhere with safe water and sanitation by 2030. That is a wide-ranging goal, with eight objectives, and if they are met that should be a good and helpful step forward. WaterAid, however, has said that Governments must bring about a dramatic and long-term increase in public and private financing for water, sanitation and hygiene to achieve strong, national systems so that there is universal access. Private and public sectors need to co-operate effectively to achieve that universal access. An integrated approach could ensure that improving access to water, sanitation and hygiene services is embedded in plans, policies and programmes on health, nutrition, education, gender equality and employment. Last but not least, pledges made at the 2015 Paris climate summit must be implemented, because they are about the long-term sustainability of water supplies.

Are the Government using their strong voice internationally to push up the international agenda the importance of clean water and sanitation? SDG 6 should become a real priority, so how will progress towards achieving it be monitored internationally? Will the Government use the expertise of the Department for International Development, which works on some very good schemes, to inform best practice everywhere and to ensure that women and girls are prioritised for sanitation and water supply?

Jim Shannon: There is much talk in the press maligning DFID projects, or saying that some are not used properly. Sometimes it is good, as the hon. Lady has just done, to focus on some of the excellent work that DFID does and on the projects that are successful. It is good to remind us of such things, because everything is not negative.

Dr Blackman-Woods: I echo that point. I urge the Minister to use that good experience to help to roll out best practice elsewhere.

2.27 pm

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Percy. I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for securing the debate and for speaking so eloquently, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) and the hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods).

I will give two examples from my own experience of why this issue is so important. In 1982, I visited for the first time a country that was then a developing country—Peru. I was in the high Andes and visiting a friend of mine, Philip Archer, who was a doctor with a mission there. For the first part of his service—three or four years—he had been a doctor at a health centre. Time after time, the patients who came through his door had diseases that were caused by poor water or lack of water. For his second period of service, he said, “There is no point in my treating the symptoms; I will treat the

[Jeremy Lefroy]

cause”, so he ended up becoming a public health educator and putting in water systems to help the people of the high Andes.

My second example is perhaps closer to home. My wife ran a public health education programme in northern Tanzania, Kilimanjaro region, for the Evangelical Lutheran Church Northern diocese. As part of the programme, she and her colleagues also saw the problems caused by poor water—not so much on the mountain, where there was plenty of water, although sanitation was sometimes an issue, but on the plains, in particular among the Masai, and elsewhere. She, too, said, “There’s not much point talking to people about health education when they don’t have water, or if they do, they have to walk several kilometres to it.” The problems that that brings have been eloquently described. Collecting water is usually—almost always—done by women or girls. They suffer attacks from wild animals. We heard of people being killed and very badly hurt by crocodiles when collecting water from rivers and, when walking through the bush, by other wild animals. People are also attacked by humans from time to time—they have to cope with all that as well as missing out on their education or livelihood.

With the help of the Rabobank Foundation of the Netherlands, the northern diocese of the Lutheran Church instituted a programme for drilling shallow wells in various villages. In my view that was done in a very sensible manner—I have to say that because my wife was in charge of the project and she is an extremely sensible person, as were her colleagues. They did it under the guidance of the local community, which, first of all, would come to them and say, “Let’s have a shallow well. We really want one.” They then had to show a sign of commitment, so the idea was that the well would be drilled with money from the Rabobank Foundation and other donations, but the villagers would collect the money for the pump. By doing that, they would assume responsibility for the pump and for its maintenance.

By and large, the programme worked well. I shall be going back to Tanzania later this year and I hope to see some of the wells that were drilled up to 20 years ago—or even longer—still in operation and maintained, with the villagers contributing a set amount each month for the pump’s maintenance. Perhaps they will have replaced the pump in that time with the money that they have accumulated.

To me, the programme spoke of a lot of things: first, of the determination of the people themselves. They wanted clean water and could see the impact on their wives and daughters; the women were the loudest in saying, “We want this.” Secondly, these were not massive programmes. This was not a huge project. It involved a few thousand dollars per village and the villagers themselves were able to collect several hundred dollars for the pump. We are therefore talking about small programmes, the impact of which, as we have seen in the International Development Committee, is sometimes overlooked. However, a great deal can be achieved by running a large number of small village and community-based programmes.

At the same time, sanitation was a clear issue. Public health education was the way to convey the importance of good sanitation, and it did not take a lot of money;

this was a public health programme that covered several hundred thousand people yet probably cost only a few cents per person per year. People did not have to be given money; once they were told the importance of putting in more modern sanitation and modern toilets, they did so, because they saw how obvious it was. They heard about the consequences of poor sanitation and poor water and did something about it. I will come on to what I would like to ask the Minister at the end, but I am talking now about a relatively modestly funded programme achieving significant results. The educators, who were trained by my wife and her team, would go out into their community, month in, month out, and encourage people to improve the sanitation in their homes and villages.

My final point is about the link with disease, which has already been made very clear and is completely uncontroversial. If we look at the diarrheal diseases, in particular, and one or two others that are classified among the neglected tropical diseases—I declare an interest as chair of the all-party group on malaria and neglected tropical diseases, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire also contributes hugely—we see that many of these diseases are directly linked to a lack of water or poor water and a lack of hygiene. I know that DFID has made neglected tropical diseases a key part of its programme from 2011 onwards. Indeed, under the previous Labour Government, a significant sum of £50 million was committed, which was raised to £240 million over five years under the coalition Government. It has been shown that there is a huge payback from work on neglected tropical diseases—something like £30 to £40 for every £1 invested.

Will the Minister commit, first, to look at the whole area of water and sanitation and see what more can be done? This is a very basic thing. I saw the impact at first hand 35 years ago, yet we are still talking about it. Let us do more.

Secondly, let us do it in a smart way. There are so many programmes around the world. Water Aid is a fantastic organisation that has contributed to many of them, but there are so many programmes that are not big and which perhaps go under the radar. Let us see how we can support them as a country. We may have to go through a larger organisation to do so, but let us ask how we can do more than we are doing at the moment. Let us not hear colleagues come to us and say, “Well, I’ve got a link in my constituency to a water project in Africa, but I cannot get DFID to support it because it is too small.” Excellent programmes such as Aid Match and Aid Direct have made a real impact in this area, but let us make water programmes a priority; they are ideal and they very much fit into that category of spending.

Thirdly, let us look at how we can support health education programmes, which, again, are often fairly low-key but incredibly effective. They can be run through government, faith groups, Churches and community organisations and are often low-cost, involving amounts of money that do not appear on DFID’s radar. There must be ways of ensuring that these programmes are supported, either through some kind of match funding or direct funding, or even possibly, as we have suggested in our Committee, by making funds available to local DFID offices for support, without people having to go through the centre, with the time and effort that that involves.

Finally, I emphasise again the importance of continuing to support neglected tropical diseases alongside the work on WASH—water, sanitation and hygiene. In fact, WASH projects and NTD projects should go together. Even though providing medicines to schoolchildren to get rid of worms is excellent, there is little point in doing that year after year when those children will get worms back immediately because the water is poor. Let us have the two kinds of projects going hand in hand. As the current programmes come to an end and the Department considers the future funding of neglected tropical diseases, I urge the Minister to consider the huge value for money that those programmes provide.

Thank you for chairing the debate, Mr Percy, and I thank the hon. Member for Strangford for securing it.

2.38 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr Percy. Although I am responding for the Scottish National party from the Front Bench, I would like to put on record the apologies of the SNP's international spokesperson, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). He has important constituency work today, otherwise he would have been here; this is a cause he is very passionate about.

I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for securing this important debate, which has been really good. I have a feeling that because he covered the issue so comprehensively, a lot of my comments will be prefaced by, "As the hon. Member for Strangford said earlier". The two cases he mentioned at the end of his speech were very powerful and illustrated the need for further action on water and sanitation in Africa.

The hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) certainly added to the debate, giving examples from Burundi, Uganda and South Sudan. She talked about open defecation in the fields and witnessing the sewage traversing towards villages, and that underpins the need for more action. I must say, I have learned more today about Members' childhood toilet activities than I thought I would.

The hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) made some important points about the millennium development goals and learning lessons for the sustainable development goals. She made a powerful point about sub-Saharan countries being poorer now than in the 1960s.

The hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) presented some excellent examples from his personal knowledge of and involvement in projects. Importantly, he touched on the fact that small programmes and smart working are the way forward. There does not have to be big money. We hear about expenditure on headline projects and the overseas aid budget, but the way forward is to work smart and invest in small, sustainable projects so that communities can take ownership of them.

I am a civil engineer, and prior to being elected to this place, I spent my career in the water industry. I have always known the importance of clean water and sanitation in this country, let alone in the developing world. I used to do presentations in schools, and to try to capture the children's imagination I used the example that the water infrastructure in this country saves more lives than the

NHS. That is backed up by the fact that the World Bank has declared that hand-washing with soap is the single most cost-effective health intervention.

Hon. Members have touched on the fact that because we have a successful water and sanitation infrastructure in this country, many people fit for granted. Some people complain about the taste of water if there is a slight change and do not realise that it is still perfectly healthy and provides great health benefits. They complain if they lose their water supply for three hours and cannot put their kettle or have a bath or shower, without realising that some people without water and sanitation face personal challenges every day.

It was when I worked for Scottish Water and its predecessor that I became aware of WaterAid and WaterAid Scotland, and I pay tribute to them. What struck me when I first went to a WaterAid presentation was the sustainability aspect of the projects it invests in, which struck a chord with me. That touches on the point the hon. Member for Stafford made about smart investment in sustainable projects. I am also impressed by the wider education that WaterAid is involved in. As my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) said, it is fantastic at engaging MPs and widening their education, but it goes further than that in its education programme.

I was pleased that earlier this year a school in my constituency, James Hamilton Academy, won WaterAid's star supporters competition as a result of its innovative learning programme about water collection and sustainability. The project challenged pupils to think differently about water usage and to compare their usage with that of a child in the developing world. We can safely say that the pupils will no longer take their water supply for granted.

Another example of education was in October 2015 when a group of Scottish Water staff headed out to Zambia to visit WaterAid projects. They visited communities with and without access to safe water, which helped them to gain a real understanding of the challenges facing communities. Since their return, the Zambia team have delivered numerous presentations to their colleagues at Scottish Water. That became an ongoing education programme to spread the word.

Statistics highlight the importance of this debate. It is a basic fact that unclean water and the lack of basic sanitation prevents the eradication of poverty and disease globally, and particularly in Africa. It is well documented that water and sanitation are necessary for success in many other development areas, such as improving health, education and the prospects of women and girls.

In sub-Saharan Africa, only 68% of people have access to clean water and 30% to adequate sanitation. That means children in sub-Saharan Africa are more than 14 times more likely to die before the age of five than children in developed regions. In Uganda, 80% of the population does not have a safe place to go to the toilet. Every year, 500,000 children, most of whom live in Africa, die from diarrhoea caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation. That is more than one child every minute.

Pauline Latham: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is not a proud record for a President who has been in power in Uganda for more than 30 years? What

[*Pauline Latham*]

progress has been made over the past 30-odd years? The President plans to carry on for ever. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the situation in that country is desperate?

Alan Brown: I agree with the hon. Lady. She obviously has a good understanding of Uganda, and I thank her for her intervention.

More than 9,000 children die every year in Ethiopia alone from diarrhoea caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation. Approximately 800,000 children aged between one month and five years died from pneumonia in 2013, and about 1,400 children die every day from preventable diarrhoea. Some 58% of diarrhoeal deaths are caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation and hygiene.

The effects of a lack of water and sanitation go much further than just disease, as other hon. Members have said. It affects all aspects of life and has a profound impact on women and girls in Africa. As we have heard, they are typically responsible for collecting water for their family, and girls spend as many as six hours a day collecting water, leaving them little time to go to school. In many places, schools are not located within villages or close to where people work, so if girls must travel for hours to collect water, they face the problem of having to travel for hours to go to school as well, so attendance is difficult.

Without a safe and private place to go to the toilet, many girls are forced to drop out of school when they start to menstruate. Many women and girls also have to wait until night to relieve themselves in the open, which causes further health problems and strips them of dignity. Many are harassed or even assaulted. A former work colleague of mine who went to India on a fact-finding mission gave harrowing accounts of women being raped as they went out at night to open fields to use as a toilet. Clearly, the same can happen in Africa.

A lack of clean water also makes it extremely difficult to give birth safely, and mother and child often do not survive. I would like to illustrate that point with one case. Aisha Mkude, who is 38, lives in Lugono village in Tanzania. Last year, she gave birth to her first son, who was born healthy. Aisha says she left the hospital feeling joyful, but just two days later her son got a high fever and started discharging smelly water from his belly button, so she returned to the clinic with him. She says:

“There wasn’t enough water at the health centre when I gave birth, resulting in him catching an infection.”

That was because after the birth, she had washed herself and her baby in water that her brother’s wife had fetched for her from the nearby river. It was the dry season, so she had to dig out part of the river to get water. Unfortunately Aisha’s son lived for only seven days, but if there had been regular availability of safe water at the health centre, that situation would have been prevented. She says:

“I feel so bad because I never expected this but because it has happened I will just accept it.”

She should not have to accept it, and that is the thrust of today’s debate. That example highlights the importance of WaterAid’s Healthy Start campaign, which brings into sharp focus the importance of water, sanitation and hygiene in improving the health and nutrition of newborns and children.

That example also illustrates why global action and co-operation are required in a wider context. To that end, we welcome the UN members signing up to the sustainable development goals, particularly goal 6—access to water and sanitation for all by 2030. It is vital that the UK Government set an ambitious and realistic agenda to help ensure that that framework of goals is achieved.

Other hon. Members have touched on this point, but investment in water, sanitation and hygiene is an extremely cost-effective way to spend the UK’s aid budget. We have heard about the 1:4 ratio—for every £1 spent on improving access to water and sanitation, an estimated £4 is returned. We also need to consider that according to the World Bank, total global economic losses due to inadequate water supply and sanitation services have been estimated at \$260 billion a year. That illustrates the fact that it is imperative that suitable money be committed. At present, only 2% of UK bilateral aid goes to water, sanitation and hygiene. I put my name to a letter issued in the name of the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) calling on the Government to increase that percentage. It would be good if the Minister could give his thoughts on that.

The hon. Member for Strangford touched on the fact that the House is generally united on this subject, but I will make one criticism of the Government. Their overseas development aid needs to be concentrated on programmes relating to water and sanitation projects throughout Africa and elsewhere, instead of on defence. I am concerned that there is increasing double-counting of defence expenditure towards both the NATO targets and official development assistance, through mechanisms such as the conflict, security and stability fund. We should not blur the lines between aid and defence spending. The Government need to realign their moral compass and redirect aid towards those who need it most. The £1 billion conflict, security and stability fund, which the UK Government lists as overseas development aid, is not an appropriate use of UK aid spend. Indeed, in February 2016, Oxfam, Global Citizen and ONE called on Governments across Europe to ensure that aid budgets are used only for poverty eradication and sustainable development.

On a more positive note, I welcome the Government’s commitment to reach a further 60 million people with access to clean water and sanitation by 2020. I look forward to seeing how that will be advanced when the bilateral aid review is published. I suggest, however, that the Government could be even more ambitious.

In Scotland, the SNP-led Government are also committed to boosting water and sanitation projects in Africa, through their climate justice fund. In December 2015, Nicola Sturgeon announced £12 million of funding to help mitigate the effects of climate change on the world’s most vulnerable populations. That was a doubling of the climate justice fund. The head of Oxfam Scotland, Jamie Livingstone, said that

“the Scottish Government’s enhanced commitment to climate justice is very welcome—it increases the funding promised and creates much needed predictability.”

The work enabled by that fund has focused on clean water provision and is aimed at mapping pollution sources, which are very often sanitation facilities. The Scottish Government are working to position water and sanitation assets to maximise access and minimise cross-contamination.

A lot of good work is ongoing, and there is the ambitious aim to supply water and sanitation to all by 2030. As the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire said, that is not far away, but I remind the House that even if we achieve that goal by 2030, there will still be millions of deaths before then, and that is why urgent action is needed.

2.54 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Percy. I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for initiating this very important debate. I listened with interest to the contributions from the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham), my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) and the hon. Members for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown). They all brought their different perspectives and insights to bear on this subject.

[MR PETER BONE *in the Chair*]

I do not want to repeat the points that have already been made, but I will begin by saying this. Last week, I was thousands of miles away from this Chamber in Somaliland, in the horn of Africa, where people are suffering an absolute lack of clean water—drought. If the Minister will forgive me, I will say a few words about the incidence of drought in eastern and southern Africa before I complete my remarks.

However, on the question of clean water and sanitation, I, like others, pay my respects to WaterAid, an international organisation whose mission is to transform the lives of the poorest and most marginalised people by improving access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene. As hon. Members have said, WaterAid works with partners in 37 countries, and within Africa it works in 11 countries. Its global advocacy priority focuses on the importance of water, sanitation and hygiene in improving the health and nutrition of newborns and children.

There can be a tendency in advanced western societies to take clean water for granted. In this country, we expect to turn on a tap and see clean water. We probably spend more time worrying about water, precipitation and rain than about its absence, but I remind the Chamber that, in north America, people are just coming through an awful crisis, in Flint, Michigan, caused by an absence of clean water. In 2014, the water supply for that very poor city in Michigan was changed to save money. As a consequence, for the past two years, the people of Flint have been exposed to polluted water; 6,000 to 12,000 children have been exposed to drinking water with high levels of lead; and, most recently, Government officials have had to resign and criminal charges have been filed. Even in relatively prosperous western countries, we should not take clean water for granted.

Before the Minister responds to the debate, I have the following points to put to him; they were reflected in earlier speeches by my colleagues. Hon. Members want the Government to set an ambitious agenda that will help to ensure that SDG 6 is achieved. It is crucial that water, sanitation and hygiene are integrated into Government plans to help to achieve other goals—for example, on poverty, hunger, education and gender

equality. Water, sanitation and hygiene are enablers for and signifiers of different types of development, so the UK Government should prioritise water, sanitation and hygiene. That of course includes increased resources. The proportion of UK bilateral aid that goes to water, sanitation and hygiene is currently just 2%. We would like those resources to be increased and will be interested to hear what the Minister has to say to that. We would like water, sanitation and hygiene to be integrated into relevant health and nutrition programmes, including those to be announced in the bilateral aid review, which is expected shortly.

The UK Government should use their global influence to encourage national Governments to ensure that water and sanitation is prioritised. It is a contradiction that in Ghana, for instance, residential developments being built now are the equal of any in Miami or elsewhere in north America, but it is the country with the second highest level of open defecation in the world. We want to ensure in these societies that as well as private affluence, we see an end to public squalor. That includes public defecation and an emphasis on clean water, sanitation and hygiene.

This August, global leaders will attend a crucial summit on nutrition to pledge resources to tackle all forms of malnutrition. At that summit, we would all like the Government to prioritise water, sanitation and hygiene within any financial commitments that are made. The Government should also make clear the links between water, sanitation and hygiene and nutrition in keynote speeches that they deliver.

We are faced with many development challenges in an increasingly globalised world, but drought in the horn of Africa and southern Africa is a real issue. I was pleased to visit British Somaliland last week with the Muslim Charities Forum to see at first hand the consequences of that absence of water and to understand how problematic an absolute lack of water is. The peoples of Somaliland are largely pastoral, and they take their flocks of goats, sheep and camels from region to region looking for water to graze. In effect, they follow the clouds. A succession of seasons of drought has put them in a serious position. The danger in British Somaliland is that drought may turn into famine.

We know that Ministers have some excellent programmes in Somalia, but immediate help is needed, both to provide water, food and shelter and to make regions such as Somalia resilient to the increasing incidence of drought, which means more boreholes, better irrigation and better methods of storing rainwater. We saw flash floods when we left British Somaliland, but the water runs off the earth and into the rivers. Clean water is an issue, but so is an absolute lack of water. If the Minister is unable to answer now, will he write on what is being done to help the people of Somalia to deal with the incidence of drought that they are enduring now and on what is being done to help them to be resilient? With climate change, such regions of the world, which once might have seen drought every seven years or every decade, are seeing drought year after year. They need help in both the short term and the medium term to become resilient to drought.

It is easy in a country such as the UK to take water for granted, but whether it is the complete absence of water in the shape of drought, the absence of clean water or the absence of sanitation, such issues are

[Ms Diane Abbott]

crucial for developing countries. In this Chamber, which is within a few hundred yards of the River Thames and Peter Bazalgette's great sewer, we cannot forget that nothing in the 19th century pushed back the incidence of infectious disease more than the creation of genuinely clean water and access to sanitation. What we did in the UK in the 19th century we can do in Africa and the developing world in the 21st century. I await the Minister's response with interest.

3.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Nick Hurd): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. You have missed a good debate, with some typically thoughtful Back-Bench contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) and from the hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods), who unfortunately has had to go back to her constituency. I join others in congratulating the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing this debate, which is an opportunity to throw light on an important issue that is central to what we do to try to help people in Africa out of poverty. It is worth remembering that we invested almost £800 million of taxpayers' money in that work in the last Parliament. People complain about the smallness of that as a percentage of overall spending, but it is a lot of money to most of our constituents. It is therefore important to take such opportunities to remind ourselves of why we are spending that money and to what effect, and to ask ourselves whether we are doing enough.

Like others, I congratulate WaterAid on its work, and through the hon. Gentleman I congratulate the charities and churches and the scouts in his constituency on their work, which is emblematic of some of the small-scale, hugely valuable work to which my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford also alluded. I have been pleased by how many speakers have been informed and perceptive enough to see the links between this agenda, which cannot sit in a silo, and other agendas about which we care deeply, particularly the transmission of diseases. I was delighted to hear my hon. Friend talk about the links that this subject has with neglected tropical diseases—we share a passion for that subject—and with our determination to support more girls into education. He also spoke about the links with our work on climate resilience and on the conservation of water resources. This agenda touches so many other things.

I am delighted that the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) mentioned drought and the region's vulnerability to extreme weather. She deserves great credit for visiting and seeing that for herself. We are living through a period of enormous risk to people's lives, and the impact of El Niño in that part of the world is not sufficiently understood or appreciated. I thank her for raising its profile, and I assure her that DFID is on the case in the sense that, since mid-2015, we have committed an additional £150 million of support to the area. I have been to Ethiopia, and I am in regular contact with Ethiopia to help it manage the risk, which is at a 1984 Band Aid-type level—it is as severe as that.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hurd: I am happy to give way to a late arrival, if protocol allows.

Tom Tugendhat: Forgive me for my late arrival. I, too, pay tribute to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for securing the debate and for being kind enough to help me prepare for it. One point that I have not heard in the Minister's summing up—perhaps it was raised earlier—is about nature of power. I served in Afghanistan and sought to develop civil culture in areas where water was controlled by an individual or a small group. WaterAid should truly be valued for equalising power in communities that have only one source of life. The work being done is not simply about health or the ability to grow a crop or two, but about changing the democratic mandate in any group, whether it be a small tribe or a whole country. The work being done by DFID, which I saw for myself in Helmand in Afghanistan, is about exactly that. It is about empowering communities to take control of their own lives, not just to be free of disease.

Mr Hurd: My hon. Friend adds another texture—another layer of relevance that has not yet been mentioned in this debate—so he has added value.

Like the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington, I will not go over the statistics again, because they have been given a good airing. However numb we have become in this House to the horror of much of what is happening around the world, it is still staggering that by the end of the day another 1,000 children under five will have died from a lack of clean water and basic sanitation, which is just not acceptable. Such deaths are utterly preventable. The drinking water of at least a quarter of the world's population is contaminated with faeces, and more than 650 million people do not have access to a water supply close to their home. Those numbers are shaming, given what we take for granted. That ground was well covered in the debate.

I was also extremely encouraged to hear how many Members wanted to emphasise the particularly heavy burden that falls on women and girls, which matters a great deal to the Department. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire spoke powerfully about the huge physical burden on them. I lifted a water container in Goma, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and I was staggered by how heavy it was. I asked the ladies how far they had walked with it, and their answer was extraordinary. I also asked them about the risks they take in queuing and walking. The situation they face is genuinely shocking and unacceptable.

The human dimension has come through powerfully in the debate, but the economic dimension has not come up. Some clever people have attributed an economic cost to the lack of good water and sanitation at about \$1.8 billion a year in Nigeria alone. Whether that is right or wrong, the human and financial cost is massively significant. So this issue matters, and I genuinely congratulate hon. Members on throwing a spotlight on it today. The good news is that we can do something about it. We have done something, but not enough. I will return to that, but it is worth noting that human endeavour has moved the needle in important ways.

The world met the millennium development goal for drinking water in 2010, and although the sanitation target was missed—I will return to that—2 billion more people had a toilet in 2015 than in 1990. Some countries have shown outstanding leadership in that context. For example, Ethiopia has reduced open defecation by 64% over the MDG period.

I am genuinely proud of the role that the UK has played over many years. It predates me and this Government, so I claim no credit for it. Between 2011 and 2015, we helped more than 60 million people to get access to water and sanitation, exceeding the coalition Government target. That has made a real difference to poor people's lives in countries such as Ethiopia, Tanzania, Mozambique and Nigeria. Many Members have seen that for themselves in their visits and know how powerful and important it is.

In Ethiopia, we are working hard to support the Government to reach 31 million people with sustainable water and sanitation services. That includes ensuring that the services are resilient to future threats from climate change, because as many Members will know, the sustainability of such services is critical.

Pauline Latham: Does my hon. Friend agree that the money that DFID is putting into Sierra Leone post-Ebola will be incredibly important to it in moving forward? The fight against Ebola required a lot of water, and water is crucial for many countries to stop disease. Sierra Leone had many problems before Ebola, and obviously during the outbreak it had more. In Freetown, in the slum area, pigs, chickens and people can be seen sharing the same dribble of water along the main street. Until that situation is solved, Ebola could occur again.

Mr Hurd: This is freaky; my hon. Friend has obviously seen my speech, because my next point is on Sierra Leone.

In Sierra Leone our support has been crucial in a country that was so cruelly affected by Ebola. I look forward to seeing our support on the ground there in a forthcoming visit. Our support for solid waste management in Bo will create more than 300 new jobs. There are many dimensions to the support being provided that we need to understand and appreciate. We have been leading innovation in how to deliver water and sanitation programmes. Through the WASH programme we have reached nearly 5 million people, but we have paid the NGOs undertaking the projects only once we have independently confirmed that the services are in place. Of course, we are working in a context of extreme and quite understandable scrutiny of the value for money of what we do, so as we contract services we have to be more innovative in how we push to make sure that we pay for results and get value for money for the British taxpayer.

Ms Abbott: I quite agree with the Minister about value for money, but there is another aspect that we have to be certain of. It is not enough to have capital spending and to physically put in place toilets, boreholes and so on; we have to work with communities so that they actually use those facilities.

Mr Hurd: I could not agree more with the hon. Lady, and I will say a little more about that.

The focus of the debate has been largely on the role of Governments, with some entirely correct acknowledgment of the role of civil society. We have perhaps not talked enough about the role of the private sector, which has an enormously important role to play in its responsibilities and opportunities to scale up and sustain solutions. I draw Members' attention to an interesting initiative, the Toilet Board Coalition, which is looking at new ways in which companies are planning investments in water and sanitation. Through our support provided to Water & Sanitation for the Urban Poor, DFID has played a leading role in developing private sector sanitation solutions, including the award-winning Clean Team, which is delivering high quality services in Ghana. That is an example of using a business model for installation and service, which provides an opportunity to scale and sustain work.

So there has been some genuine progress, but, as the tone of the debate has made clear, not enough. There is still a great deal more to do. There have been shortfalls, and it is important to understand why. Meeting the challenge of water supply requires a collective effort of Governments, donors, NGOs and the private sector. On sustainability, at any one time 40% of water supplies do not function because of poor operation and maintenance. On sanitation, there has been a gap, because we are fighting against the reality of political and community priorities, which shift if cholera strikes. Sanitation is the responsibility of the household and community, but households have competing priorities.

On the hon. Lady's point about sustaining services and building community support, in a lot of the work that we do, our preference is to work through community-led total sanitation solutions, which is about promoting the construction of latrines and also the maintenance and rebuilding of them after the rains come. We have to take time to invest in and engage with the community so that they understand the priority that should be attached to this against other competing priorities. So this work is not easy.

I assure the House, particularly the hon. Member for Strangford, who secured the debate, that the UK remains—there is cross-party support for this; we have heard it today and I am grateful for it—hugely committed to this agenda and wants to stay ambitious. We have to because, as various Members have said, sustainable development goal 6 calls for universal access to water and sanitation by 2030, which is massively ambitious and time marches on, but we are determined to play a key role in achieving the goal.

The UK aid strategy confirmed that, on top of the millions of people we helped to gain access to water and sanitation during the previous Parliament, the Government are committed—it is printed on my table in my ministerial office—to helping a further 60 million people gain access to water and sanitation by 2020. That is the commitment we will be held accountable for and we will meet that through our bilateral aid review and through our centrally managed programmes. Our commitment is hugely ambitious, but we are determined to see it through.

Tom Tugendhat: The point that the Minister is making about increasing support is absolutely essential. I am sure I am not alone in having people write to me about concerns over migration to this country. There can be

[Tom Tugendhat]

few better ways to encourage people to stay at home than to allow them the opportunity to enjoy the normal areas of sanitation and life that we enjoy here, so the commitment that he is making is extremely welcome and I thank the Department for it.

Mr Hurd: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. He has skilfully brought us back to the national interest that we consistently need to focus on. There is a great deal of quite justified concern about migration from Africa. It is principally economic, but also driven by other factors. The drivers for why people move—of course, people have always moved in Africa, since time began—include land, access to water, and natural resources. Therefore, the more we can do to help people feel they can rely on resources and get access to those services in their area, the less risk there is that they will move.

The 60 million people are our additional commitment—they are in addition to the 60 million in the previous Parliament. I reassure the House—because it is the focus of the debate—that we will maintain an extremely strong focus on Africa and on meeting the needs of women and adolescent girls. Building on experience from countries such as South Sudan, Malawi and Tanzania, we will develop programmes that deliver improved nutrition as well as water and sanitation. It is becoming increasingly clear to me and the team I am working with that we must make more linkages across areas. Water and nutrition are an obvious case where work and thinking need to be integrated more.

Through our health programming we will continue to work with our partners to ensure that all healthcare facilities have safe water and adequate toilets and handwashing facilities. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire has been passionate and eloquent on that point, on the basis of her many visits.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hurd: I am delighted to give way to another latecomer.

Fiona Bruce: It is heartening to hear about the Government's commitment, and the figures that the Minister has given. Does he agree that it is critical that the UK should use its global influence to work with the Governments of other countries and ensure that they make a commitment to informing and educating their populations about how the connection with water can improve health and hygiene? There is a great deal to be done on that account.

Mr Hurd: I am delighted that another highly valued member of the International Development Committee has joined us. That is a hugely important point, and there are two elements to it: one is the role that the UK can play in influencing other international donors and Governments to step up—because we have taken a lead and others need to step up, in a crowded environment where there are many pressures on time and money. However, there is also a conversation to be had in countries that we try to help—about priorities and capacity. As I elaborated on when I was speaking about

Ethiopia, we now have some quite rich experience of how to help with the thinking, within Governments, about the priority to be given to this agenda.

I want briefly to mention water resource management, which the hon. Member for Strangford raised. It is a critical aspect of the matter, and we will continue to invest in water resource management, to ensure that water and sanitation services are sustainable. Those investments also help countries to reduce the impact of floods and droughts. It is worth noting that water insecurity in Africa is estimated to cost about 5% of GDP, and we think that unlocking investment in water, together with improved governance, could help more than 2 billion people to lead healthier and more prosperous lives.

The whole agenda of how water is managed is critical and it needs to be part of the debate—as does the need for evidence. That may not have come through strongly enough, but what we do must be based on solid evidence. That is why we are one of the largest funders of research in the sector, with flagship programmes including the Sanitation and Hygiene Applied Research for Equity programme, which is showing how sanitation can be improved most effectively.

We are keen to drive innovation in this area, wherever it comes from. The hon. Member for Strangford mentioned the statistic, which may or may not be true, although it sounds right, that in some areas more people have access to a mobile phone than to clean water. Our challenge is how to use that mobile phone technology as part of the solution. Part of the problem is the fact that often no one knows when water pumps fall into disrepair, and we are piloting work on building sensors into the pumps to provide real-time information on which ones are down and in need of attention. We are keen to see how the digital technology that is transforming all aspects of our life can help in that context.

I want to close by talking about our role in convening, encouraging and bringing people together. I am quite serious when I say that the pressures on the development budget are intense, because of all the problems around the world, such as El Niño, Syria and the humanitarian crises everywhere. There are lots of people competing to assert priorities, and powerful lobbies saying “We need more; we need to jump higher.” That is the reality of our world. The sanitation and water for all initiative was set up to develop political momentum and to secure financial commitments from countries and the private sector. We play an important role in that process; we think it is valuable and we will use it to hold others to account on their commitments, and to enable them to hold us to account on the achievement of our ambitions.

There has been clarity in the debate about the importance we should attach to helping millions more people to access the most basic necessities, which we take for granted. We can see all the development benefits that will accrue through doing that. In our view it is clearly in our national interest and we can see the consequences of failure. The evidence makes it clear that focusing aid money on delivering water and sanitation gives value for money, because of the changes it brings about. I hope that I have provided assurance to the hon. Member for Strangford in particular—who deserves credit for securing the debate—that the Government remain extremely

committed to the agenda, to meeting the manifesto target, and to maintaining British leadership in this area.

3.26 pm

Jim Shannon: I thank all the right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken for their valuable contributions, which I appreciate. I thank the ladies from WaterAid who kindly facilitated our debate with information, and whose knowledge helped us to bring the debate together factually. The hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) spoke with great personal knowledge gained through Select Committee work and the visits she has made. She mentioned having a tin bath, and I am in an age group that means I can remember that as well. I can also remember outside toilets. We have come on a great deal in our own countries, and there is a similar need to move on in Africa.

The hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) mentioned the global goals—on water aid, which has been met, and on water sanitation, which has not. She talked about long-term viability and short-term fixes, and was clear about the need to have a vision and a strategy and to address urgent needs. I thought that she made an important comment when she said that some sub-Saharan countries are poorer today than they were in the '60s and '70s, and that addressing water aid and sanitation is even more difficult for them.

The hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), whose contributions I value, as I do his friendship, gave us examples from Peru and Tanzania, where his wife has done good work, and talked about the importance of health education and treating problems at source. I thought it was great that he gave examples of what can be done with a \$2,000 spend. A small investment can give great returns, and I thought it was a tremendous example. Some things that were done 30 or 35 years ago are still working today. He referred to the neglected tropical diseases, and we may want to focus on that over time.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) referred to communities involved in projects, including Scottish Water staff and their project in Zambia. He spoke of young people dropping out of school in Africa because of lack of access to water aid and sanitation, and the need to prioritise poverty eradication projects.

The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), brought to the debate something we had not considered: the problems stemming from drought that affects Somali tribesmen and their animals in their wanderings across Africa as they follow the water to where the grass is. She wanted to encourage national Governments to act together. She referred to the storage of water and the need to ensure that we access water wherever it is and retain it as best we can.

Some of the interventions were very helpful. I thank the two hon. Members who came in after the start of the debate; they had other engagements. I was aware of that. The hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) referred to the power over water rights and access, which, until he intervened on the Minister, had not been considered in the debate, but it is a vital issue in countries where water is almost the equivalent of oil. Water is of tremendous importance. The hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) referred, as she always does in the good work she does on the Select Committee, to the importance of the work within DFID to ensure that the Governments can deliver.

I was impressed by the Minister's response—I am impressed by him anyway—for which I thank him. We recognise his commitment to his portfolio and to achieving what he wants to achieve, which I believe is what those who have spoken today and those in the House more widely want to achieve. That is important for us.

Water, sanitation and hygiene are enablers for other areas of development, including health and education. That theme ran through all the contributions today. Water, sanitation and hygiene are also highly cost-effective, but only 2% of UK bilateral aid goes towards that. However, I recognise the £800 million the Minister referred to. It is a significant contribution, but if we can do so much with small moneys, that is what we should be trying to do. I would also like water, sanitation and hygiene to be prioritised in the forthcoming aid reviews.

I have been told before that we are not allowed to use props in our speeches, so I am not going to use a prop, but I will refer to this bottle of water. To be truthful, I did not know this until yesterday, but on the labels of the bottles of water in front of us, it says:

“Belu is an ethical bottled water produced in the UK. It is completely carbon neutral. It comes in a lightweight recyclable bottle”

and so on. It then says that 100% of profits go to WaterAid. So, every time we pour a glass of water in this House from any bottle of Belu, we will be supporting WaterAid. WaterAid transforms people's lives by improving access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation in the world's poorest communities, and to date Belu has donated more than £1 million to WaterAid. If anyone ever needs a prop, or something to reach to and say, “That's what WaterAid does”, they can use that bottle.

I thank the Minister, the shadow Minister, and all other Members for their contributions and for highlighting this issue and the position of the people outside the House whom we and the Government want to help.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered clean water and sanitation in Africa.

3.33 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 21 April 2016

CABINET OFFICE

Police and Crime Commissioner Elections: Indemnity for Returning Officers

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose): I have laid a minute setting out the Cabinet Office's proposal to indemnify returning officers for the police and crime commissioner elections on 5 May 2016 against uninsured claims that arise out of the conduct of their duties. We will also provide a certificate confirming that we will bear any employee liabilities of the returning officer which would otherwise be covered by insurance procured under the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969. An indemnity was previously provided by the Home Office to returning officers for the 2012 police and crime commissioner elections and the Cabinet Office regularly provides indemnities for UK parliamentary and European parliamentary elections. HM Treasury has approved the indemnity in principle.

It is normal practice, when a Government Department proposes to undertake a contingent liability in excess of £300,000 for which there is no specific statutory authority, for the Department concerned to present to Parliament a minute giving particulars of the liability created and explaining the circumstances; and to refrain from incurring the liability until 14 parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the minute, except in cases of special urgency.

Cabinet Office officials have been in discussion with HM Treasury officials and lawyers on the scope of indemnities of this kind and to ensure consistency between indemnities provided in respect of these and other polls. Thus it has not been possible to lay this minute before now. As a consequence, there is now a special urgency as the elections will take place shortly.

[HCWS685]

DEFENCE

Atomic Weapons Establishment Contract

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): I am announcing the successful completion of a review of the Department's contract with one of its key suppliers, AWE Management Ltd (AWEML), a joint venture between Lockheed Martin Inc., Jacobs Inc. and Serco. The contract is for the management and operation of the AWE sites at Aldermaston, Burghfield and Blacknest.

As with all major commercial programmes, this contract is kept under regular review to ensure it continues to meet the Ministry of Defence's requirements in terms of performance, affordability and value for money. As a result of the review, the contract with AWEML has been improved. It provides the opportunity for higher performance incentives, as well as reductions if targets

are not met. The duration of the contract is unchanged, running through to 2025. It will also now be a qualifying defence contract under the terms of the Defence Reform Act 2014 and single source procurement framework.

The core commitment in the AWE management and operation contract remains extant—to provide and maintain the nuclear warhead stockpile for the UK's nuclear deterrent, efficiently and effectively without compromising safety or security, for as long as the Government require.

[HCWS689]

Armed Forces Pay Review Body Report: Government Response

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): The supplement to the 2016 report of the Armed Forces' Pay Review Body (AFPRB) making recommendations on the pay of service medical and dental officers has been published today. I wish to express my thanks to the chairman and members of the review body for their report. The AFPRB's recommendations are to be accepted in full with implementation effective from 1 April 2016. Copies of the AFPRB supplementary report are available in the Vote Office.

[HCWS692]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Human Rights and Democracy Report

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): I have today laid before Parliament a copy of the 2015 Foreign and Commonwealth Office Report on Human Rights and Democracy (CM 9245).

The report focuses on significant human rights country and policy developments overseas in 2015. It sets out how the Government's three human rights themes (democratic values and the rule of law; strengthening the rules-based international system; and human rights for a stable world) operate in practice, and includes reports on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's 30 human rights priority countries: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Burma, Burundi, Central African Republic, China, Colombia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Libya, Maldives, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

We have also published today the July-December 2015 updates on our previous 27 priority countries online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2015/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2015>.

The full report can be read at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2015>.

[HCWS684]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Action Plan: Anti-money Laundering and Counter-terrorism Finance

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): Today, the Government are publishing an action plan that sets out the steps that the UK will take to strengthen their response to money laundering and terrorist financing, and to protect the safety of its citizens and the integrity of the UK financial system. Copies will be available on www.gov.uk and in the Library of the House.

This action plan will tackle all forms of money laundering, with a particular focus on the illicit funds supporting and generating serious and organised crime, which deprives people of their security and prosperity; terrorism, which poses a direct and immediate threat to our domestic security and overseas interests; and the laundering of the proceeds of overseas corruption into or through the UK, which fuels political instability in the source countries.

This Government have already taken significant action to tackle these damaging crimes and to improve the reputation of the UK, including of our financial and professional services industries. The National Risk Assessment on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing (NRA), published in October 2015, was candid and robust in its assessment and set out our current understanding of the risks to the UK and the gaps in our response. The action plan addresses the gaps identified.

The Prime Minister's Anti-Corruption summit next month will galvanise the international response to issues including corporate secrecy, Government transparency, the enforcement of international anti-corruption laws, and the strengthening of international institutions.

This action plan sets out changes that amount to the most significant reform to our anti-money laundering regime for over a decade, since the commencement of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

We will:

Enhance the law enforcement response

Consult on tough new powers to tackle money laundering, including unexplained wealth orders (UWO) to require those who are suspected of money laundering to explain the sources of their wealth; the provision of a linked forfeiture power for use where the answers provided are unsatisfactory, or where the subject of the UWO fails to respond; the provision of a power to designate the highest risk entities and require additional regulatory measures to be carried out on them by the regulated sector; and the closing of loopholes that can be exploited by terrorists to raise and move funds.

Deliver new capabilities and support to take on the most sophisticated 'high-end' money laundering cases, and to ensure that operational partners have, and are able to use, an appropriate and effective suite of tools to counter terrorist finance.

The Government have already established a cross-agency taskforce, recently announced by the Prime Minister, to investigate all evidence of illegality that may emerge from the data relating to Mossack Fonseca, the law firm based in Panama.

Improve the effectiveness of the supervisory regime

Undertake a wide-ranging review of the supervisory regime to develop radical options for reform aimed at ensuring we have an effective and proportionate system. Engagement has already begun with stakeholders and the public call for information is included within the action plan.

Increase our international reach

Promote more effective information sharing across international boundaries.

Place new NCA International Liaison Officer posts in selected jurisdictions.

Training will be delivered to, and expertise shared with, key overseas partners to combat terrorist finance.

Work with international partners to tackle money laundering and terrorist financing threats upstream, and develop multilateral approaches in preparation for the Prime Minister's Anti-Corruption summit in May 2016.

Develop a stronger partnership with the private sector

Radically reform the suspicious activity reports (SARs) regime (the statutory regime under which persons in the regulated sector must report suspicions of money laundering or terrorist financing to the National Crime Agency), make better use of public and private sector resources against the highest threats, target the entities who carry out money laundering instead of individual transactions, and provide the National Crime Agency with a suite of new powers, including one to oblige SARs reporters to provide additional information when requested.

Make the Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce (JMLIT) a permanent feature of the UK's anti-money laundering regime, which brings together the financial sector, law enforcement agencies and the Financial Conduct Authority to share information to prevent, detect and disrupt money laundering and terrorist financing activities.

Consult on proposed new powers to provide the financial sector with 'safe harbour' for the sharing of information on financial crime.

The reforms to our domestic anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing regime set out in the action plan, coupled with the international leadership being shown by the UK through the Prime Minister's Anti-Corruption summit, will lead to greater disruption of money laundering and terrorist financing activities, the prosecution of those responsible and increased recovery of the proceeds of crime, and a greater protection of the UK financial system.

[HCWS686]

Section 40 (4a) of the British Nationality Act 1981

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): David Anderson QC, Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, has completed the first review on the operation of section 40(4A) of the British Nationality Act 1981. His report will be laid before the House today.

I am grateful to David Anderson for his considered report. He continues to provide important independent scrutiny of UK counter-terrorism legislation.

The report makes no recommendations, but sets out the evolution of the power under review and provides observations on the power, and on deprivation more broadly. The Government's positions on the issues raised in the report are a matter of public record.

The report provides the basis for future reviews which may have the opportunity to consider examples of the operation of the power which, as was intended, is only likely to be used in a small subset of the most serious cases.

The next report is required to be produced and laid before the House after 28 July 2019.

[HCWS695]

Refugees and Resettlement

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire):

Following my statement on 28 January, the Government have continued to work to provide support to refugee children. We have always been clear that in order to provide the best help to the greatest number of those in need, we need to support the majority of refugees to stay safely in their home region.

That is why we recently doubled our aid for the Syrian crisis to £2.3 billion, our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis. This support has reached hundreds of thousands of people in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. To galvanise international efforts we co-hosted the “Supporting Syria and the Region” conference in London on 4 February, securing pledges of more than \$11 billion, the largest amount ever raised in one day for a humanitarian crisis. These commitments will create an estimated 1.1 million jobs for refugees and host country citizens by 2018. By the end of the 2016-17 school year, 1.7 million refugee and vulnerable children will be in quality education with equal access for girls and boys.

Today I am able to announce the results of work with UNHCR and informed by a roundtable with NGOs, local authorities and devolved administrations to provide a resettlement route to the UK, specifically designed for “Children at Risk” from the middle east and north Africa region. On the UNHCR’s recommendation the scheme will not target unaccompanied children alone, but will be extended to all “Children at Risk” as defined by the UNHCR. This broad category encompasses unaccompanied children and separated children—those separated from their parents and/or other family members—as well as other vulnerable children such as child carers and those facing the risk of child labour, child marriage or other forms of neglect, abuse or exploitation.

Through this category we will resettle the most vulnerable children, accompanied by their families, where the UNHCR deems resettlement is in the best interests of the child. We will commit to resettling several hundred individuals in the first year with a view to resettling up to 3,000 individuals over the lifetime of this Parliament, the majority of whom will be children. We will also review the scheme at the two-year mark. This unique initiative will be the largest resettlement effort that focuses on children at risk from the MENA region and will be over and above the commitment to resettle 20,000 refugees under the Syrian resettlement scheme. It will be open to all at risk groups and nationalities within the region, with the best interests of the child at the heart of the scheme. The UNHCR is fully supportive of the launch of this new initiative and the UK’s commitment to assist vulnerable refugee children at risk through further resettlement efforts which uphold the principles of child protection.

The Government are committed to making a full contribution to the global refugee crisis, in particular by helping children at risk. We firmly believe that we can make the biggest difference and add most value by supporting children and their families in the conflict region while providing a route to the UK for the minority of vulnerable or at risk cases where resettlement is judged by the UNHCR to be in the child’s best interests.

At the same time we need to shut down the illegal migration routes to Europe, exploited by human traffickers who encourage people to risk their lives to make perilous journeys. The success of the EU-Turkey migration agreement is a vital opportunity to end the misery and lethal risk that smugglers and organised criminals are causing on a daily basis.

Following discussion with the European Commission and the Greek Government I can today announce that the UK will be offering 75 expert personnel to help with processing and administration of migrants in reception centres, act as interpreters, provide medical support and bolster our existing team assisting the Commission to ensure effective and efficient co-ordination. We will also provide vital equipment and medical supplies. This is in addition to the UK maritime contribution, with three Border Force vessels assisting the Hellenic Coastguard to conduct search and rescue missions, and a Royal Navy vessel as part of the NATO mission in the Aegean.

The teams we send to Greece will include experts in supporting vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied children and those trained to tackle people trafficking. This will help ensure that vulnerable people, including children, are identified and can access asylum procedures as quickly as possible. This is in addition to the work undertaken by the Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Kevin Hyland, to visit hotspots and assess what more can be done to ensure unaccompanied children are protected from traffickers.

To increase support to refugees in Turkey the Government are contributing £250 million to the initial €3 billion Turkey refugee facility. This is expected to provide immediate humanitarian support as well as funding for schools, hospitals and housing. We are also working with the Turkish Government to identify what expert support would best assist their immigration and asylum services in handling migrants returned under the EU-Turkey agreement.

We continue to take action within Europe to assist vulnerable migrant children. The UK is the largest bilateral contributor to the humanitarian response to the crisis in Europe and the Balkans with a total contribution of £65 million. This includes nearly £46 million to provide life-saving aid to migrants and refugees including food, water, hygiene kits and infant packs, and protection for the most vulnerable, as well as support to organisations helping Governments build their capacity to manage arrivals in Greece and the Balkans. The efforts of the partners we fund are targeted to reach the most vulnerable—including children.

It also includes the £10 million refugee children fund the Department for International Development (DFID) has created to support the needs of vulnerable refugee and migrant children specifically in Europe. The fund will support three specialist and mandated organisations UNHCR, Save the Children and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to work with host authorities to care for and assist unaccompanied or separated children in Europe and the Balkans. This includes identifying vulnerable children, providing for their immediate support, referral to specialist care, and helping find solutions such as family reunification.

It is important to use the tools available to help children reunite with family wherever possible. The Government are committed to meeting our obligations under the Dublin regulation. We have seconded additional

resource into the European Asylum Support Office totalling over 1,000 days of expert support to Italy and Greece to implement and streamline the Dublin process, including to quickly identify children who qualify for family reunion. And we continue to work with the French authorities to address the situation in Calais, including through a permanent bilateral standing committee to improve co-operation on Dublin transfers, particularly family reunion.

The recent secondment of a senior asylum expert to the French Interior Ministry to improve the process for family cases has already resulted in a significant increase in the number of children being reunited with family in the UK. In the last six weeks 24 cases have been accepted for transfer to the UK from France under family unity provisions, more than half of whom have already arrived in the UK. Once an asylum claim has been lodged in another member state we have demonstrated that transfers can take place within weeks.

We will do all we can to ensure that children in Europe with a right to be reunited with their family in the UK are supported to do so. However, the Government remain of the view that relocation schemes within Europe risk creating unintended consequences or perverse incentives for people to put their lives into the hands of traffickers. Instead we are committed to providing safe and legal routes for the most vulnerable refugees from Syria to resettle to the UK. Under the Syrian vulnerable persons resettlement scheme we are committed to resettling 20,000 vulnerable refugees by 2020. In the last quarter of 2015 we resettled 1,085 Syrian refugees under this scheme over half of whom were children.

[HCWS687]

JUSTICE

Civil Legal Aid

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara): On 18 February the Court of Appeal handed down judgment on an appeal in a judicial review challenge to the domestic violence evidence requirements under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO). I would now like to inform the House of the steps the Government are taking to respond to the Court's concerns.

Legal aid is a fundamental part of our justice system, but resources are not limitless. Our overriding approach to legal aid reform is to reduce the burden on the taxpayer of paying for legal aid, while ensuring that it is targeted at the highest priorities. In line with this approach, LASPO removed legal aid from most private family matters while making a clear exception for victims of domestic violence. In such cases, the applicant is required to supply specific evidence of domestic violence, which is set out in regulations.

In this judicial review, the Court of Appeal found that the regulations frustrated LASPO's purpose in two specific areas. First, in that they required evidence to have been obtained within a two-year period before the application for legal aid. Secondly, because they lacked provision for victims of financial abuse.

We continue to believe that victims of domestic violence in private family disputes should receive legal aid where evidence is provided, and the Court of Appeal has agreed that the Lord Chancellor has the power to make arrangements in regulations to allow this. But there are areas where we need further information—for example, the number of individuals who have evidence over two years old. We also need to more fully appreciate the issues in play in cases of financial abuse, on which there is only limited research available.

We have begun work with domestic violence support groups, legal representative bodies and colleagues across Government to gather data and develop our understanding of these issues. Our findings will be used to inform an evidence-based solution to the Court's concerns, with the aim of drawing up replacement regulations.

In the meantime we are taking immediate action, through interim regulations laid before Parliament today, to change our arrangements. We are more than doubling the original time limit for evidence—increasing it from two to five years, and we are introducing a provision for the assessment of evidence concerning financial abuse. We are expediting implementation of these changes so they will come into effect on Monday 25 April in order to make sure that victims of domestic violence can receive the support they need as soon as possible, and to give certainty to those considering applications for legal aid. We believe that these arrangements address the Court's concerns while work continues to find a sustainable longer-term solution.

[HCWS690]

Inquests on Deaths of Service Personnel Overseas

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage): My hon. Friend, the Minister for Defence Personnel and Veterans, and I wish to make the last in our series of quarterly joint statements on the progress of coroner investigations into the deaths of UK service personnel who have died on active service overseas. As in all of our statements, we wish to express our continuing gratitude to all those members of the armed forces who have served or are now serving overseas for their bravery, professionalism, and commitment to service. Our thoughts are especially with the families and loved ones of those who have given their lives in this service.

This statement provides information on the inquests conducted by the Oxfordshire, Wiltshire and Swindon, and other coroner areas in England and Wales as at 13 April 2016.

Additional, supplemental, tables have also been placed in the Libraries of both Houses, which give the status and details of all current and previous cases, including whether there has been or will be a service inquiry (formerly known as a Board of Inquiry).

The Ministry of Defence's Defence Inquests Unit continues to work with coroners (including the cadre of coroners specially trained to conduct investigations and inquests into the deaths of service personnel), with the aim of ensuring that investigations are thorough and that inquests are timely and effective. Under section 12 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 investigations may now be held in Scotland, where appropriate.

Since 2007 our two Departments have provided funding for the additional resources required by the Oxfordshire and Wiltshire and Swindon coroner services, as service personnel who have lost their lives overseas have been repatriated to RAF Lyneham in Wiltshire and RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire. Coroners have thus been able to conduct investigations into these deaths as well as their local caseload.

We are sincerely grateful to all to those who support and assist bereaved families during this process, particularly coroners and their staff who unfailingly conduct their investigations with families at their heart, and the Chief Coroner who continues to provide leadership and oversight of coroner services.

Current status of inquests

Since our previous statement on 10 September last year, the inquests into the deaths of the five servicemen who died in the Lynx helicopter crash on 26 April 2014 have been held by the Oxfordshire Coroner. A total of 629 inquests have therefore now been held into the deaths of service personnel on active service in Iraq or Afghanistan, or who have died in the UK from injuries sustained while on active service. There are three cases where the death of an injured serviceman did not lead to a formal inquest, although two of these were taken into consideration at inquests into other deaths that occurred in the same incidents. The third death was of a serviceman in Scotland who made a partial recovery but later died from his injuries, and a fatal accident inquiry was not held.

Coroners' investigations which remain open

As at 13 April 2016, there remain only two open coroner investigations into the deaths of service personnel in Afghanistan. The first relates to the death of Lance Corporal James Brynin on 13 October 2013. The Senior Coroner for West Sussex opened the inquest on 10 March 2016, and subsequently adjourned the hearing pending a police investigation into the death. The Coroner hopes to reconvene the hearing in September this year. The second is that of the death of Sapper Adam Moralee on 5 March 2014. This death is currently subject to a police investigation, and it is not known when this investigation and any subsequent action may be concluded.

An investigation is also open into the death of Private Jamie Sawyer who died while serving on the UN peacekeeping mission in Cyprus. The Senior Coroner for Birmingham is currently responsible for the investigation of the death, which is on hold while a prosecution takes place in Cyprus.

With the exception of the two inquests mentioned above, which are not expected to be completed for some time, all operational inquests relating to Iraq and Afghanistan have now been completed, and this will therefore be the last of our series of statements on this topic. Our sympathy and condolences go out to the families and friends of Lance Corporal Brynin and Sapper Moralee, and we mean no disrespect to their memory in taking the decision not to provide further updates.

Table detailing inquests into service deaths (WMS tables (updated) April 2016.docx) can be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-04-21/HCWS688>.

[HCWS688]

Tribunals

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): The Government have today published a consultation paper proposing new fees for proceedings in the first-tier tribunal (immigration and asylum chamber) and upper tribunal (immigration and asylum chamber).

In the spending review the Government announced that we were investing £700 million in Her Majesty's Court and Tribunal Service (HMCTS). This will transform our courts and tribunals, reducing complexity in language, processes and systems; helping people reach the best resolution for them; minimising the steps that people need to go through to obtain justice; and improving access to justice. We will invest in better facilities and use technology to reduce paperwork, so that we create a courts and tribunals service fit for the modern age.

At the same time, we must reduce the burden on the taxpayer of running our courts and tribunals. In meeting our spending review settlement, all parts of the Ministry of Justice must contribute to the national effort to reduce the deficit and restore the Government's finances to surplus. The courts and tribunals service cost £1.8 billion in 2014-15, but only £700 million was received in income. This leaves a net cost to the taxpayer of around £1.1 billion in one year alone.

Our consultation proposes increasing fees in those immigration and asylum proceedings where a fee is payable so that the fee meets the costs of those proceedings in full. We have previously consulted on plans to raise fees for proceedings in the first-tier tribunal (immigration and asylum chamber) in order to recover around 25% of the £84 million annual costs of that chamber. Having re-assessed the Ministry of Justice's financial position following the spending review, we need to go much further.

In the light of the challenging financial circumstances we face we have already had to take difficult decisions. We have implemented enhanced court fees, above the cost of the proceedings to which they relate, for money claims; possession claims; general applications within civil proceedings; and divorce petitions.

In these financial circumstances, we have concluded that it is no longer reasonable to expect the taxpayer to fund around 75% of the costs of immigration and asylum proceedings. We therefore propose increasing fees in the first-tier tribunal from £80 to £490 for an application for a decision on the papers and from £140 to £800 for an application for an oral hearing. We also propose introducing a new fee of £455 for an application to the first-tier tribunal for permission to appeal to the upper tribunal.

We also believe that the same principles should apply to appeals to the upper tribunal (immigration and asylum chamber) so the consultation also seeks views on introducing fees, set at full cost recovery levels, for these proceedings. The consultation proposes a fee of £350 for an application to the upper tribunal for permission to appeal, where permission has been refused by the first-tier tribunal, and a fee of £510 for an appeal hearing where permission is granted.

We are mindful of the fact that some applicants will face difficulties in paying these fees, so to make sure that the burden of funding the system is shared as fairly as

possible we will continue to exempt from fees those in particularly vulnerable positions. This includes those who qualify for legal aid or asylum support; those who are appealing against a decision to deprive them of their citizenship; and those children bringing appeals to the tribunal who are being supported by a local authority. We will also extend our exemptions to protect children being housed by the local authority and the parents of children receiving local authority support. In addition, we are consulting on further extensions to the exemptions scheme in this consultation to make sure we continue to protect the most vulnerable.

Higher fees are never popular but they are necessary if we are, as a nation, to live within our means. These proposals would raise around an additional £37 million a year, which is a critical contribution to cutting the deficit and reducing the burden on the taxpayer of running the courts and tribunals.

Full details of the Government's proposals are set out in the consultation document which has been published on the gov.uk website.

[HCWS691]

PRIME MINISTER

Senior Salaries Review Body

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): The 38th report of the Senior Salaries Review Body is being published today. This makes recommendations about the pay of the senior civil service, senior military officers and the judiciary.

We understand the need to ensure that we are able to recruit, retain and motivate staff with the right skills and experience. However, pay restraint continues to be a key part of our plans to finish fixing the public finances. Senior public sector workers, like everyone else, will have to continue to play their part to ensure we deliver security for working people across the country. Moreover, the independent Office for Budget Responsibility estimates that 200,000 public sector jobs have been protected thanks to our average 1% pay policy.

Senior military officers

The Government have accepted the recommendation of a 1% increase to base military salaries for all 2-star officers and above with effect from 1 April 2016. The Government have accepted the recommendation that there is no change to the current pay differentials for senior medical and dental officers.

Judiciary

The Government have accepted the review body's recommendation of a 1% salary increase for the judiciary.

Senior civil service

The report makes clear the need to take a more strategic approach to senior civil service reward, including better targeting of resources and greater focus on the total package. We welcome this analysis which will inform the civil service workforce strategy.

The Government have accepted in full the recommendation of the Senior Salaries Review Body to introduce an in-year contribution award scheme for up to 10% of staff within current cost limits. This will provide a closer link between pay and performance by enabling departments to provide instant financial recognition for outstanding contribution.

We recognise the concerns of the Senior Salaries Review Body on the pay overlap between delegated grades and the bottom of senior civil service pay band 1. The Government believe that individual departments are best placed to assess the pay position of individuals within their own senior civil service cadre, and indeed the needs of their own delegated grades, and to decide how to prioritise the resources available to address any pay issues.

We have therefore accepted in part the recommendation on raising minimum salaries. The Government accept the increase in minima for pay bands 2 and 3. For pay band 1, a £2,000 increase in the minimum salary would restrict the flexibility that departments have asked for to enable them to target the resources available. Instead, the Government will prescribe an increase of £1,000 and ask departments to give serious consideration to raising salaries by more based on their individual business needs.

Similarly, the Government have accepted in part the recommendation on a flexible framework for base pay awards, but do not support an across the board budget of 0.94%. Instead, as well as raising staff to the new pay band minima, departments should have the flexibility they have asked for to target the remainder of the 1% award to meet their own business needs.

This package of proposals for 2016-17 provides the right balance between necessary pay restraint and the need to recruit and retain people of the right calibre. It gives departments flexibility to target pay increases within the 1% average award, enables them to reward outstanding performance and will help them to recruit and retain people in business critical roles.

Very senior NHS managers

The report recommends that the Department for Health determines what level of pay increase is appropriate for this year. Such very senior managers are mainly employed by national arm's length bodies.

The Government have decided to request arm's length bodies to target the use of the 1% pay award to address both specific local recruitment and retention issues, and reward individual performance.

We will also proceed with the roll out of the new arm's length body executive and senior manager pay framework, as set out in our evidence to Senior Salaries Review Body.

We are grateful to the chairman and members of the review body for their work on this year's report. Copies have been laid in the Vote Office, the Printed Paper Office and the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS693]

Staff Counsellor for the Security and Intelligence Services

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I have appointed Julian Miller as staff counsellor for the security and intelligence agencies. He will start in May 2016. He was deputy National Security Adviser in the Cabinet Office from 2010 until his retirement in 2015. Previous posts included Private Secretary to the Defence Secretary, Chief of the Assessments Staff in the Joint Intelligence Organisation and director strategy and resources in the Ministry of Defence.

Julian Miller succeeds Desmond Bowen, who has served as staff counsellor since April 2009. I would like to thank Desmond Bowen for his service over the past seven years and the support and guidance he has provided to the staff of the security and intelligence agencies during his tenure.

The position of staff counsellor for the security and intelligence agencies was created in 1987. It is a non-statutory appointment. The post holder is available to be consulted by any member of the agencies regarding

matters of conscience about the work of their service, or a personal grievance or other problem which has not been resolved internally. Staff in certain other Departments closely involved in intelligence work are also able to consult the staff counsellor on matters of conscience about their work, provided that such matters arise from or are related to the individual's access to intelligence.

[HCWS694]

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