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13 July 2016**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 13 July 2016

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

SESSIONAL RETURNS

Ordered,

That there be laid before this House Returns for Session 2015-16 of information and statistics relating to:

- (1) Business of the House
- (2) Closure of Debate, Proposal of Question and Allocation of Time (including Programme Motions)
- (3) Sittings of the House
- (4) Private Bills and Private Business
- (5) Public Bills
- (6) Delegated Legislation and Legislative Reform Orders
- (7) European Legislation, etc
- (8) Grand Committees
- (9) Panel of Chairs
- (10) Select Committees.—(*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Rail Links: Wales and the South-west

1. **Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): What assessment the Government have made of the adequacy of rail links between Wales and the south-west. [905783]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): It is a pleasure to observe the House's increased interest in Welsh questions today.

The Government are investing a record amount in the United Kingdom's railways. The new fleet of inter-city express trains which will be introduced next year on the south Wales and Great Western main lines will significantly enhance the travel experiences of passengers in Wales and the south-west.

Neil Carmichael: The money that has been invested so far has made a real difference to our national transport infrastructure, but does the Minister agree that it is important to ensure that we have the right stations in the right places, so that more and more passengers can have access to trains?

Guto Bebb: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend, who is well known for his campaigning efforts on behalf of rail commuters. The Government's investment in the railway infrastructure is at record levels. We are seeing the electrification of the main railway line to Swansea, and we are also seeing great investment in signalling in north Wales. That new capacity will be good for the economy of south Wales and the south-west.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): As the Minister will know, there is more economic connectivity between south Wales and the south-west than there is between south Wales and north Wales. Will he undertake to speed up the electrification of the railways, particularly at a time when Brexit is leading to considerable uncertainty about inward investment in Wales?

Guto Bebb: The hon. Gentleman has made a good point about the importance of rail connectivity to economic development, but I do not think it is a case of either/or. I think it is important to have great connections between north and south Wales, but we should also recognise the need for south Wales to be linked with the London area and the south-west, and the same applies to north Wales. As for "speeding up", I will take no lessons from the Labour party, which failed to invest a single penny in the electrification of any railway line in Wales during a 13-year period.

Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): By stark contrast with what was done by the last Government, what this Government are doing for the Great Western line—the electrification, and the new trains—is remarkable. Will the Minister meet me to discuss the provision of direct trains from Cardiff Central station to London to build on that capacity and investment?

Guto Bebb: My hon. Friend is a great champion of railway connections between south Wales and London, and it would be a pleasure to meet him to discuss further developments in a Welsh context. I fully agree that the modernisation and electrification of the south Wales main line will greatly enhance the connectivity between south Wales and London, not least the new link to Heathrow airport.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Improving Cardiff Central station is a vital part of all this. Will the Minister update the House on what recent discussions the Government have had with Cardiff council and others about the modernisation and upgrading of the station?

Guto Bebb: I can confirm that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has met council leaders in Cardiff to discuss the redevelopment of Cardiff Central station. The Government have already invested in enhanced capacity in the form of additional platforms, but the process needs to continue. We recognise the importance of the station to the economy of not just the capital city but the wider economic area that surrounds it, and talks are ongoing.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Plans for future south Wales rail links were heavily dependent on EU cash. Will the Minister ask the Treasury to support rail links such as the metro for the future?

Guto Bebb: The south Wales metro links will clearly be important to the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but it should be borne in mind that the amount invested in the Cardiff capital region city deal is £1.2 billion, of which less than 8% is currently earmarked as EU funding, and that the Government have already committed £500 million to that development. I think the hon. Gentleman should be talking up the prospects for the economy of south Wales, rather than highlighting the deficiencies that he sees in the current funding arrangements.

EU Referendum: Political Consequences

2. **Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential consequences for Wales of the outcome of the EU referendum. [905784]

4. **Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the economic effect on Wales of UK membership of the EU. [905786]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): The British people have voted to leave the European Union, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that their will must be respected and delivered. We are now preparing for a negotiated exit from the EU, which will involve close engagement with all the devolved Administrations to ensure that the interests of all parts of the United Kingdom are protected and advanced.

Mr Jones: Structural funding for Wales is guaranteed until 2020. Given the substantial budgetary savings that will be made after British withdrawal from the EU, can my right hon. Friend confirm that his office will make every effort to ensure that the current level of funding will continue until at least that date?

Alun Cairns: The Government have a strong record in guaranteeing funds for Wales, most notably the Barnett floor, which was ignored for 13 years by Labour. That demonstrates that we will work hard in prioritising the areas of the UK that rightly need and deserve support.

Christina Rees: Has the Minister had talks with major employers in Wales such as Ford, Airbus, GE, Toyota and Tata to find out what their investment intentions are following the vote to leave the EU?

Alun Cairns: The hon. Lady raises an important question. Within a week of the Brexit referendum I met a number of business leaders in Cardiff and last week I met a number of business leaders in north Wales. I was struck by their pragmatism and approach—the positivity they were showing. One of the most positive quotes was that entrepreneurs “thrive on change.” They recognise that we are not turning our backs on Europe, but opening up new markets across the globe.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that every single Government Minister who has spoken on this issue has expressed their desire to ensure spending remains at exactly the same levels in Wales as it always has done, and that that shows this Government's commitment to the people of Wales?

Alun Cairns: My hon. Friend makes an important point and allows me to underline once again the positive financial commitments this Government have made to Wales. In addition to the 115% funding for the Barnett floor that we have introduced, there is a £2.8 billion investment in electrification and £500 million for a city deal, on top of a range of other projects—UK taxpayers' money being invested in Wales on top of the Barnett consequential.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Given that Wales will no longer receive funding through the European regional development fund, which is allocated on objective needs-based criteria, and that Holtham saw the Barnett floor as a temporary transition measure, what consideration is the Secretary of State giving to developing a clearly needs-based formula for allocating funding to Wales?

Alun Cairns: There were many campaigns for a Barnett floor but it was only this Government who delivered on that. On European funds, we have not yet concluded our negotiating position, but simply replacing what are currently EU funds with another source from Westminster misses the point: the EU referendum sent out a number of messages, and those areas that receive most EU funds were the areas, sadly, that voted most strongly to leave the EU. We need to look at models of regional aid in a different way.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): The debate on our future in the EU was very badly informed. Will the Secretary of State convene an independent inquiry to identify, quantify and publish the losses, and indeed any benefits, to Wales from leaving the EU and the steps he can take, within his powers, to safeguard our national interest?

Alun Cairns: A European Union unit is being set up in Whitehall, which will consider all the implications for my right hon. Friend the next Prime Minister in order to form judgments and direct Government policy, but we must recognise that if any country can make a success of leaving the EU it is the United Kingdom, with its proud history as a global trading nation.

Hywel Williams: I did ask about the Secretary of State's Department. Anyway, I am concerned about the loss of common agricultural policy and convergence funding, and of research moneys to universities, and about the lost opportunities for young people to live, work and study abroad. But also, being Welsh and European, I feel the closing of our horizons towards a parochial little Britainism. What more can he do to ensure the future of our Welsh cultural London bypass to the rest of our continent?

Alun Cairns: I am disappointed by the hon. Gentleman's question. He will understand that I have a close working relationship with the Welsh Government and with the First Minister in particular. What is in Wales's interest is in the United Kingdom's interest, and I am determined to do everything possible to maintain that positive relationship as we negotiate to leave the European Union.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): The Secretary of State's answers have been predictably vacuous and ambiguous. I want to give him a chance to boost his promotion hopes today by flouting all parliamentary traditions and giving a straight answer. Brexit is perilous

to Wales, especially to the steel industry. There will be an immediate loss of £600 million, and there could be further losses later. The simple question—a one-word answer will do—is this: will he guarantee that under Brexit Wales will not lose any of the funding that it has now?

Alun Cairns: I can guarantee that Wales will get its fair share, through the Barnett floor and all the other means that I have highlighted. My party can give certainty of leadership with a strong visionary negotiating stance as we approach our departure from the European Union. It is quite obvious that we cannot have that certainty of leadership from the Labour party.

Rebalancing the Economy

3. **Karen Lumley** (Redditch) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of steps taken to rebalance the economy in Wales. [905785]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): This Government are taking unprecedented steps to ensure greater and fairer prosperity right across the UK, and the UK Government's cities and local growth agenda is revolutionising the way in which we achieve this. The signing of the Cardiff capital region city deal, alongside ongoing negotiations in Swansea and early discussions for a north Wales growth deal, is a clear demonstration of our commitment to rebalancing the economy in Wales.

Karen Lumley: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in my old home area of north Wales, good transport links are vital to rebalancing the economy? What plans does he have to achieve that in order to attract more investment?

Guto Bebb: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the importance of transport links for economic growth in north Wales. Last Thursday, I was at a summit in north Wales with the Welsh Government economic Minister and local government leaders. We discussed a proposal for improving rail and road links in north Wales as part of the north Wales growth deal.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Central to rebalancing the Welsh economy are the metro projects and the city regions. Given that during the referendum campaign 13 Government Ministers signed a letter guaranteeing the continuation of EU funding, will the Minister ensure that none of those projects loses out as a result of our leaving the EU?

Guto Bebb: I think the hon. Gentleman is asking me to give a guarantee in relation to a future Government. That Government will be established by the new Prime Minister from this afternoon onwards. The key point is that the city deal was an initiative that showed the co-operation between the Westminster Government and the Welsh Government. It showed what could be done when Governments work together. The proposed investment in the south Wales metro is something that was not delivered by the previous Government during the 13-year period in which they could have made a difference.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): Given the opportunities of the north Wales growth deal for my constituency and for north-east Wales, what steps is

the Minister taking to follow the lead of the Treasury to ensure that women business leaders are fully engaged in the north Wales growth deal?

Guto Bebb: The meetings that we are having in north Wales have been with council leaders, further education leaders and leaders of Welsh businesses, and I am glad to say that they have involved both male and female leaders. The key point is that our approach in north Wales is inclusive and supported by all stakeholders. People realise the potential of north Wales joining the northern powerhouse for the benefit of all the residents of north Wales.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Exports are central to any rebalancing strategy. Unlike the British state, which has a gigantic trade deficit, Wales has a significant trade surplus. It is the best performing component of the UK. What assessment has the Minister made of the number of countries across the world to which Welsh companies export, and the number of trade deals that will therefore have to be renegotiated? Does he not realise that tariff-free access to the single market is vital to the Welsh economy and that—

Mr Speaker: Order. We are grateful to the hon. Gentleman. We have got his drift.

Guto Bebb: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his passionate question. I agree with him that access to the market is important for the Welsh economy, but he should also recognise that the growth in Welsh exports has been faster to countries outside the European Union. We need a balanced approach and to ensure that we have access to markets throughout the world, so that Welsh manufacturing businesses, such as Airbus, can carry on with their recent success.

EU Referendum: Regeneration Projects

5. **Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the outcome of the EU referendum on regeneration projects in Wales. [905787]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns): As Secretary of State I am determined to maintain our recent economic success and to ensure that we manage our transition to the new arrangements in a calm and measured way. As we negotiate our way out of the EU, a whole range of decisions will have to be made in due course.

Gerald Jones: The A465—the heads of the valleys road—runs through my constituency and has historically had a bad safety record—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I think the people of Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney at the very least will want to hear the hon. Gentleman.

Gerald Jones: Thank you, Mr Speaker. With EU funds, the road has been mostly turned into a dual carriageway, but some phases of the work have yet to start. Will the Secretary of State assure me that he will do all that he can and work with the Welsh Government to provide support and ensure that that project and many like it will not be jeopardised by Brexit?

Alun Cairns: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I underline that we remain full, active members of the EU, with all the benefits and obligations that that brings, for at least two years. The project he highlights is one of the more successful EU-funded projects, but not all of them were as successful but had questionable strategies and woolly outcomes. We need to reassess how we support regional aid programmes.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): Can the shadow Secretary of State—sorry, I mean the Secretary of State, who is just a shadow in his own party—give an absolute commitment that no regeneration projects will lose out as a result of the disastrous Brexit result?

Alun Cairns: I can guarantee that for the next two years at least no EU-supported project will lose out. We have of course not yet concluded our negotiating position, and simply replacing one source of funding with another misses the point. The EU referendum sent out a clear message from the communities that are purported to benefit the most from European aid that they simply did not want what was being offered to them.

Tidal Lagoons

6. **Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): What assessment the Government have made of the potential contribution of tidal lagoons to energy production in Wales. [905788]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): Tidal lagoons have the potential to make a significant contribution to the UK energy mix, and exciting projects in Wales such as the Swansea bay lagoon deserve serious consideration. That is why we have commissioned an independent review of tidal lagoons, and I look forward to reading its findings in the autumn.

Neil Parish: The Bristol channel has the second highest tidal rise and fall in the world. We need to harness that power and we can pay for it over a longer period because it will create power for hundreds of years to come.

Guto Bebb: I thank my hon. Friend for his passionate remarks. He is right that that potential exists, and that is why we have commissioned an independent review that will report in the autumn. It needs to look carefully at the costs and benefits of a potential tidal lagoon. We are supportive of the concept, but we have to ensure that we balance the development against the cost to the UK taxpayer.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): As the Minister will know, many renewable energy projects depend on EU funding—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”] Mr Speaker, I did not know I was that popular! Such projects include the Swansea bay tidal lagoon. Will the Minister provide a cast-iron guarantee that the UK Government will meet that funding if it is lost as we exit the EU?

Guto Bebb: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that he is not that popular.

The complex tidal lagoon issue is being considered—we are looking at all the issues. I am not aware of any EU funding that was committed to the tidal lagoon project, so I can offer no guarantees.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): The Hendry review team has met representatives of business and civic society right across Wales. The tidal lagoon infrastructure project is a massive economic opportunity for Wales and my constituency in particular. Will the Minister assure the House that he will emphasise to the Hendry review how much support and enthusiasm there is for this project, and how important it is that this vital scheme is completed as a matter of urgency?

Guto Bebb: I welcome the hon. Lady to her place on the Front Bench. I fully accept the comments made about support for the concept in the Swansea area, and I can confirm that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already met Charles Hendry to discuss the project. It is not my position to prejudge an independent report, but I assure her that the views of the residents and local authorities in south Wales are known to Charles Hendry.

Farming Sector

7. **Glyn Davies** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the contribution of the farming sector to the economy in Wales. [905789]

11. **Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the contribution of the farming sector to the economy in Wales. [905794]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb): The farming sector is the economic backbone of the Welsh rural economy. The total income from farming in Wales is estimated at more than £175 million, but more important is the contribution that Welsh agriculture makes to our rural communities. It is crucial and this Government will continue to support it. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. The voice of Montgomeryshire must be heard.

Glyn Davies: Does the Minister share my concerns and those of the Welsh farming unions about the administration of the single farm payment scheme in Wales, particularly in relation to cross-border issues? Will he agree to meet the farming unions at the Royal Welsh show next week to discuss this serious issue?

Guto Bebb: I agree completely with my hon. Friend that any delays in payments to the farming community are problematic. This issue is devolved to the Welsh Government and it is one I have already discussed with farming unions. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be at the Royal Welsh next week, subject to the decisions of the next Prime Minister, and meetings have been arranged with farming unions at that event, which is undoubtedly the premier farming event of the whole United Kingdom.

Caroline Nokes: Welsh, and indeed British, farmers are responsible for producing some of the finest food in the world. Now that we are to leave the EU, what effort is my hon. Friend making to make sure that the Department ensures that all of the UK's fantastic home-grown produce is promoted to international markets?

Guto Bebb: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the quality of food produced in Wales is second to none. We produce the best lamb in the entire world, and the contribution of such produce to the economy is crucial. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have already met business leaders, including food producers, to give them confidence that they can still access international markets following the EU referendum result.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): The Royal Welsh show next week in Builth Wells will indeed show the very best of Welsh agriculture. When the Secretary of State goes there, he will get the same question that I have received in the past few weeks, since 23 June: what guarantees are there that the support for the family farm at its current level will remain in the future to sustain the essential rural economy, in west Wales and more generally?

Guto Bebb: The hon. Gentleman is a champion of the agricultural sector—there is no doubt about that. I can assure him, once again, that the Wales Office has already had meetings with the farming unions. We can certainly offer the guarantee that the current funding arrangements will be in place until at least 2018, but the ongoing support for Welsh farming will be subject to agreements involving this Government, the way in which we exit the European Union and the decisions taken by the future Prime Minister.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Given that the common agricultural policy and rural development programme contribute hundreds of millions of pounds to the Welsh rural economy, what UK exit scenario could possibly best serve Wales?

Guto Bebb: As the hon. Lady knows, I argued for Wales and the UK to stay within the EU, but the reality is that Wales voted to leave. It is therefore crucial that we support the industries that are dependent on exporting to the EU. We have a quality product offered by Welsh agriculture, so it is imperative that we talk up that market and support the sector to the best of our abilities. Again, I give assurance to the farming unions that the current funding situation is in place until 2018.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that leaving the European Union offers a golden opportunity to assess the level of subsidy paid to farming in Wales to see whether that money can be more effectively and efficiently spent in other areas?

Guto Bebb: We need to look at the way in which Government spend money. If there is to be a funding mechanism in the future for Welsh agriculture, it must be looked at in the totality of Government spending. However, it is pretty important to state that more than 60,000 jobs in Wales are dependent on the agriculture sector, and it would be short-sighted in the extreme for any Government to turn their back on a sector that puts Wales on the international map.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [905833] **Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP):** If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 13 July.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I know that the whole House will join me in congratulating Andy Murray, Heather Watson, Jordanne Whiley, Gordon Reid and Alfie Hewett on their stunning success at Wimbledon.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. Other than one meeting this afternoon with Her Majesty the Queen, the diary for the rest of my day is remarkably light.

Danny Kinahan: May I echo the Prime Minister's congratulations to Andrew Murray and all the other winners? We thank the Prime Minister for all his hard work and his leadership—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear"!]
—particularly his commitment to the Union and to Northern Ireland, visiting it often and swimming in Lough Erne. Perhaps he would like to come and swim in Lough Neagh. The Ulster Unionist party looks forward to working with the next Prime Minister. I am told that there are lots of leadership roles out there at the moment—there is the England football team and "Top Gear". Even across the Big Pond, there is a role that needs filling. I will if I may go into my pet subject.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): In your own time, Danny.

Danny Kinahan: Thank you.

Brexit really threatens the Union. Will the Prime Minister work with his successors to ensure that we have somebody that will pull together all the countries of the Union and the overseas territories so that we can all work and thrive together?

The Prime Minister: Let me thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks and fascinating suggestions for future jobs, most of which sound even harder than this one, so I think I'll pass. I believe that Northern Ireland is stronger than it was six years ago—58,000 more people in work, the full devolution of justice and home affairs delivered under this Government, the Saville report published, record inward investment and the creation of new jobs. Like him, I care passionately about our United Kingdom, as do all of us in this House. We need to make sure that, as we leave the European Union, we work out how to keep the benefits of the common travel area. Hard work is being done now with civil servants in Northern Ireland, Whitehall and the Republic of Ireland, and the pace of that work needs to quicken.

Q4. [905836] **Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con):** I, too, pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for all the hard work that he has done leading this great country for the past few years.

My right hon. Friend's lasting legacy will include supporting the Kurds whose peshmerga are bravely fighting Daesh in all our interests. Having visited the peshmerga on the frontline, I know that our airstrikes, weapons and training are crucial, but peshmerga injuries could be reduced with additional equipment such as body armour, respirators and front-line medical facilities, and we possibly could provide some beds in our specialist hospital in Birmingham to the most seriously injured. Does he agree that that is a relatively small investment that would make a huge difference to our allies in our common fight to defeat the evil of terrorism?

The Prime Minister: First, I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. He is absolutely right that the Kurds are incredibly brave fighters and are doing valuable work against Daesh in Iraq and Syria. I will look carefully at his suggestion of using the Birmingham hospital. The Queen Elizabeth Hospital has excellent facilities for battlefield casualties. Our Army is already providing medical instruction to the peshmerga to help them deal with the situation, but we will look to see whether more can be done. Let us be frank, the strategy is working. Daesh is on the back foot: it has lost 45% of the territory that it once held in Iraq; its finances have been hit; more than 25,000 Daesh fighters have now been killed; desertion has increased; and the flow of foreign fighters has fallen by 90%. I have always said that this will take a long time to work in Iraq and Syria, but we must stick at it and we must stay the course.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): May I start by joining the Prime Minister in paying tribute to the British winners at Wimbledon—Andy Murray, Heather Watson, Jordanne Whaley, Alfie Hewett and Gordon Reid? Also, I think it would be nice if we congratulated Serena Williams on her fantastic achievement.

It is only right that after his six years as Prime Minister, we thank the right hon. Gentleman for his service. I have often disagreed with him, but some of his achievements I welcome and want to recognise today. One is helping to secure the release of Shaker Aamer from Guantanamo Bay; another is legislating to achieve equal marriage in our society. I am sure he would like to acknowledge that it was Labour votes that helped him to get the legislation through. Will he express some concern at the way that homelessness has risen in this country for the past six years and looks like it is going to continue to rise?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. I join him in paying tribute to Serena Williams, who has now overtaken Steffi Graf's amazing record of 22 grand slams.

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for what he said about Shaker Aamer. That was a case that this Government raised again and again with the US Government, and we are pleased that it has been resolved. I thank him also for what he said about equal marriage. There are 30,000 gay people in our country who, in the past six years, have been able to get married. That is real progress. I will never forget the day at No. 10 when one of the people who works very close to the front door said to me, "I'm not that interested in politics, Mr Cameron, but because of something your lot have done, I am able

to marry the person I've loved all my life this weekend." There are many amazing moments in this job, but that was one of my favourites.

As for homelessness, it is still 10% below the peak that we saw under Labour, but the key is building more homes. We have built 700,000 homes since I became Prime Minister, but now we need to quicken the pace of that. The key to building more homes is, yes, programmes such as Help to Buy; yes, the reforms to the planning system, but the absolute key is a strong economy.

Jeremy Corbyn: I have been listening carefully to what the Home Secretary has been saying over the past few days. She said:

"It's harder than ever for young people to buy their first house."

Does the Prime Minister think that is because of record low house building or his Government's apparent belief that £450,000 is an affordable price for a starter home?

The Prime Minister: First, let me say at the Dispatch Box how warmly I congratulate the Home Secretary on becoming leader of the Conservative party. When it comes to women Prime Ministers, I am very pleased to be able to say that pretty soon it is going to be 2:0, and not a pink bus in sight.

On the issue of housing and homelessness, as I said, 700,000 homes have been delivered. The right hon. Gentleman asked about affordability, which is key. When I became Prime Minister, because of what had happened to the mortgage market, a first-time buyer often needed to have as much as £30,000 to put down a deposit. Because of the combination of Help to Buy and shared ownership, some people are able to get on the housing ladder now with a deposit of as little as £2,000. With the low mortgage rates and the new houses we are building, we are making good progress.

Jeremy Corbyn: The malaise seems a little deeper still. The Home Secretary said, talking of the economy, "so that it really does work for everyone. Because it is apparent to anybody who is in touch with the real world that people do not feel our economy works that way".

Is she not right that too many people in too many places in Britain feel that the economy has been destroyed in their towns because the industries have gone, there are high levels of unemployment or under-employment, and a deep sense of malaise? Do not we all need to address that?

The Prime Minister: If we are going to talk about the economic record, let us get the facts straight. We have cut the deficit by two thirds. There are 2.5 million more people in work in our country. There are almost a million more businesses, and 2.9 million people in apprenticeships have been trained under this Government. When it comes to poverty, 300,000 fewer people are in relative poverty and 100,000 fewer children are in relative poverty. If I am accused of sloth in delivery by the right hon. Gentleman, let us take the past week. We have both been having leadership elections. We got on with it. We have had resignation, nomination, competition and coronation. The Opposition have not even decided what the rules are yet. If they ever got into power, it would take them about a year to work out who would sit where.

Jeremy Corbyn: Democracy is an exciting and splendid thing, and I am enjoying every moment of it.

Talking of the economy, the Home Secretary said that many people

“find themselves exploited by unscrupulous bosses”—

I cannot imagine who she was referring to. In his hand-over discussions with the Home Secretary, could the Prime Minister enlighten us as to whether there is any proposal to take on agency Britain by banning zero-hours contracts, clamping down on umbrella companies, repealing the Trade Union Act 2016 or, preferably, all three?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is right that democracy is a splendid thing—I have to agree with him about that. Let me answer very directly on exploitation in the workplace. It is this Government that, for the first time, has introduced a national living wage—that is a huge change. It is this Government that has massively increased the power of the Gangmasters Licensing Authority. There are record fines for businesses that do not pay the minimum wage, and there is much more policing and many more prosecutions taking place. All of those things have changed under this Government. As for zero-hours contracts, they account for fewer than one in 40 people in work. Some 60% of people on zero-hours contracts do not want to work more hours. It was this Government that did something the Labour party never did, which was to ban exclusive zero-hours contracts—13 years of Labour, but it took a coalition Conservative Government to do it.

Let me say something to the right hon. Gentleman about the democratic process of leadership elections, because I did say a couple of weeks ago—*[Interruption.]* I have to say that I am beginning to admire his tenacity. He is reminding me of the Black Knight in “Monty Python and the Holy Grail”. He has been kicked so many times, but he says, “Keep going, it’s only a flesh wound.” I admire that.

Jeremy Corbyn: I would like the Prime Minister to address another issue that the House voted on last week. I have a question from Nina—*[Interruption.]* It is a question from somebody who deserves an answer. She says:

“I would like to know, if there is any possibility, that an EU citizen, that has lived in the UK for thirty years can have their right of permanent residence... revoked and deported, depending on the Brexit negotiations”.

There has been no clear answer to this question. It is one that worries a very large number of people, and it would be good if, in his last Question Time, the Prime Minister could at least offer some assurance to those people.

The Prime Minister: Let me reassure Nina that there is absolutely no chance of that happening to someone in those circumstances. We are working hard to do what we want, which is to give a guarantee to EU citizens that they will have their rights respected—all those who have come to this country. The only circumstance in which I could ever envisage a future Government trying to undo that guarantee would be if British citizens in other European countries did not have their rights

respected. I think it is important to have reciprocity. The new Prime Minister will be working to give that guarantee as fast as we can.

I am glad the right hon. Gentleman mentions emails, because, actually, I have an email as well. I got this—I am not making this up, I promise—on 16 September 2015 from someone called Judith, and she said this:

“Please, please keep dignity, and not triumphalism during the first PMQs today with Jeremy Corbyn.”

She gave this reason:

“Tom Watson, who may oust Jeremy Corbyn...is a very different kettle of fish. He is experienced, organised and far more dangerous in the long run.”

She goes on:

“Sensible, sober, polite answers to Mr Corbyn...let him create his own party disunity.”

After this is over, I have got to find Judith and find out what on earth happens next.

Jeremy Corbyn: I have had the pleasure of asking the Prime Minister 179 questions—*[HON. MEMBERS: “More!”]* Thank you. There are plenty more to come to his successor—don’t worry about that.

Before I ask the Prime Minister my last question, could I just put on record that I wish him well as he leaves office? I also wish his family well—Samantha and their children. We should all recognise that while many of us really do enjoy our jobs and our political life, it is the loved ones nearest to us and our families who actually make enormous sacrifices so that we may be able to do this. I would also like him to pass on my thanks to his mum for her advice about ties, suits and songs. It is extremely kind of her, and I would be grateful if he would pass that on to her personally. I am reflecting on the lesson that she offered.

I have one rumour that I want the Prime Minister to deal with. There is a rumour going round that his departure has been carefully choreographed so that he can slip seamlessly into the vacancy on “Strictly” that was created this morning by Len Goodman’s departure. Is that his next career?

The Prime Minister: I do not really have a *pasa doble*, so I can promise that that is not the case.

Let me thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks and good wishes to my amazing wife Samantha and my lovely children, who are all watching from the Gallery today. He is absolutely right: the pressure in these jobs often bears hardest on those we love around us. Let me send my best wishes to his family as well.

I have done a bit of research, Mr Speaker. I have addressed 5,500 questions from this Dispatch Box; I will leave it for others to work out how many I have answered. Because of your belief in letting everyone have their say, I think I have done a record 92 hours of statements from this Dispatch Box, as well as some very enjoyable Liaison Committee appearances and other things.

I will certainly send the right hon. Gentleman’s best wishes back to my mother. He seems to have taken her advice and is looking absolutely splendid today.

This gives me the opportunity to put a rumour to rest, as well—it is even more serious than the “Strictly Come Dancing” one. The right hon. Gentleman will

appreciate this because El Gato, his cat, is particularly famous. This is the rumour that somehow I do not love Larry; I do, and I have photographic evidence to prove it. Sadly, I cannot take Larry with me; he belongs to the house and the staff love him very much, as do I.

Mr Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in 33 years in this House watching five Prime Ministers and several ex-Prime Ministers, I have seen him achieve a mastery of that Dispatch Box unparalleled in my time? That is not just because of his command of detail and his wit, but because he commands the respect of friend and foe alike, who know that he is driven not just by legitimate political ambitions and ideas, but by a sense of duty that always leads him to try to make this country more prosperous, more solvent, more tolerant, more fair, and more free. He will command the respect of generations to come.

The Prime Minister: Those words mean a lot from my right hon. Friend, who has spent so much time in this House. It is a special place. I think Prime Minister's questions, for all its theatrics, does have a purpose, because it is a time when every week the Prime Minister has to know absolutely everything that is going on in Whitehall. Often you find out things that you want to stop pretty quickly before 12 o'clock on a Wednesday. I believe that politics is about public service in the national interest, and that is what I have always tried to do.

This session does have some admirers around the world. I remember when I was doing the Leader of the Opposition's job and I met Mayor Bloomberg in New York. We walked down the street and everyone knew Mike Bloomberg. Everyone came up and said, "Mayor, you're doing a great job." No one had a clue who I was, until eventually someone said, "Hey, Cameron. Prime Minister's questions—we love your show!"

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): I join the Prime Minister and the leader of the Labour party in paying tribute to all the winners at Wimbledon.

This week we mark the 21st anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. As this is one of the few political causes that the Prime Minister and I both wholeheartedly support, I hope he will impress on his successor the importance of supporting the Remembering Srebrenica organisation and all the good work that it does across the UK.

Notwithstanding our differences, I genuinely extend my best personal wishes to the Prime Minister and his family; I wish them all the best. However, the Prime Minister's legacy will undoubtedly be that he has brought us to the brink of being taken out of the European Union, so we on these Benches will not be applauding his premiership. What advice has he given his successor on taking Scotland out of the EU against the wishes of Scottish voters?

The Prime Minister: First, let me join the right hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to all those who lost their lives in Srebrenica. We should make sure that we commemorate the event properly every year. This year there will be a service in the Foreign Office, where commemoration will be given and testimony read out. We should think of it alongside the terrible events of modern history such as the holocaust. This also reminds

us that while, as we often debate in this House, there is a price for intervention, there is also sometimes a price from non-intervention. We should remember that.

In terms of what the right hon. Gentleman says about Scotland, the United Kingdom and Europe, my advice to my successor, who is a brilliant negotiator, is that we should try to be as close to the European Union as we can be for the benefits of trade, co-operation and security. The channel will not get any wider once we leave the European Union, and that is the relationship we should seek. That would be good for the United Kingdom and good for Scotland.

Angus Robertson: The Prime Minister's successor is very well known in Scotland at present—this is across all the front pages—because of the threat to deport the very much loved and liked Brain family from the highlands. The first vote of her premiership is likely to be on imposing Trident against the wishes of almost every single MP from Scotland. Meanwhile, she says that she plans to plough on with Brexit, regardless of the fact that Scotland voted to remain in the EU. How does the outgoing Prime Minister think that all that will go down in Scotland?

The Prime Minister: First of all, specifically on the Brain family, Mrs Brain came to this country on a tier 4 student visa to study for a Scottish history degree. She completed it and her husband and son came as dependants. We have given them an extension until 1 August to put in an application for a work visa in the normal way, and I very much hope that will happen.

On Trident, there will be a vote in this House. It is right that this House should decide. Actually, many people in Scotland support our nuclear deterrent, maintaining it and the jobs that come in Scotland.

The right hon. Gentleman asks about the record of this Government when it comes to Scotland. I will tell him what it is: 143,000 more people in work in Scotland; massive investment in the renewable industries in Scotland; the two biggest warships in our history built in Scotland; a powerhouse Parliament; a referendum that was legal, decisive and fair; and, I might add, a Scotsman winning Wimbledon twice while I was Prime Minister. Never mind Indy 2; I think it is time for Andy 2.

Q7. [905839] **Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister for the leadership he has shown, particularly in his support of women in the Conservative party. The Prime Minister's legacy for me, however, and for fellow cancer survivors, is the personal support that he has shown for the cancer drugs fund. Today I ask him to show the same support for those who have been affected by contaminated blood. Will he please update the House as to whether they, too, will have a legacy?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for what she says about the cancer drugs fund, which has helped many people and families in our country. She is absolutely right to raise the issue of contaminated blood, and I can today announce that we will spend the extra £125 million that we have identified. A much fairer and more comprehensive scheme will guarantee that all those infected will, for the first time, receive a regular annual payment. That will include all those with hepatitis stage 1,

who will now receive £3,500 per year, rising to £4,500 per year by the end of the Parliament. For those with hepatitis C at stage 2 or HIV, or who are co-infected with both, annual payments will increase over the lifetime of the Parliament, and we will enhance the support for those who have been bereaved and those who will be in future, significantly boosting the money for the discretionary payments. Last year I apologised to the victims on behalf of the British Government for something that should never have happened. Today I am proud to provide them with the support that they deserve.

Although it is not right to pick out two individuals, I think that people should know that they can come to constituency surgeries, make their point to their Member of Parliament and campaign, as these sufferers have done. In my case, David Leadbetter and Matthew Davies repeatedly came to my surgery, saying, "This mustn't stand. More must be done." I know that not everyone will be fully satisfied with what is being done, but it does show our democracy working and compassion in replying to this terrible problem.

Q2. [905834] **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): The Prime Minister came to office promising to keep the UK's triple A rating, to end top-down NHS reorganisations and to stop his party banging on about Europe. How would he say that has gone?

The Prime Minister: On the economic record, 2.5 million more jobs, the deficit cut by two thirds, 2.9 million apprenticeships, a million more businesses, and a growth rate that has been at the top of the developed world are all because of the choices that we made. Because we did that, we have been able to back our NHS with a 10% funding increase, which is more than £10 billion in real terms in this Parliament. As for Europe, we have to settle these issues. It is right that, when trying to settle a really big constitutional issue, you not just rely on Parliament, but ask the people as well. We made a promise and we kept a promise.

Q12. [905844] **Steve Brine** (Winchester) (Con): I am very sorry that this turns out to be my last question to the Prime Minister. I want to thank him for everything he has done for my constituency, where every school is now good or outstanding and the jobless total is down 64% since he took office. As he prepares to leave Downing Street, I encourage him to return to the big society agenda that I know he is so passionate about. Does he remember saying, shortly before becoming Prime Minister, that politicians are a mixture of egotism and altruism, and that

"you just hope that the"

right one

"wins out and that people do the right thing rather than the politically convenient thing"?

It seems to me that he has stayed on the right side of that divide in the past six years, not least in the manner of his departure. I think that this country is going to miss him a great deal.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. When it comes to education, there is a very strong record to build on. We have 1.4 million more children in good or outstanding schools than in 2010. We have seen the free school movement really

take off, with over 300 free schools open. I visited one yesterday that is outstanding, as a quarter of them are, which is an amazing record when we think how little time they have had to get going. I think that we should build on that record.

As for the big society, yes, we should use a stronger economy to build a bigger and stronger society. One thing we are doing is introducing the National Citizen Service. Some 200,000 young people have taken part in that programme and I hope that, by the end of this Parliament, it will be the norm for 16-year-olds to take part. We talk about the soft skills that are necessary to give people real life chances. Many people do not get those chances, and the National Citizen Service will help them.

Q3. [905835] **Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for the courteous way he has always answered the questions I have managed to ask him. I have always listened carefully to his answers but, until I had two eye operations, I was not able to see him very clearly. Is he as concerned as I am about newspaper reports that people who are not entitled to NHS cataract operations are jumping the queue and preventing people who are entitled to NHS operations from having that treatment?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. I try to answer questions from this Dispatch Box, but it is difficult sometimes when I have not seen the specific story, and I have not in this case. I recall from previous occasions that we are still investing in cataract operations and that the number of people receiving them is going up. However, I will look carefully—this afternoon—at the question he asks about the danger of queue jumping and get back to him.

Q13. [905845] **Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): Under the leadership of my right hon. Friend, unemployment in my constituency has dropped from 5.1% in May 2010 to 1.9% in May this year. That is a record to be proud of and one for which I would like to thank him. Does he agree that that has been possible only thanks to his firm focus on jobs, apprenticeships, skills, a strong economy and investment?

The Prime Minister: The figures are remarkable—when a constituency gets to an unemployment rate of 1.9%, that is very close to full employment. We had 2.4 million apprenticeships in the previous Parliament, and there are already an extra 500,000 in this Parliament, taking us towards the target of 3 million in this Parliament. I am confident that we can achieve that target if we work hard. These are not just numbers on a page; they are real people who have experience of the workplace, who are learning a trade and who are taking their first steps in their career. What I want is that, when they get that career, we not only have the national living wage, but make sure that people do not start paying income tax until they are earning a good wage. We have taken 4 million of the lowest paid people in our country out of income tax altogether—that is a record to be proud of.

Q5. [905837] **Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): This week is Black Country Week. Yesterday, black country manufacturers were in Parliament demonstrating the high-quality products that are exported

worldwide. Will the outgoing Prime Minister impress on the incoming Prime Minister the huge importance of maintaining access to the EU single market during Brexit negotiations so that we can maximise the black country's contribution to exports, productivity and jobs?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. We have seen in the west midlands 173,000 more people in work under this Government. We have seen something of a renaissance in manufacturing, particularly in the automotive sector, some of which is, indeed, in the black country. It is vital for that industry that we have proper access to the single market. I think he is right; this is one of the things we absolutely have to focus on. I want these high-quality automotive and aerospace manufacturing firms to go from strength to strength in our country, and making sure we get that access to Europe is going to be vital.

Q15. [905847] **Mr Robin Walker** (Worcester) (Con): Ten years ago today, I was applying to become the Conservative parliamentary candidate for Labour-held Worcester as my right hon. Friend was uniting the then Opposition and preparing them for government. Like many Conservative Members, I entered this House in the week when he became Prime Minister. Since that time, unemployment in Worcester has halved and apprenticeships have doubled. We have more good and outstanding schools, and are beginning to receive fairer funding. Wages are up and taxes are down. May I thank my right hon. Friend for all his service to our nation and for the legacy of improved life chances that he will leave behind?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. We have seen unemployment fall in all these constituencies and the claimant count going down. More importantly, we now see 450,000 fewer children in households in which nobody works. Think of the effect of having a parent or a loved one in work helping to put food on the table and providing a role model for their children. That is really what this is all about, and I thank him for his kind remarks.

Q8. [905840] **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Between broken vows, Brexit and the likely renewal of weapons of mass destruction on the Clyde, the Prime Minister has done more for Scottish independence than many SNP Members could ever hope to do. As he contemplates a move to Aberdeenshire, will he now make his commitment to Scottish independence official by visiting snp.org/joinus?

The Prime Minister: What I say to the hon. Lady, and indeed to all SNP Members, is that when Lord Smith himself says that the vow to create a powerhouse Parliament was kept, the SNP should pay attention to that, and recognise that a promise was made and a promise was delivered. I have talked many times at this Dispatch Box about creating this powerhouse Parliament; what I have not seen is the SNP using any of the powers that it now has.

Mr Speaker: Finally, Mr Kenneth Clarke.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): May I first join with all who have thanked the Prime Minister for the statesmanlike leadership that he has given to our

party and to the country for the past six years? I thank him particularly for the debating eloquence and also the wit and humour that he has always brought to Prime Minister's questions on Wednesdays. Although, no doubt, he will have plans for a slightly more enjoyable and relaxed Wednesday morning and lunchtime in the future, may I ask that he will nevertheless still be an active participant in this House as it faces a large number of problems over the next few years? As no two people know what Brexit means at the moment, we need his advice and statesmanship as much as we ever have.

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his very kind remarks. I remember that one of the toughest conversations I had in politics was when I was Leader of the Opposition and I was trying to get him to join my Front Bench. He was on a bird-watching holiday in Patagonia; it was almost impossible to persuade him to come back.

Not many people know this, but my right hon. and learned Friend's first act as Chancellor of the Exchequer was to fire me as a special adviser. I am proud of the fact that one of my first acts was to appoint him to my Cabinet in the coalition Government. The then Deputy Prime Minister will join me in saying that my right hon. and learned Friend provided great wisdom, thoughtfulness and ballast at a time of national difficulty with the advice that he gave us. He is not always the easiest person to get hold of—Tory modernisation has never quite got as far as getting Ken Clarke to carry a mobile phone. He did briefly have one, but he said, "The problem is that people keep ringing me on it." In opposition, I seem to remember that we had to move our morning meeting to accommodate his 9 o'clock cigar.

I will watch these exchanges from the Back Benches. I will miss the roar of the crowd and I will miss the barbs from the Opposition, but I will be willing you on. When I say "willing you on", I do not just mean willing on the new Prime Minister at this Dispatch Box, or indeed just willing on the Government Front Bench and defending the manifesto that I helped to put together. I mean willing all of you on, because people come here with huge passion for the issues they care about and with great love for the constituencies that they represent. I will also be willing on this place. Yes, we can be pretty tough, and we test and challenge our leaders—perhaps more than some other countries—but that is something we should be proud of, and we should keep at it. I hope that you will all keep at it, and I shall will you on as you do.

The last thing I would say is that you can achieve a lot of things in politics and get a lot of things done; in the end, public service and the national interest is what it is all about. Nothing is really impossible if you put your mind to it. After all, as I once said, I was the future once. *[Applause.]*

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I will come to the hon. Lady—how could I forget her? Her point of order will be heard, but we will first deal with the presentation of Bills.

BILLS PRESENTED**HARBOURS, DOCKS AND PIERS CLAUSES ACT 1847
(AMENDMENT)***Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Craig Mackinlay, supported by Sir Roger Gale, Caroline Lucas, Paul Scully, James Cleverly, Martin Vickers, Mr David Nuttall, Kelly Tolhurst and Craig Tracey, presented a Bill to amend section 33 of the Harbours, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847 to allow local authorities to proscribe, in certain circumstances, the transport of live animals for slaughter abroad via facilities that local authorities control and operate; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 November, and to be printed (Bill 52).

**UK ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (MAINTENANCE OF
EU STANDARDS)***Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Geraint Davies, supported by Mary Creagh, Caroline Lucas, Kerry McCarthy, Mr Mark Williams, Liz Saville Roberts, Chris Stephens, Margaret Greenwood, Sir Alan Meale, Dr Rosena Allin-Khan, Liz McInnes and Gill Furniss, presented a Bill to make provision about the safeguarding of standards of environmental protection derived from European Union legislation, including for water, air, soil, flood protection, and climate change, after the withdrawal of the UK from the EU; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be a Second time on Friday 28 October, and to be printed (Bill 53).

Point of Order

12.40 pm

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In light of the Prime Minister's announcement during Prime Minister's Question Time about financial support for people who received contaminated blood from the NHS in years gone by, would it be in order for you, Mr Speaker, to seek a Minister to come to the House to give further details? Many Members from all parts of the House have been concerned about the issue for many years. It is welcome that the Prime Minister said the Government have reached a conclusion and will now bring forward and implement proposals, but it would be very helpful for all Members to have an opportunity to question a Health Minister on the actual implications of what has been announced today. I understand that a Minister has indicated, in an email sent to me at 12.26 pm today, that she intends to make a written statement to the House tomorrow. However, in light of the overwhelming interest in all parts of the House, a Minister appearing at the Dispatch Box would be much more helpful to Members of Parliament.

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order. She has devoted close attention to this issue and raised it many times in the House, not least, if memory serves me correctly, on 26 March 2015, to give but one example. I think it is only fair to say to her that tomorrow is likely to be heavily subscribed, being the second day of the two-day debate on the Iraq inquiry, so I suspend judgment on whether tomorrow is necessarily the best day for the purpose. However, I am happy to say to her that from my vantage point, and knowing the extent and breadth of interest in the issue across the House, I think it would show a sensitivity to parliamentary feeling if there were an oral statement, rather than merely a written statement. I hope that that is helpful and constitutes an answer in the mind of the hon. Lady.

National Health Service

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

12.42 pm

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a bill to re-establish the Secretary of State's legal duty as to the National Health Service in England and to make provision about the other duties of the Secretary of State in that regard; to make provision about the administration and accountability of the National Health Service in England; to repeal section 1 of the National Health Service (Private Finance) Act 1997, sections 38 and 39 of the Immigration Act 2014 and Part 9 of the Health and Social Care Information Act 2012; to make provision about the application of international law in relation to health services in the United Kingdom; and for connected purposes.

It is a privilege to have the opportunity to present this Bill to the House. I pay tribute to the many patients, nurses, doctors, trade unions and campaigners across the country who have been working tirelessly to combat the privatisation of our national health service. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) and the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for the work that they have done.

The Bill is intended to fully restore the NHS as an accountable public service by reversing marketisation in the NHS, abolishing the purchaser-provider split, ending contracting, re-establishing public bodies and making public services accountable to local communities. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 provided the framework for the privatisation of the NHS, and we are seeing that privatisation happen at pace. I believe that the Act brought in three core changes that are driving that privatisation. First, it removed the legal duty on the Secretary of State for Health to provide and secure a comprehensive national health service in England. Secondly, it included a requirement to put NHS contracts out to competitive tender in the free market, putting the profit motive at the heart of the service. Thirdly, it allowed NHS hospitals to make up to 49% of their money out of private patients.

The Bill makes the case for a planned, managed health service. It would reinstate the duty of the Health Secretary, lost under the 2012 Act, to provide a secure and comprehensive NHS. That is important because, under the current arrangements, clinical commissioning groups do not have to serve a particular geographic area and are not required to tend to all illnesses and conditions. In some areas, certain treatments, such as hip and knee replacements and cataract operations, are already being rationed. Reinstating the Secretary of State's duty is vital to provide the Government accountability needed to maintain a comprehensive NHS.

The 2012 Act forces NHS contracts out to competitive tender in the marketplace, allowing private companies to cherry-pick NHS services from which they can make money. Since 2012, we have seen the effect of NHS contracts going to private companies—it undermines NHS services and the pay and conditions of staff and fragments the service. The sums of money involved are eye-watering. The Government would have us believe that only 6% of contracts go to private firms, but according to the NHS Support Federation, private firms won 36.8% of contracts in 2014-15, securing £3.54 billion of the £9.628 billion of deals awarded.

Does that matter? I say yes, absolutely, without question. Contracting out is very expensive. In the USA, the cost accounts for about 30% of healthcare expenditure, compared with 5% in the non-marketised NHS pre-1990. Any private company has a duty to generate profit for shareholders, but the money we pay through our taxes should be spent on patient care and should not go to shareholders. Putting healthcare contracts out to competitive tender means money being spent on marketing and contract lawyers that could be spent on patients. A proliferation of providers also means a proliferation of administrative costs and opens up opportunities for fraud.

The only way the private sector can reduce costs is ultimately by cutting quality, which might happen by a number of means—for example, by cutting the pay and terms and conditions of health service staff or by selling off nationally owned assets. As a nation, we hold our doctors, nurses and other NHS staff in high esteem, and it is important that we protect their pay and conditions. The Bill therefore includes a requirement for the use of national terms and conditions of employment for relevant NHS staff under the NHS Staff Council and its “Agenda for Change” system. It also includes provisions aimed at preventing the application of competition law and procurement rules to the NHS. It would abolish Monitor, the sector regulator that licenses health service providers and oversees the operation of procurement, choice and competition rules in the health service, and it would repeal sections of the 2012 Act relating to procurement, competition, tariff pricing and health special administration.

Under the 2012 Act, NHS hospitals can make up to 49% of their money from private patients. How they make it is up to them, but the startling fact is that they can do it. They can choose to devote 49% of patient beds to private patients, 49% of theatre time to private patients or 49% of consultants' time to private patients—and absolutely nobody voted for it. It was in neither the Conservative party's nor the Liberal Democrats' manifesto, yet they went ahead and passed legislation to make it happen. That is nothing short of a national scandal. I ask hon. Members to reflect on what it would mean for their constituents if their hospital made such choices. How soon could that happen? In some places, it is happening already. The Royal Marsden hospital now makes 26%—over a quarter—of its money from private patients.

I turn to the NHS financial crisis, which we are all aware of, which is particularly notable in our hospitals and which is accelerating at a frightening pace. NHS trusts in England have recorded a deficit of £2.45 billion for 2015-16—the biggest overspend in the history of the NHS, nearly three times that of the preceding year and more than 20 times the 2013-14 deficit. Three in four hospitals predict that they will be in deficit this year, and the financial crisis is also having an impact on the delivery of care. In those circumstances, it is not difficult to see how hospital managers might feel that increasing the number of private patients they treat in order to generate more income is one of the few options open to them.

We can also look at the recent arrival of sustainability transformation plans to see the bigger picture. England has been divided into 44 areas, each of which is required to come up with an STP. The first priority for the STP is that CCGs and providers must cut expenditure, stay

within budget for 2016-17 and continue to do so for the next four years in order to be entitled to access centrally controlled transformation funding. They will face tough choices—they could sell assets, cut services, ration services or actually charge for services. In that landscape, we can expect to see hospitals taking private patients to generate extra cash, putting NHS patients at the back of the queue.

Doubtless the Government would argue that hospitals will be able to reinvest the money earned from private patients, but that argument does not stack up. If we cut 49% of resources from NHS patients, waiting times will grow and the quality of service will decline. We will see the emergence of a two-tier health service: first-rate for those with the money to pay, but NHS patients receiving a much diminished service. The concept of a comprehensive service free at the point of use will be lost within a generation, and we will all face the real possibility of having to buy health insurance, just as people do in America.

Let us remind ourselves that these hospitals are ours. They have been paid for out of our taxes and are run by our NHS staff—they are not the Government's to give away. This Bill addresses that and would remove the right of NHS hospitals to make 49% of their money out of private patients.

We will not be able to manage our NHS properly until we address the issue of social care. We are all aware of how important that is. Why should we settle for an NHS that is free to all who need it unless they are elderly or have complex needs? The Bill provides an opportunity to change that. It would give the Secretary of State a duty to exercise his functions with a view to integrating the provision of health and social care services. That integration was a key aim of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) when he was shadow Secretary of State for Health in the last Parliament and formed part of the Labour party manifesto. I believe that families up and down the country would welcome that development.

The Bill would also provide for the transfer of financial obligations on NHS private finance initiative agreements to the Treasury, which would also be required to assess and publish those obligations. That would improve public health, stop the privatisation of the NHS and return it to its founding principles. It would remove competition and the profit motive as the drivers of policy and replace them with the public service ethos that has been the hallmark of the NHS since its foundation. The NHS is currently on life support, and the public, patients and NHS staff know it. The Bill provides a viable alternative. The NHS was 68 years old last week; we need to make sure it is there for all who need it for the next 68 years, too.

12.52 pm

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I rise to oppose the Bill, which is wholly based on a false premise. The hon. Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) said that the Bill was necessary to stop the privatisation of the NHS. Well, the privatisation of the NHS is not occurring, so going by her own words, the Bill is completely unnecessary.

The hon. Lady laid the blame for the so-called privatisation of the NHS on the Health and Social Care Act 2012, and she thinks that repealing that Act will

therefore solve the problem of what she describes as the privatisation of the NHS. The hon. Lady, who cannot seem to be bothered to listen to the debate, even though it is about her Bill, might have acknowledged that the so-called privatisation of the NHS started long before the 2012 Act. In fact, it gathered pace during the time of the last Labour Government.

If we look at the figures for expenditure on private providers, we see that from a near standing start under the Labour Government, the amount of the total NHS resource expenditure going to private providers grew much more rapidly under the Labour Government than it has under this Government. The increase in resources going to those providers has actually slowed down; it is much slower than it was. It was the hon. Lady's party that introduced the private sector into the NHS and allowed private sector providers to provide NHS treatment.

I welcome that, as it happens. I do not see it as a bad thing. If my constituents need hospital treatment on the NHS, they have usually had to go to either the Bradford Royal Infirmary, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah), or to Airedale hospital, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Kris Hopkins). However, under the current provisions, whereby the NHS can allow private providers to supply services, my constituents can now go to the Yorkshire Clinic in my constituency for high-quality treatment. They are served much closer to their homes, and their treatment is still free at the point of need.

As far as I am concerned, that is the essential founding principle of the NHS that must be preserved—that treatment is free at the point of need. That is what matters to people. That is what they want when they need healthcare treatment—free, high-quality healthcare at the point of need, at a location that is convenient for them and convenient for their family members to visit. Whether that is carried out at an NHS hospital or a private hospital is neither here nor there, as long as they are getting treatment free of charge at the point of need. My constituents have benefited greatly from being able to have treatment at the Yorkshire Clinic rather than having to go to one of the NHS hospitals outside my constituency.

The last Labour Government, of course, were far worse when it came to giving contracts to the private sector. Those of us who were here at the time will know that they did not pay the same tariff—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) keeps chirping away from the Opposition Front Bench; if she listened, she might learn something. *[Interruption.]* Well she might, and other hon. Members might well too. Many of them were not here at the time, but those who were will recall—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) is exercising his democratic rights as a parliamentarian, so he must be heard—preferably with courtesy, but certainly without noise.

Philip Davies: Thank you, Mr Speaker; I appreciate that.

I was making the point that when the Labour party gave out contracts to the private sector, it actually paid the private providers a higher tariff for carrying out that work than they paid NHS hospitals and providers. To

[Philip Davies]

my mind, that was a complete outrage. If Labour was so much against the private sector, why on earth was it paying private providers a higher tariff than NHS providers? It was the current Government who stopped that absurd practice and made sure that private providers were paid the same tariff as NHS providers. The hon. Member for Wirral West could have mentioned that in her remarks, but she failed to do so.

As I said, the whole Bill is based on a false premise, because it was the last Labour Government who introduced the private sector into the NHS and paid private providers more for carrying out the same work, and the current Government have dealt with that absurdity.

The hon. Lady was pretty quiet about the part of the Bill that deals with section 38 of the Immigration Act 2014, which she wishes to repeal. That section requires nationals from outside the European economic area who come to the UK for longer than six months to pay a health surcharge when making their immigration application. Although no statistics are yet available on the amount of revenue raised from that surcharge, an answer to a parliamentary question last year showed that the Government estimated that they would recover about £200 million a year from foreign nationals using the NHS. The hon. Lady wishes to repeal that legislation. In effect, she wants foreign nationals to come to the UK and use the NHS free of charge. No wonder she mentioned so little of that. At the end of her speech she talked about the financial crisis that the NHS is suffering, yet she is bringing forward a Bill that will stop the NHS being able to recover some of the money spent on treating foreign nationals. The whole Bill is a complete absurdity and nonsense.

If the hon. Lady is proud of that provision in the Bill, why did she not mention it during her speech? Perhaps she is secretly embarrassed about it. Perhaps she knows that her constituents would not particularly appreciate her attempt to introduce legislation to give foreign nationals free treatment, which would cost the NHS more money rather than saving it money. I know that she is one of the last remaining supporters of the Leader of the Opposition, but even he might think that that was rather a strange way of trying to improve the NHS's financial position.

I know that this is the same Bill that the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) presented during the last Session. Perhaps the hon. Member for Wirral West did not actually read the Bill. Perhaps she presented it without having looked at it, and did not realise that it included that particular provision. Either there has

been an omission on her part, or we have the rather strange absurdity that she wants to introduce legislation to take at least £200 million a year away from the NHS. She might be able to discuss how that would help the NHS, but I do not see the logic in it.

I do not intend to prevent the hon. Lady from having her moment in the sun. I merely wished to point out that the whole Bill is based on a false premise. It was the last Labour Government who introduced the private sector into the NHS, not the current Government. No matter how many times the hon. Lady repeats that particular myth, it will not get off the ground. Her Bill would cost the NHS more rather than saving it any money, and on that basis, when it comes before the House, I shall be here.

Question put (Standing Order No. 23) and agreed to.
Ordered.

That Margaret Greenwood, Caroline Lucas, Dawn Butler, Stella Creasy, Nic Dakin, Peter Dowd, Mike Kane, Liz McInnes, Yasmin Qureshi, Marie Rimmer, Stephen Twigg and John Pugh present the Bill.

Margaret Greenwood accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on 4 November 2016 and to be printed (Bill 51).

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. During a debate on 13 June, I raised the issue of British taxpayers' money being used to fund convicted Palestinian terrorists. I twice requested that the Minister of State, Department for International Development, publish the memorandum of understanding between DFID and the Palestinian Authority. The Minister has now written an extraordinary letter to me, saying that his officials are seeking a meeting with the Palestinian Authority to discuss the release of the document. The Palestinian Authority is being given the right to veto a Member of Parliament's request for information. How are we supposed to hold the Government to account when they refuse to release crucial documentation unless they are given permission to do so by the Palestinian Authority?

Mr Speaker: It sounds a rum business, I am bound to say, but it is not a matter for the Chair. It is a matter that will have to be pursued with a terrier-like tenacity, and knowing the hon. Gentleman—as I have done for 30 years, since our robust skirmishes in the students' union of the University of Essex—I can testify to his possession of that quality in a high degree. I therefore rather imagine that he will pursue the matter until he gets what he wants.

INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Order, 30 June, and Standing Order 118(6)),

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that Her Majesty will appoint Jenny Willott to the office of ordinary member of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority with effect from 7 August 2016 for the period ending 31 December 2020.—(*Margot James.*)

The House divided: Ayes 312, Noes 45.

Division No. 45]

[1.4 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Arkless, Richard
Atkins, Victoria
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Bardell, Hannah
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Benyon, Richard
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackford, Ian
Blackman, Bob
Blackman, Kirsty
Borwick, Victoria
Boswell, Philip
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brake, rh Tom
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brock, Deidre
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Cherry, Joanna
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Colville, Oliver

Costa, Alberto
Cowan, Ronnie
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Donelan, Michelle
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elphicke, Charlie
Evans, Graham
Evennett, rh Mr David
Fallon, rh Michael
Farron, Tim
Fellows, Marion
Fernandes, Suella
Ferrier, Margaret
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gibson, Patricia
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grant, Peter
Gray, Neil
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew

Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hopkins, Kris
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kennedy, Seema
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Kinahan, Danny
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Lamb, rh Norman
Latham, Pauline
Law, Chris
Lefroy, Jeremy
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lopresti, Jack
Loughton, Tim
Lumley, Karen
Mackinlay, Craig
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
Maynard, Paul
McCaig, Callum
McCartney, Jason
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McGarry, Natalie
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Monaghan, Dr Paul
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mulholland, Greg
Mullin, Roger
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newlands, Gavin
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Offord, Dr Matthew
O'Hara, Brendan
Osborne, rh Mr George
Oswald, Kirsten
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Paterson, Steven
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Philp, Chris
Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pugh, John
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, rh Angus
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Salmond, rh Alex
Sandbach, Antoinette
Saville Roberts, Liz
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Sheppard, Tommy
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Royston

Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephens, Chris
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Derek
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig

Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warburton, David
 Weir, Mike
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Margot James and
Guy Opperman

NOES

Allen, Mr Graham
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blomfield, Paul
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Davies, Philip
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Furniss, Gill
 Glass, Pat
 Glendon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Mr George

Huq, Dr Rupa
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Lewis, Clive
 Lucas, Caroline
 Matheson, Christian
 McCartney, Karl
 McInnes, Liz
 Murray, Ian
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Osamor, Kate
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Stevens, Jo
 Stringer, Graham
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Wright, Mr Iain

Tellers for the Noes:
Steve McCabe and
Kevin Brennan

Question accordingly agreed to.

Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism

1.17 pm

The Minister for Security (Mr John Hayes): I beg to move,

That the draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 11 July, be approved.

We can never entirely eliminate the threat from terrorism, but we are determined to do what we can to minimise the threat from terrorism in the UK and abroad. Additionally, we must continue to demonstrate our support for other members of the international community in their efforts to tackle terrorism wherever it occurs. Proscription is an important tool in those efforts; it is part of the Government's strategy to disrupt terrorist activity.

The four groups we propose to add to the list of terrorist organisations, amending schedule 2 to the Terrorism Act 2000, are the Global Islamic Media Front, including the Bangla Team; the Turkistan Islamic party; the Mujahidin Indonesia Timur; and Jamaah Ansharut Daulah. This is the 20th order under the Act. These groups are particularly relevant to south and south-east Asia but, significantly, also to the ongoing conflict in Syria.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I am sure the Minister will find the House in full agreement with what he is proposing today, but may I ask a question of fact? How many organisations are currently proscribed?

Mr Hayes: I will be dealing with that later in my remarks. I know the right hon. Gentleman takes a keen interest in these matters as Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee. Indeed, he contributed the last time I was at the Dispatch Box on these subjects, and I will also be referring to some of the remarks he made on that occasion later in my speech.

I want to emphasise that these groups are also significant to the conflict in Syria. The House will of course be aware that Syria is the No. 1 destination for jihadists in the world. The recent attacks earlier this month in Bangladesh demonstrate the high threat level from terrorism in Asia. Proscribing these appalling organisations sends a strong message that terrorist activity is not tolerated wherever it happens.

Under section 3 of the 2000 Act, the Home Secretary has the power to proscribe an organisation that she believes is currently concerned in terrorism. If the statutory test is met, the Home Secretary may exercise discretion to proscribe the organisation, and it may be useful to the House to set out the factors that are considered when exercising that discretion. These include the nature and scale of the organisation's activities and the need to support other members of the international community in tackling terrorism.

I also want to say a word about the effect of proscription. Proscription means that an organisation is outlawed and therefore unable to operate in the UK. It is a criminal offence for a person to belong to, support or arrange a meeting in support of a proscribed organisation, or to wear clothing or carry articles in public which arouse reasonable suspicion that an individual is a member or supporter of a proscribed organisation.

Proscription can support other disruptive activity including the use of immigration powers such as exclusion or prosecution for other offences. It also acts to support strong messaging to deter fundraising and recruitment. Additionally, the assets of a proscribed organisation are subject to seizure as terrorist assets. Given the wide-ranging impact of this power to proscribe, the Home Secretary exercises it only after thoroughly reviewing the available evidence on an organisation.

I want to deal with the question put by the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz). Currently, 66 international and 14 Northern Ireland-related terrorist organisations are proscribed. When we last debated these matters, we were talking about de-proscription rather than proscription, and he asked about the review and appeal processes. He made the case for these matters to be reviewed periodically because he was concerned that proscription was an indefinite business. I asked those questions too, when I arrived at the Home Office and took on these responsibilities.

Currently, an organisation can apply to be de-proscribed. That process, like the proscription process, is a thorough one. The Home Secretary has to respond to a request within 90 days and the organisation can then appeal to a commission made up of senior judicial figures. I have become convinced that that is the right way to go about these things. As long as that appeal process—first to the Home Secretary and then beyond—is a robust one, the emphasis should be on those organisations to make their case. I think it is right to take this opportunity to deal with that question, as the right hon. Gentleman has raised it on a previous occasion.

Keith Vaz: The independent reviewer, David Anderson, has suggested that there needs to be a time limit. What is the Government's response to that? On a number of previous occasions, including before the Minister took office, the Government said that their response would be coming shortly. It is now a couple of years since the Minister first mentioned this. Does he have a view on whether the Government accept what the independent reviewer has said?

Mr Hayes: I have made clear my own views on this, but the right hon. Gentleman is right to ask what the formal response will be. I take his overtures on these matters very seriously and I will return to the Home Office with fresh alacrity to deal with the specific issue of how we will respond formally. He has articulated these matters on a previous occasion, and he is right to raise them now. I too feel that it is important to get this right and, as I have said, I have been asking the same questions. I have become convinced that the process as it stands is the right one, but it is right that we should formally respond and I will ensure that we do so.

As I have said, the proscription process is a thorough one. It includes looking at open source material, intelligence material and advice that reflects consultation across Government, including with the intelligence and law enforcement agencies. The cross-Government proscription review group supports the Home Secretary in her decision-making process. The Home Secretary's decision to proscribe is taken carefully after considering all the evidence.

Although I am unable to comment on specific intelligence, I can provide the House with a summary of each group's activities in turn. The first group that this

order proscribes is the Global Islamic Media Front, including the Bangla Team. It is an Islamic extremist propaganda organisation associated with al-Qaeda and other extremist groups around the world. Its activities include propagating a jihadist ideology, producing and disseminating training manuals to guide terror attacks and publishing jihadi newscasts. It produces materials in a number of languages including Arabic, Urdu, Bengali, English, German and French.

Hon. Members will be aware of the rise of sectarian violence in Bangladesh and of its tragic effects. The first group we are proposing to proscribe in this order has claimed responsibility for a number of prominent murders and attacks involving secular bloggers since 2013. For example, the Bangla Team has published an infographic chronicling attacks carried out against "blasphemers in Bangladesh". The graphic contained the names and locations of 13 attacks, eight of which were celebrated as successful assassinations.

The second group this order proscribes is the Turkistan Islamic Party. This is an Islamic terrorist and separatist organisation founded in 1989. It has claimed responsibility for a number of attacks in China, the latest in April 2014. The group also has terrorist links to al-Qaeda. In November 2015, the TIP released the 18th issue of its magazine *Islamic Turkistan*, which detailed the group's jihad against the authorities and the fact that it hosted training camps controlled by the Pakistan Taliban. More recently, the TIP has maintained an active and visible presence in the Syrian war. It has published a number of video clips of its activities and claimed responsibility for attacks and suicide bombings. The TIP has been banned by the United Nations and is sanctioned by the USA under the terrorist exclusion list.

The third group to be proscribed is Mujahidin Indonesia Timur, which is Indonesia's most active terrorist group. It is based in the mountainous jungle area of Poso in central Sulawesi and is led by Indonesia's most wanted terrorist. The group's modus operandi is to attack the police and the army, and those attacks include the use of explosives and shootings. The group has been responsible for the deaths of at least a dozen police officers. The fact that it has claimed responsibility for a number of recent terrorist attacks confirms its determination not only to propagate but to plan and execute terrorism.

The last group to be proscribed is Jamaah Ansharut Daulah, which was established in March 2015 following the merger of several Indonesian extremist and terrorist groups. It has close ties to other terrorist groups, including Daesh. Its membership includes several former Jamaah Islamiyah terrorists. JI was responsible for the 2002 and 2005 Bali attacks. JAD was responsible for the attack in Jakarta in January 2016 which was claimed by Daesh and resulted in the deaths of seven people.

Proscription matters, and our determination to counter the malevolence that I have described matters too. In thwarting terror, we must act—as a people, a House and a Government—with an iron will and strong determination. The American poet Robert Frost wrote:

"Don't ever take a fence down until you know why it was put up."

In these dangerous times, we must—and will—do all we can to protect ourselves and others from attack. I believe it is right that these four groups should be proscribed in the way that I have set out.

1.29 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): I would customarily start a speech such as this by saying something like, “Where is the Home Secretary?” but even I will admit that the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) has better things to do today. I want to take this opportunity on behalf of the Opposition Benches to pay tribute to her tenure as Home Secretary. I have found that she has certainly been prepared to listen, particularly in the case of Hillsborough, on which her work was outstanding for the families who had faced a terrible injustice for all those years. I hope that she will continue to listen, and I have every hope that she will go on to make a good Prime Minister.

I also pay tribute to the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), the Minister of State—for now. With the fast impending reshuffle, he will be twitchy on the Front Bench, but I suspect that his obvious talents will be rightly rewarded.

The order before the House today arises from the Terrorism Act 2000, which was passed by the previous Labour Government and was intended to provide a flexible framework to deal with the changing and emerging threat of new forms of terrorism. It is fair to say that we have seen unimaginable events in the 16 years since that legislation was originally enacted. Specifically, we have seen the rise of terrorism based on a distortion of Islam and its values. It is important to describe it as such rather than use the shorthand “Islamic terrorism”, because that is inaccurate and makes life harder for those in the Muslim community who face a daily and monumental battle against this perversion of their faith. Let us be careful in our language and help those battling radicalisation, not those who foment it.

The BBC has taken to using the phrase “so-called Islamic State”. In my view, that is not helpful. The use of “so-called” does not undermine “Islamic” or “State” and those are the two words that the public hear. It gives undeserved status to the organisation and makes it sound as though it is an authorised branch of Islam. I urge the director-general of the BBC to review that editorial decision and to move, as the Government have, to the use of Daesh. That is important, as I said at the beginning, because we face a highly changeable and challenging terrorism landscape.

Figures from the “Global Peace Index 2016” report show that deaths from terrorism increased by 80% in the past year. Only 69 countries did not record a terrorist incident. The intensity of terrorist activity is also increasing. Last year, 11 countries reported 500 or more deaths from terrorist incidents—double the year before—and incidents are happening all the time. Last month, a police officer was killed in France, for which Daesh claimed responsibility, and 44 people were killed and 239 injured by a bomb at Istanbul airport, for which it is suspected that Daesh was again responsible. Those are big increases on a rising trend. The year 2014 saw some 13,500 terrorist attacks around the world and 32,700 deaths. This is the context in which we are considering today’s order. As the terrorism landscape changes, the Government are right to be vigilant and to try to keep one step ahead.

We are being asked today to give agreement to the Government to proscribe four organisations linked to terrorism. Two have links to al-Qaeda and the others

have links with Daesh. The public and political debate is obviously focused on the activities of Daesh in Syria and the wider middle east. It would however be a mistake for this House to lose sight of what is happening in Asia, particularly south-east Asia, as the Minister rightly said. It would be a further mistake for the House to focus on Daesh and to lose focus on al-Qaeda and its efforts to regroup. That is why the Government are right to bring this order for consideration today and to disrupt the activities of the relevant organisations before they establish a stronger foothold. The evidence that the Home Office put before the House makes it clear that there are grounds to proscribe the organisations.

We accept that evidence and will support the order this afternoon, but I want to make one point before I close that I ask the Minister and the Government to take into account. I want to go back to when the legislation was first introduced and to the first group of organisations to be proscribed under the 2000 Act, which included the International Sikh Youth Federation. There were objections at the time and what followed was a protracted legal argument in the courts, which ended only recently, and led to the Government coming to the House to lift the proscription. Learning from that experience, I say to the Minister that evidence does change over time. There may have been grounds to proscribe that organisation back then, but those grounds clearly expired some time ago. However, the people to which such orders relate may find that they stigmatise a section of their community.

Keith Vaz: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The fear of stigma is very much in the minds of communities. An example is the LTTE, which was correctly proscribed by the Government. Its leader was killed and the organisation no longer exists, but a stigma is still attached to members of the Tamil community. That is why it is so important to have a time limit, after which proscriptions can be reviewed, rather than people having to go to court each time. We of course support what the Government are doing on this occasion—we always have—but it is important that we are able to review without the need to go to court.

Andy Burnham: I strongly agree with the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee. The experience of the Sikh community in challenging the proscription of the International Sikh Youth Federation was pretty dispiriting, in that it had to pursue a lengthy legal process while facing an unresponsive Home Office. There may be good grounds to proscribe organisations—my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) accepted that there was a case with the organisation that he mentioned—but the stigma does affect a much wider community.

When the evidence changes, so should the Government, who should act quickly to remove any perceptions. I hope that they listen to what my right hon. Friend said—and they would be right to, because he is full of judgment and wisdom on such matters. My only request of the Government is that they institute a regime of the kind that he suggests, that there is a regular process of review, and that there are up-to-date assessments of the organisations that pose a genuine threat to the safety of our country. We should also make the challenge process easier than it was found to be by members of the Sikh community.

That is the only caveat that I place on our support for the order. Terrorism is a threat to our country. It is right that we take every possible action to root it out and we should work with the communities that struggle to deal with it. The Government are right to bring the order before the House today and we will give it our full support.

1.39 pm

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): You will no doubt be pleased, Mr Speaker, as will hon. Members, to hear that I intend to keep my comments brief, with a view to freeing up as much time as possible for discussion of the Iraq war inquiry.

Although issues of national security are reserved, the Scottish Government have co-operated closely with the UK Government and will continue to do so. We recognise that the security services and the police require adequate powers to fight terrorism. However, such powers should always be necessary, proportionate and in accordance with the rule of law. We have assessed the four organisations that it is proposed to add to the proscribed list against that benchmark. There is clear evidence that the Global Islamic Media Front propagates jihadist ideology. The MIT has a clear modus operandi of attacking the police and army, and it has made many killings, as the Minister outlined. The Turkistan Islamic party has claimed responsibility for a number of atrocities in China. The JAD was responsible for the awful mall attack we all witnessed earlier this year in Jakarta.

I wish to add the calls from Scottish National party Members to the request made by the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) to the BBC to reconsider the language it uses when dealing with terrorist organisations, and in particular, the kind of legitimacy it gives by using the phrase “so-called Islamic State”, which I consider to be appalling. These people are not Islamic and the phrase should not be used any more. The BBC should accede to calls championed by my SNP colleagues that we should use, as the Government now do, the term “Daesh”.

1.41 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I, too, wish to add my party's support to what the Minister is doing today. As we all know, the focus is very much on Syria, although today's proscriptions go further than that, in dealing with organisations from the far east, and he has referred to the names of proscribed organisations.

The Prime Minister, in today's Prime Minister's questions, said that Daesh has had 20,000 of its terrorists killed in battle and has lost some 40% of its territory. As that has happened, and as Daesh is becoming more fragmented and is not the overall body that it was in the past, there will be more organisations to proscribe, as small splinter groups and organisations spring up from across the whole of the middle east. The shadow Minister also touched on this, but let me ask the Minister: is there a better way for us to proscribe organisations than by coming to this House every time? I know that there is a procedure to follow, which has been clearly outlined, but is there a better way of doing this? That is my first question.

Secondly, we have been told that the legislation and the change will apply to Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Minister referred to proscribed organisations in

Northern Ireland in his speech and in his response to the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz). The threat level from Northern Ireland-related terrorism in Northern Ireland has been at severe since this was first published in 2010. What is being done to bring down the threat level? What impact is the high threat level having in terms of the 2000 Act and Northern Ireland's ability to suppress and prevent terrorism? Is the Act effective enough in dealing with those organisations already proscribed in Northern Ireland, given the high level of threat?

Thirdly, as we all know, terrorists across the world seem to flock together to supply each other with weapons, ammunition and bomb-making explosives. Some groups in Northern Ireland, dissident republicans in particular, have been very focused on that. I do not know whether this is the Minister's remit, but can he say whether any activity has been seen involving terrorist groups in the far east, the middle east or south America, and those at home in Northern Ireland? I will leave that with him.

1.44 pm

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): I wish briefly to ask in this debate why the Government still have not banned, and have not included in today's order, Hizb ut-Tahrir. Around the time of the 7/7 attacks, the current Prime Minister—if he is still in office as we speak—said:

“We think it should be banned—why has it not happened?”—*[Official Report, 4 July 2007; Vol. 462, c. 951.]*

In 2009, he attacked his predecessor in very strong terms for not banning that organisation. In 2010, the Conservative party manifesto said:

“A Conservative government will ban any organisations which advocate hate or the violent overthrow of our society, such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir”.

My point to the Minister is simple: why have the Government, after all these years—after six years in government and all the work they have been able to do on all these issues—still not banned Hizb ut-Tahrir, as they promised to do on so many occasions?

Mr Speaker: Order. If the Minister of State wishes briefly to respond, he is at liberty to do so, but he is under no obligation to do so.

Mr John Hayes: I was going to respond.

Mr Speaker: The House will bear that with stoicism and fortitude, and may even experience excitement in the process. We shall see.

1.45 pm

Mr Hayes: I hope my remarks will be pithy, but it would be a discourtesy to those who have contributed to the debate if I were not to deal with some of the important matters they have raised. First, let me deal with the points made by the shadow Secretary of State and thank him for his support for the work we are trying to do today. I echo his sentiments about both the dynamism and the intensity of terrorism—he is right about both—and because of that dynamism we need to keep these matters under constant review. I thank him for his remarks about my talents and hope that they have been heard right across the Treasury Bench and further afield. He is also right to draw attention to Asia,

[Mr John Hayes]

and south-east Asia in particular. It is of course important that we focus on Syria—as I say, it is the main destination for jihadists from across the world—but we should not underestimate the worldwide spread of terrorism and indeed we do not in the Home Office. I can assure him that we take Asia and south-east Asia very seriously, which is partly why we are dealing with these matters in the way we are today.

A considerable number of comments were made by the Chairman of the Select Committee and others about the process by which we proscribe and have proscribed organisations. I will go a little further than perhaps my officials and others might have expected, and say now that I am not going to put in place a statutory period of review, contrary to the advice of David Anderson and the advocacy of the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee. However, I have listened carefully to what the shadow Minister and others have said about the speed at which the current system works. If we are not going to have a review, and I think we should not—that is my formal response on behalf of the Government, which I will put in writing—we need to ensure that the process, as it stands, is fit for purpose. That means ensuring that it is not burdensome, that it is not too lengthy and that it is not insensitive in the way it was suggested it might have been in some cases. To that end, I will look again at making sure we put in place a process that is robust and transparent, but which is not endless. That is the point the shadow Minister was making, and he is right about the effect that stigma can have. I understand that and I want to be as sensitive to it as we can be. He can reasonably say that he and the Select Committee Chairman have earned that commitment from me, given that they put their case so reasonably.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) raised some issues specific to Northern Ireland and some that are more general. He can be certain that the Government look at these matters very carefully and repeatedly. As I said earlier, we consider proscription with absolute care. He is right, too, that we need to look at the links between organisations, which I talked about when I introduced this order. I will follow up the question he raised about those links. I cannot speak about some of those matters on the Floor of the House, because they are highly sensitive. As he will appreciate, these intelligence issues cannot be aired on all occasions. I will, however, follow up his question. He will understand that part of it relates to something he has raised in this House before, as he is a diligent Member of this House and understandably takes an interest in these subjects. He has previously raised the role that social media and communications technology play in making some of those links real. He is right to do so. The Government take that seriously and do a great deal of work in that area, and I am more than happy—as I have been in the past—to correspond with him on those matters.

The hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) raised the matter of Hizb ut-Tahrir—[*Interruption.*] Well, the pronunciation is not perfect, but then I cannot be perfect in every way. It would not be appropriate for me to speak more specifically about HUT—as it is more commonly known—in this debate. The Government have significant concerns about that organisation, and he has drawn attention to them. He will know that that

has been articulated repeatedly in exactly the way he described. We continue to monitor its activities extremely closely. Individual members are of course subject to general criminal law, and we will certainly continue to ensure that groups like it cannot operate without challenge in public places in this country, and that civic organisations are made aware of them and the names under which they operate in order to disguise their activities. The group is not proscribed in the UK at the moment, but, as I have said, these matters are regularly scrutinised and considered by Government. I think that I had better leave it at that. With those comments—

Andy Burnham rose—

Mr Hayes: I will happily give way.

Andy Burnham: Before the Minister sits down, will he address the point that I raised, and that was echoed by the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless)? I am talking about the use by the BBC of the phrase, “so-called Islamic State”. I have been in mosques recently and seen how it causes great despondency among the people who are trying to counter radicalisation. They say that the use of the words “so-called” does not undermine the words “Islamic” or “State”. They feel very strongly that, by repeating that phrase, the BBC is only making their job harder. Will the Minister join the Scottish National party, the Labour party and, hopefully, the Conservative party in sending a clear message to the BBC today that it needs to review this editorial decision?

Mr Hayes: Not for the first time, the right hon. Gentleman has done this House a service in drawing our attention exactly to the subject that he raises. He is absolutely right that the media, and particularly the BBC, have a salient responsibility in this respect. The BBC is of course taken seriously, and as a result, the impression that is created from the words that it uses can have devastating effect. I entirely agree with him and others who have made the case in this House today and say, on behalf of the Government, that we should indeed send a message to the BBC that calling organisations “so-called” creates entirely the wrong impression. I hope that, henceforth, it will drop that description in exactly the way he said.

Richard Arkless: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hayes: I am drawing my remarks to their exciting conclusion and I do not want to spoil that, but I will give way very briefly.

Richard Arkless: Very quickly, can the Minister confirm that he will write to the BBC to request this, and that we will not just have a talking shop in the House today?

Mr Hayes: That alone would not be good enough. I will speak to the BBC and write to it. The matter will also be recorded today in *Hansard*. The letter will leave my office this afternoon, and I will speak to BBC staff by telephone today. As you have often said, Mr Speaker, I never disappoint in this House.

The exciting peroration to which I was about to move is this. Edmund Burke said:

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.”

The good men of this country, and women—I emphasise that particularly in the current climate—when it comes to the struggle against—

Mr Speaker: Order. I want to hear not only the Minister of State’s peroration, but application.

Mr Hayes: When it comes to the matter of terrorism, this House will speak with a single voice, exercise an iron will and certainly, rather than doing nothing, do everything it can to bring about its defeat.

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful—and I think the House will be—to the right hon. Gentleman, in light of the pressure on time, for his addressing us with the eloquence of Demosthenes and with a pithiness that is all his own.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 11 July, be approved.

Report of the Iraq Inquiry

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

[Relevant documents: First Report from the Defence Committee, Session 2015–16, on Flexible response? An SDSR checklist of potential threats and vulnerabilities, HC 493, and the Government’s response, Fourth Special Report of Session 2015–16, HC 794. Eleventh Report from the Defence Committee, Session 2014–15, on Decision-making in Defence Policy, HC 682, and the Government’s response, Third Special Report of Session 2015–16, HC 367. Seventh Report from the Defence Committee, Session 2014–15, on The situation in Iraq and Syria and the response to al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq al-Sham (DAESH), HC 690, and the Government’s response, Twelfth Special Report of Session 2014–15, HC 1126. Fourteenth Report from the Defence Committee, Session 2013–14, on Intervention: Why, When and How?, HC 952, and the Government’s response, Fourth Special Report of Session 2014–15, HC 581.]

1.55 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Report of the Iraq Inquiry.

I welcome the opportunity to open this first day of debate on the report of the Iraq inquiry. I suspect that, in the circumstances, the world’s eye will not be focused on our proceedings with quite the laser-like intensity that might have been expected when the debate was originally announced.

Let me start by paying tribute to the work of Sir John Chilcot and other members of the inquiry committee, including the late Sir Martin Gilbert, who sadly passed away during the writing of the report. For anyone who has read even just part of this report—I defy anyone to say that they have read the entire thing—it will be clear that the committee has discharged what is a Herculean task thoroughly, fairly, with great rigour and a degree of frankness that will reassure those who feared a whitewash and that ensures there can be no ambiguity about the lessons that need to be learned.

I also want to signal my understanding that the publication of the Chilcot report a week ago will have been a poignant and no doubt difficult moment for the families of those who lost loved ones in Iraq. It is important, even as we examine the detail of the report and conduct this debate, that they know that this House will never forget the sacrifice of the 179 British servicemen and women, as well as the 23 British civilians, who lost their lives during the conflict and its aftermath. We will also never forget the service and the sacrifice of the thousands more who suffered life-changing injuries, and we reaffirm to them today our determination that they will get the care they need for the rest of their lives. I hope that the survivors and the relatives of the fallen alike will have taken comfort from the assiduous and detailed examination of the war to be found in this report. The sacrifice of our service people demands nothing less.

More than 13 years since the invasion of Iraq began, 10 years since the Conservative party and others first called for it, and seven years since the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown finally commissioned it, the Iraq inquiry report sets out to try to answer the crucial

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questions that have dominated the debate about the war in Iraq and the events that preceded and followed it. Did the United Kingdom decide to go to war on a mistaken or false premise? Were all the decisions leading up to the war and subsequently properly taken and informed by proper consideration of legal advice? Was the operation to invade Iraq properly planned and executed? Did the Government of the day foresee and prepare adequately for the aftermath? Were our armed forces adequately funded and provided with the proper protection and equipment for their task?

Digesting fully the contents of this report will take weeks rather than days. In 13 volumes and 2.6 million words, Sir John and his committee take us in painstaking detail through the decision making in Government between 2001, when the possibility of military action first arose, and 2009, when British combat troops finally departed Iraq. They set out the conclusions that they have reached on some of the central issues that have proved so controversial, including the handling, use and presentation of secret intelligence, and they identify many lessons that should be learned and implemented for the future.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that a number of us are a bit perplexed at the speed with which this admittedly two-day debate is taking place? As he said, there are 2.6 million words to be read, and for a full understanding it seems to me that today's debate is a little premature and might have been better left until the autumn.

Mr Hammond: I suspect that right hon. and hon. Members would have been dismayed if they had not had an opportunity to put on record their reactions to the Chilcot report, albeit necessarily initial reactions. We will no doubt hear in the course of debate whether the concerns that my right hon. Friend expresses are widely shared.

The words of the very first paragraph of the executive summary of the report spell out the enormity of the undertaking and thus the gravity that should have attended all aspects of its preparation and execution:

"In 2003, for the first time since the Second World War, the United Kingdom took part in an opposed invasion and full-scale occupation of a sovereign State—Iraq."

A reading of Sir John's report, however, suggests that flaws, errors and omissions abounded. If the House will allow me, I will try to summarise the key findings that he makes.

First, on the question of why the United Kingdom went to war, the two issues central to the case that Tony Blair put forward were Saddam's failure to comply with the obligations imposed by the UN Security Council between 1991 and 1999, and the message that the international community would send if those obligations were not enforced, and the threat to international peace and security from the weapons of mass destruction that, he argued, were at Saddam's disposal.

The report identifies an

"ingrained belief of the Government and the intelligence community that Saddam Hussein's regime retained chemical and biological warfare capabilities, was determined to preserve and if possible enhance its capabilities . . . and was pursuing an active and successful policy of deception and concealment."

There were good reasons for this belief, given the past actions of Saddam's regime. His past use of chemical weapons against Kurdish civilians and Iranian military forces, his refusal to comply with the demands of weapons inspectors, and his refusal to comply with UN Security Council resolutions all pointed in that direction. As Sir John set out:

"As late as 17 March, Mr Blair was being advised by the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee that Iraq possessed chemical and biological weapons, the means to deliver them and the capacity to produce them."

However, as Sir John also says:

"It is now clear that policy on Iraq was made on the basis of flawed intelligence and assessments."

He finds that

"At no stage was the proposition that Iraq might no longer have chemical, biological or nuclear weapons or programmes identified and examined"

by either the Joint Intelligence Committee or the wider intelligence community.

In the case that he set out to the House of Commons on 18 March 2003, Mr Blair also argued that there was a link between international terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, and that—I quote from the then Prime Minister's statement—

"the two together constitute a fundamental assault on our way of life."—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2003; Vol. 401, c. 767.]

Sir John finds that

"While it was reasonable for the Government to be concerned about the fusion of proliferation and terrorism, there was no basis in the JIC Assessments to suggest that Iraq itself represented such a threat."

When it comes to the use and presentation of intelligence, in particular the Government's dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction published on the day of the Commons debate on 24 September 2002, Sir John finds that

"There is no evidence that intelligence was improperly included in the dossier or that No.10 improperly influenced the text"

and that

"The JIC accepted ownership of the dossier and agreed its content."

However, he also finds that the judgments presented in Mr Blair's statement to the House that day and in the dossier

"were presented with a certainty that was not justified."

The Joint Intelligence Committee, he finds, should have made it clear to Mr Blair that the assessed intelligence had not established beyond doubt either that Iraq had continued to produce chemical or biological weapons, or that efforts to develop nuclear weapons continued.

On the much debated question of the legality of the war, the inquiry has not expressed a view on whether military action was legal. As Sir John says, that could

"only be resolved by a properly constituted and internationally recognised Court."

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Government are refusing to release confidential advice that Whitehall officials gave to Gordon Brown about the remit of the inquiry. This advice was what made it impossible for Sir John Chilcot to rule on whether the 2003 war was illegal. The Government's refusal flies in the face of an Information Tribunal ruling which ordered the material's release, and it means that the public cannot see what options were considered when deciding

on the nature and the scope of the inquiry when it was established. Will the Government reconsider their refusal to release that information?

Mr Hammond: The Government, in considering this report, will look at all these matters, but that is not the answer that Sir John has primarily identified for his decision not to pass any view on whether military action was legal. He says that the inquiry was not constituted in a way, nor did it have the necessary skills or qualifications, to make that decision.

Joanna Cherry: With respect, that is precisely my question. The Information Tribunal has ordered the release of material showing why the remit of the inquiry was so refined. This is not a criticism of Chilcot; it is a criticism of the present Government for refusing to release information about why the scope of the inquiry was restricted and could not look at the legality. That is what the public want to know.

Mr Hammond: The point I am making is that Sir John himself identifies not the lack of remit, but the lack of qualifications of the members of the inquiry to reach that decision. He says that that could

“only be resolved by a properly constituted and internationally recognised Court.”

The hon. and learned Lady will know that a huge number of documents have been declassified and made available in this process, but clearly it is not possible to declassify every document.

Sir John goes on to find that, although the then Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, advised on 13 March 2003 that there was, on balance, a secure legal basis for military action,

“The circumstances in which it was ultimately decided that there was a legal basis for UK participation were far from satisfactory.”

Sir John, however, is clear that military action was not undertaken as “a last resort”—that there were further diplomatic steps that could have been taken to seek compliance by the Saddam regime—and that by moving to a military solution when the UNSC would not sanction such a development the UK, far from upholding it, was “undermining the Security Council”.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): The Foreign Secretary will have seen the comments of Robin Butler before publication of the Chilcot report last week. According to Robin Butler,

“The legality or illegality of the Iraq war was never a question Sir John Chilcot was asked to deal with”,

so why will not the Government release the documents which might give the public and Parliament an insight into why the Chilcot inquiry did not have the remit and was not qualified to deal with the legality question?

Mr Hammond: The point that I have made already and will make again is that as I understand it Sir John has not identified lack of remit as the reason why he has given no opinion on the legality of the war. He has identified a lack of appropriate skill sets in the inquiry, and he suggested that it should be a matter that is dealt with by a properly constituted and internationally recognised court. As I have said already, the Government in looking at the report of the Iraq inquiry—it will take some time

to do that—will consider all these matters, including questions that the right hon. Gentleman is raising about whether any further documents can appropriately be declassified and made available.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): Obviously, John Chilcot’s report is masterful in its description of the formal records and the detail, and in the lessons he very wisely draws. However, will the Foreign Secretary, as a politician, look at the political context for a moment? Does he agree that the background was clearly that the Americans and the Blair Government wished to invade Iraq to change the regime and get rid of Saddam Hussein? However, that would have been illegal regime change, so what my right hon. Friend has just gone through—people’s desperate desire to find evidence and to persuade themselves that there were weapons of mass destruction, that Saddam was not co-operating with the inspectors, that there was a risk of terrorism and so on—was mainly, and no doubt subconsciously, motivated by a desire to give the Attorney General some basis on which he could say that this action was legal?

Mr Hammond: My reading of the inquiry report is that it does indeed identify that regime change as an objective would be illegal in UK law, but I think the suggestion is that, through a process of group-think, the people who were involved in this process came to see regime change as a means to deliver the legitimate objective, which was compliance with the UN Security Council resolutions. A fair reading of the report suggests that that is the process of mind that is being spelled out by Sir John.

Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab): I hope I may be able to assist the Foreign Secretary, although whether he will regard it like that is another matter. I perfectly understand what the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) says, and I understand that it is a view that he has held for a long time, but having had the advantage—that he did not—of being in the Cabinet room when these discussions were taking place, can I just tell the Foreign Secretary that, as we got closer and closer to decision time, the then Prime Minister, Mr Blair, stressed on repeated occasions to the Cabinet that the resolution called for Saddam Hussein to comply with the UN inspectors, and if he did so comply, there would be no military action? He pointed out that the downside of that was that this terrible man, who certainly did commit war crimes on a mass scale, would remain in power, but that that was a downside we would have to accept.

Mr Hammond: I am sure the House is grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving that insight from the frontline, as it were, of where this debate started, but one of the things that comes out very clearly from a reading of the report is the misalignment between the position of the UK Government and the position of the US Government, who clearly were pursuing regime change as an objective, as they were legally entitled to do under their own regime.

On operational planning, it is well recorded that the initial invasion and defeat of Iraqi forces proceeded rapidly. The UK’s armed forces performed extremely well—a fact of which we and they should be proud—despite

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the changes to the overall invasion plan as a result of the Turkish Government's decision to refuse access to Iraq's borders through Turkish territory. In fact, Iraq's military turned out to be a good deal less formidable than many of us had imagined.

The task that should have been at least as big as preparing for the invasion was preparing for the aftermath. As Tony Blair said before the Liaison Committee in January 2003:

"You do not engage in military conflict that may produce regime change unless you are prepared to follow through and work in the aftermath of that regime change to ensure the country is stable and the people are properly looked after."

However, Sir John has found that, when the invasion of Iraq began, the UK Government

"was not in a position to conclude that satisfactory plans had been drawn up and preparations made to meet known post-conflict challenges and risks in Iraq".

Understanding what those challenges were—the need to restore broken infrastructure, administer a state and provide security, including against the threats of internecine violence, terrorism and Iranian influence—did not, as the report clearly states,

"require the benefit of hindsight".

However, the Government assumed that the US would be responsible for preparing the post-conflict plan, that the plan would be authorised by the UN Security Council and that the UN would play a major post-conflict role, with the international community sharing the post-conflict burden.

The report finds that the Government

"expected not to have to make a substantial commitment to post-conflict administration."

It concludes that the failure to anticipate and plan for post-conflict challenges in the short-to-medium term increased the risk that the UK would be unable to respond to the unexpected in Iraq, and, in the longer term, reduced the likelihood of achieving the UK's strategic objectives there.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Let me just bring the Secretary of State back for a second to the point about regime change. Does he agree that it is important that what is said in private should be reflected in Parliament, and vice versa? On 18 March 2003, Tony Blair said to Parliament:

"I have never put the justification for action as regime change."—*[Official Report, 18 March 2003; Vol. 401, c. 772.]*

However, in a private note to Bush just a week later, on 26 March, he said:

"That's why, though Iraq's WMD is the immediate justification for action, ridding Iraq of Saddam is the real prize."

Mr Hammond: It goes without saying that Ministers—indeed, all Members—should be completely truthful in their utterances to Parliament at all times, and the ministerial code makes that clear.

Specifically on the reconstruction effort, Sir John finds that

"the UK failed to plan or prepare for the major reconstruction programme required"

and that lessons that had been learned through previous reviews of post-conflict reconstruction and stabilisation "were not applied in Iraq".

On the issue of de-ba'athification, Sir John finds that early decisions on the form of de-Ba'athification and its implementation

"had a significant and lasting negative impact on Iraq."

Limiting de-Ba'athification to the top three tiers, rather than four, of the party would have had the potential to be far less damaging to Iraq's post-invasion recovery and political stability. The UK chose not to act on its well-founded misgivings about handing over implementation of de-Ba'athification policy to the governing council.

Turning to the equipping and resourcing of British troops, Sir John finds that the Government failed to match resources to the objectives. He records that by undertaking concurrent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Government

"knowingly exceeded the Defence Planning Assumptions."

At least in part as a consequence, Sir John concludes that the military role ended

"a long way from success."

Furthermore, he finds that

"delays in providing adequate medium weight Protected Patrol Vehicles and the failure to meet the needs of UK forces...for ISTAR and helicopters should not have been tolerated"

and that the

"MoD was slow in responding to the developing threat from Improvised Explosive Devices."

At the end of this analysis, Sir John finds plainly that

"the Iraq of 2009 certainly did not meet the UK's objectives...it fell far short of strategic success."

These findings relate to decisions taken at that time, and the arrangements and processes in place at the time. It is, therefore, for those who were Ministers at the time to answer for their actions. This Government's role is not to seek to apportion blame or to revisit those actions; it is to ensure that the lessons identified by Chilcot are learned, and that they have already led to changes or will lead to changes being implemented in the future.

The Government, including previous Administrations, have not stood still while waiting for the findings we have before us today. There were a number of important reviews relating to the invasion and occupation of Iraq before Chilcot, including Lord Butler's review of intelligence on weapons of mass destruction, Lord Hutton's inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of Dr David Kelly, and the inquiries of the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee and the Intelligence and Security Committee of both Houses. As a result of each, lessons have been identified and changes have been implemented, so a good deal of the work has already been done.

Alex Salmond: I hear what the Foreign Secretary says about processes, but does he judge that the post-war reconstruction in Libya would give us any confidence that the lessons have been learned from the post-war reconstruction of Iraq?

Mr Hammond: I think the two things are completely different. In Iraq at the end of the war, Britain was a joint occupying power and shared joint responsibility for the occupation commission. We were in control of the territory, exercising all the functions and responsibility of Government. As a result of the decisions that were taken around Libya, British boots were never on the ground, we were never in control of that country and

we were never an occupying power, so we did not have it within our capability to take the actions that we should have done.

Let me summarise the most important lessons that Sir John has drawn in this report. First, taking military action should always be a last resort. Only after exhausting all credible alternatives should we consider taking the country to war. I believe—this is my personal belief—that the political price that has been paid for apparently neglecting this important principle will ensure that future Administrations are unlikely to overlook it.

Secondly, how government is conducted matters. The failures of process, of challenge, and even of proper record-keeping identified by Sir John were serious and widespread. In part to prevent such failures in the future, the Conservative-led coalition Government established the National Security Council in May 2010 to ensure that there is proper, co-ordinated, strategic decision making across the whole of Government. The NSC includes the Chief of the Defence Staff, the heads of the intelligence agencies, and the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, as well as relevant Ministers—and now the Attorney General—alongside senior officials. It is properly supported by a dedicated secretariat led by the national security adviser, ensuring that all parts of the national security apparatus are properly joined up across Whitehall and beyond.

So we now have a system that ensures that decisions on serious security issues are taken on the basis of full papers and proper challenge and discussion, with legal advice fully explained and considered, and proposals stress-tested by Departments, with decisions formally recorded. Having sat on the National Security Council for six years, first as an occasional member, as Transport Secretary, and then permanently as Defence Secretary and now Foreign Secretary, it seems to me highly improbable that the process of conduct of business in relation to this matter through 2002 and 2003, as set out by Chilcot, could be repeated now.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I think that the Foreign Secretary's last comment was particularly complacent. Looking at, for example, the Attorney General, why is that not an independent appointment? Why do we still allow the Attorney General to be an appointment of the Prime Minister? It should be somebody who is independent and legally qualified in this area, and that certainly was not the case during the Iraq war.

Mr Hammond: The Attorney General's office is of course filled with expert lawyers. The Attorney General produces his advice on the basis of the advice provided to him by his expert lawyers. I have no doubt, from my extensive experience of Attorney General advice, both as Defence Secretary and as Foreign Secretary, that it is impartial, fearless, and quite often gives us advice that we perhaps do not like, and we have to change course accordingly, as is appropriate. *[Interruption.]* No, the hon. Lady is taking a conspiracy theory too far. If we get advice from the Attorney General that steers us away from a course of action, then we move to a different course of action. I can tell her, from my own direct experience—my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary will have similar examples from the relatively recent past—of advice from the Attorney General causing us to think again and go in a different direction.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): It is important to note, is it not, that when sofa government takes place, officials from the Government Legal Service and the Attorney General's Office are not present to hear the conversations and to give advice where necessary?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is one of the purposes of a more formal process of decision making. I can say from personal experience that Attorney General advice is often complex, and it is necessary to have it in advance of the meeting at which decisions will be discussed and taken so that one can absorb it and consult one's own departmental lawyers, as a departmental Minister, to explain it, challenge it, or review it further.

The third lesson to draw from the inquiry is that a culture at the heart of Government that welcomes challenge to the conventional wisdom of "the system", or the strongly held convictions of Ministers, is essential to avoid the sort of group-think that led to what Chilcot describes as

"the ingrained belief...that Saddam Hussein's regime retained chemical and biological warfare capabilities".

Inevitably, the culture at the centre of any Government is a product primarily of the climate established by the Prime Minister of the day. Ensuring that people around the NSC table feel free to speak their minds without jeopardising their careers is the greatest contribution a Prime Minister can make. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) for the way in which he has done that over the past six years.

Fourthly, proper planning for the aftermath of any intervention in another country is vital to successfully delivering the overall objective. The failure in London properly to plan for the conflict's aftermath, fatally combined with the flawed assumption that the Americans must have a plan, when they did not, led inevitably to the chaos that we saw on the ground in Iraq. As we know will be the case in Syria, Libya, Yemen, and again, today, Iraq, when the current conflicts in each end, the challenge of rebuilding effective governance in conflict-torn countries is enormous. Under this Government, we have created the conflict, stability and stabilisation fund—CSSF—with £1 billion a year in it now, rising to £1.3 billion by the end of the spending review period. It builds on the success of the cross-Government stabilisation unit to ensure proper planning and preparedness for post-conflict situations and a capacity for rapid deployment of expert staff anywhere in the world.

The fifth lesson that we draw—one that I feel particularly keenly as a former Defence Secretary—is that our armed forces must always be properly equipped for the tasks we ask them to do. That is why we have instituted quinquennial strategic defence and security reviews to ensure that we commit the level of resources necessary to meet the ambition set out in the national security strategy. Since 2010, we have eliminated the £38 billion black hole we inherited in the defence procurement budget; we have continued to meet the NATO commitment to spend at least 2% of our GDP on defence; and we have set out a 10-year forward defence equipment programme, planning to invest at least £178 billion on new military equipment over the next decade. I am proud of these decisions. But we should be clear today that the decision to send our troops into a pre-planned

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engagement without the right equipment, in Iraq and later in Afghanistan, was unacceptable and something that no Government should ever allow to happen again.

There are, of course, many more lessons to be drawn from the report of the Iraq inquiry—too many to fit into a single speech—and some of them, I am sure, will be drawn out during the course of the debate today and tomorrow. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney said in his statement last week, there are also some lessons and conclusions that we could draw, but should avoid drawing. First, we should not dismiss the importance of solidarity with our close friends and allies, the United States, when our common security interests are threatened. As both President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry have reaffirmed in their respective recent visits to London, the relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom is special. We share not only culture and history, but fundamental values. America is our principal ally and partner around the world, and our partnership remains vital for our continued security and prosperity. Of course, that does not mean that we should blindly or slavishly follow US foreign policy, or fail to speak frankly and honestly, as close friends should. But we must be clear about the value of the relationship between our two countries, and clear that that value is a legitimate factor to be taken into account in British foreign policy decisions. Protecting and enhancing the special relationship, in itself, makes Britain safer.

Secondly, it would be wrong to conclude that we cannot trust the analysis and judgments of the UK intelligence community. As Foreign Secretary, I know as well as anyone the vital contribution our intelligence agencies make to keeping Britain and the British people safe, and I know the risks they sometimes have to take in order to do so. But intelligence is rarely black and white, and it always comes with a calibrated health warning as to the confidence level the user should attach to it. That places a burden of responsibility on the user when decisions or, indeed, strategic communications are based on intelligence. The reforms that were put in place following the Butler report have, quite properly, separated the process of assessing intelligence from the policy making that flows from it. I believe that our intelligence and policy making machinery today is in much better shape than it was in 2003 as a result of this and other reforms.

Thirdly, we should not conclude that our military lacks capability to intervene successfully around the world. As the Chilcot report highlights, the military invasion of Iraq, despite the problems of planning, was successfully and swiftly completed. It was the failure of policy makers to plan for the aftermath that led to the subsequent deterioration in the security situation.

Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, we must not conclude that military intervention in another country is always wrong. As the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999, the British intervention in Sierra Leone in 2000 and the French-led intervention in Mali in 2014 have shown, there are circumstances in which it is absolutely right and appropriate to intervene. Having commemorated just two days ago the 21st anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre, we must also acknowledge that there have

been times in our recent history when the international community should have intervened but did not, with Srebrenica and Rwanda being the most prominent examples.

Despite the risks of action and the failures of the past, Britain must not and will not shrink from military intervention as a last resort when our security is threatened; nor will it resile from its proper role on the world stage. Our commitment to the campaign against Daesh in Iraq and Syria is testament to that resolve. Today the United Kingdom stands united with Iraq in the face of continued terrorism. We will continue to help the Iraqi people as they defeat Daesh, reassert the territorial integrity of their country and seek to build a better future for their children.

There is no greater decision that a Prime Minister and a Cabinet can take than to commit this country to war, to ask our troops to put themselves in harm's way on our behalf. The decision to invade Iraq and topple its Government in 2003 was among the most controversial in our nation's recent history. It is right, therefore, that we should seek to learn the lessons from the mistakes that were made, to ensure that they are not repeated in the future.

The report of the Iraq inquiry has been a long time coming, but I think that most agree that it is a thorough, independent and exhaustive piece of work. It does not pull its punches in its analysis, and its conclusions and lessons are clearly drawn and unambiguous. As I set out earlier, I am confident that many of the most important lessons identified in the report have already been learned and the necessary responses already implemented, but in the weeks and months ahead, as we examine the report in greater detail, the Government will look further at whether any additional steps are required.

A decision to wage war is not easily reversible, so it must be carefully and diligently made with proper regard to due process and legal obligations. War itself is, of course, intrinsically dangerous, so it must be properly prepared for and the people fighting it must be properly equipped and protected. The aftermath of war is unpredictable but usually ugly, so it must be meticulously planned for and systematically executed. But, subject to those conditions, we should be clear as a nation that we will not resile from the use of military force to protect our security where all other options have failed.

Sir John has done the nation a great service in pointing the way to ensure the proper, safe and legal use of military force. The rest is up to us.

2.33 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): If this is the Foreign Secretary's last appearance at the Dispatch Box in his current role, he has made a typically serious and thoughtful speech for his farewell. It behoves all of us to reflect seriously and thoughtfully on the Chilcot report, and the Labour party has a duty to apologise for the mistakes made to all the families of the British servicemen and women and civilian personnel who lost their lives, to all those who suffered life-changing injuries, and to the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians who have died and are still dying today. The Leader of the Opposition has rightly done that.

If there is one grave danger that we face, it is that we will assume that all the lessons of Chilcot have been

learned. I listened carefully to the Foreign Secretary, and I am concerned about some of his statements. One draws from them that he assumes that the mistakes made in Iraq cannot be made again. Indeed, the outgoing Prime Minister, in his statement last week, seemed to pick out the same five lessons that the Foreign Secretary mentioned today and said that he felt the lessons had been learned. He seemed to say that the actions that have already been taken, such as the setting up of the National Security Council and the creation of the conflict, stability and security fund, had effectively fixed the problems that arose from the Iraq war.

Mr Philip Hammond: I will repeat what I actually said. I am confident that many of the most important lessons identified in the report have already been learned and the necessary responses implemented, but in the weeks and months ahead, as we examine the report in greater detail, the Government will look further at whether any additional steps are required.

Emily Thornberry: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that, because it is important to emphasise that further lessons need to be learned, some of which I hope to address. I will not spend time repeating any of Chilcot's factual findings, because, looking to the future, we need to consider the lessons and make sure that we do not make any of the same mistakes again. The Secretary of State for Defence will speak later about operational lessons that the military must learn, and it seems to me that there are more lessons than the five that Ministers have outlined so far.

I want to outline some of the points that jump out at us from the report. It seems to me that we have continued to make mistakes during the current Prime Minister's time in office, and I will explain why.

On the flawed intelligence, although Chilcot finds that no deliberate attempt was made to mislead people, the intelligence on which the war was based was clearly flawed and did not justify the certainty attached to it by the Government. Has that lesson been learned? Last year, the Government asked this House to authorise military action in Syria. By contrast with Iraq in 2003, the military action did not include the deployment of ground troops.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware of an attempt to get the House to consider a contempt motion against Tony Blair? Does she agree that, whatever else is in the Chilcot report, it does not give grounds for such a motion?

Emily Thornberry: That is a serious point, and I hope that Members will consider it. The question is whether the House was deliberately misled. Chilcot concluded that, although the intelligence may have been flawed and the House misled, it was not deliberately misled. Therefore, in my opinion, if the House tried to make any findings of fact and act on them, it would move away from those previous times when the instrument of a contempt motion has been used. When it has been used previously, there has been a finding of fact upon which the House has been able to act, meaning that someone has either been found guilty or admitted an offence. There has been no admission of deliberately misleading the House, so if the House attempted to

make a factual finding, it would become a kangaroo court, because the person accused would not be allowed to represent themselves or speak. In my view, such circumstances would fly in the face of this country's established principles of justice. Opposition Members are particularly interested in the Human Rights Act, and in article 6, on the right to a fair trial.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): The hon. Lady has pre-empted what I was about to say. It seems somewhat strange that some Members who rightly proclaim our need to adhere to the European convention on human rights should suggest a process that cannot meet article 6 requirements under any circumstances.

Emily Thornberry: I always get very worried when I agree so thoroughly with the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but I find it happening on many occasions. *[Interruption.]* I hear from a sedentary position, "You lawyers are all the same", but we do agree on certain principles. Frankly, our concern is sometimes to ensure that our colleagues who are not lawyers understand these basic legal principles.

Alex Salmond: Instead of worrying about agreeing with Government Members, should the hon. Lady not be worrying about disagreeing with the comments that her leader made just at the weekend? Has she actually read the private notes that the former Prime Minister sent to the President of the United States of America, and compared them with his public and parliamentary remarks? Does she find the two things consistent?

Emily Thornberry: Chilcot considered those notes and statements over a long period. Sir John Chilcot is a man of great standing, and the report is very thoughtful, and I will not gainsay what he says. There are plenty of lessons to learn from the report, and in my view they go much further than simply focusing on one individual and what happened many years ago. What is important is what is happening now. We need to make sure that the Government make the correct decisions before intervening in other people's countries and risking loss of life.

Alex Salmond: Is it the hon. Lady's position that someone can be found in contempt of this House only if they admit that contempt? That is what she seemed to say.

Emily Thornberry: No. What I am saying is that there are standards that we have always upheld. For example, I believe Warren Hastings was tried by this House 200 years ago, but he was tried by judges, he was represented and he was given an opportunity to say what he had to say. We should not draw conclusions that Chilcot did not without the person involved having an opportunity to speak or be represented.

Alex Salmond: In that case, will the hon. Lady tell us in which court the former Prime Minister could be tried?

Emily Thornberry: I appreciate that there is speculation about what may or may not happen to the former Prime Minister. That is not within my brief today, speaking as the shadow Foreign Secretary and attempting to draw the lessons from Chilcot. It is important that I address

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that this afternoon and leave it to others to take such legal action as they think appropriate. It will be for them to take that to the proper court, which will make a decision. We cannot, within the great traditions of our country, constitute ourselves as a court.

Last year, the Government asked this House to authorise military action in Syria. By contrast with Iraq in 2003, the deployment of ground troops was ruled out, which meant a reliance on local forces instead. I mentioned flawed intelligence; at that stage, we were told that there were 70,000 moderate rebels in Syria who would help defeat Daesh, which would force Assad to negotiate a peace agreement and step down. Many of us were sceptical about that 70,000 figure, and I was certainly one of them. That figure was produced by the Joint Intelligence Committee, and the Government declined to say which groups were included in that figure, where they were, what the definition of “moderate” was, how we could be sure that all these rebels were signed up to the coalition’s military strategy, or how they would get to the battlefield. All those questions mattered.

As the Government acknowledged, no military strategy could succeed without forces on the ground. Time will tell whether those 70,000 moderate Sunni rebels existed and whether they were in a position to fight the battles that it was claimed they would be able to. However, it seems to me that there is a parallel to be drawn between the intelligence that was relied on in relation to the 70,000 figure and the flawed intelligence that has been relied on in the past. It is therefore important for us to learn a lesson from Iraq 12 years earlier. Serious questions have been raised about the intelligence that underpins our decisions to take military action. Once again, Parliament was asked last year simply to take on trust what the Government said about intelligence.

There are further issues to consider, including a lack of ability for people to challenge things internally. Chilcot makes it clear that both civil servants and Cabinet Ministers lacked the opportunity, information and encouragement to challenge the case being made to them. The Prime Minister says that his National Security Council has fixed all that, but if so, why does the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy say that the NSC has so far proved itself to be

“a reactive body, rather than a strategic one, which seems to us to be a lost opportunity”?

That criticism is important, and we should not be complacent in the face of it.

The NSC certainly did not challenge the short-sighted and highly damaging cuts to our armed forces in the last Parliament, despite the huge and justifiable misgivings of senior military figures about the impact on our defence capabilities. Nor is there any evidence of the NSC doing anything to challenge the inadequate planning for the aftermath of the intervention in Libya, a subject that I will address shortly. Ultimately, while making progress in small ways, the NSC has failed to address the fundamental problem, which is a culture in Whitehall of overly optimistic group-think, which exposure to independent views could help us challenge. It is not good enough to say that it has been fixed, because it has not. [Interruption.] The Foreign Secretary asks how I know that. I am giving him the evidence of how I know

that there is overly optimistic group-think. It is partly because of the results of decisions that have been taken, but there is more, which I will go into later in my speech.

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady is completely wrong in her analysis of how the NSC approached the strategic defence and security review in 2010. All the papers were put before members of the National Security Council—I was one of them—and we spent weeks reading the best possible advice. We made our decisions in the light of the very difficult economic situation that the country found itself in and the £38 billion black hole left in the defence budget by the Labour Government, but the idea that we lacked expertise before us at that time is completely wrong.

Emily Thornberry: I spent only six months in the area of defence, but although I spent a great deal of time immersing myself in it, I am not just relying on my own views in saying what a disaster the coalition’s first so-called strategic defence review was. It is not just me who thinks that. Senior military figures, not just in this country but among our allies, were very concerned about what cuts to the military budget were doing to our capability. It is my view that the second strategic defence review spent a great deal of time patching up the holes that had been created by the coalition’s first one.

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady is being generous in giving way. However, once again, she is wrong. The most senior military officials and soldiers in the country were at the table for the first security and defence review. They were part of the discussion; they were not locked out.

Emily Thornberry: The right hon. Gentleman has had his opportunity to put his views on the record, and I am sure that he will speak later. My view is that if things had been fixed in the way that the Foreign Secretary has stated, we would not be swinging backwards and forwards on our military budget. We make cuts and create holes in our defence capability, then the next time we try to patch them up.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): As one of the Defence Ministers at the time, let me say that it was a most unpleasant experience, as a Conservative, having to make cuts in our armed forces. However, the truth was that the Budget deficit we inherited of £156 billion was itself a threat to our national security. We had to take action. Sadly, defence had to take some of those cuts. Where would the hon. Lady have made cuts, if not in defence?

Emily Thornberry: We are moving a long way from the lessons that need to be drawn from Chilcot, and if I may, I will return to my speech. The hon. Gentleman and I have discussed defence on many occasions. I always enjoy the discussions, and I am quite happy to take his points at another time. However, I do not want to spend the entire afternoon discussing defence, much as I am tempted to. I simply say that if the NSC has brought in outside perspectives from time to time, it has clearly not done so enough to deal with the underlying problem.

Another issue that comes out in Chilcot, and that has not been fixed, is the lack of challenge in Parliament. That was the other potential source of challenge to the Government. Although there were vigorous debates in the House, those debates and the 217 MPs who voted to indicate that the case had not been made were ultimately not enough to stop the march to war. I was not yet in the House; I was on the demonstrations. Although more Labour MPs than MPs from any other political party voted against the war, there were not enough of us to stop it.

Have we moved on since then? Many people have said that the 2013 vote against taking action in Syria was a watershed moment. It cemented the convention that whatever the views of the Executive, this House has the final say. The House was asked to approve a broad mandate for the use of military force without a coherent strategy, clear objectives or a long-term plan. It was all too reminiscent of the approach to Iraq. Members from all parts of the House exercised a healthy degree of scepticism, and they were right to do so.

At the same time, the Government have increasingly taken advantage of loopholes in that convention to intervene in more conflicts with less oversight. They have developed military capability in cyberspace, but they refuse to say in what circumstances it might be used or when Parliament might be informed. They have increased investment in drones and special forces at a time when there have been many cuts to other parts of the armed forces. They have shown a willingness to use both as a means of intervening in conflicts to which the UK is not a party; that has included the use of special forces in quasi-conventional combat roles. In doing so, the Government seek to bypass not only parliamentary support for their interventions but any form of parliamentary oversight. The development of hybrid warfare demands new mechanisms for holding the Executive to account. All parties, on both sides of the House, should be working on developing those mechanisms, because as we all know, hybrid warfare is likely to be the future.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): Does the hon. Lady acknowledge that there is at least an argument that to use the whipping system to secure a parliamentary majority for a predetermined war emasculates the House of Commons rather than empowers it, because it prevents Back-Bench Members of Parliament from thereafter holding the Government to account? Does she agree that there might be an argument in favour of introducing some kind of UK war powers Act to get around that difficulty?

Emily Thornberry: There is continuing debate about the matter. As long as we can be confident that a decision made in this House will not need to be taken off to the courts, for the judges, eventually, to decide whether we go to war—that would be entirely inappropriate—and as long as we can keep control of any such legislation so that it ensures that, where possible, the Government will come to Parliament and allow us to express our view, I think that that is right.

I understand that this is the system that we have at the moment, but I am concerned that although the convention continues to develop and strengthen as time goes on, it is still in the gift of the Executive to decide

whether they will bring the matter to Parliament. There is an argument for putting the convention on a more formal footing, but there is the danger of court intervention. It is a moot point, and something that we must continue to look at.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I am grateful for the hon. Lady's strategic lesson in the modern combat capability of Her Majesty's armed forces. I was interested in her description of the use of special forces in almost-combat capability. Having served with various parts of Her Majesty's forces in the past, I know that most foreign deployments are considered to be near to combat even if they are in a training role, because of the pressures on them. It is a very novel interpretation to suggest that hybrid warfare may not continue to exist.

We are getting into a rather bizarre discussion, if the hon. Lady will forgive me for saying so, on the strategy and use of the armed forces, when surely the focus should be on the legality and the appropriateness of the deployment. It might be best to stick to the areas that the House is qualified to talk about, rather than to dress up as armchair generals and pretend that we know what is going on in different areas.

Emily Thornberry: It is important that we look to tomorrow's problems. Special forces are likely to be used increasingly. On the idea that we will send, for example, special forces into Libya in a training capacity, I agree with the hon. Gentleman about how that might end up a quasi-combat role. Presumably, if the training forces are in Libya, they will be in a camp. They may be in a part of Libya that is allegedly safe, but they will need to be guarded. Who will guard them? We can see how it is possible to slide down a slippery slope. At the moment, although it would be inappropriate in the case of a decision to send special forces or trainers into an area, if we can have parliamentary scrutiny of our secret service—if the behaviour of MI5 and MI6 is at least answerable to a Committee of this House—it is not beyond our wit to allow there to be similar accountability over special forces. I have written about this issue.

Mr Philip Hammond: It is important to point out that the oversight that the Intelligence and Security Committee, prominent members of which are present, exercises over the intelligence community is always post the fact. The only kind of meaningful oversight over special force deployment of the type that the hon. Lady is talking about would have to be before the fact. That would be a very different proposition.

Emily Thornberry: I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for making that point. I do not expect special forces, before they are used, to have to go before a Committee of Parliament and get permission, but I do think that there should be some form of accountability and some explanation. It was embarrassing, and it demonstrated the democratic deficit in relation to hybrid warfare, to read in the papers that the King of Jordan was gossiping with Congressmen in America about our special forces, when nobody in this House had officially been told about it. That highlights the democratic deficit in this country. We should learn lessons from Chilcot. We should learn lessons about accountability and about

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not simply trusting the Executive to get a decision right. We should make sure that there is more accountability, and that we are on our toes. We must be prepared to modernise our structures as necessary to reflect the changing nature of warfare in the 21st century.

Let me go back to my speech. I talked about the development of hybrid warfare and new mechanisms for holding the Executive to account, and I believe that all parties should work together on that. Another point was raised about American-British relations. Chilcot made it clear that American-British relations would not have been harmed had the UK not joined the US-led coalition. Chilcot argues that that was not a basis for joining the invasion. In my view, that is another lesson that we have not learned. In 2013, pressure from the United States played a major role in the Government's rush to intervene in Syria. It became obvious that the US Administration's efforts to persuade Congress to back intervention hinged on the Prime Minister's success in persuading Parliament to do so. Speaking after our House declined to support the action in Syria, the then Defence Secretary—now the Foreign Secretary—said that the vote would “certainly” damage the Anglo-American relationship. In my view, the relationship has endured. We have got over it without any adverse consequences, and it serves as a reminder that our alliance with the United States rests on stronger foundations than an expectation of unquestioning British compliance with American wishes.

Tom Tugendhat: The hon. Lady speaks of the special relationship, and I would be the first to acknowledge that the relationship with the United States goes much deeper than one incident or one vote, but is it not also valid to listen to the words of various American generals, including General Jim Mattis, who, as she knows, commanded Centcom? After the vote, he pointed to the damaging impact that it would have on the enduring commitment and understanding between the US and British militaries. Does she recognise that just as that special relationship is made up of many threads, undermining it thread by thread will weaken it?

Emily Thornberry: I am sure that some American generals were disappointed that Harold Wilson would not agree to British involvement in Vietnam, but we got over it and our relationship is strong enough to endure differences of opinion. If we are to be good friends, it is important to recognise that good friends trust each other enough to disagree at times. The 2013 Syria vote made it clear that Parliament understood that; it also suggested that the Government did not. That is why it is such a tragedy that cuts to the Foreign Office budget have weakened Whitehall's institutional knowledge of the world. It is important for our leadership role in the world to have proper understanding of it, and for hundreds of years we have had an insight into the world that other countries have not had. We have a leadership role, and we can have a voice that is different from that of the Americans because we will have a different understanding. To have 16% cuts in the Foreign Office year on year, and a hollowing out of our institutional knowledge, has in my view been a tragedy.

Tom Tugendhat *rose*—

Emily Thornberry: I am sorry but the hon. Gentleman has already intervened twice. I am taking a very long time, and I ought to get on with it.

Chilcot says that Tony Blair ignored warnings about the sectarian violence that would sweep Iraq after Saddam fell, and after the appalling loss of life that has followed in Iraq and surrounding countries, we are still very much living with that mistake. Again, has that lesson been learned? If we consider the intervention in Libya, it is clear that it has not been. During the uprising against Gaddafi, armed militias across the country focused their attention on toppling the regime, and the British Government later seemed almost surprised that once that goal had been achieved, those militias turned their fire on each other. Although divisions in Libya were always more tribal than the sectarian divisions in Iraq, the result has been the same. The belief that democratic elections would help to fill the power vacuum proved hopelessly optimistic, when factions that found themselves in the minority simply refused to accept that the result was legitimate.

Had those with knowledge of the country been directly consulted at the time, they would have warned the Government that such things would happen. Had informed and impartial advice been sought out, such warnings were readily available and in the public domain. It was also clear to many experts in the region that if Gaddafi was toppled there was a huge risk of knock-on instability when well-armed, highly trained mercenaries returned to their native countries such as Mali, Niger and Chad. Again, the warnings were there, but such advice was either not heard or not listened to until it was too late. Again, a parallel can be drawn between our intervention in Libya and our understanding of what would happen next and listening to experts, and what happened in our first intervention in Iraq when we did not listen to expertise or pay attention to what was said.

Mr Philip Hammond: First, the intervention in Libya was at the request of the Arab League, which I suggest would have had an insight into the region and would count as people who knew what was going on. Secondly, although I understand the hon. Lady's analysis, does that lead to the conclusion that toppling any despot always runs the risk of creating chaos and confusion? That is the nature of despotism. We are five years down the line from ending a 40-year brutal dictatorship in Libya. The game is not over yet, but I predict that Libya will end up a better place than it was under Gaddafi.

Emily Thornberry: It is interesting to hear what the right hon. Gentleman says, but that issue is one of speculation. In my view it is not legal to intervene in a country to topple a regime, and morally we should not intervene in a country unless we have some form of strategy to ensure that the country we leave is in a better state than when we first arrived.

Mr Grieve: When I was in government I had some involvement in the Libyan intervention, and from memory I do not think that there was a blinding of oneself to potential problems as a result of that intervention. We must also bear it in mind that the trigger for the intervention was the fact that Colonel Gaddafi was about to kill tens of thousands of his own citizens. That prompted the Security Council resolution that provided

the legal basis for the intervention. That highlights—I will come on to speak about this—some of the really difficult decisions in those areas, where even questions of legality do not come into it. I certainly would not be willing to characterise that intervention as having been wrong in the circumstances that prevailed at the time.

Emily Thornberry: I hear what the right hon. and learned Gentleman says, but my point is that, again, information was available and could have informed the intervention. Once the initial intervention had been made, what happened thereafter? How were manifest and obvious dangers protected against? I do not think that those important points were considered, and again we learn a lesson from Chilcot and Iraq that is so much more important than any form of soap opera regarding Tony Blair or not Tony Blair.

The other important issue is post-war planning, some of which has been touched on—this is my final point, Mr Speaker, as everyone will be glad to hear. Perhaps most devastatingly, Chilcot highlights the total absence of adequate planning for what would happen after the war and the long-term strategy for Iraq. If ever a mistake should never be repeated, it is the idea that we enter into another military intervention with no idea of its consequences, no plan for the aftermath, and no long-term strategy. And yet, that is the exact hallmark of all the outgoing Prime Minister's interventions.

Again, we see the evidence in Libya. In the words of President Obama, the Prime Minister became “distracted”, and once the Gaddafi regime had been overthrown, the lengthy, arduous task of post-war reconstruction was all but ignored. In the years since, Libya has been riven by factionalism and violence. Its experiment with democracy was brief, with power in the hands of rival militias, and the ungoverned space that that created was an invitation for Daesh to establish a strategic foothold on the Libyan coast. It is a stain on this Government that they began to pay real attention to the mess they had left in Libya only once that terrorist threat from Daesh became too urgent to ignore.

Joanna Cherry: I am not sure whether the hon. Lady has said anything about Chilcot's findings on the circumstances in which it was ultimately decided that there was a legal basis for UK participation in Iraq, but he says that they were far from satisfactory. I am sure she will agree with me and endorse the view presented earlier that the Attorney General should give independent and impartial advice. According to evidence to the Committee, Chilcot details how the then Attorney General initially resisted the legality, and eventually acquiesced in the view that the use of military force against Iraq could be legally justified. Has the hon. Lady formed a view about what changed the then Attorney General's mind?

Emily Thornberry: Tempting though it is to debate that issue with the hon. and learned Lady, it is important to note that any Attorney General knows that they are the only person in the Cabinet who can say to the Prime Minister, “No. You can't do that. It is not legal. You are not allowed to.” That heavy burden must be exercised by people of great courage and substance. It is about the rule of law and the fact that no one is above the law.

All AGs need to learn that lesson, and they must be confident and capable of standing up to their leader. That is an important point and perhaps another lesson.

Britain has always been a leading light in the development of international law, and much international law has been a result of documents that we have drafted. Our adherence to international law has been a very important part in its development. One thing that has been clouded, as a result of the Iraq intervention and other interventions since, has been the need for a clear law on the circumstances in which one can and cannot intervene. That has not developed as well as it might have if there had not been a temptation to try to press the facts into what is understood of the law. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) is a big fan of the Responsibility to Protect. The effect the Iraq war had on the development of RtoP is very sad: Cook was attempting to develop it at the time of the Iraq war and it was held up as a result of the intervention in Iraq. Were the lessons on long-term planning from Iraq learned in Libya? I would say absolutely not. The central lesson is this: you cannot bomb a country from 30,000 feet into a western-style democracy.

In conclusion, we cannot turn the clock back. We cannot correct the mistakes that were made. We cannot bring back the lives that were lost. We cannot undo the chaos we have created, but we can, and we must, stop those mistakes being repeated. Unfortunately, as I have pointed out today, whatever his rhetoric and whatever his well-meaning intentions, too often the outgoing Prime Minister has repeated exactly the same mistakes in his own military interventions: relying on speculative intelligence, keeping Parliament in the dark, and failing to plan for what happens afterwards. It is to be hoped that the new Prime Minister will study the Chilcot report not as a commentary on decisions made in the past but as a guide to the decisions she will have to make. Let us hope she does so. As she takes on her new and onerous responsibilities, we wish her well.

3.12 pm

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): The decision to invade Iraq was the most disastrous foreign policy decision taken by this country in my lifetime. It did not cause, but it greatly contributed to, the extraordinary problems that have persisted in the middle east and the wider world ever since. I fear it will continue to have tragic consequences for some years to come.

First, we all owe a debt to Sir John Chilcot for producing what will undoubtedly be the most authoritative analysis of how on earth such an appalling blunder came to be made. I certainly have not had the chance to get much beyond the executive summary and just a little bit of the rest of it. It will take a long time before anybody in this House gets through the millions of words that have been produced. The lessons for the inquiry into the Iraq war will be of benefit in particular to specialists: those in the military, the intelligence service, the diplomatic corps and politicians—Ministers, shadow Ministers and those who hold the Government to account—for many years to come. It is too soon to follow up on his extremely formidable findings, which I am sure are correct, but there is a role for this House to begin to consider, as we are, its political aspect.

[Mr Kenneth Clarke]

Sir John Chilcot has examined the formal records, meetings and processes. He analysed them to see what happened, but he is not a politician. The House of Commons and the Ministers involved are able to look at this with a slightly different eye. Why did people reach particular decisions? What is it that makes us want to reach those decisions? Where did it go wrong, in particular as far as the collective system of Cabinet Government is concerned, and the accountability, through Parliament, to the wider public? Because Sir John Chilcot is not a politician, I am not sure that he is able to answer on the wider perspective.

I would like to begin by agreeing with one point made by the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) and say how irrelevant it has been to try to turn all this into a witch hunt against celebrity individuals who were involved at the time. That is one of the great failures of political debate in our day. As far as the wider media and the world were concerned, the recent referendum debate was largely the Dave and Boris show. It is quite pointless to say, “Let’s persecute Tony Blair. He was in charge. Are we going to censure him? Is he going to be prosecuted as a war criminal?” and all the rest of it. That is also true for all the other individuals involved.

The one thing the report makes quite clear is that nobody has committed any crime. As one who was present at the time, I have absolutely no doubt that anybody acted on any other basis than that they believed passionately they were acting in the public interest. One of the great things about Tony Blair was that he did believe passionately in what he was doing at the time. That was very evident on the Floor of the House. He never had a doubt about what he was doing, so I am not surprised that he continues to protest as strongly as he does. He has not changed his mind. He believed he was acting in the national interest in cementing our alliance with the Americans. He thought that was absolutely key to our security. He thought that a British contribution would help the Americans with planning, advocacy and so on. He firmly believed that just removing Saddam Hussein was a virtuous act that would make the world a better place—he still does.

Then, as now, regime change is the point on which he gets most passionate. He really thinks—he is probably right; I agree with him, actually—that he got rid of an evil regime. I agree with those who say that that was not in itself a totally adequate achievement. He certainly believed that the regime had weapons of mass destruction. I faced him in the House, intervening on him and so on. I remember one day thinking, “This is the last man still living who still believes they are going to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.” It was increasingly obvious to everyone else that no such material was going to be found. Pursuing Tony Blair is a complete irrelevance to what the House should be looking at.

Caroline Lucas *rose*—

Mr Clarke: I will give way briefly to the hon. Lady, but I am not on the Front Bench and cannot keep on giving way as previous speakers have. I hope everybody understands that.

Caroline Lucas: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way and agree with him on the dangers of focusing on just one person. We need to focus on that person, but we also need to focus on the system. However, I worry about the way in which the right hon. and learned Gentleman appears to be letting that one person off any real responsibility for misleading the House. We only have to read Chilcot to see, for example, how Blair misled the House about the position of the French. The motion Blair moved in the House stated that,

“it has not proved possible to secure a second Resolution in the UN because one Permanent Member of the Security Council made plain in public its intention to use its veto whatever the circumstances”.—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2003; Vol. 401, c. 760.]

Yet within a few minutes, even before Prime Minister’s questions, the French were on the phone to Tony Blair saying, “You are deliberately misrepresenting our position.” This happens time and again in the Chilcot report, so while we should not focus only on one man, let us not let him off the hook completely. That does not do any of us any good.

Mr Clarke: I certainly did not rise to defend Tony Blair, but he is not the first politician to make a mistake and he will not be the last. If the hon. Lady believes the French, she believes the French. The French were able to exercise a veto in the Security Council. It was a mistake at the time to try to blame the French entirely. They were never going to get a majority in the Security Council, but the French were adamantly—[*Interruption.*]

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has made it perfectly plain that at this point he is not giving way. Therefore, the House must listen to the development of his argument.

Mr Clarke: Mr Speaker, I have already spent more time than I intended to on Tony Blair. Members who wish to argue about the French veto in 2003 can do so between themselves.

The political background to what was being decided and what the politicians wanted to do was key. I was a Back-Bench Opposition Member at the time, but I followed the events with some care. I had one advantage: I did not have access to what was going on inside the Government, but I knew a lot of American, as well as British, politicians. At various political gatherings—Bilderberg, Davos and so on—I knew and was on friendly terms with quite a few of the key American neo-cons. I was arguing against the merits of the invasion of Iraq before the debate even started here.

That is important background. In the Bush Administration, the key policy makers wanted to invade Iraq immediately after 9/11. By 2001, there was not the slightest doubt but that they would invade. They had a rather naive, idealistic approach that faintly shocked me: they thought the previous Administration had not used American military power for all the benefits it could produce in the world, but they were going to use it for good, and they thought they would be treated as liberating heroes when they arrived in Baghdad and set up a better regime.

They thought that a man called Chalabi would win the election held thereafter. I met Chalabi once or twice. He once got about 2% in an Iraqi election. They thought he would be in charge but that he would need supervision, so there was going to be a US general—constant comparisons were made with General MacArthur turning Imperial Japan into a democracy after the war. Much was also made of the importance of denazification following Hitler's fall, hence there was going to be de-Ba'athification in Iraq to get rid of all these people in the army and the security services and so on. The House will be reassured to know that I fiercely disagreed. I liked these people, but my thought, during such a discussion, was always, "One of us isn't on the same planet." I formed a fairly hostile view, therefore, long before it arrived here.

If I knew in 2001 that the Bush Administration was going to invade Iraq, I am quite certain that Tony Blair and the British military knew, and that they had a long time to work out how they were going to join in. That explains a lot. Why did the Americans want the British to join in? They did not need us for military purposes. They could defeat the Iraqis without our military assistance. They did not rate our military that highly—although they thought our special forces and intelligences were very good—but we were a very valuable political ally. They thought that the presentation would be greatly improved if the British, of all people, were at the heart of the alliance, and as I have said, Tony Blair was very keen to join them. I doubt he bought all the neo-con theories, but he clearly thought that getting rid of Saddam Hussein's regime was one of the best contributions he could make to the future of the Iraqi people and he was determined to join in.

Reading these mysteries, one must ask, "What was the snag for Tony Blair and the Government?" I am confident I knew enough, through my contacts, to know that the snag for Tony Blair, who wanted to take part and who—it seems—had already told George W. Bush that he wanted to take part, was that it was not legal for the UK to take part in a war being launched for the purpose of changing the regime in another country. When he received that advice, with which I think every lawyer in the place agreed, it was undoubtedly right.

As somebody said, however, that was not the view the Americans took. American neo-cons are not so impressed with international law. Their constitution does not constrain them. I once had a key American official tell me, "We have all the legal authority we need to invade: we have a large majority in both Houses of Congress." And that was it. But they were so keen to have the British that they were prepared to give Tony Blair some time to tackle this problem of whether it was lawful for him to take part, and to work out a basis upon which the British could join.

At this point, I think, these people's motives were virtuous. They believed all this. They were making the world a better place by removing a tyrant and installing a pro-American, pro-western, pro-Israeli, democratic Government in a liberal society. They were going to change the regime, and we were going to do it lawfully, so we had to turn to the question of the dreadful weapons that Saddam Hussein undoubtedly had used against his own people years before, and whether they had all been disposed of or whether we could demonstrate

that he was a continuing threat. If we could demonstrate that he had weapons of mass destruction, that they were a threat to British interests and our neighbours, and that he was not co-operating with weapons inspections and so on, and if we could get a UN resolution, then we had a legal basis for invading.

Once one realises that that was the—perfectly worthy and well-intentioned—mindset of most of the British people taking part in the process to intervene, one can understand why some of these extraordinary processes happened. I personally believe that the American Administration delayed the invasion for a month or few—

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): Two months.

Mr Clarke: Two months, says my right hon. Friend. They delayed the invasion to give the British more time to get through this convoluted legal stuff—I use sarcastic words of the kind the occasional impatient American used at the time—before they could join in. The problem was that the Americans, although they went to the UN and got resolution 1441 and all the rest of it, began to lose patience, seeing that this could go on forever, and it reached the stage where they were going to invade in March 2003. They could not wait any longer. The Blair Government—those who knew what was going on—had to speed the thing up a bit, realising that if they were not careful, they would fail to get there in time.

One thing that surprises me in the Chilcot report concerns the advice the Government got from the Joint Intelligence Committee, which eventually produced enough intelligence that was plausible and no doubt believed by those putting it in the reports for the Attorney General to be persuaded—obviously quite reluctantly—that there probably was a basis for going ahead. The urgent debates then took place in this House, the last one being about two days before the date when everyone knew the troops, already in battle positions in the middle east, were about to go ahead with the operation.

We should learn the political lessons from all that. One of the first lessons relates to the ever-increasing rush to get into the position of being able to invade lawfully, so that everybody wanted to be persuaded that various things were correct and that various steps had been taken. If they had submitted themselves to slower, more challenged and more careful consideration, however, it would have led to a different conclusion.

What, then, is the outline of the main political lessons to be learned from all this? First, the American alliance should not be entered into blindly. Let me say briefly that I am as passionate a believer as Tony Blair that our alliance with the United States is crucial to this country's future security and role in the world. There is not a trace of anti-Americanism in what I am saying; our alliance is one of the most valuable features of our foreign policy. That does not mean, however, that we should allow ourselves to go along blindly and always—right or wrong—with what the American President of the day wishes to do. I take that no further, but we might have a President Trump, so it is a question worth bearing in mind. I agree with the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) that the American alliance will not be destroyed—it might

[Mr Kenneth Clarke]

be damaged for a month or two—if we do not absolutely go along with what the American President wants us to do.

Let me move on to something that is clear in Chilcot—though I have not made the point much myself—and was plain to see in how the Ministry of Defence behaved at the time. The advice of our defence chiefs is hugely important, and I share the support for and pride in them that keeps being expressed in these debates. Yet—subconsciously, I am sure—they always want to take part in any military activity that the Americans want them to join. It might be considered advice, but it always comes down to “We must ask the Americans to let us make as big a contribution as we can”. A trained military man is trained for the purpose of using military force in the national interest and further worthwhile objectives, and cannot help thinking, “This is our moment; this is the great action in which we must take part.”

It is the same with the intelligence services. They prize their relationship with the Americans above all other relationships they have with the outside world. They are dependent on co-operation in some ways, but they are anxious to please and to do what they think their American colleagues wish them to do. In this particular case, we had a Prime Minister and a Government who wanted to enter the war, so everybody was extremely anxious to find the facts, to be convinced of the situation and to enable the Prime Minister to go ahead and do what he wanted. That is an essential point, but it requires a simple politician like me to make it; it does not appear in the pages of the Chilcot report. When one is raising one’s eyebrows at what happened, I think that that answers a lot.

Particularly at the time we are talking about—and sometimes still today—there were not enough diplomats involved. There was not enough looking at the expertise of the Foreign Office. We had a lot of Arabists. The Americans had some, but they got rid of most of theirs and brought people in who had been involved in the Nicaraguan episode because they were seen as being ideologically more sound. Americans did not like the Arabists we had in the Foreign Office because they kept complicating things by talking about tribes and different sorts of Muslim, which the policy makers in Washington thought were irrelevant to the new era of western democracy in which they thought they were going to take the country.

Tom Tugendhat: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr Clarke: I am sorry, but I do not have the time.

I shall not go on by adding more to the strictures about the Attorney General—[HON. MEMBERS: “Go on!”]. The Attorney General was obviously giving the right advice. I am sitting alongside someone who was a very tough Attorney General—my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve)—who would not give the advice that eager Prime Ministers sometimes want, and neither would Michael Havers or quite a few others I recall being in government with. As has been said, that is what the Attorney General is for. I know Lord Goldsmith and he is perfectly all right. He

must have felt so exposed in the end that he gave into the temptation to say, “Well, it’s just about lawful; it is just about satisfactorily proved.”

I am sorry to have taken a little longer than I intended, but let me conclude with my main point. The big thing that matters—and it matters very much as we are having a change of Government today—is how the Cabinet and Government processes come into the equation. What about accountability to Parliament? It was obvious at the time, obvious if anyone listened to what the Foreign Secretary said publicly, obvious in what half the Labour party said and obvious from listening to officials that Cabinet Government was not working properly in Tony Blair’s Government. He went in for sofa government. Margaret Thatcher got keener and keener on sofa government towards the end of her time, but Tony Blair had taken it to an art form by the time he got into issues such as Iraq. It was the same with Parliament. There was a reluctance to come to Parliament. Both were essentially seen as hurdles to be surmounted. Once you had your policy, how were you going to get it through the Cabinet and how were you going to get it past Parliament?

My suggestion for the future is that we should all agree that that is not the mindset that people should have. They should set the proposition, and, of course, advocate it to the Cabinet, and then, with the benefit of proper information, they should listen to it being debated and examined by those who have time to do so. Similarly, Parliament should be consulted when it can be, and given proper information. One should not rely on clever timing of the debate and the work of the Whips to get it through and afterwards say that there is a democratic endorsement. I have no time to apply all my strong strictures to the circumstances of the time, but I think that, if read with my arguments in mind, the Chilcot report feeds the impression that I had then, as someone who participated in debates.

Military action is difficult. There is no point in politicians being lightheartedly irresponsible and saying, “We have got to be involved in every decision.” There will be occasions when that is not possible. There will be occasions when someone has just attacked a British interest, and we have to fight back. You can tell the Cabinet and you can tell Parliament afterwards, and any sensible Cabinet and any sensible Parliament will of course endorse it. But this was not an emergency. For two years our allies had told us that they were going to invade Iraq. It had been planned. It had been worked on. It had been discussed. The reason there was not full Cabinet discussion, and the reason there was not timely parliamentary debate, was that someone who did that might not get it by them. We did not start debating the issue until Parliament until February 2003, and the final, key vote took place when the troops were in the field. That put a lot of Conservatives off the idea of voting against it, when they might otherwise have done so. Our boys were about to go into action, the next day—which is what occurred.

Some of those matters have been addressed. The National Security Council is a hugely beneficial innovation introduced by my right hon. Friend the outgoing Prime Minister, who is probably already the ex-Prime Minister. Now is not the time to debate it, but it still needs to be improved. It has not covered everything, although it is a lot better than it was. As for Cabinet government, I

think that my right hon. Friends should ask themselves— if they are still in office under the next Prime Minister— whether they can ensure that adequate time is given to discuss things, and adequate information is given in advance. Cabinet government does not mean moving quickly from item to item; people must have some papers beforehand so that they can consider the issues properly.

The National Security Council is very valuable, because it contains defence and intelligence people alongside the politicians. I genuinely congratulate the outgoing Prime Minister: some of the best discussions in which I participated took place in the National Security Council, with my total approval. However, although I may be too sensitive, I think that it could be improved sometimes. There are occasions when a *fait accompli* is brought there and explained to you, and the defence and intelligence people explain why you should agree, and off you go.

I think it right to look into why we might have avoided what happened in Libya. The whole history of the middle east and north Africa involves our removing fascist dictatorships of the most poisonous kind from country after country, and then being surprised when they have been replaced by a situation that is, in some instances, even worse than the one that we have removed. A continuing answer to that problem needs to be sought, although at present we may have to confront even bigger problems.

I began by saying that this was the biggest foreign policy disaster of my time. We all have to ask why the institutions of the United Kingdom failed even to develop a hint of that. It was not particularly courageous for the House to vote in favour. Opinion polls showed that 70% of the British public supported the invasion. For the first week or two it was extremely popular. Had we held a referendum, which is now the fashionable way of governing the country—compared with this old-fashioned parliamentary democracy—it would have sailed through with an enormous majority. The danger of following opinion polls is shown by the fact that a year later I could not find a member of the public who had ever met anybody who agreed with the invasion of Iraq, because in the light of better information people suddenly realised it had been a terrible error.

There are Members sitting here now who were here at that time. I remember the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) organising some of the opposition on the day I spoke in February. We voted against it, and we spoke against it. Needless to say, I have looked at my speech, and I am very sad to say that I think I predicted quite a lot of the consequences and what would happen. We all agree that, “Never again if we can avoid it,” but this is a big subject and it is no good reading the report and just saying we should have a look at the intelligence arrangements; we should have a look at other arrangements as well, such as the way our Government are run, the way this Parliament organises itself, and how we get sensible accountability to the House of Commons the next time the Government have to engage in such difficult decisions.

3.41 pm

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): The parliamentary wounds of the Iraq war are still pertinent in today’s debate, but we should remember that they are as nothing

compared with the wounds of the 179 families who lost servicepeople, the 23 British civilian staff who were killed, the 200,000 Iraqis and the thousands of American soldiers. The carnage in the middle east is still with us today—these wounds are still raw and open.

Like the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), I looked back at the debate on 18 March 2003, and I was struck by a number of things that we do not always remember. We all remember Robin Cook’s brilliant resignation speech of the day before, but we do not necessarily remember John Denham’s distinguished and measured contribution on the day of the debate.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman reminded us that public opinion at that stage was in favour of war, and those of us who spoke against it from the SNP, Plaid Cymru or Liberal Benches were not given a particularly easy time. I looked at the contribution that day of Charles Kennedy, who was barracked throughout his speech against war. “Chamberlain Charlie” was one of the more printable epithets, and the “toast of Baghdad” was flung at some of us who opposed the war.

I say that not just to make the point that Members such as the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe and others who argued against the war have been vindicated, but also to remind people of the nature and context of the debate we were engaged in. There are only 179 Members in this Parliament who were Members of Parliament on 18 March 2003; a little over a quarter of Members of this Parliament were present and voting in that debate. It is as well that people remember and understand the context if we are to understand the failings of parliamentary democracy—not of referendums, but of parliamentary democracy—that the votes on Iraq that day illustrated.

I have been checking the record, and I think I can honestly say that I do not think I have ever quoted *The Times* in 30 years in this place, off and on, but I will quote it today, because I thought its headline and first paragraph on the Chilcot report last Thursday absolutely hit the mark. Under the headline “Blair’s private war”, it wrote:

“Britain fought an unnecessary, disastrous and potentially illegal war in Iraq because of Tony Blair’s misguided and personal commitment to George W Bush, the Chilcot report concluded yesterday.”

It would be impossible to read the Chilcot report without looking at that personal level of accountability as well as the wider context of the legality.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe started his speech by saying that this was not all about Tony Blair, but the rest of his speech illustrated why it is in fact very largely about Tony Blair. I want to quote from the executive summary of the Chilcot report, but these points are backed up enormously in the full report. On pages 58 and 59, Chilcot goes through the sequence of decision making between December 2001 and the immediate onset of the war. It would appear that if those decisions were the product of sofa government, it was a very small sofa indeed. Crucial decisions about the strategies and alliances involved were made by the Prime Minister and only a very few of his advisers. Chilcot finds that not even a Cabinet Committee discussed the crucial decisions listed on pages 58 and 59. The list starts with:

“The decision at the beginning of December 2001 to offer to work with President Bush on a strategy to deal with Iraq as part

[Alex Salmond]

of Phase 2 of the ‘War on Terror’, despite the fact that there was no evidence of any Iraqi involvement with the attacks on the United States or active links to Al Qaida.”

It goes right through to:

“A review of UK policy at the end of February 2003 when the inspectors had found no evidence of WMD and there was only limited support for the second resolution in the Security Council.”

All those crucial decisions were made without reference even to a Cabinet Sub-Committee and without a range of colleagues in the Cabinet being consulted.

When the former Deputy Prime Minister concluded last weekend—in a way that Chilcot was not allowed to do, either because of his remit or because of the lack of specialisms on the inquiry—that the war was illegal and apologised for it, he should actually have been apologising for the fact that all this was allowed to happen through a sequence of decisions taken over 15 months by one individual, the Prime Minister, and his advisers without any account being taken of any kind of collective responsibility.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Does Chilcot not also say that that form of government should be described as a “professional forum”, and that it should not be regarded as just advisers and cronies? Was not that the specific point of the evidence that Lord Turnbull gave to Chilcot?

Alex Salmond: I am dealing with the findings of Chilcot—

Steve McCabe: So am I.

Alex Salmond: The report states:

“The Inquiry considers that there should have been a collective discussion by a Cabinet Committee or small group of Ministers on the basis of inter-departmental advice agreed at a senior level between officials on a number of decision points”.

That is in paragraph 409 on page 58, if that helps the hon. Gentleman.

Steve McCabe: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Alex Salmond: I have answered the hon. Gentleman’s question. If he will let me continue, perhaps I will give way again later—

Steve McCabe: In paragraph 402—

Mr Speaker: Order. We cannot conduct debate with people yelling from a sedentary position in a disorderly manner, and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) must not do that. If the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) wants to give way later, he will, and if he does not, he will not. We will see how things go.

Alex Salmond: If the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) had been able to give evidence to Chilcot, no doubt the report would have concluded otherwise. However, we now have the report as it has been concluded. I am not talking about individual pieces of evidence; I am talking about the conclusion of

the Chilcot inquiry itself. This is why *The Times* was undoubtedly right to describe the events as “Blair’s private war”.

On the question of collective responsibility in this place, I fundamentally disagree with the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe on one point. If Parliament is to hold future Executives to account, it will not just be a question of changing the process of decision making, although I accept that some changes have been made. I do not accept the Foreign Secretary’s confidence that the mistakes could never be repeated, and I do not believe that his distinction between a land campaign in Iraq and an aerial bombardment in Libya fully explains why this country—never mind its allies—spent 13 times as much on bombing Libya as we spent on the budget for reconstruction in Libya. That might be a lesson that has not been carried forward. The changes that must be made relate not only to the process of government but to parliamentary accountability, the most fundamental aspect of which is Parliament deciding whether it has been misled.

Ian Austin: The fact is that Libya was already in a brutal civil war before western air forces prevented Gaddafi from slaughtering innocent people—women and children—in Benghazi. That was what was happening. The question that the right hon. Gentleman has to answer is what he would have done to help those women and children in Benghazi. [Interruption.]

Alex Salmond: As the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) says from a sedentary position, I probably would not have supplied arms to people like that over a period of time. Not doing oil deals in a tent with Colonel Gaddafi might have been another thing.

Ian Austin rose—

Alex Salmond: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I want to make my speech.

My point was about the lesson of reconstruction, not the argument for the conflict. It is fair to point out that this country spent 13 times as much bombing Libya as we did on the budget for the reconstruction of Libya. That might provide a lesson about the priority given to the aftermath of conflict, and I am unsure whether the Foreign Secretary has taken it fully on board.

This is about not just the process of government but parliamentary accountability—that is the most fundamental point of all. Parliament has held people to account in the relatively recent past—there was Profumo and the sex scandal, and if I remember correctly, Stephen Byers was accused of misleading Parliament because he nationalised a railway company. Those things were no doubt important, and that line of accountability is crucial, but how much more important is the line of accountability on peace or war, when hundreds of thousands of people lose their lives as a result of decisions made by the Executive?

My contention is that Chilcot provides a huge array of evidence for a lack of parliamentary truthfulness, in that one thing was being said to the President of the United States and quite a different thing was being said to Parliament and the people. That did not happen in just a single speech or parliamentary statement, although the immediate run-up to the war provides ample and

detailed examples. For example, the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) referred to the total misrepresentation of the situation in the United Nations. How do we know that it was a misrepresentation? Because Chilcot has published what was being said within Government, and we can compare that directly with the explanation that Parliament was being offered. The process of Parliament being told one thing while George W. Bush was being assured of something else took place not over a few weeks but over 15 months—that is amply demonstrated in the evidence presented to Chilcot. We know now why Chilcot fought so strongly to have the private memos as part of the report.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe rightly pointed to the motivation of regime change and the difficulty that regime change could not make the war legal in generally understood international terms. That is amply demonstrated in a private memo from Tony Blair to George Bush in December 2001, which states that

“any link to 11 September and AQ”—
al-Qaeda—

“is at best very tenuous; and at present international opinion would be reluctant, outside the US/UK, to support immediate military action though, for sure, people want to be rid of Saddam.

So we need a strategy for regime change that builds over time.”

At the same time, however, when pursuing the Prime Minister in the House, Charles Kennedy was being told that the “two phases” of war included the war in Afghanistan and the pursuit of

“international terrorism in all its different forms. That is a matter of investigating its financing, how terrorists move across frontiers”.—
[*Official Report*, 14 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 867-868.]

The House was being told that stage 2 of the war on terror was not an assault on Iraq—far less regime change in Iraq—but the pursuit of international terrorism. The two things are totally incompatible. One thing was being said to George Bush in private and another thing was being said to this Parliament and the people of the country.

Moving into 2002, there was something that was amply picked up by the press after Chilcot reported—the memo of 28 July to George Bush, stating:

“I will be with you, whatever.”

I heard the former Prime Minister explain that to John Humphrys on the “Today” programme by saying that of “whatever” meant somehow “wherever”, and that the memo did not give an unconditional commitment to stand with the United States in a war. I am not sure I fully understood that explanation, and crucially, nor did John Chilcot or Jack Straw, a crucial member of the Administration.

Jack Straw’s memos to Tony Blair have also been published. The report shows that on 11 March 2003 Straw wrote to Blair:

“When Bush graciously accepted your offer to be with him all the way, he wanted you alive, not dead!”

That referred not to the mortal danger to troops or civilians that would ensue from a war, but to whether the then Prime Minister would be alive or dead politically. Jack Straw was under no illusions whatever about the commitment that had been given to George Bush. Nor were Tony Blair’s own advisers, who advised him to take it out of the memo, or George Bush and his advisers, or Secretary of State Colin Powell.

Sir John Chilcot concludes, on the meaning of the memo:

“Mr Blair’s Note, which had not been discussed or agreed with his colleagues, set the UK on a path leading to diplomatic activity in the UN and the possibility of participation in military action in a way that would make it very difficult for the UK subsequently to withdraw its support for the US.”

But that was not what Parliament was being told at the same time. Parliament was not told of assurances to George W. Bush on military action. Parliament was told that the Prime Minister was striving for peace and trying to find any way to avoid a conflict, and that it was all up to Saddam to choose peace or conflict. That deliberate misrepresentation, in what was said to Parliament, of what was being said to the Americans continued into the very onset of war itself.

I want to refer to the memo that my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) quoted earlier. When Blair was telling Parliament, even in his speech in the war-or-peace debate, that

“I have never put the justification for action as regime change”,—
[*Official Report*, 18 March 2003; Vol. 401, c. 772.]

he was telling George Bush only a few days later:

“That’s why, though Iraq’s WMD is the immediate justification for action, ridding Iraq of Saddam is the real prize.”

We heard earlier that this was not a matter of one man. But that one man was the Prime Minister. We were told earlier that it was really about process of government, but it was the Prime Minister who dictated the process of government and indeed prevented government processes, meaning that checks and balances did not work. Above all, it was the Prime Minister who prevented this House from having the information it required to make a reasonable judgment.

Last week, I heard that one of the defences of intervention in Iraq was a counterfactual argument: what if Saddam Hussein had stayed in power? What would he have done? For example, what damage would he have done during the Arab spring? I have had another counterfactual argument in mind: what if the massive international coalition that was built to deal with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan had been held together? What if the hundreds of billions of dollars that were then to be wasted in the Iraqi desert had been applied to making a real success of the rebuilding of Afghanistan? What if the justification for a totally legal international intervention, which this country took part in, had resulted in a genuine benefit? What if that massive coalition, which extended even to approval from the Palestine Liberation Organisation, had been able to demonstrate that a legal war, correctly applied, could result in construction, reconstruction and allowing a country the investment required to be a shining light of a genuine international intervention?

The United States of America was, in a way, never stronger than in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. It was never more respected, because it had suffered a terrorist atrocity. What would have happened if an ever broader coalition had brought to fruition the situation that I have described, instead of this meandering into Iraq on a private vendetta of the President of the United States with his closet of neo-con advisers, aided and abetted by a British Prime Minister who subverted collective responsibility and prevented this Parliament from having the information that it required to hold the Government to account?

[Alex Salmond]

I once told the former Prime Minister that he would answer to a higher law than this Parliament, and I believe that to be absolutely true. In the meantime, this Parliament should hold him accountable at this stage, not because it is a matter of pursuing him but because it will demonstrate and illustrate that, even retrospectively, if a Parliament is systematically misled, it will say that up with it we shall not put. That is part of the changes that we should make not just in the processes of government, to impose collective responsibility, and not just in, I hope, learning the lessons of how to reconstruct a country, but, essentially, in parliamentary accountability. If we make those changes, we will be able to say legitimately that an Iraq could never happen again.

4.1 pm

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). There is no doubt that they have two very clear advantages over me in this debate, in that both of them opposed the motion in the House in 2003, which initiated our military action in Iraq. I, on the other hand, supported it—something that I have come very much to regret. I supported it at the time because I was persuaded by the arguments eloquently put forward by the Prime Minister, Mr Blair. He said that, in his view, Saddam Hussein was a real and present danger in the immediate context and that that justified taking military action against him, even without going back for a further resolution of the United Nations Security Council, but relying on the previous resolutions, which, as considerable evidence showed, had been serially breached by Saddam Hussein, certainly in his non co-operation. On that basis, I voted for the motion, as did many others who are still Members and present in this House today.

Sir John Chilcot's report highlights how the decision-making processes of government can become distorted under pressure of events. I should like to think that I am always a bit wary of that. The distortions highlighted in the report are so considerable that it highlights a dysfunctionality at the heart of Mr Blair's Government that I hope may have been exceptional to him. For all that, there are plenty of cautionary tales for us in this House today that we can look at in the current context just as much as they would have been considered at the time.

This point seems to have been rather well made already that, and I will not repeat it, because Mr Blair had formed in his view a very strong resolution that we should support the United States, including in removing Saddam Hussein and effecting regime change, the entirety of the processes of government and of Whitehall were then skewed in order to achieve that aim and had the mischief of disregarding all the evidence that might be available to contradict the belief that that was the right course of action to take—whether it was intelligence information or the thorny problem of legality, both of which I wish to touch on briefly this afternoon.

On the question of the intelligence, those of us who have been in government, or who have served on the National Security Council as I have—indeed it is also true of my current role as Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee—know perfectly well that

intelligence, often obtained at great risk and which is with difficulty, can only be what it is, a tool in decision making. The intelligence may be mistaken. One cannot prevent that in a human society, and one cannot guarantee that its interpretation will be correct. My impression during my time in government was that the intelligence agencies and the Joint Intelligence Committee now go to very considerable lengths to point out the limits of the use to which intelligence can properly be put—a lesson which, I suspect, they derived from this experience.

Reading Sir John Chilcot's report, one can only conclude that the way in which intelligence was handled during the run-up to the Iraq war is, in some cases, truly breathtaking. It makes very troublesome reading. I hope very much—I am not going to say anything more about this—that those within the agencies who now do the work will read and reread Sir John's report in order to remind themselves of how perfectly reasonable intelligence was skewed and, I have to say, misused for the purposes of justifying a theory, and then, I am afraid, misused by Mr Blair when he came to address this House in the defining moment before the war was sanctioned by this Parliament.

The certainties that were engendered were never present. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley) made a very good intervention about this last week when he said that if we had taken the time and trouble to read some of the background information available, we might have doubted some of the certainties that were being expressed. I think he was absolutely right about that, and that is another burden that Members of this House who participated in that debate will have to bear.

So much for the intelligence. What about the process of legal advice? I was at the heart of trying to provide legal advice to Government when I was a Law Officer. My hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General is on the Front Bench and he, too, has been involved in those processes. As Law Officers know, legal advice is often advice which cannot in any way be certain. Legal advice is exactly what it says it is. In some cases, particularly when one is dealing with international law, the question whether one is on the right side or the wrong side of international law is an intensely grey area, precisely because there is no ultimate tribunal to determine those issues. Yet at the heart of the British Government's doctrine and ethics is the principle that we have to act lawfully at all times. It is for the Law Officers to try to steer that course.

What shines through to me, reading the Chilcot inquiry report, is not, as some critics have said, that Lord Goldsmith as Attorney General abandoned legal objectivity. Now that I have read the Chilcot inquiry report and looked at these passages very carefully, it seems to me that he fulfilled those criteria as best he possibly could, but that he was drawn into a process which in itself was utterly flawed, because it cherry-picked whatever bit of the advice that he provided suited those who wanted to present it, and then sold it in that way both to the Cabinet, who never properly inquired or scrutinised it at all, and ultimately to the public.

Mr David Davis: Does my right hon. and learned Friend really think that the Attorney General met all his duties? The report refers to the final question to Tony Blair, which it says was answered perfunctorily,

about whether the conditions had been met. Surely he should have been a little more pressing, rather than accepting a perfunctory reply before changing his view.

Mr Grieve: I simply quote from paragraph 810 of the executive summary:

“It is an essential part of the legal basis for military action”—this was written by an official in the Attorney General’s Department—

“without a further resolution of the Security Council that there is strong evidence that Iraq has failed to comply with and co-operate fully in the implementation of resolution 1441 and has thus failed to take the final opportunity offered by the Security Council in that resolution. The Attorney General understands that it is unequivocally the Prime Minister’s view that Iraq has committed further material breaches as specified in [operative] paragraph 4 of resolution 1441, but as this is a judgment for the Prime Minister, the Attorney would be grateful for confirmation that this is the case.”

It is important to understand one of the big changes that has probably taken place between 2003 and today in the way in which a Law Officer’s advice is secured. My impression from reading Chilcot—I hope I have got this right—is that, in practice, the Attorney General was provided with only sketched backgrounds of the factual analysis on which his legal opinion was being sought. The big difference now, and I can tell the House this without giving away state secrets, is that if Law Officers are asked to advise on a factual basis that involves a serious or complex problem of international law, they will receive briefing that is as good as, and—if they demand it—potentially better than, that which would be provided to the Prime Minister himself as to the intelligence and factual base that justifies it, so they have to make their own independent assessment. However, it is quite clear that, in 2003, and, I suspect, even before then—I do not think this was peculiar to 2003—that was not the practice that was adopted; it was not how Government worked. In practice, the Law Officer, Lord Goldsmith, was placed in a position where he had, reasonably, to take on trust the factual assessments made by others, and particularly the Prime Minister.

I want to make it clear that I cannot make a judgment on whether Lord Goldsmith’s advice of 7 March was right or not, but he set out—correctly, in my view—the alternative interpretations available for resolution 1441. I simply make the point, as I did in my intervention, that there are areas of international law that raise massive difficulties of interpretation. If, for example, we stuck, as some jurists would argue, to the principle that no military intervention can take place without UN Security Council authorisation, the well-established United Kingdom doctrine of intervening on the basis of humanitarian necessity, which is what led us to be able to take action in Kosovo, would never have come about. I simply chuck that into the pool of the debate the House has had in trying to understand some of the complexities.

Of course, none of that gets away from the fact that the debate would likely have been very different in Cabinet if Lord Goldsmith’s advice in its original form had been properly presented, circulated and discussed. As any of us who have been in government know, the process by which we moderate each other’s opinions is by challenging them. If we do not have a process of challenge, we should not be surprised that, at the end of the day, people simply end up rubber-stamping decisions

because it appears convenient to do so. One of the interesting features, I might add, of being in coalition was that one quickly realised that because some members of, for example, the National Security Council or the Cabinet were not beholden to the Prime Minister, the level of challenge was raised in a manner that one might not necessarily have found in a single-party Government, which is an interesting reflection on some of the problems that flow from it. Of course, when one has a Prime Minister who is utterly dominant after four or five years in government and receiving a triumphant second mandate, these things become even harder.

Those, then, are my thoughts on those two principal issues. There are lots of other issues in the report, which is one of the most compelling reads I have had. I am not sure I am going to be able to get through the whole lot, but I will certainly try to read much more of it.

Let me just make two final points. First, the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) expressed the desire that accountability should lead to somebody being held at least in contempt of this House if Mr Blair did act improperly. I simply say to him that, just as some people were talking about impeachment, which was last used in 1806, contempt proceedings in Parliament—unless they are based on findings made in an external tribunal that meets article 6 compliance—will, in practice, be very difficult. I would strongly argue that, tempting as such a route might suggest itself to be, the practical difficulties are likely to make it impossible to follow. I say that in all sincerity.

Joanna Cherry: I would like to explore this with the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I am not quite clear in what way he considers that the former Prime Minister’s civil rights and obligations would be determined in a contempt motion. As I understand it, as a novice in parliamentary procedure, it is a breach of privilege. It is not a determination of the former PM’s civil rights or obligations, and it is clearly not a criminal charge—a contempt of court. Could the right hon. and learned Gentleman elucidate on what basis he thinks that article 6 would be engaged?

Mr Grieve: It depends, I suppose, on what sanction this House wishes to follow. However, there is a second issue. We may have examples where somebody says one thing to this House and, in front of a tribunal or court of record, when giving evidence on oath, says something different. The House can then look at those two things juxtaposed and conclude, for example, that the House was misled in evidence that it was given. That might well give rise to a finding of breach of privilege for contempt, although that still leaves unanswered the question of sanctions.

I do understand the hon. and learned Lady’s point. However, I am not, in this case, making some definitive statement; I am simply describing what, to my mind, appear to be the difficulties that are likely to come from trying to pursue this particular course of action. As, on the whole, I would like the reputation of this House to stand enhanced by the way in which we approach the Chilcot inquiry report and its aftermath, I am always wary of suggesting, counselling or recommending a course of action that might lead to the very opposite of what is intended.

Joanna Cherry: The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that I hold his legal expertise in the highest regard. He says that it is important that the reputation of this House is enhanced by the way in which it deals with the outcome of this report. Surely the reputation of this House will not be enhanced if there is no attempt to hold the former Prime Minister to account.

Mr Grieve: I have listened to the hon. and learned Lady, and this matter can be debated or discussed at greater length, but, as I say, I counsel caution. The truth is that the then Prime Minister, Mr Blair, has been examined at the court of public opinion and, I suspect, of history, and I think it is likely that that judgment is going to be pretty unkind to the way in which this process was carried out. Whether the House feels that it wants to do more immediately is a matter that we can debate another time.

The point has been made that the outcome of this process in the middle east has been, on the evidence, lamentable. Of course, the middle east is a place of massive dysfunctionality. It may be that even if we had not intervened in 2003, we would find that another pattern of war and bloody conflict would have occurred, based on a whole series of disintegrations of the social fabric of that area that has been going on for some time, and that we can see manifested in the current conflicts in Iraq and Syria. That is not, I think, entirely due to our intervention in 2003, but has elements inherent within those societies themselves. I worry very much—indeed, this has coloured my view as a politician ever since—that this has also had a terrible effect on public trust in us and our institutions in this country that carries itself all the way into the Brexit referendum and its aftermath. On that, I rather agreed, for once, with an article in the *New Statesman*.

We have much to learn from this very sorry episode. The nugget I derive from it is that we must have open debate and that we must avoid simply treating politics as presentational gimmicks. That has become a habit in modern western society because of the development of social media, the press and the way in which we communicate ideas, but if we continue to do it we will ruthlessly undermine sensible decision making and the ability to come to the right conclusions by debate, which is absolutely the heart of what this House should be about.

4.20 pm

Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab): I want to begin where the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who has just spoken very eloquently, ended. I entirely agree that there is much to learn from the Chilcot report. One of the things that I am most concerned about—I know that it is very early to say this—is that it is far from clear to me that we are actually going to learn the things that we should.

On the morning of the publication of the Chilcot report, I listened to the radio and heard a number of commentators and, indeed, Members of this House, including, I think the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), saying one after another, “Of course, we all know what happened.” The script was simple and familiar: “Tony Blair knew there were no weapons of mass destruction. He deliberately lied to the House of Commons about whether there was intelligence

to suggest that there were such weapons. He made a secret pact with George Bush long before the war, committing us to it in all circumstances, so everything that happened in between was irrelevant, and the war itself was illegal because there was no second United Nations resolution.”

It seems to me that this is the right moment to point out that this is, I think, the fifth inquiry into what happened in 2003 and before and after the invasion, and, as far as I recall, none of them has verified that incredibly simply script. Nor does it seem to me that the Chilcot report confirms it.

The inquiry team accepts, as have the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) and the former Attorney General, the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield, that when the Prime Minister told this House that he believed that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, he believed it implicitly to be true. He was not making up the intelligence or telling this House anything other than what he believed to be true, let alone inventing a lie, which seems to be being implied. Indeed, the report points out that the basic case that Saddam Hussein had retained weapons of mass destruction and that he had the intent to develop more, given the opportunity, was what the Joint Intelligence Committee itself believed.

It seems to me that one of the most important things that comes out of Chilcot—the former Attorney General touched on this—is the degree to which whole swathes of people whose professional judgment was involved were mistaken, and that continued to be the case right up to and, indeed, beyond the invasion. Chilcot makes it clear that that is what the Joint Intelligence Committee had continually reported both to the then Prime Minister and to the Cabinet. The report states:

“There is no evidence that intelligence was improperly included in the dossier or that No. 10 improperly influenced the text...The Inquiry is not questioning Mr Blair’s belief, which he consistently reiterated...or his legitimate role in advocating Government policy.”

It is really important to bear that in mind, especially as one listens to some of the detailed and very determined attempts to create a different impression.

Sir John Chilcot also pointed out that, along with the dangers that the intelligence community believed that Saddam Hussein presented, it believed that,

“Saddam Hussein could not be removed without an invasion.”

That was also thought to be relevant.

Of course, with the benefit of hindsight we all know that the intelligence community and the then Prime Minister were wrong, but we did not know it then. What is more, what our intelligence services believed was believed by almost every other intelligence service in the world, including the French and the Russians, and there is no doubt that that is why Security Council resolution 1441 was carried unanimously.

Mr David Davis: The right hon. Lady said that we did not know at the time. However, on 15 March 2002, the JIC said that the intelligence on Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programmes was sporadic and patchy. Three weeks later, in Texas, Tony Blair said:

“We know he has been developing these weapons. We know that those weapons constitute a threat”.

How did we not know at the time, and how is that consistent?

Margaret Beckett: I am familiar with the insistence that, in some way, this is hugely important. That is not the impression that the public are being given or, if I may say so, that the right hon. Gentleman, among others, is striving every day to give them. The public are being given the impression, not that the intelligence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction was sporadic and patchy but that it was there, but that the intelligence services and the then Prime Minister knew that there were no weapons of mass destruction and deliberately misled the House. That is not true and was never true. No attempt—

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Will the right hon. Member give way?

Margaret Beckett: No.

No attempt to read that into the record can possibly be justified. We did not know it then—no one knew it then—and most people very firmly believed in Saddam Hussein's intentions.

The third allegation is about the secret commitment. I was not the slightest bit surprised to hear the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) quoting the single sentence that is included in the background notification. I agree with him entirely if his assertion is that it was a profound mistake for the former Prime Minister to use that phraseology. However, I do not read into it the sinister feeling that the right hon. Gentleman does, nor indeed did the Chilcot inquiry. To my mind, if this had been a conversation, rather than a written memorandum, it would have been something along the lines of, "I am on your side, but"—but—"if we are to take action, all these things have to be addressed; we have to go the United Nations and so on." Chilcot acknowledges that it was Mr Blair's intent to get President Bush to go through the United Nations route, and that—against the advice of the President's own allies—he pursued that with determination and had success in doing so.

Alex Salmond: The right hon. Lady will find, as she peruses the report, that Chilcot found it much more significant than that. That is why he said that it would make it very difficult for the UK to subsequently withdraw its support for the US. In a memo to Tony Blair, her colleague Jack Straw said:

"When Bush graciously accepted your offer to be with him all the way".

Can the right hon. Lady give us an explanation for that?

Margaret Beckett: It would be better to ask my former colleague. However, having been the recipient of Jack Straw's notes, I would suggest that he was ironically quoting back to the Prime Minister words he did not think the Prime Minister should have used; and he was right about that, as no doubt the right hon. Gentleman will agree.

Then there is the question of legality. It has been said here before, and no doubt will be said again, that Chilcot does not pronounce on the legality of the proceeding. He criticises the processes but he does not say that a second resolution was needed, although I accept that he does not go into that territory. There is an enormous amount of dispute about this matter, and the former Attorney General touched on it a moment

ago. It has led to the query, which he raised, as to why there were so few questions from the Cabinet to the Attorney General when he gave us his advice.

One of the things I am pretty sure I have said before, but I do not suppose anybody has paid any attention and they probably will not now, is that it is quite simply the case that the issue of whether we needed a second resolution had been gone over ad nauseam. It had been discussed at length. The Cabinet had had extensive verbal reports from the then Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister about the progress of discussions in the Security Council, about the desire to have a second resolution, about how things were going, who was objecting, and the detail of how that process of negotiation was taking place.

The views of the then Foreign Office legal adviser in London have been much quoted. Evidence was given to the Chilcot inquiry about that, and it is absolutely right and wholly understandable that all the focus has been on the advice of the Foreign Office legal people in London. Although I was interested in the remarks of the Former Attorney General about how unclear international law is and how interpreting it is not always an easy matter, that is certainly not the impression that the public have been given.

However, I have rarely seen any reference made to the fact that someone else gave evidence to the inquiry about the legality of resolution 1441 and whether a second resolution was required. That person was the head of the Foreign Office legal team at the United Nations—the team whose day-to-day dealings are with the Security Council; the team who advised the then Government, and who presumably advise equivalent people in the Government today, on the handling of negotiations; and who give the Government legal advice about the detail of what resolutions mean—what their import will be.

That legal adviser confirmed what the former Foreign Secretary had consistently told the Cabinet, day after day—that the Russians and the French, in particular, had tried to get an explicit reference into resolution 1441 to the need for a second resolution before any military action could be undertaken, even though resolution 1441, as drafted, stated that it was a "final opportunity" to comply with UN resolutions and talked about "serious consequences" if Saddam did not comply. The legal adviser told the Chilcot inquiry that those discussions in the Security Council were exhaustive; that a very strong attempt was made to insist that a second resolution was carried; but that, in the end, the Russians and the French accepted that a second resolution was not referred to, and the resolution was carried unanimously—including, if I recall correctly, with the vote of the Syrian Government, which is a remarkable thought in today's circumstances.

The accusation has also been made in all these discussions that the attempt to get Saddam Hussein to conform with UN resolutions was in some way false—that there was no wish for Saddam Hussein to conform, and that the intention from the beginning was military action. As I said in an intervention on the Foreign Secretary, the then Prime Minister repeatedly warned the Cabinet that if Saddam Hussein did, indeed, choose to comply with the UN resolutions, he stayed; and he reminded us that that would be an outcome that many—not least the many in this House who campaigned on behalf of the

[Margaret Beckett]

Kurds—would deplore and regret. It was repeatedly pointed out to us, “If Saddam complies, there will be no military action. He stays in power.”

Caroline Lucas: I thank the right hon. Lady for so graciously giving way. The Chilcot report contains a quote from Sir Richard Dearlove, the head of MI6 at the time, telling Tony Blair that the US was deliberately setting the bar

“so high that Saddam Hussein would be unable to comply”.

So the idea that when Tony Blair was standing in the House of Commons on the day of the vote, there was still time for Saddam to comply, is simply wrong. Tony Blair has already been told by Sir Richard Dearlove that the bar has been set deliberately high for the weapons inspectors, so that Saddam cannot comply.

Margaret Beckett: I know about the quote from Sir Richard Dearlove and I know that he expressed that view, as I recall, quite some time before, because I do not think he was in post at the time we are speaking of. I accept that it was serious and difficult, but if Saddam had shown any intention of complying or made any move to readmit inspectors—for example, a series of tests was proposed that Saddam could meet to show whether he was complying, but all that was rejected—by the French, by the way, and also by Saddam. So that is where we are. There was, indeed, a warning that if Saddam complied, military action would not occur.

That is the original four-point series of accusations. To that story, three further accusations have now been added. The first, from the Chilcot report, is that action was taken when it was not a matter of the last resort. The second is that we could have held back longer and the whole matter could have been addressed by further inspections. The third was that the events that have since taken place in the middle east are all a result of the Iraq invasion, and that that too should lie on the consciences of all of us who voted for it.

The point about whether the intervention was a last resort was also raised by my late right hon. Friend Robin Cook, and those who make that case rest their argument on the continued effectiveness of containment backed by sanctions. What nobody seems to mention any more is that at that time, it was widely and seriously believed that containment was weakening and ceasing to be effective. Anyone who was around can cast their mind back and recall that there was an enormous and growing campaign against the sanctions that were helping to keep in place the hoped-for containment. Many right hon. and hon. Members will recall the protests that took place continually, across the road in Parliament Square, but nearly everybody has forgotten that that was not at first a protest against the war; it was a protest against the maintenance of sanctions against Saddam Hussein. To be fair to those who undertook that protest, it was done on a perfectly legitimate and understandable basis, because Saddam was stealing money that was being given to feed the Iraqi people and using it for his own purposes, and consequently there was growing poverty and hardship in Iraq. It was understandable that people should have been against sanctions on that basis, and they were, and the campaign against those sanctions was growing.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Does the right hon. Lady fully understand the significance of chapter 20 in the executive summary, which states clearly that this action was not a last resort? That is important because it is fundamental to the definition of a just war. If we accept Chilcot’s assertion, its corollary is that this was not a just war, with all the consequences that follow from that. In all these volumes of stuff, that simple sentence in the executive summary bangs the whole lot to rights.

Margaret Beckett: I realised that that was what it meant. I was under the impression—I may be mistaken; unlike many others here, I am not a lawyer—that a just war was a religious rather than a military or legal concept, although I do understand it in those terms. Apart from the question of whether the war was just because it was not a last resort, on containment, evidence was found after the invasion that Saddam Hussein had been further in breach of UN resolutions than we understood at the time. Robin Cook was unaware of that when he made his statement in this House, and the impression was created that containment was working—for example, missile development had been forbidden, but people were not aware that, as the Butler report stated, Iraq was developing ballistic missiles with a longer range than permitted under the relevant Security Council resolutions. Saddam Hussein clearly intended to reconstitute long-range delivery systems that were potentially for use with weapons of mass destruction. As we discovered after the invasion, it was not a simple matter of containment working and there being no breaches, or that Saddam Hussein was not trying to develop weapons.

There is also the argument that we could have held on, and I must accept Chilcot’s verdict that such action was not impossible. However, no one now touches on the circumstances in which people found themselves by then. We had troops in theatre in difficult, unpleasant, and incredibly dangerous circumstances. Indeed, those troops were expecting hourly, daily, the potential attacks involving chemical or biological weapons that everyone believed Saddam Hussein possessed, and that one hoped our troops were equipped to resist. So it was not a simple matter of saying there was no need.

If you are going to take action, you have to start military preparations. By that point, military preparations had advanced to such an extent that our troops were in theatre. Ultimately, one could argue—no doubt people will—that those troops could have been withdrawn, but what kind of signal would that have sent to Saddam Hussein or to the rest of the world? It seems to me that it would have given Saddam Hussein the signal that he was perfectly free to resume the kind of operations he had undertaken in the past, whether against the Kurds or Iran. These issues are not as simple as is sometimes assumed. I completely accept, however, the argument made in Chilcot that one of the lessons we should learn is that we should be wary of letting military concerns drive political decisions. That brings me back to my principal thesis, which is that there is much in Chilcot from which we can learn, but only if we do not divert ourselves on to things that Chilcot does not say.

The final issue or accusation I wish to address is that everything that has happened in Iraq, Syria and across the middle east since has all flowed from the invasion of Iraq, that it is all down to a dreadful miscalculation.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) called it the worst foreign policy mistake. Let us say that it was. I do not myself quite take that view, but let us accept his premise. But I do not think he argues, and I certainly do not for one second accept, that everything terrible that is happening now or has happened since in the middle east is as a result of that invasion.

It is grossly irresponsible, in order for people to satisfy the clear, very real anger and passion they feel against the then Government, the then Prime Minister and the current civil war in Iraq, to say to the evil men of ISIL, Daesh and al-Qaeda that they are off the hook for the blame for any of the terrible things they do because it is all down to our fault. [*Interruption.*] It is no good people making noises off, because we all know that that is exactly the kind of assertion that very many people make: that all of this stuff is down to the mistakes of the west; it is all down to the evildoing of the west and everyone else is absolved.

No one should be absolved from responsibility for the things they themselves advocate or they themselves do. I do not seek to resile from the responsibility that I exercised when I voted in Cabinet and I voted in this House for the Iraq war. I regret bitterly the events that have occurred since, as any sensible person would, but I do not pretend that the decision I made was not my decision and that it was somehow all somebody else's fault.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am sorry to have to announce this to the House, but on account of the number of would-be contributors there will now be a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches with immediate effect. That limit may have to be reviewed, but it is 10 minutes for now. I call Mr David Davis.

4.43 pm

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): It is a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett), although I felt that at the end she destroyed her own argument by attributing to other people views that nobody holds: that somehow IS is allowed off the hook of blame because of the weaknesses and failures of the British Government.

Let us be clear what those failures are: 150,000 deaths by violence, a large majority of them innocent civilians; over 1 million deaths, on medical estimates, as a result of this war; and a destroyed country. Iraq was a nasty dictatorship, but containment—sanctions, inspections when they were allowed, and no-fly zones—was broadly working. There was damage to the stability of the middle east. Of course it is not the entire story, but let us not forget that IS started in an American prisoner-of-war camp in Iraq. That is where its high command comes from, so let us not put that to one side either. There has been a significantly increased terrorist threat worldwide, something that was known and warned about before we took this action. That is what we are talking about. That is what the worst foreign policy mistake in our modern history means for many, many innocent people in the world.

In the 1990s, before that happened, I had responsibility for counter-proliferation in the Conservative Government of the time. I accept that the behaviour of the Saddam

Hussein regime was peculiar to say the least. As far as we could tell from inspections and our intelligence, it did not have WMD or a workable WMD programme but was deliberately trying to create confusion about that, by not co-operating from time to time, by moving trucks from one site to another before inspectors arrived, and so on. It was probably doing that to keep Iran convinced that it had a WMD programme. That was what it was worried about—not us, but its next-door neighbour against which it had fought a massive war shortly before. That explains some of the strange behaviour of the regime.

At that time and—I guess—up until just before 2001, the general belief was that this was a moderate and controllable threat. Indeed, Carne Ross, the middle east specialist among our delegation to the UN, said that when he first took the job he was briefed:

“Basically we don't think there's anything there. We are justifying sanctions on the basis that Iraq has not answered questions about its past stocks”.

Since then, all the JIC, SIS and GCHQ reports have corroborated that. It was considered a moderate and controllable threat at that point.

Then what happened? We had 9/11, which, quite properly, shocked the world: 3,000 deaths in a hideous terrorist spectacular. Of course, Tony Blair justifies his actions on that basis, but I have to say to him that this was a reason for getting it right, not an excuse for getting it wrong. There was understandable paranoia that something like it might happen again, either here or somewhere else, but then there came a dangerous and simplistic conflation of the real, present and continuing threat from al-Qaeda and Iraq—the axis of evil nonsense that President Bush generated at the time. This fiction was reinforced in February 2002, when the Americans rendered to Egypt somebody called Sheikh al-Libi, who was tortured on the question of whether there was a chemical and biological weapons relationship between Iraq and al-Qaeda. Essentially, he was tortured until he said yes, and that was the evidence that Colin Powell cited at the United Nations—the House might remember—when he talked about having “substantial evidence”. Of course, it was a fiction obtained under torture.

I am quite sure that that intelligence was shared with Mr Blair, who, not knowing the source, would have found it persuasive, as something told to the Americans by an al-Qaeda commander. It seems from the Chilcot report that, at some point between December 2001 and possibly March 2002 but certainly by July 2002, Mr Blair effectively signed Britain up to the American military effort. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) said, the issue was not our soldiers but our reputation. It was our involvement that legitimised the American action.

This, however, produced a problem for our Prime Minister. Under American law, to go to war on the basis of regime change is entirely legal. They do not recognise the international laws that render it otherwise, so for them regime change is a perfectly legitimate *casus belli*. From comments made and the items to which the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) referred, it seems that Tony Blair agreed, but he had a problem, because our law and international law did not allow it. He therefore saw his role as building a coalition to support the Americans.

[Mr David Davis]

There was nothing dishonourable in that, if Tony Blair believed the aim, but to do it he had to achieve a number of things. He had to create a *casus belli* under international law, and for that he needed proof of weapons of mass destruction and of a terrorist threat, and a UN resolution and thereby proof of legality. The result was UN resolution 1441, the thrust of which was that it was the final opportunity for Iraq to comply with its disarmament obligations. The vote was 15:0 in favour. As the right hon. Member for Derby South said, it did not include a deliberate trigger to war; it required a further resolution. The UN inspectorate went in and did 700 inspections of over 500 sites. Interestingly, it went to three dozen sites given to it by the CIA and MI6, who thought that was where the weapons were located. The inspectorate found not a thing—over three and a half months, it found nothing whatsoever.

Then the American President set a timetable, creating a real problem over and above the United Nations—war by March. That is why Chilcot said that going to war was not the last resort. It was not. It gave Mr Blair a problem. What should he do? Many other countries, including France and Russia, viewed the inspection process as incomplete—and, of course, it was. The UN vote was then lost by 11 to four, so when Blair returned to the UK, he had to win a debate and vote in the House of Commons. He made what some people think was the greatest speech of his life, but in order to persuade us, he had to say five things that were a clear misrepresentation.

Mr Blair accused France of saying that it would never vote for war. That was simply not true, and he knew it was not true. I refer to an interview given on Radio 4 in the last year by Sir Stephen Wall. As a Foreign Office adviser in No. 10, he was privy to what was going on and clarified what was really said, which was that, effectively, “As of now, France will vote against”. When he was asked whether Downing Street deliberately lied about Chirac’s statement, he said yes, it deliberately lied.

The next two misrepresentations were quotations from the UN inspectors’ reports. Time is short, so let me read briefly what was said by Hans Blix, the head of the inspectorate. Speaking of the British Government, he said:

“If they had gone to the British Parliament in 2003 and said that we have a lot of things unaccounted for here, and we suspect there may be something, and we think it is safer to invade them, would the British Parliament have dreamt of saying yes to such a thing? I don’t think so. I think in order to go ahead they needed to make the allegations which they made and which were not sustainable...In substance yes they misrepresented what we did and they did so in order to get the authorisation they shouldn’t have had.”

That was Hans Blix’s view of what Tony Blair did in the House of Commons. Mr Blair also misrepresented what Hussein Kamel, Saddam Hussein’s son-in-law, had told the allies about the WMD programme.

Mr Kenneth Clarke: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Davis: I do not have time. Oh, I will give way.

Mr Clarke: I had it in mind that my right hon. Friend would get a bit more time.

Does my right hon. Friend think, with hindsight, that given that Hans Blix was perfectly willing to carry on with inspections, if the Americans could have been persuaded to delay for another month, all this could have been avoided? The Americans dismissed Blix, however, and regarded him as a waste of time; they were trying to get him out of the way.

Mr Davis: That is exactly right. That should have been the stance that Mr Blair took, but he did not. He chose instead to come to Parliament to misrepresent the case.

Mr Blair also misrepresented the line put forward by Mr Hussein Kamel, who was later killed by Saddam Hussein, to claim that the WMD programme was continuing. What was, in fact, said in an interview with the inspectorate, was that the WMD had all been destroyed by 1991.

Finally, Mr Blair was asked by Tam Dalyell about the risks of terrorism arising from the war, but the Prime Minister did not give him an answer—despite having been told by the JIC and by MI5 that it would increase both the international and domestic risk of terrorism and would destabilise the states in the area.

On five counts, then, Mr Blair misrepresented to this House the substantive aspects of the argument for the war. If this House is to contribute to decisions on war in the future, it must be able to rely on being told the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth by our Prime Minister.

4.54 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): For those of us who took that fateful decision on 18 March 2003, the Chilcot report makes difficult and uncomfortable reading. Our thoughts today should, above all, be with the families, Iraqi and British, who lost loved ones in the conflict; but Members who voted for war—and I was one—did so in good faith.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett); I do not think that we were misled or lied to. Nor, more importantly, does the Chilcot report reach such a conclusion. However, we must all take our full share of the responsibility for that decision. As we now know, the intelligence was wrong, although, as my right hon. Friend said, many countries and many people—including Iraq’s neighbours, some of its own military, and the United Nations—thought that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. Had we known the truth at the time, the House would never have voted for war, and nor would I. For that we should apologise, and I certainly do, but at the time we could decide only on the basis of what we thought we knew. Let me also say this, however. If I am asked whether I regret the fact that Saddam Hussein is no longer in power, my reply is “No, I do not”, because he was a brutal dictator who had killed hundreds of thousands of his own citizens, and had used chemical weapons against them.

I want to reflect, very briefly, on three issues: the task of reconstruction that we faced, why Iraq was as it was, and some of the wider lessons. The problem faced by the Department for International Development in Basra

and the surrounding provinces in 2003 was not the humanitarian crisis that we had anticipated, but a different set of circumstances altogether. There was the dysfunctional nature of the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance. There were the problems of the coalition provisional authority, caused by a failure to plan. There was the legacy of Saddam's dictatorship—when we tried to persuade the authorities in the south to talk to Baghdad, that was the last thing that they wanted to do, because they remembered what dealing with Baghdad had been like in the past. There was the legacy of the repression of the Shi'a, there was the malign neglect of infrastructure, and there was the absence of the United Nations, which no one has mentioned so far this afternoon. The bomb that killed Sérgio Vieira de Mello and 23 of his staff in August 2003 in the Canal Hotel was, in truth, the beginning of an insurgency that grew stronger with each passing month.

The problem facing reconstruction was not money. The Chilcot report itself concludes:

“There are no indications that DFID's activities in Iraq were constrained by a lack of resources.”

Iraq was, and is still, a middle-income country with oil. In fact, the problem was spending money, including money from the World Bank, because of rapidly deteriorating security. No sooner did we manage to fix something—we made a real contribution to improving the water and electricity supply in the south of the country—than people would try to blow it up.

I want to place on record my thanks for the huge contribution that was made by many courageous individuals with whom I had the privilege of working—people from DFID and other Departments, British and Iraqi, military and civilian, non-governmental organisation staff and humanitarian staff—who tried to help the people of Iraq in the most difficult and dangerous circumstances. They all acted in the best traditions of public service, and we should thank them for what they did.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Julian Brazier): I endorse 100% the thanks and the tribute that the right hon. Gentleman has just paid to DFID officials, but he has passed rather rapidly over the subsequent months during which there appeared to be no planning for reconstruction at all.

Hilary Benn: I freely acknowledge that one of the failures, which is set out clearly in the report, was the failure to plan in advance of the decision taken on 18 March 2003. Indeed, there are lessons that we must learn from that. The truth is, however, that Iraq was a suppressed, repressed and brutalised society in which Saddam was the lid on the pressure cooker, and when he left, the lid came off. We have seen that in other countries, too—Libya has already been mentioned.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Derby South rightly said that those who seek to blame the decision to invade for all the subsequent events miss the responsibility that others have for what has gone on. We must take our share of the responsibility, and disbanding the Iraqi army—which meant that thousands of men had no salary and no income, but had a gun and a grievance—was a profound mistake. But Iraqi politicians also have to bear a responsibility for the sectarian policies they have pursued, and those who still engage in suicide bombing

cannot turn to us and say, “Look what you made me do”. They must bear responsibility for what they themselves have chosen to do to their fellow citizens.

The best evidence for the difference that good politics and good governance can make in Iraq is shown by the Kurdish region, which, let us not forget, was as it was partly because of the support we had given it through the no-fly zone. As a result, it is now the most stable and relatively prosperous part of Iraq. I pay tribute, as others have, to the peshmerga for the role that they have played, and still play, in trying to defeat Daesh.

The Kurds regard the 2003 invasion as a liberation. Karwan Jamal Tahir, the Kurdistan Regional Government representative to the UK, wrote this week about the Chilcot report that

“there was an Iraq before the 2003 invasion, an Iraq that, for millions, was a concentration camp on the surface and a mass grave beneath.”

We only have to read the reports of Human Rights Watch to see what it had to say at the time about the mass executions, the mass disappearances, the use of chemical weapons, the suppression of the Shi'a majority, particularly after the 1991 uprising, and the attempt by Saddam to eradicate the population and culture of the Marsh Arabs, who had resided continuously in the marshlands for more than 5,000 years. That was what life was like, and we should not forget it.

At least today Iraq has a fragile democracy, and whatever our views on the decision 13 years ago, we have a continuing responsibility to assist, especially when the democratically elected Government ask for our help. That is why this House was right in 2014 to provide support in helping them defeat Daesh, and we have seen the benefit of that support in the progress made in the months since. We have also discovered more about what Daesh does as towns have been liberated. That is why this House was right to vote unanimously to describe what is being done to the Yazidis, Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria as “genocide at the hands of Daesh.”

I wish the Government would do what the House asked and take that to the UN Security Council so that it can be passed on to the International Criminal Court.

Finally, I turn to the wider lessons. For too long in foreign affairs, Governments have argued, “Better the strong man we know than the chaos we fear”, even when that strong man is a brutal murdering dictator. Yet look at what happens when the strong man falls in Libya, in Egypt and, indeed, in Iraq.

Three years after the end of the second world war, the UN General Assembly adopted and proclaimed the universal declaration of human rights. Article 3 states:

“Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.”

Article 28 states:

“Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realised.”

Yet for millions of people in the world those rights, so nobly expressed, have remained just words on paper, and they were certainly just words on paper during Saddam's rule. Surely that will not do. Having created the UN, why do we not have the responsibility to ensure that the principles of the universal declaration of human rights are given universal expression internationally, exactly as we have managed to achieve, for example, in

[Hilary Benn]

our own country over many years? It is the responsibility of the UN Security Council to do that. That was why we created the UN, which has a moral responsibility and a legitimacy to act, and it is why I am a strong supporter of the Responsibility to Protect. That principle says that state sovereignty is not absolute and the international community has a responsibility to act in certain circumstances.

Finally, even though this is unspoken in the report, I think Chilcot forces us to consider that while there are consequences to taking action—we meet here today to discuss them and their legacy—there are also always consequences of not doing so. For me, that is the most important lesson of Iraq, both before and after 2003.

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

Hilary Benn: I am going to bring my remarks to a conclusion, because so many others wish to speak.

As a world, we have a responsibility to be much more effective and determined in dealing with countries and conflicts in circumstances such as these before they turn into brutal and bloody civil wars. I believe that the best way to do that is to demonstrate that multilateralism—countries working together—can provide the answer to the uncomfortable question: what is to be done? The more we do that, the stronger will be our argument against those who would act unilaterally—at times we have to act unilaterally, and we were right to do so in Kosovo and in Sierra Leone—that there is another, better way. For that to happen, however, the United Nations has to do the job for which it was created.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am trying to accommodate as many colleagues as possible, and after the next speaker it will be necessary to reduce the time limit to six minutes. I am sorry, but this is inevitable.

5.5 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): It is a pleasure, as always, to follow the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), whom I used to follow regularly when we were both on our respective parties' Front Benches.

The aim of this debate on Chilcot should be to heal wounds and learn lessons, but I very much fear that it will be characterised by a discussion of whether Mr Blair is guilty or very guilty. Such a discussion would betray the interests of all those whose loved ones were placed in harm's way and who paid the ultimate price in Iraq, as well as of the many thousands of Iraqis who lost their lives. It is the whole system of governance that we need to hold to account, not just the Prime Minister, if we are to achieve resolution and benefit.

In 2003, I sat over there on the Opposition Benches and heard what the Prime Minister said. I supported his judgment. That judgment could not have been reached and acted on by the Prime Minister without the active support, or at least the passive acquiescence, of the machinery of government. Before we come to the lessons for the future, however, let me observe that the central allegations boil down to two. The first is that the

intelligence was wrong. The second is that a culture of sofa government—a lack of accountable structures for decision making—and inadequate procedures prevailed.

Having used the product of the three intelligence agencies while I was on the National Security Council and in Cabinet, I yield to no one in my admiration and respect for those who carry out what is often difficult and dangerous work. There are people working at GCHQ who could deploy their talents in the commercial world for 10 times what they are paid by the taxpayer, yet they choose to serve their country instead. We should honour and respect them for that. I have no hesitation in saying, from my own experience, that if those who work in the intelligence agencies were asked to do something improper by their political masters, they would simply refuse to do it. Intelligence is, by its very nature, difficult to hold to account. The normal rules of transparency and openness simply do not apply. The sourcing of intelligence is by definition complex and we cannot talk about it in any detail. In one instance, while I was Secretary of State for International Development, intelligence that we received on a particular situation in Africa turned out to be wrong, but the fault for the error did not lie with Britain or British intelligence.

On the issue of sofa government and informality, it is clear that there was a lack of Cabinet structure and accountability, as well as a quite extraordinary informality and, let us say, flexibility in the use of the Attorney General and his legal opinions. However, critical lessons have been learned and, crucially, they have resulted in the setting up of the National Security Council.

Neil Gray: My brother served in both Gulf wars. The right hon. Gentleman has talked about sofa government and the lessons to be learned from poor Government structures. Pages 121 and 122 of the executive summary give details of the delay in allowing the military to prepare and of the resulting lack of equipment and preparedness for our armed forces going into Iraq. Does he believe, as I and others do, that that unnecessarily cost some members of our armed forces their lives?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman makes a point about the absolute importance of having proper accountable structures, not informal machineries of government, as I was saying.

Moving on to the Libya campaign, there was a proper process by which legal advice was given to the Cabinet. Britain's humanitarian responsibilities in the conflict were made clear at the first Cabinet meeting that authorised military action. The National Security Council met on numerous occasions, as did an inner, sub-committee of the NSC on which I sat. In addition to the conduct of the campaign, we discussed the humanitarian situation and the preparations for stabilisation on a daily basis. There was of course no invasion as such, but the Defence Secretary took personal responsibility for targeting to ensure that collateral damage was minimised, and the loss of civilian life was mercifully extremely limited.

On discharging our humanitarian responsibility, lessons were carefully learned and, as the Foreign Secretary emphasised, Britain did a good job indeed. We organised the planes and ships that successfully transported thousands of migrant workers home or to places of safety as far afield as the Philippines and Baghdad to remove them from harm's way. The evacuation of 5,000 migrants

from the quayside at Misrata was a feat greatly assisted by Britain and for which the international community deserves the highest praise. When Tripoli was in danger of running out of water, it was DFID and the United Nations that successfully implemented our plan to prevent an emergency. The provision of food and medicines to conflict areas of Libya without either was also successfully accomplished.

My point is that specific lessons from the failures in Iraq were understood and implemented in respect of our humanitarian responsibilities. However, it is post-conflict stabilisation that attracts strong criticism regarding Iraq and Libya, where it is clear today that stabilisation is currently a failure. I want to make it clear that lessons were learned and that our focus on post-conflict stabilisation was absolute immediately after military action started. Britain set up an international stabilisation unit and worked closely with the UN, which was to have lead responsibility for stabilisation when the conflict ended. Britain supplied expertise, officials and funding, drawing on the lessons of Iraq. During the war, we gave technical support to the central bank and to such organs of the state that existed. Indeed, in contrast with Iraq, where the police and security services were simply abolished, we took specific significant steps to ensure that the police in Libya, who had not been engaged in human rights abuses, could be reassured by text message, for example, that they still had a job and should report for duty when the fighting diminished.

We prepared extensively, particularly through the support that we gave to UN institutions, to help stabilise Libya's future, but we faced the simple problem that there was no peace to stabilise when the war was over and that in a country with limited structures outside the Gaddafi family the different factions were fractured and splintered. You can make all the plans you like for post-conflict stabilisation, but if there is no peace to stabilise, the international community's non-military options are severely limited.

Lessons learned from Iraq and then applied in Libya have continued in respect of the British efforts in Syria. We have already made a huge funding commitment to stabilise the country when peace finally comes. We have played a more comprehensive role in humanitarian relief in and around Syria than the whole of the rest of the European Union put together. We were also the first country to put significant sums of taxpayers' money into the Zaatari refugee camp in 2012, because we understood the approaching calamity.

The lessons we learn from the Chilcot report will shape our understanding of our place in the world. Will we continue to support the cause of liberal interventionism, as we successfully did in Sierra Leone and Kosovo, or will the House turn its back on discretionary intervention, even under UN auspices, and be prepared to stand idly by if—God forbid—another Rwandan genocide takes place? The post-Chilcot era will, I hope, see the right lessons learned and ensure that Britain remains a key international influence for good, willing to take military action, certainly as a last resort, when the situation requires it.

5.14 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The decision to go to war is undoubtedly the most difficult one that any Prime Minister, leader or Member of this

House will ever have to take. The Liberal Democrats are not pacifists—I am not a pacifist—but we believe that military action should be used only as a last resort, following the failure of diplomacy, and only in accordance with law. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 did not meet those tests, which is why, led by Charles Kennedy 13 years ago, the Liberal Democrats opposed the war. That reasoned opposition was met with vile derision by both the Government and the Conservative Opposition at the time. Thirteen years and 2 million words later, those voices have been silenced and Charles Kennedy is vindicated. It is a tragedy that he is not here to experience that vindication, and it is equally a tragedy that neither is Robin Cook. Chilcot's conclusion is exactly what so many of us have known for more than 13 years: there was no legal or strategic case for the invasion of Iraq; it was “unnecessary”; and military action was “not a last resort”. Instead of improving our security, it in fact made our country, their country and the world we share less safe.

In the case of Iraq, Mr Blair appeared to be more concerned with supporting American President George Bush than he was in pursuing British interests and the interests of the Iraqi people. The most infamous quote—

“I will be with you, whatever”—

was not written to the Iraqi people, suffering under the undeniably cruel regime of such a brutal dictator, nor was it written to the British public as a clear display of the priorities of our elected leader. Instead, it was written to a neo-conservative US President intent on proving American superiority by waging war against an abstract noun. This was a President who was failing to make dramatic advances in Afghanistan, so instead he settled his sights on Iraq, despite the fact that, as Chilcot stresses on a number of occasions, the overall threat from Iraq was viewed as less serious than those from other countries of concern—Iran, Libya and North Korea.

Mr Blair was clearly determined to follow the US into war, no matter the consequences, and he effectively committed us to the Americans, no matter the evidence. We had, we have and I hope we will continue to have an intimate and rewarding relationship with the US, but we cannot allow our foreign policy to be defined by that relationship alone; “my ally right or wrong” is not a sustainable independent foreign policy. The strength of that unwavering commitment gave rise to the error of making the evidence fit the judgment, rather than the judgment fit the evidence. Nowhere is that clearer than when it came to the legal basis of war.

The Attorney General's final view was little more than lukewarm, being that this was,

“on balance, the better view”.

I believe that if we are to commit thousands of our young men and women to circumstances where their lives will be put at risk, we need something a little bit better and more certain than “on balance”. Going forward, we must ensure that there is no ambiguity in the legal advice provided to the Government or Parliament on matters of military action.

We must also be clear on what the end goal or exit plan is for any intervention. Despite its being clear very quickly that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the UK found itself assuming leadership of a military area of responsibility. Not only that, but it is

[Tim Farron]

evident that, despite being a joint occupying power, the UK had little or no influence on the overall strategy of the Americans, leaving us blindly following their flawed lead. The US strategy included the policy of de-Ba'athification, which collapsed the Iraqi state and disbanded the army, creating a disfranchised and angry group of well-trained military leaders, many of whom went on to fight the occupation and, ultimately, to form Daesh. That appalling error directly contributed to the following six years of chaotic destruction, which saw so many of our armed forces put on the frontline without a proper strategy.

I hope that the Iraq inquiry—the Chilcot inquiry—will bring some comfort to the families of the 179 servicemen and women killed in Iraq, but there can be no justification for their being deployed to fight on a battlefield for which the proper preparation was not done. There is no doubt that the invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 have directly contributed to the threats that the world now faces from Daesh and instability in the middle east.

As I stood shoulder to shoulder with Iraqis at the vigil held in London last week to remember the lives of those lost in the most recent attacks in Baghdad, it was clear to me what legacy has been left. Just last week, more than 300 people died in suicide attacks in Baghdad on top of the tragedies that we have seen in Istanbul, Paris and elsewhere. Terrorists are responsible for those horrific events, but the Iraq war is responsible for creating the vacuum in which terrorism and Daesh were formed, and through which anti-western sentiment has thrived, and that has happened despite our being advised at the time that that was a risk.

Liberal Democrats are outward-facing internationalists. We believe that Britain should engage in the world, not turn its back on it, and that our country has a strong role to play in promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law across the globe. Sometimes—rarely—that will mean taking military action, but the Iraq war has tarnished our reputation, ignored international law and undermined international institutions such as the United Nations, which we worked so hard at building in the aftermath of two world wars. It destroyed public confidence in our leaders and in Parliament, and it made it infinitely more difficult for a Government to make the case for war by making the prospect of humanitarian intervention all the more unpalatable to many.

5.21 pm

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): On 18 March 2003, Mr Blair told the House of Commons that he judged the possibility of terrorist groups in possession of weapons of mass destruction as,

“a real and present danger to Britain and its national security.”—*[Official Report, 18 March 2003; Vol. 401, c. 768.]*

When Sir John Chilcot presented his report to the families of some of those killed in the Iraq war—those families included the parents of Lieutenant Marc Lawrence, a young naval aviator and one of my constituents, who was killed in a Sea King helicopter—he was rather more robust than he was in the conclusions of the report. He said:

“The judgements about the severity of the threat posed by Iraq’s WMDs were presented with a certainty that was not justified.”

On the eve of the vote on the Iraq war, a number of us on the Opposition Benches had grave concerns about what we were about to undertake and what we were going to ask of our young men and women in our armed services. We were called into an office by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), who was then Leader of the Opposition, and by the shadow Foreign Minister, then the Member for Devizes, Michael Ancram. We were told by my right hon. Friend that he had been informed, on Privy Council terms, that there were weapons of mass destruction, that the United Kingdom, or the interests of the United Kingdom, faced a 45-minute threat from those weapons, and that it was imperative, in the interests of our national security, that we should support the motion that was to be put before the House. I think I am right in saying that, on that basis, all but one of us concurred.

I do not doubt the information that was given to me by my right hon. Friend, but I believe that he was misled on Privy Council terms. The House has heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) of the five items on which Mr Blair misled the House. Yes, we do have to learn from this. I must take responsibility, because I voted that way, for the death of my young constituent and, by implication, for the deaths of hundreds of armed personnel and many, many civilians.

Mr Speaker, if a motion for contempt is brought before you, you should look favourably on a hearing for it, because I believe that we owe that to the families of those who have lost their loved ones in this conflict.

5.24 pm

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale). I echo the comments made by the Foreign Secretary when he opened this debate—indeed, others have made them since—about the heavy price that has been paid by those who lost their lives or who were seriously injured, and all of their families who have suffered the consequences.

As somebody who was a Member of this House in March 2003, I welcome the Chilcot report. I shall focus my remarks on two specific issues—first, my own motive for supporting the motion authorising force, and secondly, post-conflict planning. Chilcot offers an interesting and detailed analysis of the processes within the Government at the time and the status of the intelligence that was used to justify the action that followed. Given the exhaustive detail examined and the time invested in arriving at the conclusions in the report, I do not intend to criticise what it has to say.

Up until the time of the vote, my own position had been that although I accepted that UN Security Council resolution 1441 provided sufficient authority for any action, it would have been better to have secured a second Security Council resolution. I say that even though there had been 14 previous Security Council resolutions, which had been passed on the widely held assumption that Saddam Hussein did have the capacity to use weapons of mass destruction and was prepared to do so. Indeed, it was well documented that he had in the past used such weapons against the Iraqi people. However, when President Chirac effectively vetoed any further UN Security Council resolution, it seemed to me—

Caroline Lucas *rose*—

Mr Howarth: I will not give way to the hon. Lady because I have very limited time.

It seemed to me that resolution 1441 and all the previous resolutions had to be upheld; otherwise, international collective will would have been meaningless.

There was, however, another important humanitarian reason why I felt compelled to support the proposed action. Having spoken to many Iraqis who were on the receiving end of vicious attacks and repression by Saddam Hussein's regime, particularly Iraqi Kurds, I felt strongly that the course of non-action would be an abdication of humanitarian responsibility. That viewpoint was very much influenced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), who had unrivalled knowledge about what was actually happening in Iraq at the time and the appalling abuse of human rights that by then was beyond question.

Following the action in Iraq in 2003, I visited both Baghdad and Basra in March 2005, together with the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) who, at the time, was the Member for Henley. The purpose of that visit was to attend the inauguration of the Transitional National Assembly. In an article in *The Spectator* of 19 March 2005, following the visit, he concluded:

“It could all still just about work, and if it does, I think it will still be possible to draw a positive balance on this venture.”

In an interview in the North Wales edition of the *Daily Post* on 18 March 2005, another member of the delegation, Elfyn Llwyd, the then Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, said that although he had opposed the action in Iraq,

“Politicians across the spectrum do not want us to withdraw immediately.”

The then hon. Member for Henley concluded his *Spectator* article with the words of an Iraqi Minister:

“Thank you, people of Britain, for what you have done! We give you our thanks and our praise and our love. You built this country eight decades ago, and it didn't work. Now you are rebuilding it and it has to work.”

The point of those two quotes is that although there were still massive problems of sectarian violence and the challenge of restoring vital public services, the political outlook at that time was moderately hopeful. It was clear from talking to people from different parties, different religions and different backgrounds that that hope existed.

During the following two years I visited Iraq on a further two occasions—first, as the Chair of the Committee considering the Armed Forces Bill, and on another occasion with my right hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley. Two things became apparent during those visits. The first was that progress towards stability was painfully slow and the optimism that there had been in 2005 was ebbing away. The second was that the post-conflict planning had not been successful. The Foreign Secretary referred to the failure of the de-Ba'athification programme. Condoleezza Rice, who was then the National Security Adviser, has said that neither she nor the Secretary of State at the time, Colin Powell, were even consulted about that decision. That was another failure of process.

Those of us who voted for action are often asked, legitimately, whether we regret it. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn),

I cannot regret the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. What I do regret is the fact that the post-conflict planning was not successful.

5.30 pm

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): It is always a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth).

I listened with great interest to the account given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who described the read before us as compelling. I have to say that I did not find it as much of a page-turner as he evidently did, but I did get as far as volume 12, which deals with the welfare of those who participated in the Iraq war. That volume brings out a number of key findings, and that is particularly important today, with the publication of the Public Accounts Committee report on service family accommodation, which is less than obliging.

The key findings raise a number of issues that are of importance to my constituents, particularly in relation to inquests involving those who, sadly, died during the conflict. The report points to the huge backlog in inquests, which was evident at the time. If we are to honour the military covenant, we really have to understand the implications of these things for the welfare of families.

However, I am pleased to find in volume 12 that there is also some good news in all of this, and that is to do with the way in which our medical services configured and prepared themselves in the run-up to the conflict. I say that because I was—I have to declare an interest—a member of the Defence Medical Services, and I served in Iraq in late 2003 in a medical capacity. Volume 12 is therefore very much a mixed blessing in terms of the account it gives of the way we prepared for and executed our duties under the military covenant.

I voted against the Iraq war in 2003—it seemed to me at the time that the case had not been made. However, I understand full well that Members on both sides of the House voted in good conscience, one way or the other. In truth, few of us were in full possession of the facts at the time, and most of us made a judgment call. However, of all the many Divisions I have participated in over the past 15 years, that is the one I feel best and most comfortable about.

The situation in 2003 stemmed from the strategic defence review in 1998 and the new chapter added to it two years later, after the 9/11 attack. In that review, we saw the reconfiguration of our armed forces into what was called a “force for good”. In other words, our armed forces would be there not simply for national defence and security, but for something much beyond that—expeditionary things of the sort we saw subsequently to good effect in Kosovo and Sierra Leone. The problem is that that was then extrapolated to Iraq—a much bigger deal—and came up against the sofa government, conspiracy of optimism and group-think that have been referred to, together with the ingrained idea that Saddam must have had weapons of mass destruction and the intent to use them, despite evidence to the contrary and despite wise counsel at the time from a number of sources. Crucially for me, the null hypothesis—the idea that weapons of mass destruction did not exist—was never constructed or tested. That was a huge failing, which I hope the structural changes that have

[Dr Andrew Murrison]

been put in place subsequently—particularly around the National Security Council—will now make unlikely in the future.

The right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett), who is not in her place, suggested that the concept of a just war, which is familiar to anybody who has been to staff college, is some sort of religious thing, but it fundamentally is not, and it underpins much of our law in this area. It is vital to establish the idea of a just war and to discuss whether this was, in fact, a just war. Chilcot tells us absolutely clearly that military action was not seen as a last resort. Last resort is a fundamental, underpinning precept of a just war. One cannot have a just war if one could have achieved one's objectives by other means falling short of out-and-out warfare.

For me, that means that the Iraq war was not a just war. That matters—it really matters—because we ask our men and women in uniform to do extraordinary things and authorise them to do remarkable things. They have no choice in the matter, but they have every right to expect that we should make sure that they are not being sent on a fool's errand or, worse, one of questionable legality or legitimacy. Instead, in March 2003, my constituents and others were dispatched to an expeditionary war that Chilcot painstakingly takes apart as disastrous and unnecessary: a war that was waged despite intelligence and other evidence that was not clear; a war whose lack of planning and provisioning cost brave men their lives; a war that was, in short, sheer bloody chaos. It was the biggest foreign policy disaster since Suez, the consequences of which we are living with today and will do for decades to come.

The author of our part in this believes he is responsible but not to blame. I do not believe that is good enough. We need to be accountable for our actions, and it is not clear to me that the right hon. Gentleman in question has yet been brought to account.

5.36 pm

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): I was a Member of this House when we heard the former Prime Minister present his compelling case. I voted to go to war. I did so in the full knowledge that my brother, who was at that time serving with our armed forces, was poised in Kuwait to cross the border as part of one of the first units into Iraq. I want to quote the words of Colonel Tim Collins, then commander of 1 Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment, who were also poised to enter Iraq:

“We go to liberate, not to conquer... We will not fly our flags in their country. We are entering Iraq to free a people and the only flag which will be flown in that ancient land is their own... We will bring shame on neither our uniform or our nation.”

I think we can all agree on one thing in this House: that our armed forces did not bring shame on this nation—that they did their best in very difficult circumstances and achieved many of the objectives that had been set for them. We owe it to our armed forces to ask questions and to examine this report very carefully. Will we learn the lessons, not least on the lines of accountability in terms of decisions that we make, as politicians, when going to war?

I believe it is right that we examine the question of whether the former Prime Minister should be held to account for the advice that he gave Parliament. I am

clear that I voted to go to war based on the advice—the information—that he laid before this House when we made that decision. It is therefore right that we examine the advice that he gave, or the information that he made available to us, and consider whether he potentially misled this House. We will listen carefully to what others have to say before we decide how to vote on this question, but we have an open mind on the matter. We pay tribute to our armed forces, especially to those who laid down their lives in Iraq, and to their families.

I have to say in defence of the former Prime Minister, whom I have heard called a number of things in recent weeks, that I worked very closely with him on the peace process in Northern Ireland, and the idea that he is a terrorist, or a supporter of terrorism, is wrong. No one did more to bring an end to terrorism in Northern Ireland, or at least as far as it goes at the present time, than the former Prime Minister. While sometimes I disagreed with the way that he went about things in Northern Ireland, and sometimes he acted with the best of intentions, I have to say that sometimes he blurred the lines, and this is part of the problem. Perhaps he was acting from the best of intentions with regard to Iraq, but I do not think he was wholly honest with this House in the information that he put before us. We need to address that.

The other issue that we are concerned about is the resources that were made available. I do not believe that the soldiers and armed forces on the frontline were properly equipped. We need to address that. It is not good enough for us to send our armed forces to war without equipping them properly. Nor is it good enough for us to send them to war without a clear exit strategy or plan, or to walk away, as we did in 2007, without having finished the job properly. It is not right to adopt such a cut-and-run policy. When we go into a country, we cannot walk away without fully considering the consequences and following through on that. We need to not only identify lessons from the report, but act on them, and to ensure in particular that our armed forces receive the support they require when we send them into combat. That is vital.

One of the things that flowed from the Iraq war was the need to support our veterans who have sustained injuries, to their physical and—as in many cases—their mental health. We are not doing enough. I fully support the armed forces covenant and welcome what this Government have endeavoured to do, but the reality is that too many of us are dealing with constituents who are not receiving the help that they need as a result of the consequences of their service to our country.

Yes, let us accept that we have a collective responsibility to learn the political lessons that flow from the report, and let us consider whether we need to hold to account those who guided this House to its decision to send our armed forces to war in Iraq; but let us also ensure that the men and women who served our country on the foot of that decision get the support that they need when they are in combat and when they are injured as a result of combat.

5.42 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Weapons of mass destruction were held to be a vital part of the justification for war. The Chilcot report found that

WMD development programmes were far more advanced in Iran, Libya and North Korea than in Iraq. The imminence of an Iraqi threat to the United Kingdom was simply non-existent. The report notes that a November 2001 Joint Intelligence Committee assessment found that Saddam Hussein

“refused to permit any Al Qaeda activity in Iraq”.

I believe that many of those who voted for war and are now seeking to justify their support for it should be held to account, particularly the former Prime Minister. The Chilcot report is absolutely clear—this is a message for all of us ordinary Back Benchers—that there were severe doubts at the time, even in published documents, that Saddam Hussein held weapons of mass destruction.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): My hon. Friend may correct me if I am wrong, but I recall Hans Blix repeatedly saying that he needed more time because there was no evidence of weapons of mass destruction.

Sir Edward Leigh: That is correct. I want to read from *Hansard* what I said on 24 September 2002, not in any sense to say, “I told you so,” but to establish that we as Back Benchers do not necessarily always have to believe what we are told by Front Benchers, experts, Whips and the Government. We have a duty to look at our conscience. I said:

“I do not believe that it is the job of the UN—or, even more problematically, of the US backed by the UK—to change a regime in the middle east. Leaving aside questions of international law, what are the practicalities? There are nearly 30 Arab nations, and not one is a democracy. Trying to impose our ideas of democracy on Iraq may unleash democratic Kurdish and Shia movements that could lead to the dissolution of the country. It would be wrong to believe that, from the Arab point of view, our system is necessarily superior to theirs.”—[*Official Report*, 24 September 2002; Vol. 390, c. 74.]

I believe that those messages are as right today as they were then. We have to distinguish between totalitarian movements such as ISIS, which are a real threat to us, and authoritarian regimes, however unpleasant. We should not necessarily seek to overthrow the latter.

On 24 September 2002, I went on to say:

“An attack, or the threat of an attack, may be justified on the basis of the breaking of UN resolutions, but I suspect that that will not be the real trigger—many countries are in breach of UN resolutions. Let us be serious. There are three sides of a triangle to justify a war: capability, means and intent. Does Saddam have the capability to manufacture weapons of mass destruction? We have the dossier, and I am prepared to accept that he does”—

but I was misled on that, as were many of us—

“but I would like to hear more about the weapons of mass destruction held by other countries in the region—Iran, Syria and Israel—and by other rogue states, notably North Korea.

Does Saddam have the means to deliver those weapons of mass destruction to the west? Nobody seriously suggests that he can do so militarily...The suggestion, then, is that Saddam will deliver the weapons not by conventional military means but by clandestine means. Where is the evidence of his links to al-Qaeda? What would he gain by such links? Are there terrorists already capable of inflicting devastating damage on our economy? Would not our acting alone make us a more likely target for Muslim fundamentalists? Are we not uniquely vulnerable to terrorist attacks, as an open society with no identification cards, and with the London underground, Heathrow and the channel tunnel? Means of delivery—the second side of the triangle—is problematical, not proven”.—[*Official Report*, 24 September 2002; Vol.73, c. 75-76.]

Given the messages from Chilcot and from this debate, that message is as apposite today as it was then. In trying to change the middle east, we should not look to overthrow authoritarian regimes that we do not like. Rather, we should deal with what is a threat to our society and our people. ISIS is a threat to our society and our people, but regimes such as that of Assad are not necessarily such a threat.

I went on to say:

“The most difficult of the three factors is intent. What would Saddam gain by attacking the west, apart from his own immediate destruction? Has he not outlived all his foreign and domestic opponents by being at least rational and not suicidal? I do not think that anyone seriously suggests that he intends to attack the west. Would he attack Israel, which already has a nuclear deterrent?...Is the proposed attack really about a new concept of global thinking? That is the issue. Is the Truman doctrine—the concept of deterrence that has preserved peace and stability for more than 50 years—to be replaced by a new Bush doctrine of using a pre-emptive strike to overthrow dangerous regimes that could pose a threat?”.

I repeat that these messages are as true for us today as they were then. We should abide by the Truman doctrine of containment and deterrence, and not necessarily seek to impose our ideas on regimes that we dislike.

I went on to say:

“Where will the Bush doctrine take us? Where will it stop? What are the tests? A military junta is allowed to acquire a nuclear weapon in Pakistan but not in Iraq and, presumably, not in North Korea or Iran. Pakistan was only righting the balance with India, and Saddam would claim that he was righting the balance with Israel.

I do not believe that the case for attacking Iraq unilaterally, without the UN, has yet been made. That is not to say that it is wrong to threaten force—that is the only language that Saddam understands. No doubt there will be weeks of frustration. No doubt when the UN teams go in there will be more frustration and delays. However, the fact remains that after 1998, the UN contained Saddam and kept him on some sort of leash.

Finally, I remain of the belief that it is safe to contain rather than to threaten destruction of Saddam’s regime. If he is threatened with destruction, he could act irrationally, with incalculable consequences for the world community. Let us march in step with fellow permanent members of the UN Security Council and insist on weapons inspections, backed by the use of international force if they are not complied with. That is the right path to take”.—[*Official Report*, 24 September 2002; Vol.73, c. 76.]

I believe that Chilcot is a powerful testimony for us all today. Never again must we be led astray along a path towards a dangerous war such as the one that has unleashed untold misery in Iraq. Hundreds of thousands of people have died as a result of decisions taken in this House. I say never again. As ordinary Members of Parliament, if this ever happens again, we must be prepared to question the Executive and, whatever the cost to our career, vote against that Executive and vote down war.

5.49 pm

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): I start by paying tribute to all who served in the forces in Iraq, especially those, and the families of those, who were injured or lost their lives. It is absolutely clear from this debate and from last week’s statement that the Chilcot report will never settle arguments about whether the war was right or wrong, but it should lay to rest allegations about bad faith, lies or deceit.

First, the report finds that there was no falsification or misuse of intelligence by Tony Blair or No. 10. Secondly, it finds that there was no attempt to deceive Cabinet Ministers. Thirdly, it finds that there was no

[Ian Austin]

secret pact with the US to go to war. That means there is no justification for saying that evidence was “confected” or that the case for war was a “deception”, which is exactly what the Leader of the Opposition claimed in his response last week. He claimed that it created a colonial-style occupation, although the UN endorsed the west’s presence after the invasion, and the 2005 elections and referendum on a new constitution gave power to Iraqis.

To listen to Tony Blair’s critics, anyone would think that Iraq had been a peaceful haven of tranquillity before 2003, but nothing could be further from the truth. In Iraq, Saddam Hussain perpetrated the largest chemical weapons attack against civilians in history, killing thousands. He led a brutal reprisal against Iraq’s Shi’a majority, slaughtering up to 100,000 Iraqis in just one month—more than in any year since 2003. Abroad, he supported terrorism, offering al-Qaeda sanctuary, training and assistance in planning attacks.

The report does not say that Tony Blair ordered the falsification of intelligence that stated that Saddam possessed weapons of mass destruction. UN resolutions required Saddam to demonstrate that weapons of mass destruction did not exist, but he acted as though they did, presumably because that helped him to subjugate his people. His refusal to co-operate with UN inspectors led intelligence services right around the world to believe that he did, in fact, possess those weapons. Even countries that were opposed to military action, such as France, Russia and Germany, believed that he had those weapons. The debate in 2003 was not about whether Saddam possessed weapons of mass destruction, but about how to deal with them.

Of course, we must learn the lessons of mistakes made after the invasion of Iraq, but we must also learn the lessons of not taking action. British intervention in Kosovo and Sierra Leone prevented people from being slaughtered. Libya was already in a brutal civil war before western air forces prevented Gaddafi from killing innocent people in Benghazi, but without support afterwards the country is a huge problem for the whole of north Africa and the wider region. Not intervening in Syria did not prevent the world’s worst humanitarian catastrophe, hundreds of thousands of deaths or millions of refugees, let alone terrorist attacks not just in Syria but in Tunisia and Europe.

I also want to deal with the claim that toppling Saddam led to ISIS or, as we are so often told, plunged the middle east into chaos. As Martin Chulov, *The Guardian*’s middle east editor and author of a definitive study of ISIS, says:

“The Syrian civil war was not driven by Isis. It fed directly out of the Arab awakenings and was a bid to oust a ruthless regime from power. Assad could not have prevailed against the will of the streets. So he tried to transform the uprising into something that was driven by internationally-backed global jihad. Isis grew out of the chaos. They flourished with Assad’s direct and indirect support until they became a monster no one could control.”

None of that will make the slightest bit of difference to Tony Blair’s critics, to the critics of the Government of the day who took those decisions or, especially, to those on the hard left. The facts make no difference at all to those people, because they are implacably opposed to the UK or other western countries ever taking military action.

Dr Murrison: I am following the hon. Gentleman’s remarks very carefully. Does he accept that many of us here do not doubt that Tony Blair did not lie to the House, but that that is a pretty low test? The challenge is really whether he acted in a way that came anywhere close to competence. Chilcot clearly thinks that Tony Blair was incompetent, and that is the charge before him. The hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting that the Iraq war was in some way a success; manifestly, it was not.

Ian Austin: I said earlier that, clearly, mistakes were made after the invasion. But let us be honest; the charge that is made against Tony Blair and the Government of the time is of falsification and misuse of intelligence, and of wilfully misleading this House and the rest of the country. That is what people are saying, and I think the Chilcot report proves beyond doubt that none of those charges is true.

Caroline Lucas: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Austin: No, I will not give way, because other people want to speak.

Tony Blair’s critics on the hard left opposed every attempt to use British forces, not just in Iraq or Syria, but even in Kosovo, where the UK intervened to prevent thousands of people from being slaughtered. The right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) described that at the time as “unpardonable folly”, even though Britain was intervening to prevent genocidal slaughter. I will take no lectures from the SNP on these issues.

The leader of the Labour party was a founder member and chair of the Stop the War coalition—an organisation that, under his leadership, praised what it said was the “internationalism and solidarity” of ISIS, and compared it to the international brigades. It supported what it called the Iraqi “struggle” against British troops “by any means necessary”, and among many other appalling things, it said that it stood with Saddam Hussein, compared Assad to Churchill, and promoted or provided a platform for Assad apologists. For the hard left, the world is a simple place: all the problems are caused by the west, and the solutions are easy.

Sir Edward Leigh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Austin: No, I will not give way. Of course we must learn the lessons from Iraq, but let us make sure we learn the right ones. For me, the central lesson is that taking action can lead to terrible consequences, and military action anywhere in the world involves huge risks. However, there can also be terrible consequences from not intervening. If we learn the wrong lessons, we might have fewer Iraqs but we could easily have more Syrias. Perhaps we ought to consider a Chilcot-style inquiry into the consequences of not intervening in Syria, where people have been slaughtered or displaced in their millions.

5.56 pm

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I declare an interest in this report because I served in the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, and along with many colleagues from all parties in the House—some of whom are not here today—I was proud to serve my country

and to stand with many enormously honourable men and women who did their best in very difficult circumstances.

I will not fight over and again the battles being fought this afternoon about Tony Blair and his guilt or otherwise, because I would rather move forward and speak about the United Kingdom's strategy and how on earth we got ourselves into a position that meant we were so clearly acting against our own national interests. We seem to have got into a position where the only answer was to be as close as possible to the United States, and to use force at a time when other options were available. The only answer seemed to be to follow the wishes of a Prime Minister who, although he sounded powerful at the time, was clearly too weak to invite challenge, even in his own private Cabinet. For me, those are the real worries—how could we have got to that stage? There are, of course, many reasons for that, and Chilcot lists them. Today, the question is how we get out of that.

The National Security Council, introduced by the previous Prime Minister, was an excellent invention, and I look forward to our current Prime Minister taking it forward, and introducing to the various Departments that contribute to the NSC the elements that feed into it. In my former Department—I mean that as an employee rather than as a Minister, although the Prime Minister may yet call; the evening is young—the Chiefs of Staff Committee established an impressive group by going back to an old idea.

In the period between the two wars, the Chiefs of Staff Committee invented a group constantly to challenge the Treasury, the Foreign Office, and other Departments, so that they could be prepared should the worst happen. That meant that, although those Departments were not as ready as we would have liked, at least in 1939 the 10-year rule that the Treasury had imposed was no longer in force, and we were re-arming and able to defend ourselves against Nazi aggression. That Committee was reformed in the Ministry of Defence under the former Chief of the Defence Staff, General Richards. That is great, but other Departments have done less well. I will not run through them, but it seems incumbent on those who have the authority to command embassies, aid work and armies, also to be responsible for ensuring that the strategies they prepare and advise Ministers to follow are right for the United Kingdom, and not just expedient for a quick relationship with the US.

I very much welcome what my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) said about the Truman doctrine. He is right, but the Truman doctrine should not be simply a reassertion of Westphalian principles. It must today be updated with the concept of the Responsibility to Protect that the UN has made so clear over the past few years. It is right that we avoid Iraq, but it is also right that we avoid Rwanda or Srebrenica. The great error of Iraq is that it did exactly the reverse of the right to protect: it put people in greater danger. This did not happen everywhere. The Kurdish communities were often better defended because they were armed. The reality, however, was the spread of insurgency and trouble. It is hard to argue that we improved the situation, although it is very difficult to know whether we made it worse.

As we move on from that period, it is incumbent on us to consider the legal aspect. We have been talking today about the legality of the war and holding the

leader in contempt, but I would like to look closely at how we hold soldiers to account. The spread of lawfare into combat zones has changed the nature of command dramatically in the past 50 to 60 years. The concept of combat immunity has been increasingly eroded. Young lieutenants and young corporals, junior leaders in the armed forces who took decisions at the age of 19, 20 or 21 in the heat of battle, are being tried today, five or 10 years later, in the cool of the courtroom. They are being tried by people who do not and cannot understand the pressures on them at that time and at that moment. They are being held to account in a way that is not only unfair but immoral. It is we here in this place who hold the responsibility for war, not the young men we send.

6.2 pm

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the very passionate speech by the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat). I pay tribute to him for his service in the Iraq war.

In 2003, *The Sun* ran a story under the headline "Open Fire on Traitors". The piece, which has now been deleted from the newspaper's website, called on readers to

"aim your own missiles at the cowards and traitors who opted to support Saddam Hussain".

It meant "cowards and traitors" such as Robin Cook, Charles Kennedy and other Members from all parties of the House, all of whom stood up for their principles, spoke out against Tony Blair's war and were vilified for it. Alongside these figures stood the 1 million people who marched on the streets of London to make their case and the 80,000 people who took to the streets of Glasgow. We were not traitors and it is not cowardly to promote a minority view. At that time, it was a minority view to champion peace over war, and we now know that war was not the last resort. It took courage and bravery, and we in this House must be courageous, brave and honest by calling out a predetermined commitment to war and a failure of government for what it was—just that.

Ian Austin: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: I will not be giving way.

The publication of the Chilcot report last week was a vindication of all those in Parliament and across the country who were vilified for opposing this terrible, unnecessary and ultimately failed war. It exposed the sorry tale of misleading statements that preceded the House's decision to support military action, and put our servicemen and servicewomen in harm's way. We cannot allow that to happen again.

When I began reading the Chilcot report last week, my first thoughts were with the families of those servicemen and servicewomen, and those who have been saddled with the physical and mental scars of that war. Families such as that of Lance Corporal Andrew Craw from Tullibody in my constituency, who died in Iraq on 7 January 2004. How must they have been feeling when they read the report? They now know that we entered into a failed war, as Chilcot said, without adequate support for our own troops or proper thought for the aftermath and the millions of people in Iraq. To see these families' bravery and dignity, as they publicly responded to the report last week, was humbling and

[Ms Ahmed-Sheikh]

inspiring. It is worthy of note that Blair's team of spin doctors had 18 months to look at the sections of the report referring to him, whereas the families were given three hours. They must be reassured that Parliament takes its role seriously and acts truthfully at all times. They deserve no less.

The reports makes it clear that there was a complete absence of the Cabinet government essential to ensure the vital issue of national security. The evidence shows that Ministers around the Cabinet table did not effectively challenge the decision to take us to war or devote their energies to planning efficiently for the aftermath of the campaign of shock and awe at the outset of military operations. Most of all, it lays bare what took place in order that they might win the hearts and minds of the country and this House. As we have heard, Tony Blair said in his note to George Bush:

"I will be with you, whatever"—

whatever the facts, whatever the circumstances, whatever the consequences! What a damning indictment of a diminished figure!

As Tony Blair's memos to President Bush demonstrate, he said one thing in this place and another behind closed doors. He stood here, in this place, and claimed that these acts were predicated on Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction, but confirmed in writing to President Bush in private that regime change was their goal. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) has articulated five falsehoods in the lead-up to the parliamentary decision in 2003 and in connection to the post-conflict plans. Paragraph 630 of the executive summary is indeed damning.

These actions have led to around 1 million Iraqi children under 18—about 5% of Iraqi children—losing one or both parents and resulted in 70% of children in Iraq suffering from trauma-related symptoms. This is not about binding the hands of Tony Blair's successors but about showing that facts and evidence are central to everything we do. Lessons must be learned and the mistakes of the past must not be repeated. A modern Parliament needs a modern approach to transparency and accountability. If the public cannot trust what is said here, it places in peril our whole parliamentary system. Parliament must act now to protect its own integrity.

As I prepared for today's debate, I reread the speech that my predecessor, Sir George Reid, made to the Scottish Parliament prior to war in 2003. He said:

"Above the doors of the Red Cross in Geneva, there is a phrase from Dostoevsky, which we should remember in time of war. It states that, in war,

"Everyone is responsible to everyone for everything."

This House now has a responsibility to hold the former Prime Minister to account for his actions. This would be not a judicial process but a parliamentary one, for which there is precedent. This is our responsibility and we should rise to it.

6.7 pm

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate. I want to look at two elements: first, the legal recriminations against our soldiers, as touched on by my hon. and gallant Friend the

Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat); and secondly, the point raised by several Members about our preparedness for war. I would like briefly to comment on that, as a former soldier.

First, I pay tribute to the 179 members of our armed forces who lost their lives, the many others wounded and, of course, the tens of thousands of civilians who died as a consequence of the war. It was an appalling tragedy. I make no apology for returning to the subject of servicemen and women being persecuted for fighting a war in Iraq at the behest of their political masters and under the most difficult circumstances. During the now former Prime Minister's response to the publication of the report of the Chilcot inquiry on 6 July, I asked for his assurance that, just as there would be no recriminations against those who sent our armed forces to war, so there would be none against our armed forces themselves. He replied:

"We are doing everything we can to get through and knock down these wholly unjustified inquiries, because by and large, as we would expect, British forces behaved entirely properly."—[*Official Report*, 6 July 2016; Vol. 612, c. 907.]

The fact remains, however, that in an official statement to *The Sunday Telegraph* on 2 July, the International Criminal Court confirmed that it had already begun a preliminary examination of claims of torture and abuse by British soldiers after receiving a dossier from human rights lawyers acting for alleged Iraqi victims. The ICC prosecutors will comb through the 2.3 million words in the report for the evidence of war crimes committed by British troops. The ICC has added that the decision to go to war remains outside its remit. That, of course, exonerates former Prime Minister Blair, but I do not want to get deeply involved in that particular point in my short speech.

Many of us have already put on record how deeply disturbing we find the relentless pursuit of our servicemen and women by unscrupulous and opportunistic lawyers, actively inviting fabrications and fantasies. Although, regrettably, there is a need for the Iraq Historic Allegations Team, known as IHAT, its most recent report published on 31 March this year makes it clear that many of the claims are indeed fabrications and fantasies.

At that point, IHAT had received 3,281 allegations of potential criminal behaviour. Nearly 1,000 of them were screened out and did not progress to the investigations stage, while 742 remain at the initial assessment stage. IHAT is therefore currently investigating allegations relating to 1,558 potential victims, of which 288 are alleged unlawful killings and 1,270 are alleged ill treatment, ranging from common assault to serious sexual and violent assault. IHAT has closed, or is in the process of closing, investigations into 59 allegations of unlawful killing. In 56 of those cases—95%—the allegation of criminal behaviour was found to be not sustainable, meaning that there was no truth in it. Let me make the point that if we in this place send our brave men and women to war, we have got to protect them from this sort of activity when they come back. In my view, it is a disgrace.

Let me finish by briefly touching on several points raised by several hon. Members of all parties about whether we are prepared for war. Chilcot touches on this and criticises the Government of the day because the armed forces were not as prepared as they could have been. Speaking as someone who served in the

military for nine years and as an avid reader of military history—my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling would agree with me on this—I cannot think of a time at any point in our history when our armed forces have been 100% ready for a specific operation. In the second world war, our tanks could not outgun the German tanks for at least two or three years into the war. I wonder what we would say now if that circumstance were repeated—it would be interesting, would it not? Of course our armed forces should have the best kit. The point I am trying to make is that when we send our brave men and women to war in future—regrettably, we will—we have got to think very hard whether they have the right kit for the particular type of warfare required for the particular conflict zone.

Neil Gray: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's speech, but does he accept that what was then a politically expedient decision of the Prime Minister to delay the military in preparing, and the subsequent lack of equipment, could have cost some of my brother's colleagues and some of the colleagues of the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) their lives? That is the fundamental point.

Richard Drax: Because of the delay and the realisation that this was going to be a major conflict—an invasion of a country—one could sensibly argue that there was not sufficient kit to back the invasion. I absolutely concur with that. The first thing that goes into chaos—the first thing that goes wrong—the moment troops are sent into battle, is at the point of contact. It all goes haywire because that is what war is about. We in this place must learn that if we send troops into a conflict zone—a desert environment, for example, as it was in Iraq—we must make sure that they have the right kit for that environment. If they are going to fight in a jungle, we will need to make sure that there are plenty of helicopters to support them.

Look at the Falklands war. I was serving at that time, and many of my friends went there. We were desperately short of all kinds of kit. In fact, had the Argentinians dug in and fought harder, it is questionable whether the number of brave men and women we had down there would have actually won that war. We were literally at the point of running out of ammunition, helicopters and all the things we needed to execute the war.

My point is this. When we send those men and women to war again—as sadly we will—we must think very seriously indeed in this place, “Have they got the kit to do the job we are asking them to do?” There is no point, months down the line, bleating, “Oh dear, they haven't got enough helicopters”—or ships, or whatever it is.

Let me end by saying exactly what my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling said. If we are going to send our brave men and women to war again—and they are incredibly brave—we must look at the Chilcot report and learn the lessons. I am not in the blame game; I was not here at the time so I did not vote, but for heaven's sake, let us think very carefully next time.

6.15 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I remember the events that we are discussing very well. They took place during my second Parliament as an MP,

and they were not really the sort of stuff that I thought I had come here for. I remember how seriously people in and around the House discussed the issues in the run-up to the vote. I recall intense debates with colleagues and friends both inside and outside Parliament and, of course, I recall friends coming to different conclusions. According to my recollection, no one treated the issue lightly, and I do not think there is anyone who does not regret the loss of life. However, as one of those who were here at the time, and as someone who voted for the war, I take the view that we must all take some of the responsibility. We must bear some collective responsibility.

The only Cabinet resignation that I recall was that of the late Robin Cook. All the others stood firm and stayed on board, so they had a collective responsibility as well. While I understand that some folk are desperate to pin all this on one man, it is hard to see how that stands up in those circumstances. Of course there are legitimate criticisms and lessons to be learned, and I certainly accept the point about “sofa” versus Cabinet government, but Lord Turnbull actually said that he was talking about a style of government, and he also said in evidence that it was a “professional forum” and he was not talking about a bunch of advisers and cronies getting together. He was very clear about that, but it was not the impression that was given earlier.

Obviously one of the big lessons is about intelligence. I acknowledge that the Government have taken a significant step forward in that regard, but it is appalling to think that M16 knew that one of its principal sources of intelligence was a fraud, and chose not to share that with the Government before the vote. We should never let that sort of thing happen again. As for war planning and post-invasion planning, and what we have just heard about equipment, there are clear lessons to be learned, but they are not just lessons for politicians. They are lessons for intelligence officers, for the Ministry of Defence, and for senior military figures.

Part of the purpose of the Chilcot report is to enable us all to learn lessons. The tragedy is that if it is reduced simply to an attempt to pin it all on one man, we will not learn many lessons. If, after 13 years, the best outcome is a contempt motion, where will we end up? Will we end up back here saying, “What about the late Baroness Thatcher? We have found out some more details about the Belgrano”—or the Gibraltar assassinations—“so let us table a motion on that”? Will we end up saying that the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) should be hauled back because of some new revelation, or apparent revelation, about Libya? I do not think that that is what we should be trying to do.

I recognise that Tony Blair is a Marmite figure, but we did have a parliamentary vote to go to war. It was not all down to him. Nowhere in the report does Chilcot accuse him of misleading Parliament, and I really do not think that we should use this House to try to settle old scores or enmities. We should be better than that. We need to recognise the risk that will be posed in the future, when there are difficult choices to be made, if we get this wrong. Real political leadership is not about settling scores, scoring points or addressing rallies; it is about taking really tough and difficult decisions. We should be very careful in our response to Chilcot, because if we get this wrong, we could put ourselves in a

[Steve McCabe]

situation where the new Prime Minister, and any future Prime Minister, will be frightened to make a brave decision.

It is possible to make a brave choice and make the wrong choice, and we all know with the benefit of hindsight that there are elements of the Iraq situation that we would deal with differently, but if we turn this into a simple exercise of trying to pin the blame on one man in order to settle longstanding scores, we will do nothing to advance our ability to deal with difficult conflict situations in the future. This House needs to be bigger than that.

6.20 pm

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), a colleague on the Work and Pensions Committee.

In six minutes I will not be able to do justice to 2.6 million words delivered just seven days ago, but I want to draw three reflections from what I have read over the last week and what I have studied over the last several years.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak spoke about a brave choice but the wrong choice. I do not want the substance of my remarks to be what the former Prime Minister did; I want to focus on what Government must do differently next time. The lessons of Chilcot need to be absorbed across the whole of Government. There are massive issues in terms of the deference to the US and the assumptions made about what was happening when in fact it was not. There was a misunderstanding about the reality on the ground and an abuse of process in the way the decision was made.

We have got to get this right. I acknowledge what the outgoing Prime Minister has said on the establishment of the National Security Council, the national security adviser, and the creation of a conflict, stability and security fund. Those are sensible measures to try and mitigate the risks around a decision being made at the behest of our largest and most powerful ally. But what actually happened back in 2002 and 2003 was the abuse by a Prime Minister of the processes of government, by moving the decision more quickly without presenting the evidence clearly. As Members of Parliament, we want to be able to say that we make decisions in the knowledge of all the information that we should reasonably have at our disposal. It is imperative that we make decisions in that way in the future.

We need to resist making decisions before the evaluation of the implications has been completed. I do not say I could have known exactly what was going to happen and therefore would have made a different decision from that the House collectively made in 2003. The media will always focus on atrocities and the risks associated with not acting, and there will always be a short-term risk to lives, but the danger is that if we do not commission officials to systematically evaluate the different options, incorporating a detailed analysis, as Chilcot's summary says, and look at the capabilities we have before making a decision, we are not putting ourselves in the best place to make the decision in the right way. It seems to me that the collective view is likely

to be optimistic. We can always be persuaded in the face of the authority of Government to move forward at their urgings, and unless we have that evidence presented to us, we will not be in the position to do so.

The most striking conclusion of the Chilcot report for me is the lack of preparation for what came after. In 2014-15, I had the privilege of doing the Royal College of Defence Studies senior course, alongside senior officers. When I spoke to them privately, they confirmed there had been no expectation that Saddam would be toppled as quickly as he was, and no understanding of what would be required afterwards. The Chilcot summary states:

“UK officials recognised that occupying forces would not remain welcome for long”.

It also states that

“the best possible appreciation of the theatre of operations, including the political, cultural and ethnic background”

was a “fundamental element” of “vital importance” which was “lacking”.

There seems to have been a complete failure on the part of the Government, as well as a complete lack of collective analysis by our military, our intelligence services and our politicians, in not asking really searching questions, given the obvious challenges relating to culture and religious history and the social problems that would inevitably be unlocked as a consequence of the lack of government following the fall of Saddam. The failure to carry out that analysis or to establish a credible plan was the real failing, and that must never be allowed to happen again. Having had a week to reflect on this, I believe that Governments must behave differently. I welcome the changes that have taken place, including the fact that Ministries now work more closely together, but we cannot allow a Prime Minister to wield such authority again without a degree of scrutiny of the detail. Information must be made available more widely to the House.

6.26 pm

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): As my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) said earlier, Sir John Chilcot's extensive report provides a comprehensive and detailed analysis of one of the most shameful and disgraceful failures of British foreign policy. Sir John quite rightly points a finger squarely at the former Prime Minister Tony Blair, who he says led the United Kingdom into a war in Iraq

“before the peaceful options for disarmament had been exhausted.”

There cannot be a more damning set of words than that among the 2.5 million words of Sir John's report. Tony Blair stands accused: while peace was still an option, he as the British Prime Minister chose war. And why? Because he had promised his friend George Bush that he would. The revelation of the memo saying

“I will be with you, whatever”

exposes Mr. Blair's desire to help President Bush to achieve regime change in Iraq as the primary motivating force behind the invasion—an invasion, as we have heard oft times this afternoon, that cost the lives of 179 British service personnel and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians.

In his report, Sir John makes it clear that there were the makings of a dirty deal to pursue regime change in Iraq as far back as 2001. So from the very outset of this

calamitous misadventure, it appears that Tony Blair was more concerned with presentation, and with having and maintaining influence in the White House, than with doing what he should have been doing—that is, meticulously preparing and planning to ensure that UK service personnel would have the best equipment and the best possible intelligence ahead of an invasion. He singularly failed to do that, and today Tony Blair stands accused of overseeing a complete failure in military planning that left our armed forces vulnerable and with insufficient equipment, once the invasion was under way. Despite his knowing since December 2001 that war was an almost inevitable consequence of his deal with President Bush, there were still serious equipment shortfalls when war came in early 2003. Exactly one week before the invasion took place, it transpired that the new desert kit would not be ready in time, and our troops left for Iraq with insufficient body armour and ammunition. The shortfall of desert equipment amounted to 18,300 suits and 12,500 pairs of boots. That is absolutely shocking.

Even before a shot had been fired in Iraq, our service personnel had been badly let down by their Government's abject failure to plan properly for a conflict they had long known was going to occur. Worse—much worse—was to come once the immediate invasion was over. The lack of a post-invasion strategy once Saddam Hussein's army had been defeated meant that British troops were woefully unprepared to operate in a country that was descending into chaos and anarchy. That was to have disastrous consequences for many, including the soldiers of the Black Watch.

The Chilcot report reveals that on 21 October 2004 Tony Blair misled his own Cabinet on the risk of deploying the regiment to north Babil—an area known as the “triangle of death”. Cabinet minutes show that Blair told his Cabinet that

“the danger to which they”—

the Black Watch—

“would be exposed was not qualitatively different from that which they had experienced to date in their current tour.”

However, we now know that Mr Blair had received intelligence that very same day warning that north Babil would be

“more hostile to a UK presence than the population in Southern Iraq”

and that

“the presence of UK forces will attract insurgent attacks.”

Sir Kevin Tebbit, the then permanent under-secretary at the Ministry of Defence, had already warned that

“there would be a casualty issue”

for the Black Watch. How sadly prophetic those words were. On 5 November 2004, three Black Watch soldiers—Sergeant Stuart Gray, aged 31 from Dunfermline, Private Paul Lowe, aged 19 from Fife, and Private Scott McArdle, aged 22 from Glenrothes—were killed and eight of their colleagues injured.

It is abundantly clear from the report that there was absolutely no proper plan to win the war or to secure the peace. One of the report's key findings is that although it appears that Mr Blair understood the importance of securing peace, he did not seek assurances from the US President and did not make such a plan a condition of our involvement. Sir John makes it clear

that as Iraq descended into absolute chaos neither DFID nor the Foreign Office was willing, prepared or equipped to accept responsibility for reconstruction. Had there been a plan, the future would have been markedly different. The humanitarian crisis we have seen since could have been avoided and a fertile recruiting ground for extremists would not have emerged from the chaos. It was the failure to plan that put the lives of many of our servicemen and women in such grave danger. The country remains a hotbed of extremism to this day. Lessons have to be learned from the shambles that was the Iraq war. People have to be called to account for their actions and we can never allow this to happen again.

6.32 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): No one doubts that Saddam was a brutal tyrant, but few would now dispute that the Iraq invasion was the biggest foreign policy failure of recent times. The Chilcot report provides detailed confirmation that military intervention was by no means a last resort, that all other avenues were not exhausted, that Iraq posed no immediate threat to the UK and, crucially, that hindsight was not necessary to see those things.

There has been talk in the House that a contempt motion may come forward next week. If one does, I will support it, because I believe that Tony Blair was responsible for fixing evidence around a policy while telling us that he was doing the opposite. In so doing, he was treating his office, the Cabinet, this House and our constitutional checks and balances with disrespect amounting to contempt.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), who is no longer in his place, said that this process should not be about settling old scores, and I want to assure him that it is not; it is about Parliament doing its job properly. It is not about making a future Prime Minister afraid of taking difficult decisions; it is about ensuring that any future decisions are taken without misleading this House and with a full debate and Cabinet discussion. It is right to hold the former Prime Minister to account, but we must not lose sight of the fact that our political system allowed him to behave as he did. Chilcot reveals failures both systemic and parliamentary that allowed the former Prime Minister to act like a President.

Let me give just one example of those failures. Chilcot found that Parliament endorsed

“a decision to invade and occupy a sovereign nation”

without UN authority, and that it happened despite the fact that FCO legal advisers were clear in their view that the war was not legal. Lord Goldsmith, who as Attorney General constitutionally had the last word and had raised concerns in 2002, was, in Chilcot's word, “prevented” from actively advising on the key UN resolution 1441. The Attorney General's advice 11 days before the vote remained that it was not safe to say that the war was legal, yet a week later he had changed his mind, because the Prime Minister had assured him that Iraq had committed further “material breaches” of resolution 1441. Despite seven years of forensic investigation, Sir John Chilcot tells us that he cannot find the grounds that Tony Blair relied upon when he made that assurance. What is recorded is that Blair did not request, nor did he receive, considered advice on his view. That in itself is an appalling disregard for due process and must never

[Caroline Lucas]

be allowed to happen again. We must amend our system so that the Attorney General is an independent legal expert and not a political appointee of the Prime Minister.

Let us also reflect on Parliament's role. How did Members of Parliament come to vote for this terrible folly? We had a chronic and abject failure of the official Opposition. The Tories, with a few very honourable exceptions, simply abandoned the job. The job of opposition was left to the smaller parties and the 139 Labour Back Benchers who opposed the motion to go to war. Time and again we have heard in this House the defence that MPs voted for the war "in good faith", but MPs are not elected to show good faith; they are elected to show good judgment, based on the evidence. One way to help to guard against this happening in the future would be to replace the royal prerogative on war with a new constitutional convention that includes the idea that votes on war are not subject to party whipping. If that had been the case, more Members might have engaged their own judgment rather than allowing themselves to be taken along on trust.

Although Chilcot does not judge the former Prime Minister's guilt or innocence, he does bring out themes that I believe support a charge of contempt of Parliament. Let me focus on just one of those. Chilcot shows that a key example of the former Prime Minister fixing evidence around policy was a phone call with George Bush on 12 March 2003. In that call, Blair and Bush agreed to publicly pretend to continue to seek a second UN resolution, knowing that it would not happen, and then to blame France for preventing it. Chilcot reveals that Tony Blair then did two misleading things. He told his Cabinet the next day that work continued in the UN to obtain a second resolution and that the outcome remained open, even though that was not the case. He also went on to repeat a deliberate misrepresentation of the French position, both at Prime Minister's questions on 12 March and in his key parliamentary statement on 18 March—he even included it in the war motion before the House.

In short, the French position was for more time for the weapons inspectors, but with war as an explicit possibility. The former Prime Minister kept taking out of context phrases from an interview by President Chirac given on 10 March, saying that they showed that France would veto a resolution in any circumstances. That was clearly not true, and Chilcot shows that it was not true. The French kept correcting Blair, but Blair instructed Jack Straw, in Chilcot's words, to "concede nothing". Clearly that was because he needed to continue the misrepresentation of France to provide cover for his failure to get UN support for the war.

Then we come to the gross misrepresentation of Iraq as a growing threat to the region and the country. Tony Blair said that Saddam's weapons programme was "active, detailed and growing", and that the intelligence showing that was extensive, detailed and authoritative. Yet the Joint Intelligence Committee had said just six months earlier:

"Intelligence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction...and...missile programmes is sporadic and patchy."

Even just two months before that, Jack Straw had written to Blair warning of "weak intelligence", and the Butler report tells us that the intelligence between July

and September was "unproven". Over and over again, Tony Blair misled this House, and it is our right to hold him to account.

6.39 pm

Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (Ind): I have visited Iraq recently, and I visited a country in economic meltdown because of the ongoing conflict in both Iraq and Syria. Iraq is still riven by religious sectarianism, led by what has been described to me as a corrupt and patriarchal family looting the country of its assets and getting rich on its hard-won natural resources. It is a country that has fought and is still losing against al-Qaeda, and that is now in the thrall of Daesh, which has crossed the border into Syria. It is a country where more than 200 people died in a car bomb two weeks ago with barely a mention in this place. Where are the half-mast flags? Where is the Iraqi anthem at football games?

Mr Speaker: Order. My apologies to the hon. Lady, but I should have done her the courtesy of telling her what I think she knows, which is that the time limit is now four minutes.

Natalie McGarry: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am going through my speech quickly.

Where is the collective grief? Are we so inured to Iraqi deaths? Iraq is a country that cannot control its own borders; a country where its own people—the Yazidis—were, by most accounts, abandoned by Iraqi Government forces and left to Daesh; a country where men and boys were murdered and women and girls raped and passed into sexual slavery. That is the reality of modern, post-invasion Iraq. Is it better or worse than the Saddam regime? It would be entirely careless to speculate, as both are too horrendous to contemplate, and we should not have had to.

When the US and the UK planned for war—and they did indeed plan—peace should have been their objective, but damningly, Chilcot shows that it was the only objective that they did not plan for. I have heard many Members use the attacks against the Kurds as justification for the war on Iraq in 2003. The appalling attack on Halabja and Saddam's use of chemical weapons on about 5,000 Kurds took place in 1988. The UK is alleged, with strong evidence—and the US too—to have continued to trade weapons to Iraq up to 1991. Then there was the first Gulf war. If enforcing regime change was ever appropriate or legal, that was the opportunity to do so with international support, yet the UK and the US allowed the brutal regime and dictatorship of Saddam Hussain to continue.

This House recently supported airstrikes on Syria, on flimsy evidence at best of 70,000 moderate ground forces actively opposing Daesh forces—the most active of them being the Kurdish YPJ and the YPG—yet it consistently fails to support my calls and those of others that the PYD of Rojava, the Kurds, should be given a place at peace talks on the future of Syria. Where is the support for the Kurds who are at the frontline of the battle against Daesh? It is hypocrisy.

The decision to go to war should be the most seriously contended proposition in this place. It should be the most rigorously tested, with every facet and every piece of intelligence investigated and every ramification explored.

Chilcot has eventually exposed the myth about what happened, but a close look at the facts would have revealed the evidence to be flawed.

When this place sends men and women to war without adequate resources, sending some of them into perilous danger ill equipped and improperly attired, there is collective guilt. When the result of that decision is the death of soldiers serving their country and the indiscriminate deaths of innocent civilians—directly or indirectly caused by our military actions—the responsibility for that lies here, in this place, which should have more rigorously challenged the then Prime Minister and the intelligence that was presented.

The cost of the Iraq war is far greater than the £9 billion that the UK Government spent on the conflict. It is the 179 dead British service personnel, the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians killed, the 1 million people displaced and the destabilisation of the middle east, the consequences of which we can see to this day.

We can all profess to regret what happened—indeed, I am sure that everyone does—but if lessons are not learned and we do not correct the collective arrogance that has meant thumbing our nose at the UN and at international partners, mocking them, deriding them and ignoring them, we will repeat the mistakes of the past and the loss of those lives will be even more in vain.

6.43 pm

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): I rise today to speak on behalf of the family of Sapper Robert Thompson. He was a 22-year-old Royal Engineer from West Lothian and the 58th British soldier killed in the Iraq war. Robert was a member not only of my constituency, but of my extended family. Like so many families of injured or killed soldiers, his mother, Margaret Valentine, and the rest of his family have had to endure a horrific ordeal: the death of Robert; a six-year civil litigation against the Ministry of Defence to clear his name of fault; and now the publication of this report, which they advise me leaves them feeling that Robert died in a war that should never have been started. In all the machinations, reportage and criticism, we must remember those who were injured or killed in the Iraq war and the impact that the timescale of this report and its coverage will be having on them.

Margaret described her son as always being at the heart of jokes, keeping his comrades in high spirits and never one to complain. His uncle, Mark, who is my cousin, told me recently:

“He took the Queen’s shilling, knew he had a job to do and absolutely loved his work.”

The family had regular phone calls from Robert when he was deployed. Although he was always upbeat, Mark and his wife Lis, who played a significant role in his upbringing, told me how often he complained about inadequate equipment and exposure to unnecessary danger. In particular, Robert worried that his body armour was too short. “Always long in the back” was how his mum Margaret described him, and the fact that his armour regularly bruised his ribs and did not cover his kidneys was a major concern for her.

Robert’s death in 2004 was initially declared by the Ministry of Defence to be an accident, and the MOD claimed that it was his own fault. On Robert’s fourth tour of duty in Iraq, he suffocated at the bottom of a

collapsed trench while trying to replace a floating pontoon. The court reported that the Ministry of Defence had performed no risk assessment in relation to the work that he was tasked with. To get to the truth, Margaret endured six years in court against the Ministry of Defence. It was finally confirmed in 2010 that Sapper Thompson had fallen into an unguarded trench with walls that lacked supports. Lord Bonomy apportioned 80% of the blame for the accident to the MOD and 20% to Robert. Margaret commented at the time:

“It has taken six years and it was never, ever about the money. My laddie died a horrific death. He struggled to get out, but couldn’t. It was about getting here—a judge ruling that there was negligence. It was totally unsafe work and there was no regard for his safety. I always knew he never entered the trench of his own volition.”

Margaret’s solicitor, Patrick McGuire of Thompsons, said that he regarded the accident as “one of the worst examples of a complete disregard for health and safety” that he had seen in his career. A further point that I plan to take up with whoever is the next Defence Secretary is that, according to Robert’s mum, soldiers such as Robert have had their pension retained by the MOD because of a change in legislation, because they died before August 2004. The fact that those soldiers’ pensions are being retained by the MOD is a matter of shame, and I hope that it will look again at the issue.

Robert’s death and the MOD’s reaction reflect the Government’s unpreparedness, short-sightedness and lack of willingness to ensure that our soldiers had the equipment and direction necessary to undertake operations. Sir John Chilcot notes:

“It was not clear which person or department within the Ministry of Defence was responsible for...capability gaps”.

That leads Robert’s family and other families to wonder where the foresight, negotiation and planning were, not to mention the fact that those operations were guided by a foggy strategy to begin with.

My extended family have lost their son and nephew. They have undergone six years in court to understand the truth behind the circumstances. Now, like so many families, they relive his death once more with the release of the Chilcot report. Let us ensure that neither the families’ suffering nor the soldiers’ sacrifice is forgotten. Let us carry these lessons with us in the story of Sapper Robert Thompson.

6.47 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): On Remembrance Day 2007 I attended a ceremony in Glenrothes that none of us ever thought we would have to attend: the unveiling of a war memorial in a town that did not exist at the end of the second world war. The memorial has two names on it—those of Private Marc Ferns, aged 21, and Private Scott McArdle, 22. They were let down by their country. They were sent into an illegal war that was not an act of last resort, and they were sent in without the equipment that they were entitled to have to protect them from enemy attack.

I believe that the Chilcot report establishes those facts beyond doubt. It does not bring those two soldiers back—nothing can bring them back—but Chilcot finally establishes facts that some wanted to keep hidden. It starts to give answers to the families. We need to decide on our response, and part of our early response should

[Peter Grant]

be for this House of Commons to apologise for the dreadful error of judgment that our predecessors in this place made, which cost so many young lives.

There must also be a proper holding to account of those who were responsible, whose conduct has been brought into the full glare of the Chilcot report. It is not about one person; it is about 179 people. It is not about witch hunts or settling old scores, as was ridiculously suggested earlier. It is about applying the principle that nobody, but nobody, is above the law, and that if those in positions of responsibility betray that responsibility, there will be no hiding place from justice.

I do not have time to highlight the specific parts of the executive summary that I believe point unerringly to the conclusion that former Prime Minister Tony Blair deliberately and persistently misled his Cabinet, misled his Government, misled this House and misled the people of these islands, not about whether he believed that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, but about whether he cared that those weapons of mass destruction existed. He was never interested in a war to disarm; he was only ever interested in a war to achieve regime change. He was acting in support of the policies and interests of a foreign power, even when those were incompatible with the stated policies and objectives of Her Majesty's Government.

It is not correct to talk about the previous Prime Minister committing war crimes, but there is an argument for saying he was in contempt of this House. However, his conduct, had it been carried out by a diplomat, would have led to a trial for treason. It is unthinkable that, simply because he was Prime Minister, he should somehow be immune to any further investigation. It is simply not good enough that he should be allowed to walk away with nothing more than a half-hearted apology and expression of regret.

Even the motion that the House of Commons approved on 18 March 2003 said nothing about regime change. Even at that point, the former Prime Minister was keeping up the pretence; he was arguing about weapons of mass destruction when what he was interested in was overthrowing the regime of Saddam Hussein. The only conclusion I can form is that Tony Blair's actions were dishonest and misleading from the beginning. As a result, these islands went to a war they should never have taken part in.

Marc Ferns, Scott McArdle and 177 others went to that war and will never come home. We owe it to their memory—we owe it to their families—to make sure that those responsible have the case against them tested in a court of law.

6.51 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I, too, want to confine my observations to the lack of military planning and the lack of equipment provided to our service personnel in Iraq.

Page 127 of the executive summary of the Iraq inquiry says:

“The MOD was slow in responding to the developing threat in Iraq from Improvised Explosive Devices...The range of protected mobility options available to commanders...was limited. Although work had begun before 2002 to source an additional PPV”—

protected patrol vehicle—

“it was only ordered in July 2006 following Ministerial intervention.”

Royal Highland Fusilier Gordon Gentle, who was 19 years old, died in a Snatch Land Rover that was destroyed by a roadside bomb, or IED. He volunteered for the position of top cover—looking out from the top of that vulnerable vehicle. The vehicle travelled from Basra towards the Kuwaiti border—a route dubbed “IED alley” by some soldiers. If the vehicle had been fitted with an electronic jammer—known as an Element B—that device would have blocked the radio signals controlling insurgents' roadside bombs. Gordon Gentle could still be alive today if that had happened.

Those vehicles were inferior to the replacement Mastiffs, which arrived in the conflict zone two and a half years later. The Snatch Land Rover was not the vehicle that should have been used, when people were constantly trying to blow them up. When Gordon Gentle was killed, the lessons were not learned. Why it took so long for those vehicles to be replaced should be investigated.

Gordon's mother is Rose Gentle, who has campaigned vigorously to get answers from this inquiry. She wrote to me last night, and she asked me to read this out:

“As a mother that lost her son in the Iraq war I am disgusted and shocked at the way Tony Blair took us into Iraq. He misled Parliament and he misled the whole country. He should be held in contempt. Let the people of the country who vote know that their feelings and their voice matter. Mr Blair cannot be allowed to walk away while military families suffer.”

I concur with those remarks. Rose Gentle has done tremendous work for charities such as Soldiers Off The Street. As I said earlier, she was in London last week to hear the results of the Iraq inquiry.

I support the calls by my right hon. and hon. Friends for Tony Blair to be held to account. However, in addition, it is important that the state issue a formal apology to those who lost loved ones for failing to equip them and for failing to enable them to defend themselves.

6.54 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): We now know that the decision to go to war in Iraq was wrong—not just flawed but utterly wrong. This place was misled; not everyone was fooled, but sufficient to sway the vote. Meanwhile, across the UK, 1.5 million people marched in protest against the war. Their cumulative voice was drowned out by a single voice and its abuse of power. Tony Blair said that those who marched against the war would have “blood on their hands.” I do not know one single person who marched against this war who regrets their action, while apparently Mr Blair now regrets his. One hundred and seventy-nine British servicemen and women, along with 24 British civilians, were killed; and let us never forget the tens of thousands—hundreds of thousands—of civilians in Iraq who were killed, the 1.25 million orphans this war created, and the destruction of buildings and decimation of communities. The outcome was to radicalise a generation of angry, grieving Iraqis whose lives we turned upside down.

All based on what? There was no evidence of WMD. There was no evidence of Iraq having links to al-Qaeda. Evidence of contact between Iraq and Osama bin Laden was “fragmentary and uncorroborated”. However, Tony Blair still felt fine telling his pal, George W. Bush,

“I will be with you, whatever.”

How did we wage this war? We did as we always do—we sent in our troops with “wholly inadequate military equipment”. This was not new. We had known for years that we had poor vehicles and a lack of body armour. Equipment was identified in 2001 to

“not work well in hot and dusty conditions...The MoD had insufficient desert combat suits and desert boots for all personnel...Standard issue boots were unsuitable for the task; 4 Armoured Brigade’s post-exercise report cited melting boots and foot rot as ‘a major issue’.”

What do we do for those who lost loved ones? We make them wait 13 years for answers. How well do we look after the welfare of those who returned? Appallingly.

On Monday, we will vote to spend hundreds of billions of pounds on weapons of mass destruction while campaign veterans are sleeping rough in towns and cities across the UK. Many more are physically or psychologically damaged, left by us without the support network they require. When will we put in place a package for our service personnel that looks after their long-term welfare? When will we ensure that everyone leaving the armed forces does so with a qualification or skill that will stand them in good stead for the rest of their lives?

In truth, so many mistakes were made that 2.6 million words are probably not enough. I will finish with a quote from a father who lost a son—a quote that is intelligent, informed, and dignified. Roger Bacon, whose 34-year-old son Matthew was killed by a roadside bomb in Basra in 2005, said:

“Never again must so many mistakes be allowed to sacrifice British lives and lead to the destruction of a country for no positive end.

We were proud when our husbands, sons and daughters signed up to serve our country. But we cannot be proud of the way our government has treated them.

We must use this report to make sure that all parts of the Iraq War fiasco are never repeated again. Neither in a theatre of war, nor in the theatre of Whitehall.

We call on the British Government immediately to follow up Sir John’s findings to ensure that the political process by which our country decides to go to war is never again twisted and confused with no liability for such actions.”

Mr Speaker: Order. Before I put the Question, I thank colleagues for their stoicism and their succinctness. I would like particularly to thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for his typical understanding

and good grace. He was not heard today, by way of a speech, but he will be heard tomorrow, and of that he can rest assured.

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—(*George Hollingbery.*)

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

That the draft Telecommunications Restriction Orders (Custodial Institutions) (England and Wales) Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 24 May, be approved.—(*George Hollingbery.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ATOMIC ENERGY AND RADIOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

That the draft Nuclear Industries Security (Amendment) Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 26 May, be approved.—(*George Hollingbery.*)

The Speaker’s opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 20 July (Standing Order No. 41A).

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No 118(6)),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft Tees Valley Combined Authority (Election of Mayor) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 13 June, be approved.—(*George Hollingbery.*)

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 18 July, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to the UK’s nuclear deterrent not later than 10.00pm; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*George Hollingbery.*)

Tay Cities Deal

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*George Hollingbery.*)

7 pm

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): City deals have played a vital role in the economic revival of many urban areas throughout Scotland. Four city deal initiatives have so far been approved, and Dundee and the surrounding areas is the only major city region in Scotland yet to receive one. Draft plans have been submitted and the detail is under way. However, since the EU referendum, the Tay cities deal has been thrown into uncertainty, which is why I have called for this debate.

In August 2014, the Glasgow city region deal was the first Scottish city deal to be delivered, and it will be worth more than £1 billion over the next 20 years. Half of the funding for it was met by the Scottish Government. It has been followed by deals in both Aberdeen and Inverness, and 75% of the funding for the Aberdeen city deal was raised by the Scottish Government.

The 2016 Budget included an announcement that the UK Government would open negotiations with the Scottish Government for a further city deal for Edinburgh and south-east Scotland. Dundee and Perth are, therefore, the last major city regions awaiting approval.

Cities have been invited to see themselves as catalysts for regional development, and to construct proposals that are based not merely within their city boundary, but across their functional economic area, thereby providing a crucial boost to rural economies.

That brings me to my constituency. Dundee has, of course, taken the lead in co-ordinating an outline proposal for a city regional deal based on two cities—Dundee and the fair city of Perth—and the strategic towns of St Andrews in North East Fife and of Arbroath, Montrose and Forfar in Angus are diverse areas all linked by the River Tay. This is probably the largest population area in the UK mainland that is still awaiting a city deal. Our city region encompasses a population of almost 500,000 and represents 10% of Scotland's population.

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): My hon. Friend mentioned a number of major cities in Scotland, but he neglected to mention Stirling, which also wants a city deal and faces similar uncertainty as a result of recent events. I hope that he will support Stirling, as well as the fair city of Dundee.

Chris Law: Absolutely. I apologise for not mentioning the wonderful city of Stirling. I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend. I would love confirmation that Stirling will also be seriously considered for a future city deal.

The powerful collaboration is made up of four local authorities—the kingdom of Fife, the ancient seat of Angus, the fair city of Perth and Kinross, and Scotland's sunniest city, Dundee—along with public agencies such as Scottish Enterprise, VisitScotland, Skills Development Scotland, the chambers of commerce, a wide cross-section of private sector businesses and the four universities in the Tay cities area.

The Tay cities economy is diverse, ranging from agriculture, forestry and public administration to high-tech engineering, life sciences research and development,

tourism and, last but not least, the creative industries, in which video game production plays a huge part. It is also the headquarters or the major base of several of the leading 100 companies in the FTSE 100, including Scottish Southern Energy, GlaxoSmithKline, Diageo, Aviva and Stagecoach. The region is intersected by main road and rail transport corridors linking northern Scotland with the central belt and the rest of the UK. The Tay cities area, therefore, accounts for almost 7% of Scotland's total economic output, and has enormous potential for growth.

The Tay cities partnership bid represents a balance between infrastructure, investment and a number of transformational and collaborative initiatives focused on the devolvement of powers and budgets to create new employment opportunities. Connectivity is a central theme in the Tay cities proposal. The Tay cities region is at the heart of Scotland, and is strategically located between the central belt and Aberdeen and Inverness. However, there is an issue of relative remoteness that needs to be addressed by significant investment in key road, rail and air connections with the rest of Scotland, the UK, Europe and beyond.

Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): My hon. Friend will be aware that, in Angus, the Scottish Government are putting serious money into dealing with, for example, the problems with the rail line. The Tay cities deal, if it comes together, would be a huge economic boost for Angus, as well as for Dundee.

Chris Law: I concur with my hon. Friend. In fact, £200 million has been invested in the rail link between Dundee and Aberdeen. To add to that, the recent link by air to Amsterdam has been wholly welcomed, and is a major boost for the Tay cities region.

Digital connectivity is of equal importance to physical connections. Businesses now look to locate where they can receive a broadband service with the highest possible speeds and capacity. Dundee and Perth are both planning to invest heavily in their fibre networks and in related smart city technologies. To take a small example, of the last three businesses that I have been involved in, from tourism to film and media, and latterly, financial services, all were hugely dependent on broadband.

A successful Tay cities deal will play a vital part in ensuring the fulfilment of the massive potential of the skilled workforce of the Tay cities region. It is not so long ago, when I was growing up in the 1980s in Dundee, that the UK Government appeared hellbent on destroying manufacturing. Dundee paid a very high price for that. Owing to the destruction of jobs, industries and communities that took place in this period, Dundee still has a significant number of unemployed people or people in low-paid jobs. A similar pattern can be found in other towns and areas in the Tay cities region, and potential growth could be seriously held back by a lack of investment. In the Tay cities area, employment growth per year falls short of the Scottish average. Inequality is the single biggest challenge facing our region and, without a strategic approach, the gap between our wealthiest and poorest citizens will continue to grow.

However, the good news is that Dundee is now on the up. My city is a dynamic place and one of diversity, steeped in history, culture and industry. It boasts two universities, Dundee and Abertay; a fantastic art school,

the Duncan of Jordanstone; a further education college; and cultural landmarks such as the Dundee Repertory Theatre, the Gardyne Theatre and the Dundee Contemporary Arts centre. We have a world-renowned reputation for life sciences, and Ninewells is one of the largest teaching hospitals in Europe. My constituency is also an internationally renowned centre for video game development, which I have mentioned, and the birthplace of some of the biggest names in game history. Lastly, in 2014 we were recognised as the UK's first UNESCO City of Design for our diverse contributions to the fields that I have mentioned.

This is all good, but Dundee is not resting on its laurels. We are in the midst of a £1 billion master plan to regenerate and reconnect the waterfront to the city centre. Of all the cities in the UK, Dundee was chosen to build the first Victoria and Albert Museum outside of London, which will open in 2018 and is expected to bring hundreds of thousands of new visitors each year to Dundee and the surrounding areas. The waterfront redevelopment has been a turning point for regeneration in Dundee, and a city deal would ensure that further progress was made in developing Dundee into a modern and important economic centre for Scotland. It is believed that the deal could have an impact on Dundee that is 10 times greater than the waterfront development currently under way.

The Scottish Government have a strong record of delivering for Dundee. We have received over £100 million through the cities growth fund, in conjunction with Scottish Enterprise, for our waterfront regeneration. As I mentioned, we are also set to benefit from a £200 million investment to improve rail links between Dundee and Aberdeen. By comparison, we have received £5 million so far from the UK Government. The Scottish Government are very supportive of city deals and have made it absolutely clear that they will work with any Scottish city considering a deal to make a strong, joint approach to the UK Government. I have touched on this already, but let us see a renewed commitment from the UK Government to seriously consider a more generous proportion of funding for the Tay cities deal.

It is not just Dundee that is seeking clarification on the city deal: North East Fife, the home of golf and of Scotland's first seat of learning—the University of St Andrews, my alma mater, where I learned with great appreciation the history of my nation—seeks reassurances, as does the wider community. So too does the fair city of Perth—my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) is here tonight—where we find Scone Abbey, home of the Stone of Destiny where the king of the Scots was crowned. Last but not least, reassurance is needed for Angus, the birthplace of Scotland, where the signing of the declaration of Arbroath at Arbroath Abbey in 1320 marked Scotland's establishment as an independent nation.

Mike Weir: Does my hon. Friend welcome the fact that only last week, UNESCO awarded the declaration of Arbroath “memory of the world” status in recognition of its importance in the development of democracy?

Chris Law: In a simple word, absolutely.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): My hon. Friend is absolutely right to talk about the Tay cities deal in such terms, because it takes in two great

cities: the brand new city of Perth and the city of Dundee. The city deal must succeed because of its geographical spread, and I am sure that he will encourage the Minister to make sure that that happens.

Chris Law: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention; what he has just said is important. Early discussions with Government officials and Ministers have been very positive, and those who are working on the Tay cities deal are working hard to assemble the detail of how it will make a difference to lives throughout our region. A full-time, dedicated city deal team, assembled from across the regions, is responsible for putting forward a clear and considered deal proposal to the Scottish and UK Governments to bring in at least £400 million of new investment.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a fantastic speech, as per normal. In terms of who will benefit from the deal, I know that he would not wish to miss out Perth and Kinross-shire. Will he take this opportunity to request that the UK Government come good on their promises of support and do not leave it all to the Scottish Government, as has happened previously?

Chris Law: I have to agree. It is important that a generous offer is made towards a Tay cities deal—which includes, of course, Perth and Kinross—in the very near future.

The team that has been put together is learning lessons from the city deals that have been developed so far, and as we know, a draft bid is already with the UK Government. By working in partnership, and by working better, faster and more effectively, we will build Dundee and the surrounding areas for the long term, future-proofing for generations to come.

However, it pains me to announce that the cities deal is in potential crisis. Just two months ago, I asked the Prime Minister in this Chamber during Prime Minister's questions to give me a personal commitment to work with the Scottish Government to deliver funding for the Tay cities deal. The Prime Minister's response was unequivocal:

“I am very happy to give that commitment.”—[*Official Report*, 11 May 2016; Vol. 609, c. 624.]

Where I come from, when someone gives their word, that means everything. In other words, Dundee is a radical town that does not mince its words.

However, as a result of this misguided EU referendum, which Scotland neither asked for nor wanted—a referendum with no plan whatsoever for the outcome, as a result of which we have seen the resignation of the previous Prime Minister and the arrival of a new one—there is huge uncertainty about many of the UK Government's commitments, and we now hear doubts being expressed over the Tay cities deal. Following the EU referendum, the Secretary of State for Scotland caused alarm when he told our Tay city-wide paper, *The Courier*, that the new Chancellor could have “a different outlook” on the commitment. Let us hope that that is not the case.

Not only that, but, at the earliest opportunity on returning to Parliament after the vote, I asked the former Prime Minister again in this House to reaffirm his backing and he refused to give an unequivocal answer, stating:

“I cannot bind the hands of my successor.”—[*Official Report*, 29 June 2016; Vol. 612, c. 320.]

[Chris Law]

To compound the confusion, I wrote to the Scotland Office to seek clarification, and the letter that I received only last Friday tells us it is “business as usual”. What are Dundee and the neighbouring communities supposed to believe? I am hoping that this evening the Minister will be able to give me an answer that is decisive, definitive and beyond any doubt, for the good people of Dundee and the surrounding areas.

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. I absolutely agree about the uncertainty that surrounds the Tay cities deal, and that applies to other city deals that are already in progress. My constituency is part of the Edinburgh and south-east Scotland city deal—and home to Newbattle Abbey, where the declaration of Arbroath was drafted—and we are very much looking forward to securing the funding that may come from the city deal. That uncertainty applies to a number of other deals as well.

Chris Law: That is an important point, and this is the key point on which we need clarification this evening. Not only Dundee, through the Tay cities deal, but cities such as Stirling and Edinburgh need an absolute cast-iron guarantee that the existing proposals will be fulfilled. It must be made clear that there are no doubts about them going forward.

The case for the Tay city deal is crystal clear. It is almost the last major region in Scotland yet to receive one, and I believe it would be a major injustice for that to be compromised on the grounds that the country now has a new Government with different priorities. At a time of economic uncertainty, the city deal programme is now more important than ever. I call on the Government to make a speedy affirmation of their support for this deal—and the others that have been mentioned tonight—so that many stakeholders can continue their crucial work on this vital project. The UK Government must provide an assurance that the outgoing Prime Minister’s commitment to the Tay city deal will be honoured.

7.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) on his contribution. When we started I was a little concerned that we were talking about Brexit and the referendum. I was asked to discuss the Government’s support for Stirling, and I thought that we might have ventured into a debate on a different matter. Although I am in a minority in the House at the moment—I was very much a supporter of the referendum—I recognise the case that colleagues who have concerns may wish to raise, and their right to hold a different view. I also commend the hon. Gentleman for the way he has approached this debate, because he provided a lot of information to the House about the deal and why he believes it is important. When the Government take decisions, it is important to look across the piece—particularly for city deals, which are relatively competitive because most areas want to secure one—and ensure that that strong case is made. I commend him for his work this evening, and previously, in that endeavour.

In 2011 the UK Government created the city deals programme that sought to agree a series of bespoke, placed-based policy and funding deals with localities. In total, 26 English city deals were agreed between 2011 and 2014. Recognising the success of those deals, the Government have expanded that programme to other parts of the United Kingdom, working with the Government in Scotland and the devolved Administration in Wales. In 2014 the Glasgow and Clyde Valley city deal was agreed. That was followed by further city deals in Wales and the Cardiff capital region, in Scotland in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, and in Inverness and the Highlands in 2016. At the 2016 Budget, the Chancellor announced that the Government were opening city deal negotiations with Edinburgh and Swansea Bay, and hoped that those would be concluded positively.

UK city deals are driven at local level, and it is for local authorities and their partners to take the initiative in leading and proposing bids to the Scottish and the UK Governments. Where support from hon. Members is forthcoming, that is doubly welcome and effective in making the case, as the hon. Gentleman has done this evening. The Government are committed to ensuring that all parts of our country have the tools and support to grow their local economies. As such, Ministers in the Scotland Office are keen to engage with cities or regions that have proposals to improve economic performance, which includes four city deals.

City deals in Scotland are tripartite. They involve the UK Government, the Scottish Government, and the local area from which they are usually, and should expect to be, driven—I have already referred to the deals made since 2014. Building on the significant progress already made, both Governments have made it clear that they are receptive to the idea of a Tay city deal. However, in the first instance it is for those local leaders to come together and develop an ambitious and credible city deal proposal, and subsequently to put that to the UK and Scottish Governments.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): The four local authorities involved have a draft bid, and all Members who represent Dundee, Perth, Perth and Kinross, and Angus are here tonight and backing this deal 100%.

James Wharton: That is indeed true and welcome, and the fact that that complete representation is here makes the case all the more powerfully. I want to send a positive message to those who wish to pursue this city deal. I want city deals to be delivered, and I believe they can help to grow local economies. Indeed, I have no doubt that those from the areas affected by such decisions know best how to drive economic growth and what is needed to unlock the undoubtedly significant potential, some of which the hon. Member for Dundee West has already alluded to. I want to find a way to unlock that growth, and to ensure that the UK Government play their part in doing that wherever possible.

On the deal we are here to discuss, I understand that my right hon. Friend Lord Dunlop met Dundee City Council and other potential business bid partners in Dundee on 16 May to discuss their ambitions. He also met leaders of Perth and Kinross Council, at a meeting of the Scottish Cities Alliance, in Inverness on 8 June. The Government are encouraged by the ambition and early thinking contained in the city deal overview that

local leaders have shared. It is a relatively high-level proposal. There is still work to be done on it, but it is very welcome that it has come forward. It highlights opportunities around investment, innovation, inclusive growth and internationalisation. It highlights some of the things the hon. Gentleman has spoken about this evening: connectivity, the need for investment, and the opportunities that exist in that area to drive economic growth. They will benefit the UK as a whole, as well as the people living specifically in those communities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland spoke with another bid partner, Dundee University, just last week. It is clear that partners are working hard and formulating ideas, but work still needs to be done. I recognise that the hon. Gentleman is seeking clarification and a commitment from the Government that we will continue with the process. I cannot put it any more clearly than this: I would like to see it successfully concluded. I would be happy—I know my colleagues in the Scotland Office would be enthusiastic, too—to work with hon. Members and local partners to see it delivered, if we can come up with the right proposal and the detail can be provided. If the figures stack up and the proposal works, it could be very good for the area the hon. Gentleman represents. Indeed, it would be good for the wider area represented in the House this evening and good for the UK.

The track record of city deals is a successful one. Significant local growth has been generated by listening to those who know what local economies need, and by recognising that different areas need different things and will want to focus on different priorities. They need support to do that effectively. The hon. Gentleman has made a very clear case. He and I have quite a different view on the UK's membership of the EU, but we share a common interest in driving growth and empowering people to make the best of the wonderful opportunities that exist in the diverse country we are here to represent. I am very happy to give the hon. Gentleman assurances to that effect. I am very happy to continue, for as long as I am in this position, to support the city deals programme, and to work with him and his colleagues to deliver it.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): Just a little update for the Minister, if Mr Speaker will indulge me: the

Chancellor has just resigned. Will the Minister be able to shed any light on whether city deals will even still be on the table?

James Wharton: I am not sure if that was a hint from the hon. Lady that I should be checking my phone and ensuring it is fully charged. I do not know what might follow.

This is a time of change and we have a new Prime Minister. There will be a new Chancellor, whoever that may be. The track record of city deals is that they have been shown to deliver growth and boost local economies. They have been welcomed across the House and across the political divide for those very reasons. I have no doubt that whoever is appointed Chancellor in due course will want to drive growth and empower communities to unlock the potential that undoubtedly exists in them. I cannot speak for whoever that might be more directly than that, but I can assure the hon. Lady that I share the broad sense of direction put before the House in the debate this evening.

We all want to see local people empowered to make the best of the communities in which they live. We all welcome agreement about how that can be done, particularly when it is cross-party. City deals have been a successful programme, one to which this Government have been firmly committed. I want to see the programme taken forward and more done with it. I am happy to join the hon. Lady, and any hon. Member, in making that case in due course, but I cannot go further than that, as I am sure she will appreciate, because my phone has not yet rung this evening.

I want to end on a positive note. The hon. Member for Dundee West has made a strong case. My right hon. and hon. Friends in the Scotland Office will be keen to follow the debate that has taken place this evening. They are following this matter very closely. I hope the city deal can be delivered for the people he and his colleagues represent. I am convinced that in the future the city deals programme will be looked back on as something that helped to drive growth right across the United Kingdom.

Question put and agreed to.

7.24 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 13 July 2016

[MRS CHERYL GILLAN *in the Chair*]

EU Referendum: UK Steel Industry

9.30 am

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the implications for the UK steel industry of the outcome of the EU referendum.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan. A number of Welsh Members are here today and, especially as you were previously the Secretary of State for Wales, I know you will take a keen interest in this debate.

Many of us have debated this subject in Westminster Hall and in the main Chamber many times, and we have tabled many questions. I lose track of the number of times that my colleagues and I have faced the Minister, but the facts remain the same. The steel industry faces immense challenges. There is a bright future for the industry, its workforce, its products and its role in our economy, but only if the Government take decisive action to respond to the challenges that the industry faces, which is even more important in the aftermath of the EU referendum. I argued a few weeks before the referendum that a vote to leave the EU would be a body blow to the industry, and I am sorry to say that the information I have had from producers, from UK Steel, from the Community union and from many others involved in the industry is that all the referendum has resulted in is yet more uncertainty and challenges for an industry that already faces significant difficulties.

The crucial question that I want the Minister to answer today, and indeed that many of my colleagues will be addressing, is this: what will the Government do differently—not only from their approach before the referendum, but in light of that decision—to offset the additional uncertainties, risks and challenges now facing the industry?

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. He poses a question about the additional uncertainty and the Government action that is required. Is he aware that, as part of the reaction to the uncertainty, south Yorkshire-based Speciality Steels will be sold, fast-tracked and separately, despite the pause on the sale of Tata's main strip business? He will have seen Monday's written statement from the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, which made no mention of whether the Government are willing to help on financing, energy costs or research and development support. One of the things we require from the Minister today is surely a commitment that the Government will stand by the pledges they have made to support steelworkers, steel communities and the future of steelmaking, including in south Yorkshire at Rotherham and Stocksbridge.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Order. Mr Healey, I remind you that interventions are supposed to be short.

Stephen Doughty: My right hon. Friend makes a crucial point. The industry, its workers and all of us want to hear categorical assurances from the Minister today about action. We do not want to hear more platitudes and warm words. Particularly with the uncertainty, there is a real danger that the answer to our many questions will be, "We don't know. Wait for the new Prime Minister and the new Government." Well, the steel industry cannot afford to wait. It could not afford to wait before, and we now need real assurances. This is a matter of national significance.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan. I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) on securing this debate. He is rightly talking about securing concrete action from the Government. Does he agree that one idea would be for the Government to redouble their efforts to ensure that British steel is used in procurement projects, both in the supply chain and in headline contracts?

Stephen Doughty: I absolutely agree. The fundamentals of this debate have not changed. It is about the action being taken on energy costs, on the UK steel industry's terms of trade, on unfair dumping, on the additional risks now being created by the uncertainty about our future trading relationships and, indeed, on the crucial question of procurement.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his work on this issue. Does he agree that an indication of the uncertainty is the announcement in Mumbai this week that Tata and ThyssenKrupp are now talking about a merger? That can only mean consolidation of the two plants in Holland and Germany. The Government need to step in and stop that merger.

Stephen Doughty: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the future of all the steel industry in south Wales. I have no doubt that we will shortly be hearing from my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on that subject. Additional uncertainty is being created by the news that we have heard in the past few days, and I am interested to hear the Minister's perspective.

It is now more vital than ever that the Government continue to work with us, with the steel industry, with the steel trade unions—particularly Community, GMB and Unite—and with other partners to instil confidence that we will all work together to create the right business environment, which particularly applies to the devolved Administrations. The Welsh Government, following their re-election and the reappointment of Carwyn Jones as First Minister, have reiterated their commitment to doing everything they can to support the Welsh steel industry. We want that co-operative relationship, which has been in the interest of the industry, to continue.

Crucially, the steel industry is a question for the incoming Prime Minister. Will she take the kind of laissez-faire approach that we have seen from the current Prime Minister? There is no industrial strategy, and his idea was that we should not be intervening—the series of interventions in the steel industry came quite late, however welcome many of the steps taken by the Minister

[*Stephen Doughty*]

herself have been. Will the new Prime Minister form a Cabinet that is going to take decisive action in the national interest? That is the fundamental expectation of people in the steel industry. We need a proper industrial strategy, and we need tough action, particularly in relation to the Chinese.

I have a number of questions for the Minister on the uncertainty created by the referendum, particularly on the different trade options that might be on the table and their many implications for the steel industry. Like many others, I would argue that retaining access to the single market is crucial. There is a Celsa plant in my constituency. Celsa is a European company based in Catalonia that has plants all over Europe. Almost 100% of its trade is within the EU, so if we lost the ability to trade in that single market on the kind of terms we currently have, the additional cost of punitive tariffs, or other tariffs, could be devastating.

We also have questions about the future of the state aid rules under any regime. Let us not forget that it was often suggested during the referendum campaign that, somehow, everything was the EU's fault, but actually the EU has taken many steps to support the steel industry across Europe. The reality is that there are rules that would apply under European economic area and World Trade Organisation trading arrangements. What does the Minister have to say about the different options on the table? What would be the best one for our steel industry?

Other uncertainties might be created in any transitional period. Let us not forget that this is not just about exports. Raw materials are imported, whether it is scrap, as with Celsa in my constituency, or other raw materials. There could be an impact both on the steel industry's inputs and its exports. The other implication is for exchange rates. Some would argue that the fall in the pound provides a benefit to the steel industry, but of course that benefit is potentially offset by the changes in input costs. I can see no positive net benefit from the current currency situation. Indeed, any short-term marginal benefit will definitely be offset by the much wider risks. What is the Minister's perspective on that?

UK Steel, which has done an excellent job of representing the interests of the industry as a whole and is working together with the different producers, has made it clear that we need to remove the unilateral energy costs; increase the procurement of UK steel; address unfair trade provisions; provide funding mechanisms for energy efficiency projects; and set out a clear direction for the investment and support required by the industry in the long term.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): One of the unilateral cost increases for the industry was the carbon price floor, which was a unilateral tax introduced by the British Government without any foresight. They then had to request permission from the EU to try to provide a compensation scheme. Post-Brexit, will the Government reconsider that measure in the immediate future to give more space to the steel industry on costs?

Stephen Doughty: I absolutely agree. Given that the facts of our relationship have changed so substantially, what people want to know today is what completely

new and different things the Government are willing to do with the levers they control, to respond to the wider uncertainty being created.

That is even more important because in a post-Brexit Britain the self-sufficiency and security of the steel supply is of even greater strategic and economic importance for our construction industry, our defence industry and all the other parts of our economy in which the steel industry and other foundation industries play such a crucial role. In any circumstances, the steel industry is of national importance, but with Britain going alone that will be even more the case, which is why we need that action.

I have already mentioned procurement. I am still deeply disappointed that we do not seem to have seen anything concrete. We have heard a lot of good words about the guidance that has been issued to Departments, but I have yet to see any concrete projects to provide certainty to the industry. When I asked the Minister for Defence Procurement shortly after we returned from the referendum recess, there were a lot of warm words but no clarity on which defence, construction or infrastructure projects are to enjoy increased supply of UK steel. Indeed, this is not just a responsibility of the UK Government. As we have discussed in this place before, it is deeply disappointing that the Aberdeen bypass, for example, is being produced using Turkish steel. This is the responsibility of all the devolved Administrations, as well as the UK Government.

As a Welsh MP I would do this, but I mentioned the support that the Welsh Government have been providing. Quite rightly, everybody is concerned about the Tata situation in particular, which I know my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon will speak on, but the Welsh Government have made it absolutely clear that they are committed to supporting the sales process and the communities involved, and that they will continue to put every resource they can to that purpose. As far as I understand, their offer of support definitely remains on the table, but obviously there needs to be clarity on the bidders and the plans coming forward. I would be very interested to hear what discussions the Minister and her officials have had with the Welsh Government over the last few days.

There is a crucial broader point to make. We have seen discussions going on with the steel council and the various working groups, but I am concerned and would be interested to hear the Minister clarify whether those discussions and that dialogue have continued, whether the steel council and the working groups have met and whether her officials have continued working on it, or whether everybody's attention has simply been diverted by the implications of the referendum and the switch in Prime Minister and Government. We cannot afford to be diverted. Diversion of attention for a few weeks or a month could be absolutely devastating. I would like some assurances from the Minister about what is happening.

I want to allow as much time as possible for other Members to speak, because I know many want to. Let me end by saying that we have all made the arguments before and we know what they are: they are on energy, trade terms, procurement and the wider business conditions. We have seen progress on some of those areas from the Minister—I acknowledge that—but not enough. This decision is so fundamental in changing the terms for this business and its future that we need to know what is

happening that is new, that is different and that will give that certainty, reassurance and hope to the industry for the months and years ahead. As I said, this industry has a future. It can play a vital strategic role in post-Brexit Britain, but it will only do that if we see decisive Government intervention to ensure that it survives and is able to compete on a global stage. I thank you, Mrs Gillan, and every Member who has attended today to show their support.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Order. As you can see, many Members want to speak. I am entirely in your hands. If I impose an informal limit of five minutes on each of you, that will leave enough time for those on the Front Benches to sum up. But if I find that that is slipping, I am afraid I will have to impose a limit on the number of speakers.

9.43 am

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Thank you, Mrs Gillan. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I thank the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) and congratulate him on securing this debate. I am sorry if I repeat anything but, as he said, we have all been repeating and repeating ourselves about the state of the British steel industry, certainly since I came to Parliament.

We have had good news in Scotland: we had a Scottish steel taskforce and the former Tata plants are now in the hands of Liberty Steel, which at the moment is recruiting for new workers. That is a fairly good news story from Scotland, but it is only thanks to the fact that the Scottish Government have put steel at the heart of their industrial strategy and have an industrial plan.

The situation we now face is probably one of the most difficult in our post-war history, and what we do now will have serious consequences for our future. The pound is plummeting and investment is going elsewhere. The experiment with an EU referendum to satisfy Tory Back Benchers has completely backfired and it is now apparent that there is no plan—not only no industrial strategy, but no plan for going forward with Europe. Where will the UK be in terms of its European status? Will we completely Brexit? Will we be part of the European Free Trade Association? What will happen? We do not know, but I know that there is a serious plan in Scotland and the First Minister is working tirelessly with her Cabinet and with Scottish officials to speak to European partners because, as we all know, Scotland voted to stay in and we want to be in Europe—we are European to our very core.

I want to completely refute what has been said about the Aberdeen western peripheral route. I can inform the Chamber that the subcontract for steel reinforcement was recently awarded to BRC, which is situated just outside my constituency and which is the UK's largest supplier of steel reinforcement. The steel for that contract is produced in Newport; some of it requires cutting, and that process is undertaken in Newhouse, which has a postal address in Motherwell but unfortunately is not in my constituency—it is in the constituency of Airdrie and Shotts. Indeed, all steel for the Aberdeen western peripheral route project has so far been procured and

processed from suppliers based in the UK. More generally, more than £350 million in subcontracts has been awarded for the Aberdeen western peripheral route project, of which £115 million has been sourced in Scotland itself.

Stephen Doughty: I find that information very helpful, but will the hon. Lady say where the steel was actually manufactured—not where it was processed but where it was actually created?

Marion Fellows: Let me say that we do not manufacture steel in Scotland, but that goes back to when the Tories closed Ravenscraig in 1992. We roll steel in Scotland; we deal with plate. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman is chuntering from a sedentary position; I hope I can continue.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Order. He is indeed chuntering. If he wants to intervene, he must make it a lot clearer than that.

Marion Fellows: From the start of the steel crisis, the Scottish Government have exhibited tremendous leadership and collective decision making. That demonstrates what is possible when a Government have the will to intervene and have the interests of the workers at heart, but most of all when there is clear leadership and a coherent plan. Following the result of the EU referendum, it is entirely apparent that there was no plan from the UK Government for how to deal with a leave vote. In fact, we are still waiting for the change of Prime Minister today, and we still do not know who will be in charge of the business of steel next week, or even tomorrow. There are also real difficulties in the Opposition, who are still in-fighting rather than moving forward, but I pay complete and sincere tribute to those Opposition Members who have been fighting day and night for their constituents and their steel industry. I cannot say strongly enough what I have learned from them about how best to achieve things and move forward the steel industry in Scotland, half of which is based in my constituency.

No doubt the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) will speak on Tata Steel's problems later. There are real issues there, and all this uncertainty is making the whole situation in Port Talbot much more difficult than it needs to be. I implore the Minister to try to move things forward and to actually make a difference to the steel industry. The Government have had to be pushed, prodded and shoved to get anything done, and there are still serious difficulties with energy costs, rates and all the other things that were causing difficulties a year ago.

I commend the Government, and the Scottish Government, for moving forward on procurement, which is essential and a real priority, but procurement is about the future. For steel in the UK overall, we need action now.

9.50 am

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): I am pleased to see the Minister in her place. I hope she is going to advocate and fight for us under the new Prime Minister.

Business needs certainty. Investment depends on certainty about access to the markets and about the stability of the currency. We need clarity on the timetable and

[*Nia Griffith*]

process for Brexit. We need to know what sort of deal the Government intend to seek and we need very close dialogue between them and the steel industry so that steel companies know exactly what they are facing.

It is a particularly difficult time for the steel industry, so it is vital that steel companies are given every possible guarantee of support and confidence so that they keep the industry here in the UK. We need the Government to make safeguarding the steel industry a top priority. With all the uncertainty of the future—uncertainty about access to the markets and the price that we could have to pay for imported steel—it is vital that we keep our own steel industry here, both for security and to support our manufacturing industry.

Those advocating Brexit spoke of the opportunities it would offer to set our own conditions, but with that comes responsibility. The Government can no longer blame the EU. We need a Government who create the most favourable conditions possible for our steel manufacturers. They are now in direct competition with steel manufacturers around the world, so it must be made better for them to invest here in the UK than anywhere else.

We need urgent action on energy prices. As has been mentioned, the carbon floor tax could be dealt with straightaway. It was unilaterally imposed, but we then sought state aid to offset its effects. We can do something about that instantly, but more than that I support the request by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) for innovation. We need much more direct investment in innovative projects wherein the energy plant is linked directly to the steel plant, thereby keeping energy costs right down. We need Government help and intervention to make that happen.

We need speedy and targeted protection against Chinese imports. If we see that something is in direct competition with one of our products, let us act immediately so that we can protect our production lines. We also need much clearer incentives for research and development and for improvements to plant. We need a system of capital allowances and business rates that does not penalise plants that are trying to improve, increase their energy efficiency and be future leaders in their sector.

We need a really clear industrial strategy for the wider opportunities for the steel industry. We need to know exactly why we are producing the steel, what it is for and how it links into our manufacturing chain. In order to protect that chain, we need to keep steel production in the UK. We have heard warm words about public procurement, but we have yet to see real delivery. We need our supply chains to go directly into the projects that have been mentioned, many of which have not yet started.

I have particular fears for Tata Steel, which has a plant in my constituency, one in Port Talbot, and others throughout the UK. We are very worried indeed about what might happen in the talks with ThyssenKrupp. It is a very large conglomerate, and we have previously seen it decide that it just does not want to do certain things anymore and then pull out of certain sectors and close down all the factories. We have seen that happen with some of its car plants. I can easily imagine a scenario in which ThyssenKrupp simply hoovers us up,

then closes us down and moves all its steel manufacturing to continental Europe. The Welsh Government will do their best to provide support, but I implore the Minister to make sure that it is an absolutely no-doubt decision for ThyssenKrupp to keep its UK sites open, or that we have other options to explore for keeping our steel manufacturing here.

It is vital that every potential obstacle is removed and that the best conditions are provided to encourage investment in our steel industry—investment for the future that will last. We need to ensure that we have a steel industry and a manufacturing industry, that we use our steel for procurement, and that we have the security of producing our own steel.

9.54 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan. I rise to support the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) and commend him for the excellent way he introduced this debate on British steel. I wanted to add a contribution from a Member of Parliament from Northern Ireland. We do not have a steel industry in Northern Ireland, but we are very supportive of British steel, what it does, the jobs it creates and the fact that it is British. We are, of course, very much a British part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and wish to continue to be so.

I have a couple of quick comments to make in the short time I have. A collection of economic factors causing negativity in the UK steel market have put increasing pressure on steelworks—I am well aware of that, as are other Members. Demand for steel in the UK has never recovered from the financial crisis of some years ago, remaining 30% lower than pre-2008 levels. Energy costs are a massive issue for us in Northern Ireland, as they are for the British steel industry. Business rates and environmental taxes have squeezed the industry that we bit more.

We have also had problems with the Chinese steelmakers. It is estimated that they lost millions—indeed, probably billions—of dollars in 2015 as domestic demand slowed but GDP targets remained stubborn. As a result, steel exports from China to Europe have more than doubled since 2013, helping to send the price of the metal down to roughly half of 2011 levels. The EU could have introduced tariffs to address the problem, yet failed to do so. People sometimes say that tariffs are self-defeating, but I do not subscribe to that view. They can encourage our industry, and I believe we should introduce them. The US, for example, has a heavy tariff on Chinese steel imports of a whopping 236%. If the USA can do it, I do not see why we cannot do it here. Perhaps the Minister can explain.

Brexit is now over and the decision has been made. For the record, I was very much in favour of the campaign to leave the EU and I am very pleased that the people of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland decided to do that. Let us move forward together collectively and positively to see what we can do for British industry. The problems with the EU were real. It would have taken all 28 member states to agree to a tariff, so it was never going to be a possibility.

Let us look at some examples of where problems still exist in Europe. Take Belgium, for example, home to—I say this facetiously—the circus HQ. The EU has called for Belgium to recover €211 million of state aid that was used to prop up the steelmaker Duferco, while an investigation has been launched into Italy’s support for Ilva. The Belgian support was considered illegal because “you could not find a market investor that would give them the kinds of loans they got from the authorities”.

Belgium and Italy tried to do it, but the EU pulled them back. Now that we are out of Europe, we can be free of the shackles we once wore and move forward. There is an opportunity for the new UK Administration, under a new leader, to make the difference and make changes.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): Surely if we stay in the single market in some way, shape or form, we will still be subject to its rules and regulations.

Jim Shannon: There is much to be discussed after Brexit, and that is one aspect. I am very keen for the debates to start. Let us move forward and be positive—the glass is half full. We are looking forward to supporting our industry and making sure that we can deliver for it.

Let us be positive and upbeat. We now have the power, at least in principle, for the Government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the 11,000 jobs at Port Talbot in particular are kept safe, as well as those throughout the whole United Kingdom, in Scotland and elsewhere. We have to remain positive and consider the new possibility of offering tailor-made Government support. Steel prices are rising, which means that Tata Steel will be in much less of a hurry to sell up and get out of the UK than it once was.

Let us give credit where credit is due: the Government have worked hard and the Minister has been industrious. She has responded to several debates and made very clear, positive comments. I know she is committed to British steel, but we need to see more practical changes. Although the pressure on Tata to sell has been reduced by the array of slightly more positive factors, it is imperative that the Government have in place the contingency plans needed for all possible outcomes.

It is encouraging to see the Business Secretary take such an active and positive role, but we must remember the livelihoods and families at stake. The deliberations on the issue, and the eventual strategies that are delivered, must deliver a British steel industry that succeeds and is here into the infinite future. We must retain the jobs and our position as a manufacturer.

9.59 am

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) on securing this debate. He has been a strong and doughty champion of the steel industry. [*Interruption.*] Mrs Gillan, I’ll get my coat.

In my contribution, I will focus on the events and the circumstances regarding the pipe mills at Hartlepool. Last week, Tata announced its intention to sell off its Speciality Steels business, including the Hartlepool pipe mills but excluding the 20-inch tube mill. As we have already heard, this is happening in the context of Tata

Steel looking to explore the feasibility of strategic collaboration with other European steel operators, perhaps with a joint venture.

In many respects, that is a positive move. The Hartlepool pipe mills are a profitable business unit within Tata. The Minister has seen the operations there for herself. She has seen that the mills have a skilled and committed local workforce that produce high-quality and value-added products for use in a variety of sectors, such as oil and gas, construction and infrastructure. It is little wonder, therefore, that several bidders have already shown an interest in buying Tata’s Speciality Steels business.

However, there is still uncertainty. A sales process of this nature is never straightforward, especially one where a part of a larger group is being divested, so what guarantees can the Minister give to ensure that we can continue operations at the Hartlepool site and that this sales process, which may be lengthy and complex, is concluded successfully?

The Minister has answered questions about this issue before; she knows its importance. However, it is vital that guarantees are given to boost confidence, not only among the workforce about their jobs but in terms of the order book, and in terms of customers and suppliers, to ensure that they continue to trade with the Hartlepool pipe mills; it is important to consider customers and suppliers, too. What can the Government do to increase confidence during this sales process?

In addition, what work has been done, or what assessment has been carried out, in respect of the Hartlepool steelworkers’ pensions? Will they be coming out of the Tata Steel pension scheme? It will be far more difficult to make a much smaller scheme, perhaps one based on Speciality Steels, a viable one. What work is the Minister doing with regard to the pension scheme? In this period of uncertainty, it would be very helpful if she could provide some sort of guarantees or confidence to allow this sales process to be carried out in a successful manner.

In the time I have left, I shall just touch on several broader issues; they have already been referred to in the debate but are incredibly important. There is still an unlevel playing field between ourselves and European operations. Energy costs remain a concern; there is a disparity in energy costs of something like £17 per MWh, even after the energy-intensive industries compensation scheme is taken into account. That means that UK steel producers and manufacturers face an additional cost to make steel, relative to their European rivals, of around £1 million a week. What will be done to level that playing field?

The second point that I will emphasise is the importance of business confidence and capital investment in the wake of Brexit. The vote on 23 June has produced enormous uncertainty, and as a result businesses—quite reasonably and logically—might want to pause their investment plans. They will think, “Let’s just wait until the next quarter, or the quarter after that, before we invest in new plant and machinery.” If we are in a global race for economic progress, we cannot afford to pause for a quarter or two; we will be left behind and consequently our competitiveness will be eroded.

What are the Government doing to ensure that the steel industry can be provided with as much clarity as possible? Can the annual investment allowance scheme,

[Mr Iain Wright]

which has been excellent, be extended and widened? Will business rates be reformed? On the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, we saw how illogical it is that manufacturers, such as steel manufacturers, are being punished by the Government. Manufacturers want to improve their competitiveness by improving their plant and machinery, but if they do so they will be slapped with an additional tax bill. That cannot be good economic sense. I know that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills did not win the argument with the Treasury about this, but I ask the Minister and indeed the new Government to push further on it to provide the clarity that is needed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth has already talked about the importance of progress with procurement. Achieving such progress remains frustratingly slow. Government policy in this area was changed in October 2015 and again in April, which was welcome, but we need to see the new policy being translated into ongoing orders and activities for steel producers and manufacturers. I ask the Government to step up a gear, to ensure that the policy is not only changed but is active, energetic and vigorous in ensuring that local steel content can be used in all public projects.

This sounds flippant, although it is not meant to, but in many respects we no longer need to worry about state aid, so we can use this period as an opportunity to champion British steel and to ensure that we have a steel industry that is necessary and valuable for the economy, and that has a real future in the years to come.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Order. I am very pleased with the timekeeping. I think I have four speakers left and I hope to start the wind-ups at half past 10, so I hope those speakers will divide their remaining time up accordingly.

10.5 am

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) on securing this timely and important debate.

I thank the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise for championing, in her own way, the steel industry. We have not always agreed and we have both been combative, but she has been the best champion and the best voice for steel within the Government, and I hope that will continue in some way in the new Government. The challenge that we face after the outcome of the European referendum is keeping steel up there as an issue to be addressed, so that it is not pushed out by other issues. We need to continue building the momentum to deliver a steel strategy for the UK—we have already started to build that momentum.

I was pleased that the new Prime Minister—she is not yet the Prime Minister, but she is incoming—has made it very clear that she believes in an industrial strategy. I very much welcome that commitment from her, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) has just pointed out, there needs to be an active and

even interventionist industrial strategy that delivers for steel and for manufacturing. If she provides that type of strategy, I will be the first to lead the hurrahs for her.

In Scunthorpe, we recognise the bright future for the steel industry that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth talked about, because there is already a bright future in Scunthorpe, thanks to the work of Paul McBean, Ian Smith and Martin Foster, who are on the trade union side and who work with the leadership of British Steel locally. In fact, we were able to launch the new British Steel on 1 June and things are going very well. However, for things to continue to go very well, the steel industry needs the active support of the Government. Progress in a positive way will not just happen, and it will not happen at all unless the Government step up to the plate, which I hope is their intention.

The issues are well known—my hon. Friends have already referred to them. We need to do something about business rates. It is important that they are brought into line with those of European competitors. Currently, British Steel pays around £14 million per annum in business rates and the business rate system does not incentivise investment. In the modern age, that is madness and needs to be dealt with. Business rates for our capital-intensive industries need to be brought into line with those paid by their competitors, by removing plant and machinery from business rate calculations. The new Government need to do that urgently.

There are also electricity charges to consider. The UK steel industry pays double what the German steel industry pays for electricity, which increases its costs at every stage. Again, that needs to be addressed. Something needs to be done to tackle the high energy costs that still exist, either by innovation; by bringing production of energy closer to plants, which can be achieved by incentivising it; or by doing something else.

Much has already been said about procurement, which is vital for the steel industry. The procurement opportunity of leaving the EU needs to be taken advantage of and we also need to ensure that measurement systems are in place to ensure procurement of UK steel for public sector projects. I refer again to the opportunity for the development of offshore wind in the North sea, which is being led by DONG Energy. DONG Energy is being heavily incentivised by subsidies from the British taxpayer, so it would be outrageous if the steel required for that investment came from anywhere other than the UK.

We need to ensure that a pipeline of procurement is clearly in place. That issue must be addressed properly by the Government, so that we know what needs to be developed in terms of steel capacity, and so that we can ensure that the capacity is there in the UK to deliver for the future. That is what we need—a planning process to instil confidence, so that investment can deliver into the future.

I should mention the British Steel pension scheme, because it is incredibly important to my community. It needs to be addressed, sorted and given certainty so that the steel industry as a whole and pensioners in my community have confidence in the future. I would be very concerned if the impact of all the noise and the insistence on dealing properly with the challenge of the outcome of the EU referendum is to push aside the need for a sensible, solid approach to the British Steel pension scheme that puts it on a sustainable footing into the future.

I close by reminding the Minister, who has been a good Minister, that her final job in her role should be to drive things forward from whatever position she has and ensure that whoever succeeds her has the same passion and dynamism that she has shown from time to time and delivers for our steel industry.

10.10 am

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan. I also give heartfelt congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), who not only secured this debate, but has championed at every level the steel industry in his constituency and across the UK. I am very grateful for that.

The result of the EU referendum has led to unparalleled economic and political uncertainty. For the British steel industry, it has come at the worst possible time. We must not allow it to impede the work that has been done and still needs to be done to secure a sustainable future for steel. What steel needs has been explained to the Government time and time again: address the high energy costs; tackle business rates that continue to leave the industry hamstrung; commit to favouring British-produced steel in procurement; and act on the cheap dumped steel that has contributed to the severity of the crisis.

The Brexit vote may have reduced our ability to act, but we must commit to working with our European partners to ensure a co-ordinated and credible response. Tata Steel's recent change of course in strategy for its British business in light of the referendum vote presents dangers and opportunities, particularly for Speciality Steels, which is based in Rotherham and Stocksbridge. It is a tremendous asset to the British economy.

There is an unfortunate tendency to view the British steel industry as a relic—an industrial throwback to a different economic age. That could not be further from the truth for the whole industry, but especially for Speciality Steels. Speciality Steels is a world-leading business at the cutting edge of technology and expertise. It produces steel for the most complex roles, from aerospace to motorsports. Members may have watched the British grand prix, where the cars had steel from Rotherham and Stocksbridge in them. The division's list of customers speaks for itself, running from Rolls-Royce to Lockheed Martin and from Boeing to BAE. Rotherham also houses Tata's research centre, which continues to develop world-leading advances in steel production and technology to meet the most difficult demands.

However, that vibrant and dynamic business cannot continue to lead the world with one hand tied behind its back. We must act on the underlying problems the industry faces as a whole. Tata's announcement that the division is to be sold separately is cautiously welcomed. Speciality Steels is a great asset, and I am sure a number of bidders will be forthcoming, but we must make certain that the right buyer and not just any buyer is found to allow the business to continue to thrive. This can be no fire sale. I understand from press reports that there has already been some interest from potential buyers for the business. Given the new circumstances, I would appreciate it if the Minister updated us on the implications that the latest move by Tata will have on Speciality Steels in south Yorkshire.

Tata's Speciality Steels unit could be a fantastic investment opportunity for someone. As well as producing some of the best steel in the world and being at the cutting edge of innovative and highly profitable steel products such as powdered steel, it has a highly regarded workforce in Stocksbridge and Rotherham. It will have a tremendous future with the right investment. Training and support for staff needs to be provided where necessary. Support to enable the business to weather any short-term turbulence that may result from the sale is also needed. What commitments can the Minister give to support the sale process of Speciality Steels and ensure that it is managed effectively and in a timely manner? The written ministerial statement from the Secretary of State on Monday hinted at providing financial support to help the process. Will the Minister provide details of any possible support? Also, will she place on record today that the Government stand by their commitments made on 21 April 2016, which detailed hundreds of millions of pounds of support in a package for potential buyers of Tata's UK business?

Madam Gillan, another area of great concern has been the sizeable pension liabilities, especially the old British Steel liabilities. [*Interruption.*] Sorry.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Order. I quite like "Madam Gillan". [*Laughter.*]

Sarah Champion: Okay—I ask Members to follow that.

Does the Minister envisage separate solutions for these liabilities? Can she give Members any details of what support the Government may offer any potential buyer of Speciality Steels? It is well known that, for Speciality Steels to maintain its dominant market position, significant capital investment is needed to move up the value chain. Can the Government offer any support or loans to potential buyers of Speciality Steels to ensure that investment in innovation, and in research and development, continues at its current pace or, indeed, is increased?

Speciality Steels has a bright future, and I am confident that the right buyer will quickly come forward. I know that the city region and Sheffield and Rotherham councils are determined to do whatever they can to help the business. The Government have repeatedly claimed to be committed to steel. That commitment must not slip, despite the economic obstacles we face. With the right support and nurturing, British steel can continue to lead the world in quality and technology with a dedicated, experienced and well trained workforce. The Government must not take their eye off the ball at this critical time. I join with my colleagues in urging them to act, and act now, to safeguard a viable, sustainable and successful future for British steel production.

10.16 am

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) for securing today's debate. I also pay tribute to the fantastic workforce of steelworkers across the country, many of whom are represented here with us today. It is an honour to have those gentlemen here.

The past few weeks have been characterised by uncertainty, particularly since the referendum result: economic uncertainty with the pound falling, investment put on hold and jobs at risk; party-political uncertainty;

[*Stephen Kinlock*]

and governmental uncertainty and paralysis. That uncertainty has been particularly acute for the steel industry. When Tata announced on Friday that it was putting the sale of Strip Products UK on the back burner as it explored the possibility of forming a joint venture with ThyssenKrupp, the workforce and their families clearly reacted with a degree of scepticism and concern. The announcement compounded existing uncertainties. ThyssenKrupp has long expressed interest in Tata's Dutch plant, but until last week there was no convincing evidence of any interest in Tata Steel's UK operations. The central concern around the joint venture proposal, particularly with Britain outside the EU, is that the UK operations, including Port Talbot in my constituency, might not receive the support and investment they require. Clear assurances are required from the Government, Tata and ThyssenKrupp that the mooted joint venture will in no way diminish Port Talbot and the rest of the Strip Products UK division.

The uncertainties of the sale process have been compounded by Brexit and the resulting Whitehall paralysis. What we need now, on the day that a new Prime Minister enters No. 10, is a Government truly committed to the industry and its future. Like the Minister, I was a passionate campaigner for remain, but the British people voted to leave, and we must now deliver on and make the most of the mandate they have given us. To do that, we must urgently clarify the nature of our trading relationship with the EU27. I hope that the incoming Prime Minister will fully engage with the industry and parties on both sides of the House when determining the approach to Brexit negotiations.

The top priority is surely energy costs, which have been cited by leading figures in the industry as the No. 1 challenge facing British steel competitiveness. At present, there is a £17 per megawatt-hour differential between the energy costs for Germany and Britain, and that is after the energy compensation package is taken into account. Energy costs in this country are quite simply astronomical, and the Government should and must act.

At the Steel Council on 8 June, the Secretary of State was receptive to the industry proposals, with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department of Energy and Climate Change pledging to come back with "urgency" on energy costs. Well, we are still waiting. Will the Minister do all she can, in whatever time she has left in her post, to expedite the process? What the industry cannot take is more delay and uncertainty. Steel is a foundation industry, critical to the houses in which we live, the offices in which we work, the cars we drive and the bridges we cross. It is the beating heart of economies and communities such as the one that I represent. That is why we need a resilient steel industry that can compete on a level playing field with our global competitors and that serves our entire economy and our communities. The referendum has compounded the existing uncertainties facing our industry, but that means the Government must act decisively and quickly. Brexit is a fact. The will of the British people must be enacted. If the Government act with purpose, we can make sure they work for the steel industry and for our communities.

10.20 am

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) for securing this important debate.

It is widely accepted that steel and the steel industry are essential to Wales and its economy, which is particularly the case for my constituency and the people of Neath. Tata steelworks in Port Talbot and Trostre are places where hundreds of my constituents go to work every day. As products of the industrial revolution, both coal and steel have been the beating heart of Neath for more than a century, defining its communities and those who have had their lives touched by those industries.

Of the 1,050 jobs lost in the UK steel industry since the year began, 750 have been lost from Port Talbot—and on top of the 400 jobs lost in 2014. The extent of this decline could have been slowed, shrunk or even prevented had the Tory Government taken up the offers of support that have come from Europe. The forerunner of the European Union, the European Coal and Steel Community, was set up not only to cement peace, but to help economic growth by pooling resources and preventing unnecessary competition. Such planning and collaboration saw the UK steel industry become world leading not only in size but in quality.

The latest industrial revolution taking place in China may be the biggest of all. In 2013, China produced 779 million tonnes of steel, or 48% of worldwide output. The UK produced 12 million tonnes. But as members of a strong European Union, we were in a position to embody the very reason for the EU in the first place: strength in numbers, collective planning, a common purpose. Had the UK Government allowed, we could have installed anti-dumping tariffs on Chinese steel. We could have lifted the lesser duty tariff and applied for crucial EU funds, which would have shored up the industry during these difficult times.

More than half of UK steel exports are to the European single market. What will happen to those exports as a result of the recent referendum? I fear that the impact of tariffs or an elongated trade agreement may signal the death knell of an industry already fighting to compete on a level global playing field. The UK steel industry has declined by 42% between 1990 and 2014 in real terms. Economic output in 1990 was £2.7 billion compared with £1.7 billion in 2014. How can we halt this decline without the support of our European partners, automatic access to a ready-made single market, or the potential of additional funding to tackle rising energy costs and environmental commitments?

We also have organisations that innovate and produce high-tech products that are changing the way we view steel. Neath Port Talbot is home to a company called SPECIFIC—Sustainable Product Engineering Centre for Innovative Functional Industrial Coatings—which uses Tata coated steel to make world-leading, innovative technologies that produce, store and release energy. SPECIFIC is hugely concerned about the prospect of leaving Europe, not least because of the essential funding it has received, without which it probably would not exist, but also because of the potential loss of a market where it could promote and sell its products. And let us not forget the steel that we import from the EU, which

makes up 69% of our imports: it is not made in the UK, but is vital to many key industries that produce specialised products, infrastructure and new construction projects.

It is not a matter of whether Brexit will have implications for the UK steel industry, but the extent of them. Exports will be hit hard, output will be slashed, jobs will be lost and communities will be forsaken. I fear for the future of the UK steel industry in a UK outside the European Union, and I call on the Minister and the Government to do all that they can to protect it.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Thank you. We will now move to the wind-ups.

10.25 am

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Gillan. I want to start on a conciliatory note and very much congratulate the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) on securing this debate. I have spoken a number of times on this issue. I congratulate Members of all parties on the work they have done, including the Minister who has been working in very difficult circumstances. However, without recycling too many of the arguments, it is important that we focus on what we can do as a result of the Brexit vote. It is important to point out, as my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) did, that we voted differently in Scotland and are looking to protect Scotland's place in Europe. Our First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, and the Scottish steel taskforce have been working very hard on that, and I pay tribute to all the steelworkers across the country who have lost their jobs as a result of the challenges facing the industry.

Some Members have picked up on the issue of pensions. We have seen various businesses, including the likes of BHS, do significant damage to our reputation as a country in terms of what they have done with pensions. It is very important that the steelworkers have their pensions protected and that in any negotiations the Government are a great champion of that.

I want to bust a couple of myths that the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth mentioned. My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw rebutted the comment on the Aberdeen western peripheral route, but it is important to remember, as the hon. Gentleman and other Labour Members will, the tragedy of the closure of Ravenscraig and what that did. I hope the hon. Gentleman will recognise the shoulders on which he stands and the work done by Labour members in Scotland, by the SNP and those across the political spectrum who fought to keep that plant open, but were not successful. That plant, until it was closed in 1992 by a Conservative Government, was the largest hot strip steel mill in western Europe. It is because of that closure that we are not able to produce the kind of steel that we would like to. That is a great tragedy. I hope the hon. Gentleman recognises that.

As I said, I want to be conciliatory in this debate because a huge amount of work has been done. For us in Scotland, there was concern about the potential closure of the Dalzell and Clydebridge plants, which was going to cost us more than 270 jobs. However, the Scottish Government established the Scottish steel taskforce, which brought together people from across sectors: local authorities, trade unions, the UK Government,

Scottish Enterprise and more. It is also important to note the involvement and engagement that the Scottish Government had with the unions from an early stage, by contrast, I am afraid to say, with the UK Government. The First Minister said at the time of the sale to Liberty House, which is to be congratulated on its involvement and enthusiasm in taking over the steel plants in Scotland, that if there was any learning and experience that we could share with Port Talbot, we would be happy to do so. I hope the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), who has been a significant champion for his constituency, will take up that offer.

The hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) spoke about energy prices and the impact on her constituency. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is a regular feature and I believe one of the greatest contributors in Westminster Hall debates, spoke passionately. Although he does not have a steel industry in his constituency, he wants to offer support and takes a glass-half-full approach. It is important that we take such an approach. There are many issues and challenges and it will be interesting to hear the Minister's view. We do not know how long she may have left in her current role, but how does she see the negotiations with Europe going for the UK and what kind of trade agreements can we expect to see? As we know, the pound has fallen, which means that UK steel will be cheaper to foreign buyers, and that could boost demand. On the other hand, a lower pound means that imports will be more expensive. Imported coal and iron ore are used in some of Tata's UK operations, so that is a concern. I would be particularly interested to hear the Minister's thoughts on what will be done in that regard.

Jonathan Edwards: I am very interested in the point that, theoretically, the fall in sterling in normal economic times would help exports. The big issue is uncertainty—uncertainty in economics is toxic. Surely now we need an urgent statement from the Government that we will go for EEA status, to preserve our status within the single market. That would be one way of securing investment in steel.

Hannah Bardell: I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. He will know that joining the EEA and taking on those agreements would also include accepting the free movement of people. Most of us in the Opposition parties would agree that that would be positive, but, as we know, there are many on the Government Benches who disagree. This is a time of great uncertainty. It is simply unacceptable that there was no plan—as we read in the newspapers, things were thought about but not written down—and I think that everybody in British industry will be looking at that situation in shock.

The hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) spoke about action on cheap, dumped steel and what can be done on tariffs, which a number of other hon. Members also raised. The hon. Lady also raised the issue of pension liabilities and her concerns for her constituents.

It would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to the work done by the unions and the devolved Administrations. Many workers are looking on, wondering what is going to happen to their jobs. At a time such as this, it is very important that we find consensus where we can. There will be differences of opinions and policies across the

[*Hannah Bardell*]

House, but we must work together to find consensus and to secure these jobs for Britain—to find a long-term economic and industrial plan, and to make sure that we secure as many jobs as possible.

10.32 am

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan, in this debate on an incredibly important subject. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) and all my hon. Friends who have spoken in the debate. They have represented their constituents superbly over the last weeks, months and—in some cases—years to try to protect the vitally important strategic industry of steel.

I also congratulate the trade unions on their work representing their members and the communities that they live in, in these incredibly difficult times. We have seen examples of the benefits of partnership working between local politicians, the devolved Governments, local Government and the representatives of working people in those communities.

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to pay tribute to the trade unions and all those who have worked in partnership. Will he join me in paying tribute to the work of the *Daily Mirror* and its “Save our Steel” campaign? It has kept a focus on the issue, even today in the midst of everything else that is going on, to make sure that we all pay attention to what is happening in the steel industry.

Bill Esterson: My hon. Friend is quite right to draw attention to the fine work of the *Daily Mirror*. Its campaign has raised awareness among the wider public of just how important steel is to the whole country.

We express regret that the Government did not act in a stronger way to try to save Redcar and that there was not greater engagement earlier on Redcar and elsewhere, but we have to focus on where the steel industry is and what can be done now, not least given the challenges following the vote to leave the European Union.

Steel has faced a profound crisis for quite some time. Plants that had been in profitable production for decades have closed. In Redcar, that brought to an end a century or more of steelmaking on the site. For other plants, the potential changes of ownership have been the source of considerable uncertainty and, of course, Brexit has piled uncertainty on top of what was already a very worrying situation.

Britain’s relationship to the EU and the rest of the world is now more unsettled than it has been for many generations. We have seen the immediate impact of the vote not just in the steel industry, but in this industry we have seen the planned sale of the Port Talbot steelworks put on hold. An estimated 15,000 jobs are directly at stake, with another 40,000 immediately affected through the supply chain. Then there are the risks, which my hon. Friends have raised, from the impact on the British Steel pension fund—that threatens the prosperity of more than 130,000 workers, and of course there is the threatened loss of a vital strategic industry. The time is now for decisive Government action to secure as much stability and certainty as possible.

Before the leave vote, the Government had started to act and to recognise, quite rightly, the strategic importance of the steel industry in this country. That recognition had included the potential for the Government to take a stake in the Port Talbot works—the Business Secretary had dropped his previous opposition to responsible ownership and had, at last, understood the importance of Government intervention in industry. As part of any deal, however, he was proposing to switch the indexing of British Steel pensions from the retail prices index measure of inflation to the far lower consumer prices index measure. Over time that would have amounted to a 15% cut in pensions being paid, and, as well as affecting the prosperity of British Steel pensioners, it suggested opening the door to similar pension raids in other sectors.

The proposal has quite rightly been resisted by the unions and also, notably, by other Government Departments. Addressing the crisis in steel at the expense of pensioners is simply not acceptable. Supporting our steel industry will require the Government to follow best practice from north America and Europe, and to develop an effective industrial strategy to support the industry. It will require willingness from the Government to support the pension fund.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): I apologise for not being here at the start of the debate. My hon. Friend talked about pensioners. Shotton steelworks is in my constituency, and there are a lot of pensioners because the steelworks used to be far bigger. Many still live in the area, so the change in spending power over time will affect not only them but the whole area. We have to think about that as well.

Bill Esterson: Absolutely. Any money taken away from pensioners affects the rest of the economy, including other businesses and the livelihoods of many other people. My hon. Friend is quite right that those considerations need to be carefully taken into account.

In his excellent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth said that the vote to leave the European Union has been a body blow that has put uncertainty on top of the existing difficulties. I will remind the Minister of some of my hon. Friend’s questions. He wanted to know what the Government will do differently now and made the point that time is of the essence—the steel industry simply cannot wait for the new Prime Minister to take time to act. As my hon. Friend said, the Government need to continue working, and to step up that work, with local MPs, the devolved Assembly, local government and the unions. They need to move away from the laissez-faire approach we have seen in previous times. When my hon. Friend was making that point, the Minister was waving her hand dismissively, as she is sometimes wont to do. That is simply not the response that is needed on this critical issue.

My hon. Friend also said that access to the single market is essential. We heard in an intervention about the importance for Members of all parties of retaining that access. That is true not just for steel but for businesses in many other industries, too—not least those that are part of the steel supply chain, whether in manufacturing, construction or defence. We need to know what the options are for retaining that support. What action will

the Government take to ensure that the supply chain will continue to be supported by UK steel production? What action will they take to ensure that raw material prices are not adversely affected, and that there is not the impact that my hon. Friend talked about?

My hon. Friend mentioned exchange rates and said that the benefits will be offset by import costs. He and a number of my hon. Friends mentioned energy costs. My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) talked about the impact of the carbon price floor changes. We heard about the impact of business rates and the need for action on energy costs more generally. Will the Minister tell us exactly what she or her potential successor will do to take action on those points?

On the issue of procurement, the steel for the Aberdeen bypass—it was a £12 million contract—was made in Turkey, not Scotland or elsewhere in the UK.

Jonathan Edwards: I was not going to make any tribal statements, but the *Western Mail*, the national paper of Wales, last month exposed the fact that the Welsh Government have been using rebar steel from Germany for a road project—the Eastern Bay link road in Cardiff—less than a mile from where rebar is produced by Celsa in the Cardiff South and Penarth constituency.

Bill Esterson: That is the first I have heard of that.

Jonathan Edwards: You should read the *Western Mail*.

Bill Esterson: Unfortunately, the *Western Mail* does not find its way to Merseyside very often.

Jonathan Edwards: It is a fine paper.

Bill Esterson: I am sure it is a fine paper.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth asked about the Steel Council. Will the Minister confirm what discussions are taking place and what work it is continuing to do after the Brexit vote? It has a critical role in the next few weeks and months.

I am conscious that the Minister has a lot to respond to, but I want to reiterate the importance of what my hon. Friend said. Government action is needed now. The steel industry, the workers, the supply chain, the businesses directly affected and the rest of the economy cannot wait weeks or months for action. Steel is crucial to our economy, our strategic needs and our communities. The Minister or her successor needs to make sure the Government do whatever it takes to save our steel.

10.43 am

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan. I do not know whether you have had the great pleasure of chairing a steel debate before, but I know that you have family connections in Wales. The majority of the speakers in this excellent debate are from Wales—a part of the United Kingdom that is very dear to your heart—so welcome to the gang. As you will have gathered, we regularly meet here or in the main Chamber to debate this issue with all its twists

and turns. It is fair to say that, the last time we debated this issue, none of us anticipated that the next time that we gathered for a debate it would be on this subject.

I pay huge tribute, as ever, to the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) for securing this debate. I will not have time to address all of the points that have been raised, but I will try to stick to the actual topic of the debate, which is the effect of Brexit on the steel industry.

It is right, good and fair to say—I am going to be a bit partisan here—that it is very much to the credit of my party that we have avoided the uncertainty that we undoubtedly would have had if we had waited until September to elect a new leader and install a new Prime Minister. That would not have been the best thing for our country or, indeed, our economy and our steel industry. We absolutely need certainty, and my hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) did everybody an enormous favour with her greatly courageous decision. We now have a new Prime Minister who can, frankly, get on and do all the things that need to be done to create certainty. She can answer many of the questions that I cannot answer, because this is a matter for the new Prime Minister and her Government.

In the words of the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), Brexit is a fact. It might hurt us but, as he rightly said, it is the will of the British people. At least we know where we are on that. We have a big task ahead of us, and I am sure nobody here is under any illusions about the scale of the complexity that we face as we withdraw from the European Union. It will take a number of years and it will be hugely complicated, but we are beginning. We will see stability and confidence return to the economy, and that will have a great impact on our steel industry.

The United Kingdom steel sector exported 6.3 million tonnes of steel last year, 3.3 million tonnes of which went to European Union member states. That is how important the EU is to the exporting of steel. Access to the single market is absolutely critical, not just for steel but for the whole of our economy.

The automotive sector has been a massive success story in recent years. We have exported a huge number of cars—many of which are made with British steel—to EU markets. I went to Nissan only the other week, and I was reminded that 45% of the steel that it uses is made here in Britain. That is the point that the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth was making. I gently say to the Scottish National party and the Scottish Government that it is not just processing that is so important. It is also important that we buy British-made steel—steel that is made in Port Talbot or Scunthorpe, not Turkey.

It is important that we secure tariff-free access to the European market, not just for the steel sector but for the parts of our economy that buy British steel, such as the automotive sector. I have personally spoken to the important people at all the large automotive companies to reassure them and to tell them how critical it is that they keep putting in orders to Port Talbot, and they told me that tariff-free access is important for their sector.

Jonathan Edwards: The Minister mentioned the complexities following the referendum result for export strategy. What analysis have the UK Government done

[Jonathan Edwards]

to date of the countries that UK-based steel producers export to? How many trade deals are now going to have to be renegotiated so those exports can continue?

Anna Soubry: I do not know about the actual figures, but we have looked at that with considerable care, and we will continue to do so. A special unit has been set up, and—if I can put it this way—will be beefed up by the incoming Prime Minister. Those are exactly the sort of issues and complexities that we are going to have to deal with.

Let me make it very clear that, until we actually leave the EU, we are a member of the EU. I think some people think we have left. Well, we have not left. We are still subject to all its rules and regulations—for example, the state aid rules—and we have access to the single market. Those things are incredibly important throughout the process that will now unfold. While we remain a member of the EU, we are subject to the state aid rules, the trade defence measures and so on. What replaces those rules—we may remain subject to them in return for market access—is for the new Prime Minister and her team to negotiate. Whatever my role is—I may end up on the Back Benches—[HON. MEMBERS: “No!”] The worst nightmare of the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright), who has been my hon. Friend on many occasions, is that I return to the Back Benches and then end up on his Select Committee.

Mr Wright: No, no!

Anna Soubry: I think we are all becoming demob happy. We are looking forward to next week when we will have a short break, but we will all continue, as we always do, to work for our constituents in the so-called recess. I think that other people sometimes forget that.

Stephen Doughty: The Minister is making some good jokes; however, this is a very serious point. Although we are about to go into a parliamentary recess, it is absolutely crucial that the meetings with the Steel Council and the working groups continue and that the work with the officials goes on. We cannot afford to let weeks go by in the summer when the industry is facing so many challenges.

Anna Soubry: I could not agree with the hon. Gentleman more. He is absolutely right, and he needs to know that the Steel Council has been working as if nothing has happened or changed ever since the referendum vote. Indeed, the UK Metals Council is meeting now—that is where I would have been had he not secured this debate. Everyone involved in the sector needs to understand that the work of the Government, Ministers and my officials has continued through this recent period and, without doubt, will continue through the summer. If I stay in my job, he can be assured that I will continue to do everything I can to work for the best interests of our steel industry; if I have a successor, that person will do exactly the same. The officials, of course, do not change. Furthermore, the determination will be as instilled in the new Prime Minister as it has been in our outgoing Prime Minister.

To deal quickly with procurement, we changed the rules, and we were the first member state of the EU to do that, commendably so. However, Opposition Members

make a good point about the need now to ensure real evidence that those rules are working. We need good reporting, so that we can come back to say that we are absolutely certain that the new procurement rules are producing the results we want.

Network Rail sources 98% of its steel domestically, or 145,000 tonnes over the next five years, and there is no reason to believe that that will change. High Speed 2 will need 2 million tonnes of steel over the next 10 years—forgive me, Mrs Gillan, but I am a huge supporter of HS2 and I fear our friendship will be wobbling here. I assure you and all hon. Members that I will continue to do everything I can in Government to make the case for wonderful and important infrastructure projects to be brought forward as much as they can be, as it will be a great boost for our economy if we can do that.

I have spoken with steel makers since the referendum, although it was not the result they wanted. It was sad that 69.6% of people in Hartlepool voted out; 60% of people in Cardiff voted in, but in Sheffield, 51% voted out; in Rotherham, 67.9% voted out; even in Neath Port Talbot, 56.8% voted out; and in the constituency represented so ably by the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), nearly 70% voted out. We all have a big, big job to do—but we can talk about that on another occasion. Only last week, however, I met British Steel, and things are going well notwithstanding—I do not want to be overly confident, but it is on track to deliver its business plan.

I want to deal with the point made by the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) and by the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion). Yesterday, I had a good meeting to discuss—freely—the situation in Stocksbridge and Rotherham. The Secretary of State has written in response to the right hon. Gentleman’s letter, although that reply might not yet have been received. For his and the hon. Lady’s benefit, the Secretary of State wrote:

“To date, no such requests have been made by any of the potential bidders, but we would be willing to consider requests that are made in the future.”

We know that people will be interested in the speciality steels, and rightly so, because it is a cracking business, with huge potential. Hon. Members can be assured that if we get requests to enable those sales to support that side of the sector, we absolutely will do it.

John Healey: Will the Minister give way?

Anna Soubry: I will take one intervention, but quickly, or I shall be in big trouble.

John Healey: I thank the Minister for giving way and for her response. May I ask her to thank the Secretary of State for his response, and to let her successor, if there is one, and his successor, if there is one, know that we as South Yorkshire MPs will be holding the Government to that commitment?

Anna Soubry: I did not doubt that for one moment, and I thank him.

The situation with Tata and the potential deal with ThyssenKrupp has raised several issues, notably that of pensions, about which hon. Members rightly have concerns. I have to say that the Opposition spokesman—this is a matter for the Department for Work and Pensions—did

not make the most supportive contribution, but more than 4,000 consultees have taken part in the Government consultation. It will take time to go through all that, but the Government have always said that we will do everything we can to support the production of steel in south Wales, which means ensuring that at least one of those blast furnaces remains open.

As ever, the clock is against me, but the usual rules apply, and I will reply by letter to any questions that have been asked but I have not been able to answer. I again congratulate the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth on securing the debate, and I assure him that wherever I am in the Government I will certainly continue to fight for the British steel industry to be sustainable and to continue making steel. I want to ensure that the case is taken forward, so we have that sustainable steel industry.

The hon. Member for Hartlepool looks as if he wants some reassurance, and he can have it. I have been to Hartlepool—I have been to almost all the steel mills throughout Britain, and apparently I will get one of those “I-Spy” badges as a result, if I come to the end of my tenure. It will be a proud moment, and I will wear it with great pride. Hartlepool is another viable business and, again, we will be there when buyers come forward. If they need support or want to talk to Government, we will do everything we can. Notwithstanding the referendum result, let us put some confidence back and say that we will create—or, rather, maintain—a sustainable steel industry. I will do everything I can, wherever I might be, to support it.

10.55 am

Stephen Doughty: I thank the Minister for some of the things she said, which were confidence-boosting and provide some hopeful direction. We must all want to take her up on her suggestion—whether she is in the role or not—because that is a clear signal to send to her successor, if there is one, to the successor of the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, if there is one, and to the new Prime Minister that this issue will not go away. It requires serious, concrete ministerial attention—not just officials—to drive it forward over the weeks and months to come. If we get distracted by everything else going on, the industry will face serious troubles.

I have three points to make, the first about energy costs, which the Minister did not get into in great detail—she is welcome to intervene, if she wants. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) that figure of £17 per megawatt-hour

differential between the energy costs faced here and across the EU. In particular, that is an issue for companies such as Celsa in my constituency, which operate throughout the European Union and see the energy costs in other countries. Perhaps the Minister will intervene or write to us, but I want to understand whether she would be satisfied for the differential to continue over any length of time.

Anna Soubry: I forgot this, but the hon. Gentleman makes a good point. A lot of work is still to be done on energy. A major target and piece of work for the incoming Government is to ensure that the steel industry—indeed, all the manufacturing sector—has a level playing field, and that must be achieved.

Stephen Doughty: I thank the Minister for her comments, which I hope she will also express clearly to the Department of Energy and Climate Change, other Departments and the new Prime Minister.

On another fundamental issue, the debate was about the impact of Brexit and the referendum decision on the steel industry, and the Minister and other colleagues who have taken part in the debate today have outlined the potential risks if we do not get the right sort of deal. Access to the single market is crucial. Some have suggested that we should invoke article 50 straightaway and rush into the negotiations, but that would be foolish—I see the Minister nodding. Even some in my own party have suggested that, but it would be wholly wrong. We need to take a very careful approach, for the sake of the industry. The deal has to be the right one; we have to secure access for our exports, and to ensure that we do not end up with punitive shocks, because even if those were only in existence for three or six months in transition from one regime to another, they could be devastating to the industry.

To conclude, I thank all colleagues who have attended today, because it shows the great concern for the steel industry in Parliament. No matter what else is going on and that we are having a change of Prime Minister today; colleagues are still willing to attend and to stand up for constituents and the steel industry throughout the UK. I thank all those in the industry, whether in the trade unions, the management or the industry bodies, who continue to fight the fight and to make the case that steel does have a future, and that the Government need to act to ensure that future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the implications for the UK steel industry of the outcome of the EU referendum.

Stevens-Johnson Syndrome and Toxic Epidermal Necrolysis

11 am

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered awareness and funding for treatment of Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis.

It is a delight to move a motion under your chairmanship for the first time, Mrs Gillan, and I am grateful to the Speaker for selecting this issue for debate. I am also grateful to the Minister and look forward to having a positive exchange with him.

I had never heard of Stevens-Johnson syndrome or toxic epidermal necrolysis—my pronunciation of some of these medical terms may leave a little to be desired—until my constituent Nadier Lawson, who had suffered from the condition, contacted me. She has set up an awareness group, SJS Awareness UK, which is based in my constituency. It was because of her and that group that I asked for the debate.

SJS—and its much more severe form, TEN—is a severe reaction that affects the skin. It is caused by a whole range of standard medicines that we all use regularly. The reaction is most commonly caused by drugs used to treat epilepsy; some antibiotics, such as penicillin and sulphonamides; over-the-counter drugs such as ibuprofen; and medications that are commonly used to treat HIV and gout. The adverse reaction triggered by those drugs is devastating. I have seen pictures of children and adults who have had such a reaction, and they are truly shocking. People start with a skin rash, which rapidly develops into excruciating blistering across their skin, which starts to peel off. The condition particularly attacks the mucus membranes in the body—in the mouth, eyes, nasal passages and guts—and is similar to having third-degree burns on the skin. The condition is classified according to how much of the body surface is blistered: if it is less than 10%, the condition is called Stevens-Johnson syndrome; if it is 11% to 30%, it is called overlap syndrome; and if it is over 30%, it is called toxic epidermal necrolysis.

The initial symptoms that people experience are non-specific. Someone can take a pill one day and feel nothing for up to a week or two but then start to feel unwell and develop a rash, which is often assumed to be chicken pox, and may experience flu-like symptoms. A key problem associated with the condition is that all too often, it takes far too long to identify. Obviously, the first thing to do is to stop taking the medication that is causing the condition. Failure to identify the condition early enough can lead to terrible lasting effects, including permanent damage to the eyes—resulting at its most extreme in blindness—and lungs, loss of nail beds, arthritis and chronic fatigue syndrome. At the very worst, people die. Around one in 10 people with SJS, the mildest form of the condition, and up to a quarter of those with TEN, the most severe form of the condition, die.

I have a whole lot of case studies, but I thought it worth reading out just one, which was given by a young man who came to an event that I held in the House to bring together people who had experienced the condition. He is called Stuart Doyle, and he wrote and said this:

“Nine years ago I had a TENS reaction. I burned from the inside out and lost around 95% of my skin, all through second and third degree burns with permanent scarring. My finger and toenails burned off and have never grown back. The enamel on my teeth burned away. Mouth, throat, lungs and stomach all burned. My eyes burned and ulcerated, then fused to my upper and lower eyelids. My tear film was destroyed, as was my tear production and I lost all saliva production too. I also had inner ear burning and am now partially deaf in one ear. My genitals burned.”

I will skip a bit and give just a summary of what he said and wrote. He continued:

“I spent six weeks in a ketamine-induced coma, which I was placed in just two days after I arrived at my first hospital. I arrived with what seemed to be meningitis, it was textbook and it was moving fast. Two days later my oxygen SATS had dropped to the point where brain damage had begun its process. They acted quickly; they had already started treating me, my son, and my partner for meningitis. It wasn’t until after the lumbar puncture results came back, that they realised it was not what they first thought it was.

The high doses of anti-biotics were stopped, by this point my throat and lungs had begun burning and blistering and a rash now covered more than half of my body. It was the lungs and throat burning that had begun to close up my airways and provoked the need for a ventilator to keep my brain intact. The ketamine-induced coma was to try and get my heart rate back down from the 180 beats per minute mark caused by the pain of the internal burning. If they’d not done that, I’d have certainly died from cardiac arrest there and then. I was to stay in the coma on full life support for six weeks; my total hospital stay was three months. I woke up in a different city.”

He goes on to describe how the condition has impacted his life, saying:

“I hoped I’d die, I wished every night for 3 years after my reaction that I’d not wake again. I had more surgeries than I can recall, my eyes were in a terrible state.”

This is the treatment that he requires today:

“My eyes require a tremendous amount of work. My day starts before 6am and ends around midnight. I have to change my lenses at least 20 times a day, put in more than 100 drops, both lubricants and steroids, and then there is the ever present pain. But, it’s totally worth the effort and I am so lucky, and grateful for all the work that my doctors put in to get me to here.”

He then says:

“The hardest thing about my new life, is the chronic pain”.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the right hon. Lady on raising awareness of this issue. As far as I am aware, this is the first time that this condition has been brought to the attention of Westminster Hall and the Minister. The background information about the condition indicates that it can be triggered by normal medicines such as paracetamol. Is it time for the Minister and the NHS to address the issue by raising awareness of the condition among GPs, consultants and everyone else? The condition affects only one or two people in every million, but it is an important issue.

Dame Margaret Hodge: I completely agree. We are raising awareness through the debate, and I hope that the Minister will take action so we can get early identification and therefore prevent people from suffering the condition’s worst impacts.

The condition is rare, and therein lies the problem. I would appreciate it if the Minister addressed the following issues. There is a lack of awareness among many medical professionals, who just do not come across the condition. Insufficient attention is paid to the condition and its

symptoms in the education and training of all health professionals. Survivors whom I have talked to all talk about that. A young man, Laurence McCalla, went to my local hospital, Queen's hospital. They gave him antibiotics; it took about 24 hours to identify the condition. At one point he had 20 doctors and consultants looking at him, because it was new to them and they wanted to learn from it as a case study. Another lad, from Worcester, said:

"There is one big thing that stands out the most from this though. It astonishes me that so many doctors I have seen do not know about it."

Debbie Hazel was misdiagnosed three times, as doctors thought she had chicken pox. She says:

"One of the problems was the lack of knowledge doctors have about the condition."

The mum of a 13-year-old son, who lives in Surrey, says:

"My son was so ill and I couldn't hold him or kiss him. He was screaming because his skin was so raw. I felt helpless. Nobody could tell us what was happening because nobody knew."

My first ask to the Minister, therefore, is for a commitment that the condition, and its symptoms and treatment, should be taught to medical students, nurses and pharmacists as part of their educational courses. SJS Awareness, the organisation in my constituency, has a fantastic poster about the symptoms and how to spot the condition. Those posters could, if the Minister were to help us, be distributed to all GPs. Early diagnosis, and therefore awareness, would not just alleviate suffering; it would save lives.

Guidance has also been prepared on the clinical pathway by the British Association of Dermatologists. What steps will the Minister take to ensure that that guidance is followed throughout the country so that identification and treatment of the condition is not a postcode lottery? SJS Awareness has asked me to ask the Minister whether we could have an SJS awareness week for the general public. We are talking about such regularly used medicines—Optrex, ibuprofen, penicillin. They are standard medications, which we do not even think about using. We need to raise our awareness about the potential side effects.

Finally, because the condition is rare, money for research on it is limited. However, there is a cost to the NHS from not understanding the condition or recognising it early and understanding how to treat it. I understand the cost of treating skin reactions is about £500 million a year and it simply makes economic sense, as well as being a question of people's lives, of course, to use research to get better at understanding why some people have such a reaction to drugs. An interesting key finding on genetic testing is that, in China, there is a gene in the population that predisposes people to different types of skin reaction, putting them at a higher risk from the drug carbamazepine. I do not know whether the Minister has come across that. In China and Taiwan, doctors test for the gene before they administer the drug. If we did more work here, we could manage that.

We also want research on new and better ways of treating severe reactions. From what I gather, more treatment should happen in burns units; often that is not understood and people are put into the intensive care unit and given the wrong medication. Finally, it is very important that we should have research on better understanding the features of drugs that make them

more liable to cause the reactions in question. Those are three hugely important areas of research. I hope that the Minister can give us some comfort on that point.

People who saw the title of today's debate would not have had a clue what I was going to talk about, yet the condition could affect any one of us, because we all take the medications concerned—they are standard. I have a file full of tragic cases of people affected by Stevens-Johnson syndrome, yet many people would not have a clue what we are debating. I ask the Minister, therefore, to do some practical things: to help us to raise awareness; to improve the training and development of all medical professionals, so that they understand the syndrome; and to get money for research so that we can understand the causes and prevent recurrences of this terrible condition in our population.

11.15 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences (George Freeman): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan, not least because on other occasions you have been a doughty champion of campaigns on rare diseases. It is also a pleasure to respond to the debate. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) on obtaining it and thank her for raising the issue. It is my great privilege as the Minister for rare diseases to be educated every time we have such a debate. A process of huge preparations is triggered in the Department, so already, just by raising the issue, the right hon. Lady has struck a blow and alerted the machine to the condition and its causes. However, I want to go further.

Perhaps, as this is the day when we say farewell to the Prime Minister, I may pay tribute to his personal leadership in the field of medical research, and to his unleashing of UK leadership, building on what happened under previous Administrations. The Labour Government did a lot of great work setting up the National Institute for Health Research, but because of the Prime Minister's experience with genetic conditions in his family he has been an incredible champion of genomics and of rare disease science and research. As he leaves I want to state that that is one of his great legacies. It has been my privilege to be his first Minister for Life Sciences, with the purpose of driving forward that quiet revolution and UK leadership.

I also want to pay tribute to SJS Awareness. As with so many rare conditions, it is charities and patient groups, the patients and victims of diseases, who take the early steps in speaking up, raising money, rattling tins, having raffles and raising awareness, which in the end lead, as I see often, to huge progress and advances in research and treatment. I encourage them to continue and not to give up. I hope that what I will say will send a good signal.

The truth is that the debate on this condition shows up a wider issue throughout the biomedical research community. The more we know about disease and how patients respond to drugs, the more we realise how many conditions there are. We discover them literally each month through the UK genome project, at a faster and faster pace, and that is changing the way drug discovery works, and the way the system thinks of conditions. The old model of diagnosing on a standard understanding of X number of conditions with clear

[George Freeman]

symptoms no longer holds. We must, as the right hon. Lady said, think about how we will help a new generation of clinicians to have at their fingertips the genomics, data and informatics to be able to recognise conditions and triage patients into the right treatment.

The Government take the issue of rare disease treatment incredibly seriously, and that is why we have worked with NHS England on launching the UK rare diseases strategy. There are now 51 recommendations. It is not just a brochure; it is a serious document with commitments and an action plan. Although the number of rare disease patients suffering from a particular condition may be small—the one that we are considering affects about 150 patients a year—collectively more than 3 million people in the UK suffer from rare diseases, so they are not rare; they are very common, and they are experienced by a huge number of people. It is only fair that the system should recognise that, and start to adjust and adapt towards the mainstreaming of provision for people with rare diseases.

Research is, of course, vital, which is why the £1 billion a year that we spend on the National Institute for Health Research, the £850 million for the Medical Research Council and the £1.4 billion spent by the Association of Medical Research Charities and its members is so important. That underpins UK leadership in this space, and it is even more important for rare conditions such as Stevens-Johnson syndrome. There are some encouraging research projects under way which I want to highlight, partly because I think they give hope to patients and charities.

The National Institute for Health Research clinical research network is supporting the MOLGEN trial. It is actively recruiting patients from across 80 NHS trusts who have experienced adverse drug reactions. That study has already recruited 1,740 participants and plans to continue recruiting patients until February 2019 with an eventual aim of accurately predicting those patients at risk of developing severe reactions, including Stevens-Johnson syndrome.

Further research that is likely to benefit those with the syndrome include the 10-year study of chronic eye inflammation, including SJS, which is being taken forward by the NIHR clinical research network in the west midlands. That has recruited 224 patients to date and will continue until 2021. The MRC Centre for Drug Safety Science at the University of Liverpool is doing powerful work in this field and has already been instrumental in identifying some of the genetic markers that indicate that a patient group are at an increased risk of developing the condition. The progress we are making in genetics generally, in terms of deep science, diagnosis and genetics for new cures, holds real hope. Being realistic, that is not hope for those patients who are in that excruciating agony that the right hon. Lady powerfully described in the words of one of her constituents.

While patients with SJS are more likely to be identified earlier and receive the best forms of clinical management, we want to prevent the condition in the first place by understanding the underlying genetic causes. That is why we are so committed to the 100,000 Genomes Project. For those who are not aware of it, it was led and inspired by the Prime Minister. I describe it as the NASA of UK biomedical research. It is our world-leading

project to take 100,000 entire, fully sequenced genomes from NHS volunteers and combine them with phenotypic hospital data to form a global reference library for understanding the genetic predispositions for both disease and drug reactions. It is that combination of the living medical record of patients at scale with their genomic information at scale that allows us to understand those genetic mutations, which are often not associated with a particular condition so are not studied. When we have the whole genome at scale we can see, for example, the reason why 20% of patients respond to a certain drug in a certain way is that all of them have a genetic variation, which we had not realised, in a sequence that nobody had realised was associated with that disease.

Although we are only partially through sequencing the first genomes, we are already identifying extraordinary insights into rare diseases. I saw recently, when meeting the informatics team at Genomics England, a man who had presented with a rare blindness disease. It presents in teenage years with early onset blindness and can lead to mortality at around the age of 40. He has two young boys. He volunteered for the programme and the scientists quickly identified five possible variations that may have accounted for the condition, of which they were able to knock out four that had nothing to do with the eye. One was a pathway related to the eye and on that information alone they were able to recognise that that pathway is one that is implicated in the disease, for which there is already a treatment that is available at pence as a generic. With the patient's consent they decided to try it and the drug arrested the condition.

That is an extraordinary breakthrough that was based on genomics simply allowing us to understand, initially quite randomly, how to prevent that condition, though we have not got a cure for it. We have identified in the haystack of the pharmacopeia of drugs one that has already worked. The genome programme is already identifying early treatments that are giving patients with rare diseases real hope. I am delighted to say that while the programme is a bit behind on the recruitment and sequencing of cancer genomes, for a whole series of operational reasons, it is steaming ahead on rare diseases. The UK is driving world leadership in that space. I was recently in Washington and met the White House precision medicine team, which is looking to us for a steer on how to use genomics to drive rare disease treatment and diagnosis.

Dame Margaret Hodge: To be specific about SJS, are there volunteers who have the condition, or relatives of volunteers who have it, in that sample? I do not know what is appropriate; I am not a great scientist, but that would seem to me to be a very useful way of progressing on this particular rare disease, though I recognise it is one of many. Does the Minister know?

George Freeman: The right hon. Lady read my mind. I do not have that information at my fingertips but I have already asked that question and I will happily ask Genomics England to ensure that she and I have that answer. I will touch on the point she made about awareness because I think there is an opportunity for us to use the genomic programme to trigger greater awareness among those who suffer from rare diseases, and possibly to drive up recruitment rates for the programme.

Let me touch on the NHS rare diseases advisory group, which recently noted that SJS is a devastating disease with a very high mortality rate, and endorsed the proposal for a highly specialised service for SJS and toxic epidermal necrolysis. The intention is for a nationally commissioned service to standardise treatment around the country in a small number of expert centres. Those proposals include a network of centres for both treatment and research and for using the diagnostic material to support that research. The establishment of a national service should make it possible to implement the national guidelines for patient care that were published by the British Association of Dermatologists just last month.

The Government absolutely recognise the long-term impact of SJS on survivors and their families. That is why we are putting not just research but patient support and a patient voice at the heart of the UK strategy for rare diseases. It is crucial that people who suffer from conditions like these are able to both feel that their suffering is not in vein and that they are being listened to and supporting research, and also that they are helping to drive new care pathways.

I will address the specific questions the right hon. Lady asked. She talked about lack of awareness and training. She is absolutely right that that is a major issue for our health system because the more we discover those rare diseases, the more we have a real challenge to keep our medical students up to date. In the old days we trained medics for the conditions that we understood but, because of the pace of discovery now, we have discovered new diseases that were not known when their textbooks were published before they have even finished a year at medical school. That is a challenge for the whole system and I will raise that important point with the relevant agencies who are in charge of training to ensure that they address it.

Dame Margaret Hodge: I take that point but I draw to the Minister's attention the fact that this disease was identified in 1922; it is not entirely new. Early identification means the drug that is causing the problem is withdrawn and the more appropriate treatment can be started. I hope the Minister can go a little bit further.

George Freeman: Many of these conditions have been known about for years, but it is only now that we are really beginning, through genomics and infomatics, to get a handle on how we might track, spot earlier and use big data to analyse cause and effect and develop new medicines that could intervene. Some of these conditions that have been thought of as never treatable are now becoming treatable because of the pace of biomedical progress. We need to inform our trainee clinicians not to think, "Well, I'm sorry. You've got a

diagnosis; there is nothing we can do about it. People have suffered for 80 years." There is a genomics programme, an accelerated access review for new medicines and an early access to medicines scheme, and we are beginning to accelerate getting new cures through into treatment. I will raise the issue of greater awareness of rare disease and what is available for them with the agencies responsible for training medical students.

The right hon. Lady raised the idea of an awareness week, which I think is an excellent idea. The truth is there are many rare diseases and I foresee a clamour for every rare disease to have a week, for which there would not be enough weeks in the year. It may be that one has a rare dermatological conditions awareness week, which would heighten awareness. There may be different ways to do that but her idea is first class. She also talked about money for research; she would not be doing her job if she did not. The Government spend a considerable amount of money on research. The NIHR has a policy of not identifying particular diseases and earmarking money to them but, following the debate, I will raise with the NIHR how much is being spent that would be relevant for sufferers of SJS. I know it is taking steps to amend its research criteria in the years ahead so that it is responding to the progress made in the genomics programme and others.

The right hon. Lady made an excellent point about gene testing. The reason I am so inspired by that quiet revolution is that we are now at a point at which we can start to gene test patients, profile them and get targeted medicines to them. That is already happening with cancer and some other diseases. For the new drugs we have launched in the NHS this year for Hep C, it turns out we can profile which patients will respond in six weeks, in eight weeks or in 12 weeks. That is driving a new model of reimbursement that sits at the heart of my accelerated access review.

Lastly, the right hon. Lady raised the important issue of side effects and the wider science of drug side effects, which the Government are investing in through a whole series of programmes in the Department of Health and NHS England. Understanding side effects can be a cue to the science of new cures. I hope she is reassured that we are taking that seriously and I will follow up—or will ensure my successor follows up, if I am no longer in post after today—the points she has sensibly raised.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair): Order.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Govia Thameslink Rail Service

[JOAN RYAN *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the performance of Govia Thameslink rail service.

I had wanted to title the debate “The Woeful Performance of the GTR Service”, but the Table Office would not allow me to do so. Here we are—*déjà vu* all over again. It is no surprise to see on both sides of the Chamber so many hon. Members from south London and Sussex who have a close interest in this appalling state of affairs, which is continuing to deteriorate.

Southern Thameslink goes from bad to worse. It cancels more trains than the whole of the rest of the network put together. Our constituents are losing their jobs, parents are unable to see their children because they get home so late at night and students are missing lessons at schools and colleges, and in some cases missing exams, as a result of the woeful incompetence of this train company, and there is no end in sight. This is embarrassing, pathetic, unsustainable and a national disgrace for Britain’s largest rail passenger carrier. The management, the unions and, frankly, the Department for Transport should all be thoroughly ashamed that we are in this state of affairs. I would guess that it is the single biggest issue at the moment for most colleagues in the Chamber—it will be even bigger than the issue of Europe in some cases. We continue to be inundated by correspondence from frustrated, demoralised and understandably angry constituents.

Last Thursday, by way of example, I was going home in the late afternoon on the Brighton line. I arrived a little early for a train. I actually got a seat on a Gatwick Express train—several other trains had been cancelled. Within minutes, that train became absolutely cram-packed. There were people who had missed other trains going to Gatwick airport. They were going on holiday, going travelling. Before the train left, it was so congested that someone in front of me had a panic attack and had to be helped out of the carriage. I gave up my seat to a pregnant lady, and we had to look after her for the rest of the journey. Passengers were swapping stories: “What time does your plane go? You’re more likely to miss it than this other person.” The situation was absolutely horrific. It was unsafe, unacceptable and a real joke—but a very dangerous joke.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman may find this experience familiar. My constituent Lucy Cooper emailed me on behalf of her daughter, Ellie, who is a Govia Thameslink Railway customer—I use that word advisedly. Ellie described being so packed on a train that the person next to her fainted. The woman was fortunately not hurt, because there were so many people crowded around her that she could not even fall down. Is that not shocking in terms of the level of unsafe practices that are now arising?

Tim Loughton: I completely agree. I am sure all of us in the Chamber have similar stories and have had similar emails and letters. Gatwick airport is the gateway to the

United Kingdom. Some 40 million people come to Gatwick airport currently, let alone if a second runway is positioned there. What an impression they get of the infrastructure in this country when they have to get on a train in those conditions!

I have with me many emails. One says:

“Yesterday I saw one unfortunate gentleman who became very poorly and distressed after having stood, squashed, for over an hour and a half in full city attire, an older American woman in tears and several hugely upset elderly people and little children who became panicked about the heat and crush.”

There are other people who do not get home until after 9.30 at night, having left the City at 5 o’clock. Someone missed his wedding anniversary. He ended his email to Southern by saying that

“frankly guys it’s not good enough.

Please, give up the franchise.

Please, don’t spend £6m on taxis for execs—please spend it on me.

Please, don’t keep blaming staff shortages—they are equally blaming you and it’s me (and my fellow commuters) sitting in the middle.

Please, remember—until you give up/lose the franchise—you are a TRANSPORT company. So please—transport people!”

It goes on and on. Another email says:

“At the end of the day it would seem to me that Southern and the RMT—

the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers—

“are acting like two spoiled children. Both have their positions and both are refusing to move at all, neither gives a damn about customers. It is the customer that is suffering in all this—it would not be so bad if we had any choice about the train operator that we use (in which case Southern trains would be empty I’m sure)—the fact is Southern have a monopoly and we have no other options.”

Time and again, we are getting emails like that, with no sign of the situation getting any better at all.

Jim Dowd (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, although the current dispute has made matters markedly worse, in truth the reason why Southern should relinquish the franchise is that its performance has been lamentable over many years, not just recently?

Tim Loughton: Well, the franchise has not been going for that many years and of course we had all the problems supposedly attributable to London Bridge at the beginning of the year, when the situation was bad enough, but it has got hugely worse since then. I will come on to that in a moment—I know that many other hon. Members want to speak.

On Monday, to deal with the crisis, GTR introduced its emergency timetable. That came on the back of the increasing number of planned cancellations, presumably because it reduces the penalties that the company has to pay. It came on top of the loosening of the franchise agreement, which I read about in the newspaper. Hon. Members were given no notice by the Department for Transport or, indeed, the company itself. Given all the interest that had been shown by colleagues here today, one would at least have expected to have been forewarned about that by the Minister. That was, frankly, discourteous and disgraceful and has only compounded our anger with the way the whole dispute has been handled.

When the new emergency timetable came in, what was the result? Last night, I got the figures for the public performance measure for 12 July. With the emergency timetable and 341 planned cancellations—341 fewer trains running—the PPM was 77%; it was barely three quarters on the second day of the emergency timetable. The position was that 2,800 trains ran, 2,172 were more or less on time, 620 were late and 122 were cancelled or very late. The result of the emergency timetable is that there is less choice for customers and more overcrowding, but presumably fewer fines. Extraordinarily, Charles Horton, the chief executive, in his appearance before the Select Committee on Transport the other day, said:

“We expect to see crowding levels evening out because of more regular intervals between trains”

as a result of the emergency timetable.

What sort of weird logic is that? There will be the same number of passengers battling to get a train to or from work, but more inconvenience because of the timings and surely more overcrowding because there are fewer trains to convey them. The extraordinary complacency of that attitude is absolutely baffling.

Specific problems have been caused by the change in the timetable. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) will mention the suspension of the Lewes to Seaford line in other than peak times—there is a replacement bus service—which includes the cross-channel port of Newhaven, which does not now have a regular daytime train service. It includes one of my local schools. We actually had the platform extended because, with the number of girls from Davison High School in Worthing using that station to go to and from school, it had become dangerous. Now, the only train in the morning arrives at East Worthing station at 5.35 or 7.16, with no further trains getting there until 18:24, and there is a similar lack of trains going home. Therefore, a station that Southern rail expanded to cater for the increasing number of pupils using it cannot be used as a stop for those girls to go to and from school. The crisis that this is causing is absolutely crazy.

The company cancelled 341 trains as part of the emergency timetable. We are told in the briefing note from GTR:

“The number of trains cancelled in the revised timetable is 341 which is broadly similar to the number”

that were cancelled on an ad hoc basis to date.

That is fine: the company is just making it official that it is rubbish—that now it is part of the official timetable that it is officially very rubbish. It is extraordinary logic, and apparently the company has done that without even having to get the permission of the Department for Transport, or so the chief executive claimed at the Select Committee the other day. We would like to know from the Minister how this works. How is it allowed to do this and get away with it, and still have its franchise as the largest passenger conveyer in the country? What are we going to have next? Why does it not reduce the timetable to zero trains and then it would have 100% competence in completing its timetable? That is the logic of where this is going, such is the ridiculousness of the situation.

This is at the heart of the problem. I do not believe that there is sufficient deterrent or incentive on either side, for the management or the unions who are party to these problems, to find a resolution with any sense of

urgency. All this time, it is the passengers—our constituents—who are suffering and losing out. We listened to Mick Cash from the RMT in front of the Select Committee going on about how, “We couldn’t possibly, for safety reasons, have driver-only operated trains,” despite the fact those already operate on 60% of Govia Thameslink services and 30% of trains on the whole of the network, and have done since 1985. It is not prepared to sit down and discuss that, and it is not prepared to acknowledge independent studies that have shown that there is not a major safety consideration.

Then we had the management of GTR saying, “We have tried to sit down with them but they are being unreasonable and they are all going off sick deliberately.” There may be some truth in that; they may be cancelling trains deliberately in order to worsen the situation. Frankly, my constituents do not care whose fault it is; they just wanted it sorted. There is, “He said this”, “She said that”, “He did this”, “They did that”—it is absolutely ridiculous. Somebody—frankly, it should be the Government—should get the two parties together and metaphorically if not physically bang some heads together and tell them to sort it or else.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the way that he is dealing with this debate. It is clear from the statistics, which he will have seen, that the company is suffering from a very high level of real sickness. Clearly, there is something very wrong, or else it has a very sickly workforce. Does he agree that there are ways that sophisticated companies manage things like sickness? Would it not be better if the management of GTR took a great deal more trouble and were more proactive in dealing with the sickness problem?

Tim Loughton: My right hon. Friend is right. As somebody who has been even angrier than me in the face of GTR on occasions, he knows that there are solutions to this problem that have not been properly pursued. We are told by GTR that before the dispute happened approximately 21 conductors were off sick at any one time. Overnight, when this dispute came in, that almost doubled to 40, with spikes at three particular depots. Something is clearly up but there are things that GTR could do, whether genuine sickness needs sorting out or it is a form of unofficial working to rule.

I have been trying to get to the bottom of the finances in this whole crisis. In the Select Committee last week, Charles Horton said that GTR’s turnover amounts to some £1.3 billion, with just over 90% of that coming from the fee, paid by the Department for Transport, for running the franchise. The amount of fine—it is really difficult to drill down into exactly how much fine it has paid—seems to be about £2 million. Less than 0.2% of its annual revenue is having to be paid in fines as a result of the incompetent way in which it has run this service. Is that a real disincentive or penalty? I just cannot see how it is.

This is an unconventional franchise. I have tried looking at the franchise: all 668 pages of it. It is the only one in the country where the rail company is paid a fee by the Department and where all the revenue from passengers’ tickets goes directly to the Government. It is difficult to see who loses out when it goes wrong. When the network fails, there is a points problem, a London Bridge problem or whatever, Network Rail pays a penalty

[Tim Loughton]

to GTR as the operator. That penalty is only paid on to the customer if they actually get round to the complicated process of the compensation payments, so GTR makes a profit, potentially, from problems on the network.

We read in *The Times* a few months ago—as I said, we were not notified by the Department—that GTR had been in breach of its licence and could have lost its franchise, but instead the Department agreed simply to loosen the targets for GTR, allowing an additional 9,000 trains to be cancelled a year without it being in breach of the reconfigured franchise agreement. These are my questions to the Minister. Exactly how much is GTR losing and what is the financial impact on Government revenue? How much compensation is Network Rail paying to GTR that is not then paid out to customers? What is the impact of the planned cancellations on penalties payable? My understanding is that when there are planned cancellations it does not have to pay the ad hoc penalties when trains do not turn up, do not start or skip stations or whatever. Are there financial implications for the loosening of the franchise and the introduction of this emergency timetable? What this boils down to is how much GTR and the Government have to feel financially pained before they do something urgently to resolve this crisis—and this is a crisis of great magnitude.

The Minister has the power to intervene on behalf of passengers and has made various statements. In yesterday's *Evening Standard* she was quoted as saying that

“the real solution is for the RMT to end this dispute and the high levels of sickness amongst its members...we are working with TfL and issued a prospectus earlier in the year for new ways to improve services in the capital.”

That comes after the Mayor asked for GTR to be stripped of its franchise. The Minister has also said:

“Historically the Government doesn't intervene in industrial disputes.”

But we are now told that a letter has been sent by the Minister to the unions offering some sort of deal. Perhaps she will comment on that and whether it is true, whether she is going to intervene, whether she can intervene and whether she is prepared to intervene. She has said:

“The union is holding commuters to ransom. Again if there was a legitimate safety concern or genuine job losses I would understand but this is a growing industry...This is not about job losses. This is about politics...What do you want me to do, get them in for beer and sandwiches?”

Frankly, that is not good enough and those sorts of sloganising headlines do nothing to get this problem resolved for our constituents. She has really got to get a grip.

There are many other problems as well. Back in January we had a summit in Westminster Hall. It was a very useful meeting. My right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) was greatly aerated. We enjoyed his interventions at the expense of the GTR management greatly; they were heartfelt and passionate and we all agreed with him. At that summit we had GTR, Network Rail, Department for Transport officials, MPs, Transport Focus and others—there were about 22 or so hon. Members, many of whom are in this room at the moment. We made it clear at that stage that this could not go on. At that stage we were primarily looking at the fallout from the problems with London Bridge,

well before these additional problems came along. We were promised a follow-up summit six months on in order to assess the situation. Where has that gone? We have one week to go before the recess and there is no follow-up summit to get everybody together and hold their feet to the fire—in my right hon. Friend's favourite phrase.

What really struck everybody at that summit was that the head official from the Department for Transport, when asked about taking back the franchise, got up and said, “Well basically, if GTR were not running this franchise—a very large franchise, a complex franchise—I would be the one responsible for it in the Department for Transport, and you don't want that.” In effect, GTR was told it faced little prospect of us taking back the franchise because we cannot really run it ourselves. What sort of incentive was that for GTR to get its act together if it knows it can get even worse and even then the Government will not intervene and do something about it? I am really angry about this on behalf of my constituents.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate and I absolutely 100% agree with him on behalf of my constituents that use East Dulwich, Peckham Rye and Queens Road. They will identify completely with the level of total exasperation and frustration. He has diligently gone through all this and has done all the right things, but his constituents' situations are simply getting worse and are set to get worse still, with disruption to family and working life and downright safety issues. I simply lend him my support and say that my constituents are every bit as desperate as his. We have no tube and we have congested roads, so they cannot go by bus. People cannot lead their lives like this. I agree with him that GTR should be stripped of the franchise.

Tim Loughton: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Lady for that short intervention. She echoes the words of so many of our other colleagues who could not be here, including my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley), who texted me to tell me that he was stuck on a train somewhere, otherwise he would have joined our deliberations.

Many other problems affect this railway; it is not just the unreliability of when the trains actually run. There is overcrowding, safety is an issue and, at the same time, Southern is trying to close down all our ticket offices. It has only given a temporary moratorium on that—what a stupid thing to do. When the company cannot even run the service, it tries to threaten the easiest way of selling tickets for it. We have the antiquated rolling stock on the west coastway line—the class 313 rolling stock is 40 years old, and has no loos or any other basics. Female constituents have real problems when stranded late at night in stations far from home because a station has been skipped or the last train has been cancelled. It is not just inconvenient; there is danger attached as well.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): I see that just two of us are here from the northern side of the Thameslink line. Is my hon. Friend aware that yesterday, the 7.34 am Brighton train from St Albans, which was a

brand-new train—one of the class 700 stock—broke down, so this is not just about old rolling stock, but about new rolling stock?

Tim Loughton: I fear that that is right. Again, we were promised that everything would be so much better because of the investment in rolling stock—that it is all coming in and it is all going to be fine.

Finally, there is the issue of compensation. We are constantly told by GTR, “We have this compensation scheme, which is not easy to administer,” but the amount of compensation that people are getting back for the huge amount of aggro that they face is paltry. Frankly, my constituents are not primarily interested in compensation. They just want a reliable service with a better than evens chance of them being able to turn up at the station and get on a train at about the time they want to catch it, to arrive at their destination within about five minutes or so of the published times, and go about their work or education as normal. That is what they want.

Given the extended, prolonged, intense aggravation there has been, season-ticket holders in particular should get serious discounts. When they renew their season tickets, whether or not they have put in for individual compensation, they should get a serious discount and a very large apology to go with it.

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): On compensation, I had an email from a constituent who is losing earnings day in, day out. They noted

“I was unable to travel...due to no trains running between Polegate and Haywards Heath. I was compensated £19 for my daily loss of earnings of £350.”

My hon. Friend also mentioned the situation being dangerous, and I point out that this is not only about people’s jobs being on the line. A constituent of mine said to me that they are so late picking up their child from nursery that they are worried because:

“It is standard procedure that most nurseries contact social services when parents are late.”

The situation is damaging people’s lives.

Tim Loughton: That is just another example of the extraordinary strength of the impact on our constituents.

In summing up, I really think, with the greatest respect—and I understand that the situation is complex and challenging—that enough is enough. The Minister has got to get a grip on this. If this has not been sorted by the beginning of September, after the impact of the emergency timetable—and we have had no clear indication of when it will be sorted—GTR should lose its franchise by the end of the year. There have been enough warnings and pathetic excuses about one thing or another going wrong—goodness knows what it will be by the time we get to September—and this has gone on for far too long.

I hope that in response to this debate, the Minister can give a clear indication of what it will take for the company to lose its franchise, if it does not get its act together. At the very least, our constituents deserve a proper and honest answer from her about how she will achieve this and when. We are fed up on behalf of our constituents, who have to take this flak day in, day out. It is not fair, it is not right, and she needs to do something about it—and tell us what—now.

Joan Ryan (in the Chair): I will put a five-minute limit on for all speakers now. I may have to reduce that to try to ensure that everybody gets the opportunity to speak on behalf of their constituents. I hope to move to the Front Benchers by 3.35 pm or so.

2.55 pm

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Ryan. I congratulate the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) not only on securing the debate, but on a very powerful speech; I agree with almost every single word. The fact that we see hon. Members from both sides of the House talking on a cross-party basis, along the same lines, illustrates the strength of feeling among our constituents about the joke of a service that they have been getting from GTR on Southern and Thameslink lines. I also take this opportunity to thank the 10 hon. Members—I think most are here—who have signed my early-day motion 298 calling for GTR to be stripped of the franchise.

I have to say that I laughed yesterday, when at about 5 o’clock, GTR tweeted:

“Don’t forget to plan your journey home this evening as there may have been a change to your usual train”.

There is nothing usual about the services that GTR provides. It has the worst record on cancellation and significant lateness, by some margin, of any operator, and it performs worst on the public performance measure.

As the hon. Gentleman said, we have had meeting after meeting and several debates on this issue. We get excuse after excuse, and our constituents have all reached the end of the line in their patience with what is going on—[*Laughter.*] See what I did there? The bottom line is that the company has not trained enough drivers. It is true that Network Rail has contributed to the situation and that GTR has to operate on an ageing infrastructure, but frankly, so do all the other train-operating companies. The delay figures show that Network Rail has caused more delays for the other train operators than for GTR, but the other train operators outperform GTR. There has been poor planning on a gargantuan scale and frankly, the management of GTR are absolutely appalling. We still have problems with basic things like information being provided when there is lateness.

The impact on constituents is absolutely unbearable. People have lost their jobs, which is a disgrace, as a result of the company’s poor performance. People who are still in their jobs arrive at work stressed and do not have the right mindset to start work, which will of course have an impact on productivity. Students and pupils have told me about the impact of the stress of getting to school to do their exams recently, as a result of the performance of that train operator.

So what do we want? I will probably not take up my whole five minutes, because I want to ensure that everyone else can get in. This franchise needs to end, and it needs to end now, or as soon as possible. I do not see why we should have to wait until 2020 or 2021 when it is up for renewal. I just cannot understand—I say this as somebody who professionally, as a lawyer, worked on a franchise agreement—how the company is not in breach of this franchise, such that it can be taken away from it. I understand absolutely that this is a big franchise. It is probably too big and, ultimately, I would like to see the

[*Mr Chuka Umunna*]

parts of this franchise that cover London suburban routes transferred to Transport for London, which I believe could do a much better job of providing services to my constituents.

Turning to the longer term, in Streatham, we have Streatham Hill, Streatham and Streatham Common stations, as well as Tulse Hill and Balham stations just outside, and our stations have been over capacity for some time. Our population is growing and we are not in any Government programme to upgrade our local transport to be fit for the future. That is why ultimately, what we would like to see—I think this may provide a long-term solution to our problems with GTR and this particular franchise—is Crossrail 2 routed through Streatham. That would alleviate congestion on the Northern and Victoria lines, which are nearby, because large numbers of people to the east and south of those lines would therefore not have to travel to Tooting Bec, Tooting Broadway, Balham and Brixton and could use a Streatham Crossrail station. It would relieve congestion at Streatham Common, which is the sixth busiest station in the Southern network, and at Streatham station. It would cut congestion on our roads, too. Also, Streatham Action, a local group, and our local council have been clear that it would also provide an opportunity for growth and regeneration in our area.

I want to come back to where the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham finished. What we want from the Minister today is action. We do not want the warm words that say, “Yes, I agree with you about how awful they have been.” We want action, and we certainly do not want the Minister acting as an apologist for this company.

3 pm

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): We have been here before. There have been at least two debates in this Chamber, one secured by me and one by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), in which we heavily criticised Southern and also Network Rail for failing to deliver a satisfactory performance for their customers. We welcomed the introduction of a performance improvement plan, then a year later got very annoyed that the self-set targets, already low in that performance improvement plan, had not been adhered to; and before Christmas I said that unless there was a significant and rapid improvement in the performance of the company, removal of the franchise should certainly be considered.

Let us be clear. The current performance, which is measurably worse than it was a year ago and has deteriorated rapidly, is due to new and different reasons, and we have to understand what they are. Before the strikes that were called by the rail unions, 26 train cancellations a day were due to train crew unavailability. Clearly, it is a major failure on the part of GTR Southern not to have recruited sufficient staff to be able to run the service. Nobody should resile from criticising the company for that.

After the strikes began, in the period 29 March to 25 June, 148 trains were cancelled a day—a remarkable increase. The figures produced by GTR tell us, assuming that they are reliable, that driver sickness since the start of the strikes has increased by about a third and the

willingness to work overtime has reduced by about a third. It is that remarkable loss of labour that is causing the real disruption that so annoys our constituents at the moment.

The dispute turns on whether it is safe to introduce trains with driver-operated doors. The question for hon. Members of all parties, including all of us who rail about the performance of the franchise holder, is whether it is safe to introduce such trains. Do we think the unions have a case in mounting their industrial action or not? It is hard to argue that there is a safety issue when 60% of the trains currently operated by GTR already have driver-only operation of doors, 40% of them Southern trains. Are we all saying that those trains are unsafe? Are the unions saying that those trains are unsafe? That is the kernel of the issue at the moment, so let us confront it.

We have to decide whether the unions have a point. If we do not think they have a point—I do not think they do, because there will be no job losses, no reductions in pay, and there will still be staff on almost all the trains, including the drivers that currently have guards who operate the doors—why are we blaming Southern entirely for this dispute?

I have absolutely no compunction about criticising Southern. No hon. Member has criticised Southern more firmly than I have over the past year. I have been very clear about the failings of the company and its management. No hon. Member has criticised Southern more firmly—the record shows that—but I am sure that the current disruption is being caused by the industrial action. What I question is why we collectively—hon. Members of all parties—have been so reticent to attribute proper blame to the unions for what is happening. In my judgment, the unions are being very clever. They know that this dispute is effectively a work to rule.

Lilian Greenwood: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way and congratulate all those who have taken part in the debate. Does the right hon. Gentleman think it helped or hindered when Peter Wilkinson, the managing director of passenger services, said earlier this year:

“We have got to break them...They can’t afford to spend too long on strike and I will push them into that place...They will have to decide if they want to give a good service or get the hell out of my industry?”

I agree about the need for good industrial relations, but does the right hon. Gentleman think that that was constructive?

Nick Herbert: I am not defending Southern’s industrial relations. The question for the hon. Lady is whether she thinks the dispute is justified. If she would like to tell me that, I will sit down and give way to her now. Is the dispute justified or not?

Lilian Greenwood: Clearly, there has been a breakdown in communication between staff and management.

Nick Herbert: Answer the question.

Lilian Greenwood: The only way in which a dispute will be resolved is by people sitting round the table to discuss concerns about safety, and there are concerns across the network, across the country, about safety issues on platforms and about the control of doors.

Nick Herbert: We did not get an answer to the question, and therein lies the problem: the current disruption that is causing massive inconvenience to our constituents is principally—not entirely—caused by the industrial action, which is official on strike days but unofficial when it clearly amounts to a work to rule. The problem is being caused by the unions, but hon. Members are not willing to criticise the unions for that. Undoubtedly, all sections of the rail industry have a case to answer for the poor performance in the franchise. Some 60% of the delays up until we had the strike were caused by the failures of infrastructure of Network Rail, not Southern, although that is partly being caused by the upgrade at London Bridge.

There is a real question about whether the franchise should have been awarded and about the scale of it. The franchise is too big. All parties have a case to answer; I am sure there is a case to answer on the part of GTR and Southern's management, too. For a start, they kicked off with insufficient drivers and staff. That is poor planning, but I go back to the central point that I was seeking to make: I have found it surprising in this debate that so little attention has focused on what the unions are doing.

Before the hon. Lady intervened, I was making the point that the unions have been very clever, because all the blame has been attributed to Southern, and what happens? We now have a pantomime villain to whom it is very easy for us all to say, "Boo! Take the franchise away." I joined in on this pantomime cry: "Take the franchise away and all the problems will be over." That is the easy thing for us all to say, but the question will remain: is it safe to have these new trains with driver-only operation of doors? The new franchisee will have to answer that question, and hon. Members are doing themselves no service at all by failing to address the key reason why the dispute arose in the first place.

3.8 pm

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the very first time, Ms Ryan, and I am extremely grateful to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) for securing this debate. He and I sometimes sit together on the train—we come from neighbouring constituencies—so we suffer alongside the people we serve and see the problems at first hand.

I want to do the unusual thing of thanking the Minister because in the short time that I have been an MP, she has never refused to meet me to discuss the issues. It has often turned into weekly discussions where the anger that has been expressed to me by the people I represent has been expressed in forceful terms to her, which she has always accepted at face value, and I am grateful for that.

In the year and a half that I have been a Member of Parliament, it has been made clear that representing a constituency served by Southern is like having toothache: you wake up in the morning and feel the pain of people who are trying, and failing, to get to work on time; you feel the pain of people who get home late in the evening. It is constant and absolutely unavoidable.

I never expected, when I became an MP, that I would become such an expert on the train system serving my constituency. I now know the timetable, even though it

changes so readily. I know the rolling stock. I have spent time training and doing work shadowing on the line, including shadowing several drivers to enable me to understand the pressures they are under. I have visited London Bridge to see the construction site, and have made a visit to see the new rolling stock, to try to understand the pressures on the system. I understand the scale of the problem. There is historical underfunding; new rolling stock is coming on line; there is the London Bridge upgrade, as well as routine track maintenance; there is an industrial dispute; and very bad planning by the rail franchisee has led to the poor number of drivers and conductors that underpins all the problems.

Sir Nicholas Soames: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that part of the problem—apart from what was highlighted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert)—is that the franchisee never planned ahead sufficiently for the right number of drivers and continued to give us thoroughly wrong information about how quickly the increase in driver numbers would improve the service?

Peter Kyle: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's intervention, because that is an incredibly important point. As I have said, bad management planning has underpinned all that is happening. It takes 18 months to train a new driver, and the driver shortages of the past six months to a year were absolutely predictable. GTR should have been on the case far earlier, and the fact that there is such a shortage of expertise on the line, including the shortage of drivers and conductors, has underpinned a shambles and turned it into a crisis. I have absolute sympathy with the right hon. Gentleman's intervention.

It is inexplicable to me that, even with all the challenges on the line, things have so quickly descended into crisis. At the moment, in the midst of an industrial dispute, there is what I can only describe as a dysfunctional relationship at the heart of the network—between Government and the franchise holder, and the franchise holder and the unions, with Railtrack involved as well underneath it all. It means that no one involved wakes up in the morning thinking, "How do I make passengers' lives better today? How can I make passengers' journey home better than the journey they took to work?" The impact is that there is damage to the economy. People arrive at work late and get written warnings. They get home late, which damages communities and family life, because they are not home to see their kids before they go to bed. It is quite heartbreaking.

Someone who got in touch with me said that she had aspired for most of her working life to live in Hove, by the seaside. That is a community that I chose to live in because I absolutely love it. She has been there for five or six years, but things have now got to the point where she must pack her bags and leave—go back to London—because she can no longer cope with the shambles that is the rail franchise. The service is letting down communities and people.

The Minister will know that not only do I come to her to whinge, like everyone else, but I also try to present solutions. Many hon. Members here are like me, and want to help to turn things around and be supportive. I hosted a public meeting last week. The chief operating officer for Govia kindly came down and faced the full

[*Peter Kyle*]

force of the anger in my constituency, so I am very grateful to Dyan Crowther. She left the meeting having learned in no uncertain terms how strong the sentiment is at this time. I have also co-founded and co-chair, with the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), an all-party group that will provide an opportunity for all MPs in the area to come together for scrutiny of the issue, and enable them to support the change that is needed. I hope my actions will prove constructive.

Campaigners handed me a petition on the way in, and there are some sensible questions that I want to put directly to the Minister on their behalf. They want a sustainable compensation scheme that will be much more aggressive, assertive and responsive than the present one. They want first class to be declassified permanently, while the temporary timetable is in operation. I have written to the Minister about that; it is eminently sensible. The campaigners want the Minister to announce the duration of the present temporary timetable. I hope she will take all those points into consideration and give direct answers to the campaigners who want action so much.

3.15 pm

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): I was going to start my remarks with a comment about déjà vu until I remembered that I started my previous remarks in this Chamber, on the same subject, with a comment about déjà vu. We are getting continuous repetition.

I held a public meeting on this subject in Horsham on Saturday, and 300 of my constituents turned up—all very angry. At least one of them, I dare say, is still angry, having come up by train to sit in the Public Gallery today. I will not repeat the remarks that other Members have so eloquently made about all the problems the situation is causing—the way jobs, health and family life are being put at risk. That has been expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), among others. Every Member of Parliament attending the debate knows about that, the unions know about it, and the management knows about it.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert), who is also my constituency neighbour, I have been forthright in attacking GTR for poor performance, including in a debate that I obtained in this place three months ago. I am afraid that GTR entered the dispute when its reputation among its customers was at a low ebb. Notwithstanding that, however, I have no doubt that, as my right hon. Friend said, the immediate cause of the problems on the trains in recent months has been the dispute between the conductors and GTR.

I welcome the £2.5 billion investment in new trains. The independent Rail Safety and Standards Board has confirmed that the train doors can be operated safely by the driver. If that is so, it should be implemented. It does not mean that trains should be denuded of a second professional. I am totally in favour of having a second member of staff, trained in all safety precautions and techniques, on board the train in all but exceptional circumstances. I endorse the comment of the hon. Member

for Streatham (Mr Umunna), who pointed out that management should have a sufficiency of trained personnel to ensure that trains can run appropriately. However, on those occasions, which should be rare, when a second staff member is not available, I want the train to be able to run, if it can do so safely, and get my constituents home in the evening from London Bridge or Victoria. I know that my constituents who are undergoing the current nightmare would appreciate knowing how many trains have been cancelled in the past because a conductor was not available.

Echoing what other hon. Members have said, I ask the Government to intervene directly to ensure that the dispute will be resolved. I have heard the Minister's comments on guaranteeing jobs beyond the current franchise. My constituents are incredulous at the fact that no agreement has been possible to date, and I hope that the Minister's proposal may result in a breakthrough in discussions. The dispute must not be allowed to continue. While the temporary timetable persists, may I ask the Minister four things? I make no apology for reiterating some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle).

First, why are trains not being declassified to ease the congestion on the reduced number of services? I appreciate that that may imply compensating first-class ticket holders; well, we should do so. Secondly, when will there be a complete overhaul of compensation? The Prime Minister—he remains that currently—promised a couple of weeks ago that we would hear news on that, but we still have not. It was in response to a question of mine in the main Chamber, at column 294 on 29 June. Let us be clear: delay repay does not do it. Many season ticket holders have given up on the trains because of their lack of reliability. They bought their season ticket for use with a timetable that has proved to be fictitious. I want a significant refund to be made to passengers.

Thirdly, GTR has shown a lack of foresight in the planning around the dispute. The dumping ground that is Three Bridges station is renowned. Why could alternative means to get passengers home from there reliably, without the colossal expense of taxis, not have been put in place by now? Lastly, in addition to explaining to customers the rationale for the dispute, I hope the management will give a granular explanation of the cause of the continuing disruption. Can we have, for example, regular publication of sickness statistics? GTR owes its customers, whose trust in the operator is low, proper explanations of why their lives are being made so miserable.

I appreciate that the franchise is huge and there were good reasons, connected with going through London, why it was put together in its present form. In our previous debate I asked the Minister to be brave, if she felt that she needed to and if the franchise had become too large and out of control. I should love to hear her comments on how she feels the debate has gone, and whether the franchise is still operable on its current basis.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Joan Ryan (in the Chair): Order. In an effort to ensure that everybody has the opportunity to speak, I am reducing the time limit to three minutes.

3.20 pm

Jim Dowd (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): I will try not to use even those three minutes, Ms Ryan. I want to echo what others have said and to congratulate the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) not just on securing the debate, but on the passion and comprehensive nature of his arguments, reflecting the concerns of his constituents and everybody in this room.

The right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) made some points about the safety of trains without conductors. In the inner London part of the franchise, which GTR laughingly calls the metro zone, there are no conductors. If I thought for one moment that running driver-only trains was dangerous, I would be kicking up a fuss on behalf of my constituents who are expected to use trains without conductors. I do not believe that that issue is the key to the problem.

The difficulty is that Southern has provided lamentable services consistently throughout the time it has had the franchise. It worries me that the same company has the Southeastern franchise. The company will say that there is a Chinese wall between the franchises but I fear the contagion may spread. Just yesterday, one of my constituents said:

“On the new ‘emergency timetable’, peak time services, including the 802 from Anerley, have been cancelled meaning that passengers are forced to travel in overcrowded conditions on services that are often short formed and subject to delays and last minute cancellations. There is nothing particularly new here. Southern have always provided a sub-par service. This most recent disaster, however, seems to be a lot worse than the usual chaos.”

People have had to get used to “the usual chaos” when the service is provided by Southern.

I was standing on Forest Hill station the other day, fortunately waiting for an Overground service to Canada Water to come here. While I was there, the first train listed was the Southern service into London Bridge. As I stood there, it went from “on time”, to “delayed”, to “cancelled” within the space of four minutes. The short-running of trains is compounding the problem. People get on trains such as those on the Victoria to London Bridge line, which is supposed to go all the way, but they often get to Crystal Palace and are told that the train is terminating there, going both ways—to Victoria or to London Bridge.

The other day, a constituent told me that he had spent £700 on a season ticket for the service between Beckenham Junction and Victoria. That service has now been completely cancelled. I have been on to GTR to try to find out what the compensation arrangements are but, as the service no longer exists, my constituent believes that he now has little or no chance of being able to sustain his current job.

The situation is damaging lives. The sheer unpredictability of it all, from day to day, adds to people’s stress and the difficulties that they face. I know that the Minister has tried valiantly, over a long time, to deal with the situation, but if Southern is not up to running the service, somebody else has to.

3.23 pm

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): It is not just the new timetable that is the issue. My constituents have faced delays for many weeks and months. Last month, more than 1,350 trains were delayed each and every week. My

constituents are fed up. I will not go over the impact it is having on many of them, but their experiences reflect much of what has been said.

My constituency is rural, so the train service is the only form of public transport available to many people. I share Wivelsfield station with my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames). Plumpton, Cooksbridge, Glynde, Berwick and Polegate are also in my area, and are all facing significant delays. Cooksbridge has only ever had peak-time services. One of my campaigns during the election was to get an off-peak and weekend service for Cooksbridge, but I was told by Southern that it could not do that because it would add two minutes to the timetable.

My main concern for my residents is the new timetable, which was introduced on Monday with less than a week’s notice. Services on the branch line have been cut by 80%, and are being run by a replacement bus service. Those service cuts affect the stations of Southease, Newhaven Town, Newhaven Harbour, Bishopstone and Seaford.

Seaford is the largest town in my constituency, with 27,000 people who can no longer get to work and who have to travel to Brighton or Eastbourne, which they can no longer access by train to get to a hospital. There are young people who want to go to the University of Brighton or the University of Sussex, as there is only a sixth-form in the town, but they cannot access higher or further education because they have no train service. It is a tourist town, which depends on people not just leaving the town for work, but coming into the town to spend money.

Newhaven is a town that we are trying desperately to regenerate. I went over to France to try to save the ferry that goes from Newhaven to Dieppe only a few weeks ago. The French put £20 million a year into that ferry, and I am ashamed to say to them, “There is no longer any train service to Newhaven.”

I have five asks of the Minister. First, each and every train ticket, whether it is a single ticket or a season ticket, needs a fare reduction of 25%. Secondly, we need the urgent reintroduction of the branch line for the reasons I mentioned. Thirdly, we need new management to take over Southern. If we are not going to remove the franchise, let us get people in who can run it. No other rail operator has experienced such a level of delays when introducing driver-only trains.

Fourthly, the trolley service needs to be reintroduced. Passengers cannot be on a train for three hours and not be able to buy a bottle of water or a sandwich. The Two Ronnies made a career of making jokes out of British Rail sandwiches; we can laugh no longer because there is no trolley service available at all on my trains. Fifthly, first class needs to be declassified. I have been on a train when an elderly woman had nowhere to sit and was fined by Southern because she used first class. That is disgraceful. In the words of my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), enough is enough.

3.26 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on securing the debate and on his excellent contribution. I echo and agree with

[*Helen Hayes*]

much of what has been said. My constituents use Southern services into London Bridge and Victoria from stations such as East Dulwich, Peckham Rye and North Dulwich, and they use Thameslink services from Sydenham Hill, Herne Hill and Loughborough Junction. It is fair to say that, before the current crisis, services were already unacceptably poor. The works at London Bridge were entirely mismanaged. Southern produced a timetable that was entirely unsustainable, had no resilience and was understaffed. Satisfaction with GTR services is among the lowest in the country and, within that, the lowest levels of satisfaction are within the metro part of the service and among commuters.

My constituents have shown immense patience and forbearance with their rail services while dealing with entirely unacceptable consequences to their quality of life. The impact on family life includes people being unable to see their children at bedtime, being consistently late picking up their children, being unable to meet caring responsibilities, losing jobs, having to move jobs and just simply dealing with the additional stress within lives that are already busy and stretched. That is simply unacceptable.

Much has been said about the industrial dispute. The responsibility for good industrial relations rests with all parties. The seeds of the dispute go back a long way, and are about understaffing. GTR started the franchise with fewer drivers than the previous franchisee reported having in post. How was that even allowed to happen? GTR has been too slow to recruit and too slow to train.

On top of all that is the introduction of the emergency timetable. I was grateful to the Minister for meeting me a few weeks ago to discuss the issue, as Southern presented a sort of plan for getting through the industrial dispute. Then, with no warning and no briefing at all, the emergency timetable was introduced. In my constituency, that involved pretty much the wholesale withdrawal of commuter rail services on the Southern part of the network. Only one train out of four or five an hour run, and my constituents simply cannot get on to those trains because they are too full.

The franchise needs to be withdrawn. Enough is enough. Patience has run out. The franchise needs to be passed to Transport for London, which has a track record of running decent Overground rail services in the capital. That is what passengers want and there are huge levels of support for it. I accept that TfL cannot do that in a single step but we are in a crisis, and I call on the Minister to take action to allow the Department for Transport to take over in the interim while arrangements can be made to transfer the franchise to TfL.

3.29 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) for securing this debate. I speak on behalf of both myself and my neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd). We share the two worst-performing rail operators—Southern and Southeastern—and we bear our crosses as best we can.

I am also a daily commuter, mostly on Southern. I spend about three-and-a-half hours on my commute, so I experience the same frustration, anger and stories that

many right hon. and hon. Members have detailed today. In Bexhill and Hastings we have suffered the emergency timetable, which has affected our two-carriage train. The train does not perform that regularly, and it is now even worse. The timetable is causing real misery for our constituents in both towns.

I am a member of the Select Committee on Transport, and I can perhaps bring a little optimism to the room. It was a delight to have the leader of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, the chief executive of Southern and the rail Minister at our inquiry into Southern's performance. The session made it clear that there is some common ground. The key now is to get everyone around the table. With respect to the RMT, we finally got it to agree that, really, this just comes down to jobs. The union could call it safety, and I could call it union subs, but it comes down to a guarantee that there will be a second member of staff on the trains. The Committee was reassured to hear from the chief executive of Southern that that guarantee will be in place not only now but for the entirety of the franchise. Southern cannot give any more than that because it cannot go beyond its franchise terms. We then asked the rail Minister what can be done beyond that, and I hope that I am not misquoting her when I say that she was able to confirm that the guarantee will be in place for the next franchise, too.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) said so forcibly, it is right for us to call out behaviour that we consider unreasonable. Who else is guaranteed a job for up to 10 years? Certainly not Members of Parliament. It is down to the unions to show a little more willingness. They have now responded by letter to say that they will call for a cessation of industrial action for a three-month period, which is a good start, but they must operate the rolling stock for which we have all been waiting for so long. If it turns out that a conductor cannot join a train but that the driver can close the doors, I would rather have that train run. The unions have to be reasonable.

The unions also have to be reasonable in helping to end the sickness issues. There is undoubtedly an issue that has to be ended, and the unions have the biggest responsibility for doing so. Those are my asks of the unions—they wrote back yesterday telling the rail Minister that they are willing to sit down and give talks a try. I urge her, and all concerned, to take up that offer.

3.32 pm

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I join colleagues in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on securing this debate. It is no exaggeration to describe the situation on Southern railway as of crisis proportions. The impact on residents' day-to-day lives is deep and profound. Lee Fenton, one of my neighbours in Coulsdon, lost his job because he was so persistently late for work. I have talked to people who have had to quit their jobs, to self-employed people who are losing earnings and whose businesses are no longer viable, and to parents who are not getting home in time to put their children to bed. These problems are profoundly affecting the day-to-day lives of tens of thousands of people.

Although industrial relations are, in the first instance, GTR's responsibility, it is time for the Government to take a more active role in the industrial dispute and in

matters of the railway's performance, because this is more than just an industrial dispute on a railway, and it is about more than just how the railway operates. The dispute is profoundly affecting the lives of very many people. I share the view of the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna) that problems on Southern railway and GTR go back at least two years, and a fresh start with a new franchise is needed. Southern's public performance measure has been very low for well over a year.

I also agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) that performance, which has been very poor for a year, has become abysmal as a result of the industrial dispute. I am firmly of the view that the concerns expressed about safety are wholly without merit. As we have heard, 60% of GTR trains already run perfectly safely with driver-operated doors. Every single London underground train, where platform crowding is significantly worse than on Southern railway, works with driver-operated doors with no safety concerns at all.

I urge Labour Members to use their influence with the RMT, which I suspect is slightly more significant than mine, to urge an immediate cessation of this groundless dispute. Jobs have been guaranteed beyond the lifetime of the franchise, which is a generous offer, and pay and the number of people employed have been guaranteed. There are no reasonable grounds for the dispute. This is an urgent matter, and I urge the Minister to take control of the franchise and to get involved in resolving the industrial dispute, because our constituents, neighbours and residents cannot take this any longer. It simply must end.

3.35 pm

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on securing this important debate on the performance, and frankly the failure, of Govia Thameslink. I am sitting next to my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes), and I must point out that this sickness has spread to Hampshire. Indeed, Southern has a toe in my constituency, and it must not be forgotten that services up from Swanwick in her patch—there is a bridge between our constituencies—to Gatwick airport have left travellers stranded and abandoned, with embarrassing and derisory compensation offered.

On unsafe practices, the duty of care is not about closing doors; it is about not abandoning and stranding people on the side of a railway, with trains being cancelled or changed at short notice. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham said, people are simply being left in the middle of nowhere with no options.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem extends across the whole network? Many people using our stations in southern Hampshire on the mainline west coastway route—Swanwick, Portchester and Fareham—are travelling to Crawley or Gatwick for work, and they are putting their jobs at risk.

Mims Davies: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I have travellers from Netley and Hamble going to Bursledon and onward to Southampton Central. Those people avoid the A27 and the grind through Chichester,

or the M27 heading to Littlehampton, Worthing, Hove or Brighton and the perils of the Chichester roundabout, in the hope of getting to work safe and sound. The safety considerations are, of course, off the trains. Yes, the unions might have a point, and perhaps we have not quite gotten to the bottom of that, but for me the safety considerations are about vulnerable people being left on the side of the railway.

We are a Government who stand up for working people, and it is time for us to stand up for passengers, workers, students, visitors and vulnerable people with children. There is an economic case for action on Southern trains, and I have previously asked the Minister a question on that in the Chamber. We have heard that the issue is blighting people's lives day in, day out. It is not good enough.

I am also concerned about the safety of guards on trains. There is dangerous overcrowding late at night, with upset and angry people. Having seen the pictures of overcrowding at Victoria station, I am frankly surprised that there has not been a riot. The situation is dangerous. I do not want to over-egg or overhype it, but I have received feedback that people are frightened and concerned.

There is an economic case for us to support our businesses. We talk about Brexit and the problems that could affect our businesses, but the reality is that problems are happening now due to this franchise. I ask the Minister for a kind response and to think about all the families, workers and businesses who depend on the Government to make a substantial case for doing something. The time is now.

3.38 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): It is a delight to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Ryan. I congratulate the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on securing this crucial debate and on his tour de force. We were all impressed by what he had to say.

After little more than two years, GTR's operation of the Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern franchise has been an unmitigated disaster, with the targets on punctuality and reducing delays breached long ago and followed by a series of inadequate compromises between the Department for Transport and GTR. The views of passengers, and their intense dissatisfaction with GTR's performance, are being managed rather than met by the Government. There is insufficient protection of the passenger and public interest in the reliable operation of these vital rail services, which are essential to both the national economy and the millions of passengers who rely on them.

GTR's tenure has led to the worst punctuality ratings of any train operator in the country; a doubling in the percentage of trains that were cancelled or delayed by more than half an hour, from 3.9% to 7.4% of services which, again, is worse than any other operator in the last reporting period; an average of 50.9% of trains on time, one of the worst ratings in the country; and one in three Gatwick Express trains running late. The list goes on.

The latest Transport Focus statistics make for dire reading for GTR and the Government, with passenger satisfaction in decline to an unacceptably low level. Only 35% of passengers on the Southern metro and Sussex coastway lines regard the service as value for money, following the introduction of the remedial plan.

Jeremy Quin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andy McDonald: Will the hon. Gentleman forgive me if I do not? I want to give the Minister time to respond, and she has little enough.

As Members who represent constituencies on these lines know only too well, all these performance failures were visible on Southern GTR services well before any dispute with the rail unions over driver-only operation and prior to Southern services entering the Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern super-franchise in July 2015. We have also seen the operator of last resort, Directly Operated Railways, scaled back within DfT and removed from the Rail Delivery Group.

GTR is widely recognised as the worst train operator in the country, following a sustained period of cancellations, lateness, worsening industrial relations and failed planning that makes a mockery of the Government's regular sermons on the benefits of rail privatisation. There is cross-party consensus on the need for GTR to be stripped of the franchise: my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna), the hon. Members for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) and for Croydon South (Chris Philp), the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) and many others have all called for that. Even GTR acknowledges that it could have the franchise removed if it fails to deliver on targets in the franchise agreement. In this increasingly fractious affair, why is it only the Government who are not contemplating removing the franchise or even retaining the threat as a means of improving performance?

The Opposition would like to see our rail services back in public operation, but to ignore the clear evidence of the essential service protection that the public sector provides through the operator of last resort is entirely reckless. Perhaps GTR's accounts shed more helpful light on the extent of its relationship with DfT and the purpose it serves. Under a section entitled "Political Risks", GTR states:

"It is not anticipated that any significant political change in direction would affect the existing contract. The company's senior management continue to work closely with the DfT to ensure consistency of messaging to try to manage stakeholder expectations."

That may be standard language to reassure shareholders and investors, but it also strikes me as evidence of an unhealthy relationship in which the Government are committed to preserving the GTR franchise, whatever the cost to passengers, staff or the taxpayer. The taxpayer is paying GTR an estimated £1.17 billion every year in management fees for this dysfunctional service, and that does not include the huge levels of investment in track and stations through publicly owned Network Rail every year, including the redevelopment of London Bridge.

Neither sickness levels nor industrial action are responsible for the misery that Southern commuters in particular have contended with for more than a year now. The decline in industrial relations is a direct result of the close relationship between the Government and GTR. When senior civil servants are quoted at public meetings stating to passengers that they "have got to break" rail unions, as my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) said, the problem is entirely of the Government's making.

Labour is clear that the Government's failure to include meaningful penalties in the franchise is at the root of GTR's declining performance. We call on the Government to strip GTR of the franchise. That is the only way in which sustainable improvements in performance can be achieved. The breach and default levels for service cancellations under the original franchise agreement with Govia have been consistently exceeded, and what we have seen in response is the imposition of a remedial plan cooked up between GTR and the DfT in February this year and kept away from prying eyes for three months. That raised breach and default levels for service cancellation, meaning that passengers would have to cope with up to 31,000 fewer services.

The Minister was absolutely right when she said in a debate on Southern in this Chamber almost exactly a year ago that high levels of delay and cancellation were "an unacceptable burden on working families."—[*Official Report*, 8 July 2015; Vol. 598, c. 105WH.]

That burden is worse today, and it is the direct result of the Government's handling of this franchise—indulging GTR and failing to respond to consistent failure with removal of the franchise.

Let me turn quickly to the current dispute. Even the industry-funded Rail Safety and Standards Board has acknowledged that driver-only operated services "may increase the likelihood of an event occurring or increase the severity of its consequence."

The issue is whether risks to passengers increase when things go wrong if passengers no longer have a binding safety guarantee from a second member of on-board staff who is fully trained in safety-critical procedures. GTR's proposed new role of an on-board supervisor will not be that of a guard or a conductor; it will lack critical safety training in carriage and passenger protection in the event of an emergency incident.

GTR and the Government have also claimed that there will be no deskilling or dumbing down as a result of the GTR proposals to extend DOO on Southern services, yet the Minister told members of the Transport Committee on Monday that no train that currently has a second person on board would lose that person, and that she would ensure that the safety-critical role is maintained. We hope she will confirm today that that safety-critical role will be maintained over the life of this and future franchises. Central to that is retaining the 12-week training requirement for the second member of train crew—whether that is a guard, a conductor or an on-board supervisor.

I note that the RMT offered last week to suspend its industrial action for three months, as long as GTR suspends the DOO extension plans for a similar length of time. It surely makes sense now for the Minister to invite the RMT to meet her at the earliest opportunity to discuss the terms of a settlement with GTR that would also apply to future franchises. That should allow both parties time to reach a conclusion to this dispute, if not to the performance problems that have dogged GTR since its inception, which we believe can only be remedied by removal of the franchise.

3.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry): I appreciate the opportunity to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Ryan. I thank right hon. and

hon. Members on both sides for their contributions to this important debate. Before I look forwards, I want to take a couple of minutes to look back.

One of my first jobs on becoming rail Minister in 2014 was to go up the Shard and welcome this new franchise, and to celebrate the fact that the franchise had been awarded to an operator who, by all accounts, was well qualified to take it on. It had operated trains during the Olympics, when everything ran swimmingly, and it was appraised of the extent of the Thameslink disruption. It had an investment plan and a plan to redress the shortage of drivers—an issue that had bedevilled the previous franchise. Things seemed to be set fair.

In the summer of that year we saw the major blockades at London Bridge which caused massive disruption for people—not during the blockade but at points afterwards. Afterwards, we ran into weeks and weeks of problems. I got involved and we had a weekly quadrant meeting. My friend the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) said that we all now know far more about trains and franchising than we ever thought we would have to know.

In fairness, things were starting to work. Despite the lack of joined-up thinking about the impact of the London Bridge works on existing commuters, the major problems with Network Rail's infrastructure reliability, which were not being addressed properly, and the series of changes, including Sir Peter Hendy coming in from TfL and taking direct control of all the infrastructure work in that area, everyone was pulling together, with the massive involvement of my officials, and in April the public performance measure got back to 83.6%.

Chris Philp: That is rubbish.

Mr Umunna: It is still terrible.

Claire Perry: It was not nearly good enough, but that was 10 percentage points up over the last six months. There was every view that performance was returning to the place where we needed it to be.

Since then—I will come to the issue of the industrial action—all bets are off. When people simply do not know how many staff are rostering in a particular depot, particularly the Brighton depot, where so many trains start and finish, it is impossible to run a reliable service. I have been to London Bridge and Victoria stations many times and travelled on the trains and I have been ashamed to be the rail Minister. I suggest that successive rail Ministers over many years in many Governments should share that sense of shame.

There seem to have been four fundamental failures in the industry that mean that when things go wrong, it is really hard to recover. It is the customers—the passengers who rely on the train services—who suffer. First, I submit to the House that there has been a disdain for people—for passengers—at the heart of the railway for decades. I have shared this anecdote with the House previously: a former very senior member of Network Rail said to me that the problem with the timetable is that the customers mess it up. Think about what that implies about what that person's view of their job was: to run a system, not to move people.

Crowding is not really costed in any of the economic measures that successive Governments have used. There has just been an assumption that people will continue to cram on. It is more valuable to put a train on a long-distance

service, where there is a discretionary choice of travel, than to relieve crowding on an overground service around London. That seems to me to be perverse.

Investment has been entirely focused on engineering improvements and almost never on reduction in delay. Why do we still have this “leaves on the line” problem every year? By the way, no one has ever calculated the economic consequences of leaves on the line. Surely it is not beyond the wit of our finest metallurgists to solve that problem, yet we just accept it. We plough on and look to shave five minutes off long-distance journeys.

Thameslink will deliver some significant benefits for people travelling through London. There are brand new trains and wonderful new stations such as Blackfriars, which nobody ever talks about. It is a wonderful station delivered without a trace. Nevertheless, the human cost of the Thameslink work on the travelling public was almost forgotten. I was not the Minister at the time and I do not even know under which Government it was planned, but a man came up to me at London Bridge station in tears and said, “You're doing this so people can get from Cambridge to Brighton without disruption. That's great, but I just want to get home to see my kids.” There is something flawed with the industry, because it does not value those people's experiences.

The second failure is that, as Members know, the industry has a highly complicated structure. We have Network Rail, which is in a much better place now, post the Hendy review and Shaw changes. It has made some amazing hires. We have a franchising system that in some cases delivers huge benefits but in other cases does not. The problem with franchising is that if it is a very short-term franchise, nobody has an incentive to invest in industrial or passenger relations. Why would the staff care when the name on the nameplate changes every seven years?

Andy McDonald: They do care.

Claire Perry: They do care, but why would they feel an allegiance to a company the name of which changes every few years? The staff on the frontline care in extreme amounts, and we are all very grateful for that.

Andy McDonald: Will the Minister give way?

Claire Perry: No, I am going to continue.

Thirdly, we have an investment structure that is broken. The Government step in over and over again to fill the gaps and to buy rolling stock. By the way, the profits in the rail industry mostly accrue to the rolling stock leasing companies—the ROSCOs. If Members look at the shareholder structures to see where the profits are, they will see that they are with the rolling stock companies, not the franchise operators. GTR's margin this year is going to be around 1.5% on this franchise. There is something structurally wrong with the financial structure of the industry.

The fourth and final problem is that the contractual levers are really poor. I have been asked repeatedly, “Why don't you just take the franchise back?” The reason is that I cannot. GTR is not in breach of its franchise contract right now.

Mr Umunna indicated dissent.

Claire Perry: The hon. Gentleman knows—he has been involved in contracting—that we have a contractual structure and there are a series of inputs and outputs. The company is not in breach of them. People ask what happened with Directly Operated Railways. The franchise was handed back to the Government by East Coast. In such circumstances we can take it back in-house and do something with it, but at the moment I do not have the levers to pull to take the franchise back.

Chris Philp: Will the Minister give way?

Claire Perry: No. If I may, I will continue, because I want to try to address some action points. I will try to finish quickly.

If I thought it would help for me to fall on my sword, I would. I have thought about it repeatedly. I do not like failure. I do not fail at stuff in my life. This feels like a failure. Could I do something contractually to force the franchise to end early? Would the problems actually go away? Would the industrial action and staffing problems stop? No. Would the investment programme create anything more certain for passengers? No. In my view, it would do almost nothing. It feels like that scene in Tom Wolfe's "The Right Stuff", when the test pilot is "augering in"—into the ground—shouting:

"I've tried A! I've tried B! I've tried C! I've tried D! Tell me what else I can try!"

I take issue with the view that nobody cares. Charles Horton and Dyan Crowther really care. They have done so much work. They have been out there, briefing and working tirelessly. The emergency timetable was not just some fantasy; it was an attempt to try to deliver a reliable service that would actually work, by compressing staff and trains into the areas of greatest need and making sure that the services that were withdrawn were ones for which there were alternative routes. The front-line staff really care. Day after day, they are there, holding the line, dealing with angry customers and trying to cheer up passengers. Right hon. and hon. Members really care. We have all been on this journey for many years now. My Department cares passionately. Nobody is enjoying this process.

On industrial relations, it is true that doors operated by drivers are safe—61% of GTR trains are already operated using the technology. It is incredible what can be done through industrial action. Is it politically motivated? I do not know. Yesterday, the 8.36 service from London Victoria to Sutton was cancelled because an unknown person had been smoking in the driver's cab and the driver was not happy to drive the train. The driver's cab had to be aired and cleaned before it could be utilised, so the service was cancelled, causing knock-on delays throughout the day. To me, that does not feel like everybody pulling together to deliver a battle plan for customers who want to get home, which is what I think they should be doing.

What are we going to do? The one-month emergency timetable was today—at least as of 12 noon—delivering a 90.3% PPM on Southern. Everything could go wrong later in the day, but it looks like it is starting to work. That timetable will be in place for one month, and we need to monitor it closely. I want to bring forward compensation plans. That will involve negotiation with other parts of the Government, given that we are talking

about revenue that is coming into the Government coffers, but I am very keen to deliver compensation. I have written to the next Prime Minister about this. She has a proposal to get customers and unions more closely involved in the management structure of companies, and GTR would be a perfect example of involving them. I do want to meet the unions and the management. I have been advised repeatedly to stay out of it—hell no! I want to sit people around the table and say, "What the hell is going on? Let's try to sort this out."

Over the medium term, I want to accelerate the plan for the devolution of rail services to London. It is absolutely right to do that and it will deliver capacity on inner-London and suburban routes. I do not care about the politics and I do not care that there is a Labour Mayor; I just want the trains to run better. I also want to look at a new structure. In the Shaw report, we gave ourselves permission to look at new ways of running the railway. Could we put rolling stock and infrastructure together in a way that delivers a better service for passengers?

Although GTR is a highly complicated franchise—it is the busiest, most complicated thing in the country—it could be the perfect way to try to get everyone to focus on delivering a service. Would it not be great to be proud of the services that were bringing people into the greatest city in the UK, rather than ashamed? That is what I want, and I know it is what we all want. I may not be the Minister to deliver it, but as sure as hell I will keep trying until I am kicked out.

3.58 pm

Tim Loughton: From Streatham to Horsham, from Fareham to Bexhill, from Dulwich to Lewes, our constituents are angry, for all the reasons that have been laid out very passionately by the more than 20 Members present for the debate. With respect to the Minister, I did not want a history of the railways. I did not mention leaves on the line. I certainly would not hold up an 83% PPM as a badge of honour, because that means that almost one in five trains are still running very, very late. She said that the company was not in breach. When on earth will it technically be in breach? We need to know that.

I asked about the financial implications for the company and the Government, but answer came there none. Will the Minister please write to us so that we can understand at what point this nightmare will come to an end? The hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) described it as toothache, but the pain that our constituents are suffering is more like serious root canal surgery. My right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) said that we need to blame the unions. We do, but we also need to blame the non-21st century management practices of GTR for their not getting around the table and doing something about it.

In none of the vocabulary I heard from the Minister were the passengers the most important part for the solutions we need to achieve. I say to her: I know it is difficult to take back the franchise, but please, please set down some parameters for when such action might be triggered, or tell us what else you are going to do about it.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

South Manchester Transport Infrastructure

[MRS ANNE MAIN *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): I beg to move,

That the House has considered transport infrastructure in South Manchester.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Mrs Main, and to see other Members here in Westminster Hall. I take this opportunity to thank the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), whom I am pleased to see is still in his post after what has been a very busy day.

I have worked with fellow members of the Communities and Local Government Committee to scrutinise the Government's landmark devolution legislation. I must confess that, as the Member for Cheadle, I have a vested interest in its success. Cheadle is a constituency that sits within the Greater Manchester city region, which has already benefited from £7.6 billion funding towards the northern powerhouse.

Good transport links are key to the success of the northern powerhouse. Indeed, the enabling powers in the devolution legislation are crucial for regional ambitions for business to deliver prosperity at a time when now, more than ever, effective connectivity and transport infrastructure from the suburbs to the city are vital. I am therefore grateful to be able to raise this issue with the Minister, thereby providing an opportunity for my constituents to be reassured that the Government are committed to building the northern powerhouse, to encouraging investment in transport, and to underwriting our ambition as a city region that is easy to do business with. We need to correct traditional regional imbalances, and transport is a vital element of achieving that objective.

Greater Manchester is a major region, with 2.7 million inhabitants. In total, our Government aim to spend £13 billion on transport during this Parliament to support a growing economy and our increasing population. It is within the context of the Government's devolution agenda that further powers will place transport choices in the hands of local communities. Thus, the way that people travel and do business is set to change for the better.

Andrew Bingham (High Peak) (Con): I applaud my hon. Friend for securing this very important debate. My constituency of High Peak does not qualify as part of south Manchester, even though economically it looks to south Manchester. Does she agree that, although the transport links within south Manchester are crucial, to make the northern powerhouse work we have to get the trans-Pennine links that the Minister knows well from visiting my constituency—the A628 and the A57, the links from Greater Manchester across to Sheffield and the rest of Yorkshire—working well? They are just as vital as other links for what she is trying to achieve.

Mary Robinson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. Indeed, it is the wider links across the region that need to be considered in this discussion, because we need to do business and we need to change,

and we need to make that change a change for the better, with the potential to generate local and international business, creating global connectivity for Britain's second city, as well as for the periphery.

The Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2040 and its consultation document, which was released last week, are explicit about the need for transport to address long-term challenges in Greater Manchester that are inclusive of but not limited to our growing population.

As local plans are put in place to deliver the housing needs of the city region, our local road network is the infrastructure workhorse of our communities, and as growth is planned we must remember that our roads are not only lines on a map but a vital means for people to live their lives. Clearly, there are areas where roads are stretched beyond their capacity. A prime example is what was once a simple junction connecting the communities of Cheadle and Gatley that now blights the lives of pedestrians and drivers. It is in the light of these pressures that I will talk about the road network in my constituency. One of the most pressing issues for my constituents is indeed the junction of the A34 and the A560 at Gatley.

Unfortunately, well-intentioned but small-scale interventions over the past 20 years have not been enough to tackle the problems of this junction and to make it fit for the future. As one of the five busiest junctions in Greater Manchester, it experiences the passage of 74,500 cars a week. In addition, esure insurance recently found it to be the sixth worst junction in the country for drivers jumping red lights. Plainly, it is operationally substandard.

That has placed a great strain on the wider road network, creating tailbacks along the M60 just a few hundred metres away and creating congestion for a considerable part of my constituency and on to the A34 Kingsway. The M60, which has two slip roads on to the A34, further adds to local congestion and environmental challenges. Over time, efforts to improve the working of the junction have included the creation of an eastbound left-turn lane for traffic approaching from Gatley, as well as the installation of traffic signals on the nearby off-slip from the M60 to better regulate traffic flow into the junction. More recently, the junction has benefited from the actuation systems to adjust signal timings in response to changes in traffic flow. However, it remains a major problem for the area.

Long-term transport problems were identified in the catchily titled South East Manchester Multi Modal Strategy, which is known locally as SEMMMS. SEMMMS was first produced in 2001 and is now due for reconsideration.

William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): I am also aware of the memorably titled SEMMMS project. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the main causes of road congestion in Stockport is the lack of an A6 bypass from Hazel Grove to Bredbury, which would join with the M60? If she does, will she urge the Minister to consider that project for future funding?

Mary Robinson: My hon. Friend, whose constituency is right next to mine, knows full well how important that link would be. Indeed, I will add my words to his in pressing for that project to be considered.

[*Mary Robinson*]

I look forward to the refreshment of the SEMMMS plan, which is ongoing, and I will press for further consideration of the A34 corridor plan, which will explore the A34's intersection with the M60. That plan will enable Transport for Greater Manchester to develop a more detailed understanding of the long-term growth implications along the A34 and to identify further areas of improvement to manage congestion. These problems need to be addressed both imminently—indeed, immediately—and for the longer term. This junction is broken and we need to fix it.

It is a fact that alongside Greater Manchester's growing economic strength—growth that creates new employment and development opportunities across the wider conurbation, including Stockport—pressure continues to be put on local highway networks. There is particular pressure at junctions where there are complex flows of traffic wanting to access the city, Manchester Airport, the M60, the M56 and, very importantly for my constituents, local facilities and residential areas.

Further pressures on the general network and the A34 corridor are also in the spotlight as the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework and the Cheshire East local plan are being drawn up. It is clear that local plans must take into account the implications of increased developments, and where there are cross-boundary transport infrastructure issues it is vital to have co-operation between all stakeholders, including central Government.

I will highlight for the Minister the need for continued investment in the north. I welcome all the investment that we have had so far, but I am firmly focused on the north's future. I have also stressed the importance of smaller infrastructure projects—yes, we need High Speed 2 and High Speed 3, but we also need to underwrite this ambition with support for large but more local projects.

I am pleased that for Members whose constituencies have problematic junctions, the Government have committed themselves to investment, delivering the biggest road improvement programme since the 1970s. Continuing that commitment will be imperative.

Infrastructure investment is represented by the £475 million Local Majors fund, which is designed to support local transport projects. That is an example of the type of investment funds we need in the wake of the referendum. Indeed, these smaller scale but large local projects also need prioritising.

I have had meetings with the interim mayor of Greater Manchester and the strategic transport director of Transport for Greater Manchester to discuss applications for the fund and the role I can play in facilitating them. I encourage the Minister to continue making local authorities aware so that we can all benefit from the potential prosperity the funds can generate. In my constituency, we look forward to progress being made on the changes so urgently required at the Gatley junction, and that should be considered as part of the wider SEMMMS strategy.

I am conscious of time, but I want to touch briefly on the ambitious developments in high-speed rail. HS2 will sweep into the north. I know I am touching on the programme with a brevity that does not do justice to its importance, but with phase 2a to Crewe opening in 2027 and the delivery of phase 2b marked for completion

in 2033, there can be no further delay to the roll-out of the UK's largest infrastructure project, through which the north can benefit from increased capacity to meet demand. I therefore look forward to the legislation being brought forward later this year for phase 1. Although I appreciate the extension of timetables for delivery to allow the petitions process, I urge the Government to take steps to prevent further delays to the opening of the first step to high-speed rail.

From a local perspective, I am pleased that the ambitious project of HS2 will come close to Cheadle at Manchester airport, but I would welcome further assurances on that crucial airport link to move from planes to trains. Additionally, I welcome the commitment to modernise and renew the rolling stock, with a move away from Pacer trains—many commuters between Cheadle and Manchester will echo my views—following Arriva's new franchise around Manchester. I know passengers would welcome an increase in the capacity and comfort of local journeys. I also highlight the need for investment in stations, particularly through working cross-departmentally with the Department for Communities and Local Government to improve station environments, such as that at Cheadle Hulme in my constituency. In addition, I will be looking for greater responsibilities for franchises to invest in ticketing, to make it easier and more comfortable to travel and to use the networks to the full.

William Wragg: Does my hon. Friend agree about the importance of working with friends groups at those stations? They can do great work in drawing attention to the needs of the stations and to station improvements.

Mary Robinson: I echo my hon. Friend's point. Friends groups in all walks of life play an important part in our constituencies, particularly with regard to our railway stations. I am looking forward to hearing about improvements that could be made to get much needed disability access in our stations. We have so many people calling for that; it is about time it was delivered.

Better bus services are also critical to unlocking growth in our communities, reducing congestion, supporting the elderly in socialising and helping to improve our environment. The Bus Services Bill, which hands franchising powers down to local authorities, will better enable those authorities to tackle priorities for improvements that will increase passenger numbers and deliver more benefits. Those benefits must continue to include connectivity, and, whether it be through smart cards or better branding, getting more people to hop on a bus rather than get in the car. Central to that are more frequent services. It is always disappointing when we hear about services being reduced, such as the X57 service, or withdrawn, such as the 373. That takes away a valuable link between constituents and their work, home and hospitals. I am keen to see measures put in place to enable local authorities to influence timetabling to better reflect local need. Furthermore, the Bill and franchising offer the prospect of improved disability access, which we need, whether that is through innovative visual or audio capability or better disability training, so that drivers know where to pull in at bus stops. I have drawn local stakeholders' attention to Muscular Dystrophy UK's Trailblazers report on improving access for young disabled people.

In closing, I seek assurance from the Minister that current and future programmes will continue to be funded as has already been pledged. We all appreciate the changes now in train—excuse the pun—owing to recent national developments, but the future prosperity of the north and my constituency must be maintained. Following the decision made three weeks ago tomorrow, there is a strong argument for more infrastructure investment and delivery, and that needs to take place with the small-scale and long-term, large-scale projects.

The northern powerhouse concept is crucial not only to the prosperity of the north-west of England, but to the whole of the north and the country itself. If it is to succeed, we must be committed to its funding, to improvements to roads and junctions, to the construction of HS2 and HS3, and to the transport infrastructure of Greater Manchester in all its forms. This is undoubtedly an exciting time for the Greater Manchester region. Now more than ever our attention is turning to the north, and power is moving from Whitehall to local communities as a result of our devolution process. I look forward to the prosperity I know that will bring to my constituents, Manchester and the north.

4.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson) on securing this debate. Transport is hugely important to Greater Manchester. We agree entirely that it is essential for growth and we are, as she said, investing significantly in it. Through our devolution deals, we are putting Greater Manchester at the heart of the northern powerhouse.

As my hon. Friend knows, we are committed to creating a northern powerhouse, which is effectively about rebalancing our economy. It is part of a much broader national long-term plan. We have created Transport for the North to be a key partner and delivery body within that agenda. Its job will be to develop and drive forward transport plans to support the economic growth of the north. In terms of capital expenditure, we will invest £13 billion in this Parliament to better connect the region so that northern towns and cities can pool their strengths and create a single economy. From being a fragmented economy, it will become a much more cohesive one that is more than the sum of its parts.

I agree entirely with my hon. Friend: this is an exciting time for Greater Manchester. There is no question about that. Greater Manchester is at the heart of an exciting agenda. It is a centre of innovation, education, industry and culture. Its local enterprise partnership describes it as the fastest growing economy outside London and Europe's most competitive business location. South Manchester, with its key assets such as Manchester airport and Stockport, is obviously right at the heart of the region's success.

My hon. Friend was broad in her sweep of transport in the area, and I will try to match that and then focus on some of the local points that were made. Manchester airport is the UK's third largest airport. It employs 20,000 people, indirectly supports a further 25,000 and contributes £1.8 billion annually to the economy. That is a fantastic record. In addition, the £650 million airport city enterprise zone promises to create between

7,000 and 13,000 jobs. The airport announced its £1 billion transformation programme last June, through which it will employ more people and create more wealth in the area. The airport's success is tremendous news for the north as a whole and in particular for Greater Manchester and my hon. Friend's constituents. However, transport infrastructure needs to be in place to support that growth. People need to be able to get to the airport to benefit from it.

The south-east Manchester multi-modal strategy, or SEMMMS, highlighted the significant problems experienced in south Manchester. The proposed solutions have sat on the shelf for years, including the A6 to Manchester airport relief road. I am delighted that we have been able to support that important scheme, which brings significant benefits to the residents of the areas where traffic will be reduced, to those who will be able to access Manchester airport much more easily and to all those who will benefit from the economic growth that the scheme will bring across the area. Our support for the scheme shows that we are serious about working with local partners, because a partnership has brought the scheme to fruition. The overall budget is well over £200 million, but the Department's contribution is £165 million or so. It is a proper partnership that shows we are serious about engaging with local partners to deliver the world-class transport network that the area requires.

My hon. Friend mentioned the strategic road network. The road network is under pressure in Manchester, because of a growing population and growing economic activity. We are investing £1.5 billion in the north-west in our road investment strategy, which will deliver the biggest increase in capacity since 1971. That includes an upgrade to the strategic roads serving south Manchester. Work is under way to deliver the smart motorway upgrade for the M60 junction 8 to M62 junction 20, and the A556 Knutsford to Bowdon scheme, which will improve the main southern access to Manchester. Further work is planned to upgrade the M60 to a smart motorway between junctions 24 and 4, and to upgrade the M56 to a smart motorway between junctions 6 and 8. In addition, my Department has an ongoing study on the case for building a trans-Pennine tunnel, which is potentially a transformational project. It has been long discussed in the north, as the hon. Lady knows—for decades. We are investigating the potential for that transformational new connection between Manchester and Sheffield. A study on the M60 north-west quadrant is looking at improvements that could benefit the area and the whole M60 route.

My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Andrew Bingham) never misses an opportunity to highlight the extreme importance of developing the trans-Pennine links. As ever, we are in full agreement on this issue. He is right to champion them and our commitment has not wavered.

We are starting the process for the second road investment strategy, which will be for the period post-2020. We are trying to make it a much more open and locally driven procedure. Contributions are coming in from local highways authorities, local councils, local enterprise partnerships and Transport for the North, and they will help to determine the priorities for the strategy. I have written to colleagues, as have Highways England, so that the in-depth knowledge that MPs have of the area, its problems and the potential for future development can inform the process and make it as good as it can be.

[Andrew Jones]

Rail in the area is obviously fundamentally important as well. We have the biggest programme of railway modernisation under way since the reign of Queen Victoria. The north of England rail infrastructure upgrade programme will transform rail travel in the region. Work has begun and we are already seeing some real progress. In 2013, we saw the first phase of north-west electrification, enabling electric trains to run from Manchester airport to Glasgow. In 2014, we knocked 15 minutes off the fastest journey time between Liverpool and Manchester, and in 2015, we completed the electrification of the railway between Liverpool and Manchester, and Liverpool and Wigan. I have been to see the progress made, have experienced the benefits, and have spoken to some of the train operating company's team working there, and some passengers. It has been very well received. But of course there is much more to be done.

Our programme of more than £1 billion includes a substantial electrification programme and other track, station and signalling improvements, to increase capacity and the number of services, making journeys faster and more reliable. The transformative new TransPennine Express and Northern Rail franchises will deliver high-quality services for passengers. For south Manchester, that will include a significant increase in the capacity into Manchester in the morning peak and more seats on TransPennine Express trains; more trains to a range of major destinations right across the north; new and refurbished trains offering significantly enhanced passenger benefits; and—this has caught people's attention more than any other element of the announcements—the outdated Pacers will go. They will go from the north's railways by 2019, to be replaced with significantly upgraded trains. I know the frustration that people have with the Pacers; they also serve my own line and I use them on a weekly basis.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle made a good point that it is not just about rolling stock or infrastructure—we need station enhancements too. That is clearly a priority. Disability access is a top priority for the Department, as part of the access programme. The Department is producing an accessibility action plan, which will be published later this year, and will focus on how we can make the public transport network much more friendly for everybody within our communities. It is worth highlighting that Northern has committed to spend more than £30 million on station upgrades across the franchise over the coming years. That might address some of my hon. Friend's concerns about Cheadle Hulme station. My hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (William Wragg) is right: friends groups play a great role in being champions for their stations and making them open, friendly, informative places that people go to rather than scuttle through in a hurry, as they might have in the past.

We must mention HS2, which will be a huge boost to Manchester and the surrounding area. It will bring jobs, growth and regeneration opportunities. A station at Manchester airport will help bring those benefits to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle, as well as to many other constituencies in the area. It will provide additional connectivity for the region, allowing passengers to access the high-speed rail

network without first travelling into central Manchester. I agree with my hon. Friend's request for urgency. It is an important scheme, which is critical to the Government's programme, and we do not want to see any delay.

Local transport was a key part of my hon. Friend's contribution. She clearly identified the pressure that the local highway network is under in south Manchester. There has been some investment to address that, but it is a significant challenge. Measures to improve traffic flow on the M60 at junctions 1, 3 and 4 are underway, as is work on the traffic signal control at the junction of the M60 and the A34.

Moving on to public transport, improvements at Cheadle Hulme and Hazel Grove railway stations are under way, as are priority bus routes into central Manchester. Metrolink has been extended to Manchester airport, where a third rail platform has just opened. New transport interchanges have been built at Altrincham and Wythenshawe. Some £115 million from the local growth fund is being invested to improve transport access in Stockport town centre. It is a very exciting time to be involved in public transport in Greater Manchester.

There are clear pinch points. The junction of the A34 and the A560, as highlighted by my hon. Friend, is a well-known problem. I understand that she met recently with a former colleague, the interim mayor Tony Lloyd, to discuss that junction. I am sure she will be aware of the A34 corridor plan being developed as part of a wider refresh of the south-east Manchester multi-modal strategy. Although I share her sense that this is a priority, it is a local network and local decision. She must therefore work closely with local partners to ensure that they are aware of the concerns and bring forward robust proposals to tackle the congestion. It is well known not just in her own area, but beyond. I will make sure that officials from the Department for Transport keep in touch with that work as it develops and inform me of progress so that I can see what is happening.

We have covered a lot of ground, and have not even got to the Bus Services Bill, which is an opportunity for change in the bus market. The Bill is about to have its third day in Committee in the House of Lords, and will head to our place shortly, I hope. Greater Manchester has said that it is keen to explore franchising options. The Bill will include powers to enable local authorities to have greater input and control over the bus market. Buses are part of the future of public transport. They are underestimated and underinvested in, but my hon. Friend was right to highlight their importance. They are essential to deliver the heavy lifting of our public transport system, as well as air quality improvements in our towns and city centres. The Bus Services Bill is very interesting.

We are investing heavily in transport across the UK, but especially in the north as part of our initiative to drive the northern powerhouse. That work is taking place right across modes of transport. We are seeing significant, record-breaking levels of investment and the Department is working in partnership with local bodies, especially Transport for the North, which we will put on to a statutory basis within some months, to make sure that the plans reflect local need, and that we deliver the transport for the area required to make the economy thrive for the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Capsticks Report and NHS Whistleblowing

4.29 pm

Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered whistleblowing in the NHS and the Capsticks report into Liverpool Community Health NHS Trust.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Mrs Main. On 22 March 2016, the “Quality, safety and management assurance review at Liverpool Community Health NHS Trust” report by Capsticks solicitors was publicly released, following a serious and substantial investigation and examination of the litany of failures, misuse of power, intimidation of staff and patient harm that was allowed to go unchecked and unchallenged at Liverpool Community Health in the four years to April 2014. Some 43 individuals gave evidence to the review over 24 weeks, and almost 900 documents, spanning more than 19,000 pages, were reviewed.

The findings are clear: from 2010 to 2014, the trust’s pursuit of foundation status was its sole priority. The review compares LCH to Mid Staffs on the basis of the brutal tunnel vision that led to an unsafe drive for savings at all costs, compromised the quality of patient care, fostered bullying and harassment of staff on an industrial scale, and made possible the culture of concealment and denial at board level. The report’s findings are even more damning, given that all this took place after Mid Staffs and the publication of the initial Francis report. It demonstrates that, in pockets of the NHS, the events at Mid Staffordshire have changed little if anything at all. It prompts the question, to what extent is this happening in other trusts up and down the country?

The report paints a stark and harrowing picture of far-reaching failure, driven from the very top of the organisations where individuals have escaped the consequences of their actions to date. Sadly, the same cannot be said for the patients and staff of the organisation, which abjectly failed them.

I do not intend to go through the Capsticks report in great detail, as it is publicly available for people to read. Instead, I want to add background detail and put a human face to the words it contains. I want to talk about my experience of what can only be described as the very worst of the national health service.

I got involved in LCH simply because my father was admitted to ward 2A—a GP-led community ward at the Royal Liverpool hospital, run by LCH. The quality of my dad’s care was not great, and despite meeting managers and eventually a doctor, I remained unhappy with the care and remarked that I would speak to the Care Quality Commission. I was very surprised that staff members encouraged me to do so. It was the bravery of the ward staff, who spoke out about the horrific situation at LCH, that led to three years’ work to expose the true situation. And we are not there yet. No whistleblower has come to harm in this investigation, because I took the heat.

Once staff felt able to confide in me, many other people from across the various services with equally horrendous experiences of patient care, mismanagement

and staff mistreatment spoke out, too. The Capsticks report enabled their voices to be heard, but it was limited because it was a governance review, not a clinical review. I am seeking investigations by a range of regulatory and professional bodies—including NHS Improvement, the Care Quality Commission, the General Medical Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Royal College of Nursing, the Health and Care Professions Council, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, and the Health and Safety Executive—into the failures at LCH as an organisation and by individuals.

However, one fundamental question remains unanswered. We still do not know the full extent of the harm caused by LCH. Justice demands a public inquiry, or at least an inquiry in public. We cannot try to hide what went on. A refusal to undertake a clinical assessment of the harm would be an admission that Mid Staffs and the Francis inquiry have changed absolutely nothing, and that the lives lost unnecessarily and prematurely in the care of the NHS had no value. Is that really the state of our NHS in 2016?

Despite the information that I have presented, detailing the extent of failures at LCH, there remains a determination among some members of the NHS senior management to minimise the LCH revelations. They are of the view that the Capsticks report should not have been commissioned, and that the dismantling of the organisation will bring scrutiny of the entire system’s failures to an end. It will not. I promised those who put their trust in me that I would not let that happen. I will keep at this until we have the whole truth and those who are responsible are held to account. The Minister might reflect on why those in senior positions who knew something did not believe that the duty of candour applied to them, and why there seemed to be no consequences.

The Capsticks report paints a stark picture of far-reaching failure that emanated from the top of the organisation, where the pursuit of foundation trust status had consequences for patients and staff at LCH, and financial considerations rode roughshod over the quality of care. A combination of driving down recurring costs and minimising expenditure on front-line services meant that the trust could create the impression of a healthy financial organisation, enabling it to become an FT. All its key performance indicators were financial. No one seemed to notice that all reference to quality disappeared.

Efficiency savings are usually 2% to 4% a year in the NHS. At LCH, there were several services for which the initial cost improvement programme proposed a 50% planned reduction in the overall budget within a single financial year. Those ludicrous budget cuts were described by the interim chief executive as “erratic”—“dangerous” is the word I would use. Those cuts could be driven through because there was a lack of a clear, transparent and robust quality impact assessment process to support the cost improvement programme. The situation was compounded by the executive team’s deception of the trust’s board in the implementation of the cost improvement programme.

The Capsticks report shows no evidence that the board had any discussions about the impact of the CIP on staff and their ability to deliver safe and effective healthcare to patients. Between 2011 and 2014, more

[Rosie Cooper]

than £20 million was stripped out of front-line services. In the district nursing service, there was an underspend of £2.8 million, which meant that some areas were left to run at 50% of safe staffing levels. Stressed nurses worked unpaid long after their shift had finished to ensure that patients received essential treatment and medication. Working alone without alarms, they had to go into houses where there were drugs and guns, having been told by their managers, "That's your job."

In 2014, the deluded former chief executive wrote to me that the trust had reduced grade 3 pressure sores by more than 30%, and benchmarked against best practice. The reality was that the number of patients with avoidable, agonising pressure sores, which reach right down to the bone, rose sixfold as nurses frantically scuttled round the city trying to catch up. Staff were put in harm's way. One nurse was held hostage at knifepoint by the relative of a patient she was visiting, and was seriously sexually assaulted. The attacker was given a custodial sentence.

Clinical governance between 2010 and early 2012 was the responsibility of the director of finance. He had never previously worked in the NHS and had no clinical experience, yet he was responsible for reporting serious untoward incidents to the board. I have been told that even the person in charge of nurse prescribing had no clinical background: he was a fitness instructor.

The incident initially reported to the director of finance was relayed to the chief exec, the human resources director, the medical director, and the director of operations and chief nurse. The executive nurse promised a "root cause analysis". This never happened; nor was there a proper investigation, which was a breach of trust policy. No one seemed to notice. The director of finance stated as part of the Salmon process that the director of operations and executive nurse, and the health and safety reporting system

"both downplayed the seriousness of the incident."

The minutes of the board meeting on 23 September 2014, at which the report of the interim chief executive and interim nursing director was presented, state that "CG"—Craig Gradden, the medical director—

"confirmed that it had been reported in the 'Weekly Meeting of Harm', but had not been reported to the Board, as it had been risk rated too low".

So sexual assault of a nurse was risk-rated too low to be reported to the board—it was rated lower than a stolen personal computer or the parking problems at Burlington House.

Questioning the credibility of the medical director, he Capsticks report states:

"We also do not as a review team accept the comments made to us that the serious nature of the incident was not known at the time. Our reading of the Datix entry on this incident clearly indicates the nature and seriousness of the incident."

The chief executive, Bernie Cuthel, told Capsticks that she was not aware of the severity of the incident, but she managed to send the nurse a handwritten note.

The incident was not reported to the Health and Safety Executive either, presumably because the trust knew that it would be found wanting, as it had no proper lone-worker policy and staff did not have any alarms. Why did staff have no alarms? Because they cost too much money. The trust even charged the nurse

who was assaulted for access to the internal investigation records. How the LCH executive directors reacted to that incident demonstrated the utter inhumanity of those shameless individuals. Only under the new leadership has the incident been properly investigated.

There are other failures right across the organisation, where finance was given priority over the quality of care. At one point, the trust's in-patient services had 33 vacancies and an 11% staff sickness rate. How were they expected to maintain high standards of care? One nurse told me that she was left with one healthcare assistant to look after 18 ill patients, and when a senior manager arrived, his only comment was about the noticeboard.

Poor, ill and often elderly patients were expected to run around the city trying to get appointments to see district nurses. GPs gave me many examples, including that of one lady who, after a hysterectomy, needed an infected wound dressed. She was forced to go daily to different treatment centres in different parts of the city by taxi, because she was not fit to catch a bus; it cost her more than her income for the week. In another case, a patient was left waiting for four months for a health assessment, leaving their lung cancer undiagnosed and eventually inoperable. The equipment service was in disarray: I have seen photographs of wheelchairs for the use of patients stored in a gents toilet.

In prison healthcare services, which the trust ran before 2015, the abject failure of oversight by the board was shocking—shocking in the extreme. The service, including meds management, still requires thorough investigation. Basic health checks for new prisoners to assess their risk of suicide were not carried out, with tragic consequences. The prisons ombudsman was ignored, and the coroner now recognises organisational failure.

Staff, as well as patients, paid the price. Where there was resistance to the planned cost improvements and their consequences, the human resources function was used not to support staff but to enforce, leading to a culture of bullying and harassment. The community dental service faced a cut of £2.7 million, or 49% of its overall budget—a reduction of 50 whole-time equivalent staff. When the clinical directors tried to point out the risks to patient care, they were suspended on concocted grounds and faced disciplinary action in an effort to silence them. There are many more examples.

My first awareness of the bullying culture at LCH was in the intermediate care bed-based unit where my father was admitted. I was told by whistleblowers that nurses in the service who spoke out were bullied, and that three senior members of staff were on suspension without even having been given reasons for their suspension, although that later changed, after challenge, to redeployment in a non-clinical role for no given reason. These matters remained unresolved for more than a year, until the new team arrived. People had been moved out of the way.

Driving home one night after a day of managerial mayhem, one nurse with a family and decades of service to the NHS in a role she loved, pulled her car to the side of the road and seriously contemplated suicide. Another nurse, in the prison service, received foul racist texts from his senior manager. He was appalled and told her so. Little did he realise that that would be the end of his NHS career. He was suspended for more than a year,

then sacked and reported to the Nursing and Midwifery Council, although eventually cleared. The manager was not even disciplined.

Management failings went unchallenged. In one particularly shocking case, a whistleblower has alleged that a prisoner with dementia was placed in a tumble dryer at HMP Liverpool for the amusement of prison and health staff. It is alleged that when he tried to get out, it was a nurse who pushed him back in.

The report's description of scoping meetings is illuminating:

"people...described the culture and atmosphere as being designed to find personal fault and that the presence of a representative from Human Resources at these meetings, which in our view is most unusual, further exacerbated that feeling."

Staff knew it was dangerous to speak up.

Staff availing themselves of occupational health psychological services were limited to six weeks' support, but so great was the threat of harm to them, that some were still receiving help for more than a year. The number and severity of these cases was drawn to the attention of LCH executives by the trust providing the services, because they were outside the provider contract and required extra resource. Even that did not make a difference.

The report offers us an insight into the scale of the HR problems that existed: 332 known employee relations cases, including eight cases of bullying and harassment, 111 disciplinary cases, 26 grievances, one whistleblowing, 20 capability cases and 166 sickness sanctions—all that in a small community trust. The view of the interim chief executive offers some insight into those figures:

"When coming across grievances that were in the system, some of them were two or three years out and not resolved. I came across individual members of staff who had been on suspension for up to nine or ten months and the full time officers couldn't even tell me why they were suspended."

The mechanisms to protect staff, such as JNCC—joint negotiation and consultative committee—meetings, did not function effectively; they actually gave false assurance. The meetings were attended by the board chair and considered bullying cases regularly, but nothing changed because managers were used to enforce the directives of the executives, and for people who did not do as they were told, there were consequences. Even the ACAS report talked of employees being "fitted up".

There were cliques, and someone whose face fitted would be invited to join the Friday night Prosecco club, also known as the "Montrose mafia". When someone was suspended or fired or resigned from the stress of it all, a member of the clique would be moved into the position, without proper process, in order to deliver "the programme", which also meant overlooking the shortcomings of the executives, which were many. I was always astounded that everyone knew that Helen Lockett did her LCH on-call duty from Bristol. She was not even in Liverpool. Safe? I don't think so. As one staff member interviewed by the Capsticks team said:

"In fact it's probably the most un-healthy organisation I've ever worked in by some distance at that time. Just because those key individuals...forgot what we were actually...here to do."

On 5 February 2014, I asked the Prime Minister to forensically examine the history of HR practice, disciplinary action and subsequent payoffs. He said he would happily do so, I believe in good faith, because he thought the CQC could do that, which it turns out it cannot. I ask

the Minister, when the HR department is used as a weapon to enforce the rule of a trust, rather than the law of the land, who is policing it?

A vast amount of taxpayers' money is wasted on paying for lawyers and subsequent compensation for victims as careers and lives are destroyed. The Department of Health and professional bodies such as CIPD surely should act. The evidence of a pervasive culture of bullying and harassment at LCH reinforces Capsticks' opinion that the executive team were "out of their depth."

We might think that an executive team that slashed £20 million from front-line services, causing patient and staff harm, would guard every penny. We would be wrong. They spent more than £350,000 on drumming up support for their application for foundation trust status. They spent more than £1 million on a programme management office of external consultants to tell them how to save money. At the trust's annual meeting in 2013, the same year the board slashed £7 million from front-line services, its leadership team still managed to find enough money to hire jugglers, unicyclists, stilt-walkers and a life-sized elephant to greet guests—I am not kidding. In the same period, the chief executive's pay increased by nearly a third, from £95,000 to around £130,000 a year.

In 2014, when the CQC at long last began to expose the extent of the leadership failures at LCH, the trust board's first reaction was to spend £11,000 on a crisis communications consultant. In January 2014, as I pressed hard and still harder for answers and immediate changes for staff and patients, board members spent almost £1,000 on legal advice in an attempt to browbeat me and prevent parliamentary and public scrutiny of the goings-on at LCH.

I mentioned that the executives downgraded the risk rating of the serious sexual assault of a nurse. That was not a one-off: there were other instances in which they were willing to hide failure. The Capsticks report says:

"when risks were escalated upwards, they were either ignored or watered down by those in more senior positions to make them look less significant than they were, without any clear rationale for doing so."

That included the suppression of a report into district nursing services because its findings were so catastrophic and told the truth. Having requested documents under freedom of information, I have evidence that the nursing director and clinical director signed off the CIP plan that states that they believed those plans to be clinically safe. All the evidence says that those plans were not safe at all.

In hiding their failures, the executives regularly deceived the non-exec directors, as the Capsticks report highlights:

"There were repeated failures by the Executive Directors to be open and transparent with the wider Board, which is ultimately responsible for the care and welfare of its staff. This included not sharing with the Board details of a serious assault carried out on a health care professional and not sharing with the Board the results of a survey of staff views and opinions undertaken by the Staff Side which amongst other things highlighted that 96% of respondents believed bullying was a moderate or worse problem at the Trust."

The trust chair was present at staff side meetings.

The non-exec directors on the board are also culpable for their failings. The fact that the board was deceived by executive directors should not detract from the catalogue

[Rosie Cooper]

of errors that the non-executives made in fulfilling their duties. Instead of providing the most basic challenge and oversight, the chair of the trust and her fellow non-executive directors were in denial. They were more concerned with protecting their reputation than with protecting patient safety and staff welfare. The chair was reported on many occasions, usually in response to me, as saying:

“The board has complete confidence in the chief executive and her team.”

What is so concerning is the directors’ sheer lack of awareness—never mind acceptance—that they had failed. Capsticks says that its

“detailed review of the public minutes of Board meetings from 2011 until April 2014 do not show that Non-Executive Directors on the Board collectively and individually held the Executive Directors to account. Indeed our extensive review of these minutes shows little evidence of scrutiny and challenge.”

There was an over-reliance by the board on external consultancy reports for assurance on its performance—although ironically, the board ignored the finding of a 2012 report on governance by Deloitte that stated that “there was an inconsistent level of challenge from Non-Executive Directors on quality”.

They heard only what they wanted to hear.

Paragraph 9.36 of the Capsticks report states:

“The Board and its Committees for their part failed to understand the impact of such a significant Cost Improvement Programme on the quality and staffing of front line services and did not provide the required level of proactive oversight, too willing in our view to accept Executive Director assurance of a process which was largely at variance with that set out in national guidance.”

In paragraph 13.36 of its report, Capsticks comments that

“the Board ignored one of key findings of the Francis Inquiry... which identified ‘an unhealthy and dangerous culture’ as a pervading cause of the failures at Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust.”

Had any of the opportunities been taken, the subsequent sequence of failures could have been broken. The board could have done something. It should have done something. It did not, and patients and staff came to harm. I do not believe that the non-execs accept to this day their responsibility for the damage that they caused in failing the patients and staff at LCH.

Perhaps equally concerning for the Minister is that the extensive regulatory framework that exists, in the expectation of stopping events such as Mid-Staffs and now LCH, fell down on the job. Nurses who contacted the NMC were simply referred to protocols—although the NMC is currently engaged in resolving some of these issues. This was not the RCN and the other unions’ finest hour. Most absent of all were the NHS Trust Development Authority, which is now called NHS Improvement, and Liverpool and South Sefton clinical commissioning groups.

The clinical commissioning groups in particular have a duty—I quote from NHS England’s rules—to

“make their own assessment of cost improvements and be satisfied that services are safe for patients with no reduction in quality.”

In the case of Liverpool clinical commissioning group, there is no evidence that LCH’s savings plans received even the most basic checks to ensure that they were safe and would not lead to patient and staff harm. For a

clinical commissioning group that is responsible for almost £0.75 billion of NHS spending and the future reorganisation of health services in Liverpool, that dereliction of responsibility is deeply disturbing and must prompt the questions, “Is it up to the job?” and “Where else is its eye off the ball?”

The CQC’s previous assessments of the trust did not reveal the bullying or the seriousness of the situation, although after I contacted it, it did produce the first regulatory evidence that all was not well. It also protected the whistleblowers, for which I thank Ann Ford. The lack of any discernible action by the CQC four months after it received the Capsticks report is not good enough. The lack of accountability remains deeply troubling.

The Trust Development Authority in the end removed the chief executive, the executive nurse and the human resources director from their posts following a review by Sir Ian Carruthers. I was led to believe that because of the information that I had provided and the Carruthers review, those individuals had been sacked. That was untrue. The TDA also left the failing non-exec directors in place on the board, and that hindered the trust’s recovery. If the board was failing and the executives had to go, why leave half the board there to hinder the people brought in to make it better?

I am still astounded that I was told that the chief exec had been fired when the truth, elicited by freedom of information, says that she was given a reference and that Manchester mental health trust was asked to mentor her without being told about the full circumstances. Effectively, she had been moved from one job—because she was doing badly—to be mentored at Manchester mental health trust. Currently, she remains safely holed-up in a senior executive role at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, still earning about £106,000. I am told by the Care Quality Commission that her flight across the borders within the United Kingdom prevents it from taking any action.

Gary Andrews, the former director of finance and a non-clinical clinical governance lead, has been given a senior managerial role in NHS England’s vanguard programme. Craig Gradden, LCH’s former medical director, is employed as a medical consultant in Sefton. Helen Lockett, Liverpool Community Health’s former director of nursing, who I was told had been sacked, got a £25,000 pay-off and a reference. Only the 18-month interim order issued by the NMC while she is under investigation stops her practising. Who referred her to the NMC? Was it the system? No, it was me.

Michelle Porteous, the HR director, was allowed to leave unchallenged and was seen to spend her last days at the shredding machine—no one stopped her. Although outside the remit of the NHS and its regulators, the former chair of the trust continues to work with the health service through her management of a charitable company called Health@Work, which sells health and safety advice, training in emotional intelligence, spotting signs and symptoms of poor mental health in staff members and techniques to manage stress. I will say no more.

The Prime Minister said he did not want failures recycled around the NHS, but here we have a regulator doing just that: not investigating, not disciplining and not taking the appropriate sanction, just recycling. Accountability and the interests of patients and NHS staff require action, so I ask the Minister whether the fit

and proper person test, introduced to prevent NHS leaders responsible for serious mismanagement from assuming similar roles in the NHS, is fit for the job.

Before I come to my last point, it would be remiss of me not to mention the progress that has been made by LCH in the two years since April 2014. The trust has turned an important corner, through investment in safe staffing levels, a new approach that values clinical leadership, clear action to put quality and patient safety first and a new culture of openness and honesty. To have come so far in such a relatively short period of time is a credit to the frontline staff in LCH and the new leadership it has been given.

Most importantly, while the Capsticks review has shone a light into the dark recesses of the goings on at Liverpool Community Health in those four terrible years before the system acted, it does not, and cannot, document all the harm caused to patients. The Capsticks report finds that it is reasonable to conclude that between 2010 and 2014, patients received sub-optimal care. It is therefore a sad and undeniable fact that there will be people on Merseyside today who have lost loved ones, or seen them suffer, or suffered themselves, who do not know that their anguish was avoidable and caused by the failures of leadership at the trust.

In the interests of truth and justice, we cannot allow that to continue. I therefore look to the Minister for assurances that preferably a public inquiry, and at least an independent clinical review, into patient harm associated with the leadership failings at Liverpool Community Health NHS Trust between 2010 and 2014 will be conducted without further delay and that nothing is hidden. It must be made public. I am very aware that very senior people are really angry that this is coming out.

I also ask the Minister to include, as part of any review, an independent investigation into the adequacy of the actions taken at the same time by NHS Improvement—TDA as it was—NHS England, Liverpool CCG, South Sefton CCG, Southport and Formby CCG and their predecessor organisations to assess and address safety concerns at LCH. That needs to reflect the health system's future challenges, where accountability and governance will not just affect one organisation but a whole region, area or system. It is only through that course of action that we can provide the assurances necessary to those harmed that that will never be allowed happen again.

In finishing, I ask the Minister—obviously not today—to look at the TDA assessment programme for the break-up of LCH because, for example, Bridgewater, a trust that does not have a CQC rating, is pitching for LCH business against other organisations that do have CQC ratings. That is patently unfair. Also, in the private sector we would not allow a business to poach former members of staff—it is almost insider trading—but that clearly is going on in this process. We must establish whether former members of staff declare their conflict of interest and whether we are protecting NHS organisations from that kind of insider trading.

I am sure that the Minister is aware of how deeply angry and upsetting this is, not just for me—having spent three years looking at it and working hard at it—but for each and every single member of staff who, right now, trusts him to deliver. They were too frightened to go to their execs and they were let down by the

system. They were not sure that they could whistleblow in safety—that is why I did it. The system has let people down so badly. No one has been hurt because I did what I did in that way, but that is not right, either. People need to be able to speak freely on behalf of their organisations, their patients and their staff. This is not 21st century health politics.

5.7 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Unfortunately, this has been a repeating story since Bristol Royal Infirmary in the mid-'90s when Stephen Bolsin, the anaesthetist who raised that issue of poor survival of children having cardiac surgery, ended up in Australia. That has been a repeating theme. Regardless of the GMC telling us that it is our duty to step forward, whoever steps forward is always the one who is suspended or loses their job or suffers detriment in some way.

There are a lot of common themes when we look at Morecambe Bay, Mid Staffs and this case. In some of them, there has been the issue of trying to obtain trust status and going for cost savings. As the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Rosie Cooper) said, we have management chasing one goal while staff should be chasing a different goal: clinical quality. We see the stories of bullying and gagging and we see a coalface under pressure, with things going wrong and, if someone whistleblows, inevitably we hear of detriment: destruction to their reputation and perhaps loss of their job.

In an ideal situation we would rarely ever need to have a whistleblower. We need clinical audit, which audits not just the money but the quality of performance to give quality assurance. At one time here in England we had the Commission for Health Improvement, but that was got rid of back in 2004. When NHS Improvement came out, I thought that was like what we have in Scotland, which is called Healthcare Improvement Scotland, which we have had under one name or another since 2000. However, NHS Improvement just looks at the money, so we still have this business that the money is trumping the quality assurance.

That audit needs to be seen and problems need to be put right as soon as they are reported. Complaints should be seen as something that are used and looked at in every directorate meeting, which is something we do locally in my trust. Datix, which is used north and south of the border, is a way of trying to lower that barrier and to get people used to reporting every routine misstep, whether minor or major, bringing down the barriers to doing that and getting rid of any sense of hierarchy.

From our patient safety initiative in Scotland, we do things like using first names in theatre to try to get rid of that "fear of the prof" or fear of the consultant, so that an orderly who notices something going wrong feels able to speak up and say, "That is the wrong leg. I think we should check the paperwork again." Once we get into a situation of having things going wrong, we need to enable any member of the team to easily draw attention to it. Traditional in surgery—this will be UK-wide—are morbidity and mortality meetings in which the whole unit will review any death or significant morbidity. That does not tend to exist in other specialties but it ought to—we ought to have it for every stillbirth and for deaths in other specialties. Maybe then we would know exactly how many deaths or major detriments

[Dr Philippa Whitford]

were avoidable. That cannot be done with stats—we have to look at the cases. One of the things I set up in my unit was something we called, to make it easier for everyone, the difficult case review. Any team member—it did not matter who—could put a name in the book for the next difficult case meeting so that that case would be looked at.

Whistleblowers need internal support so they can go and not suffer detriment. We have had the Francis report and we have the freedom to speak up, and I commend the Government for setting up the national guardian system—we are doing something very similar—but what comes back from whistleblowers I meet is they are concerned that the person who has been appointed is an NHS manager. We have to have someone who is utterly outside the system. Most of all, we need to change the culture that is close to the frontline. Management must have clinical governance responsibility, not just financial governance responsibility, so that staff get used to raising issues that are then dealt with, learned from and changed, and that management see that as part of their role.

5.12 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I start by paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Rosie Cooper), who has ploughed what has at times been a very lonely furrow on this issue. She has shown incredible tenacity in pursuing the matter over a number of years. What makes this all the more remarkable is that, despite all of the inspection regimes and safeguards in place, the only reason we are debating this is because she had the courage and the determination to pursue these issues. She made a powerful and lengthy contribution today; I do not use that adjective in a critical way, but to highlight that there is so much that needs to be considered. The debate is certainly not going to be the end of the story. My contribution will perhaps not be as lengthy as on other occasions as I would like to give the Minister as much time as possible to set out how he intends to take matters forward.

At the heart of this is a random occurrence—my hon. Friend attending the trust in question as a result of her father being a patient there—and one can only wonder whether anything would have been done about the situation had she not attended, and had the brave staff on the ward not approached her after that. We heard from her about a whole catalogue of incidents, any of which in isolation ought to have raised alarm bells. When she spoke of the picture across the board, the number of grievances, some taking years to resolve, the suspensions that seem to be used as a punishment rather than the neutral act they are meant to be and the number of complaints of bullying and harassment it is clear that a wider pattern was there. In the words of the report:

“Non-Executive Directors took reassurance too easily and failed to provide sufficient scrutiny and challenge across a number of key areas. They collectively represented a series of missed opportunities to intervene.”

It should be said that there were also repeated failures by the executive directors to be open and transparent with the wider board, which included them not divulging

details of a serious assault carried out on a staff member and keeping from the board the results of a staff survey that said 96% of respondents believed bullying was a problem to some degree within the trust. Will the Minister address whether he considers there needs to be more training or support for non-executive directors, so they at least know when they are not getting the whole picture? I also wonder whether there ought to be a requirement for at least one employee representative on each board so that, if there is a culture like this, there is a greater chance of it being revealed. What steps are being taken to prevent those non-executive directors who were involved in this from serving in a similar capacity in future?

The position of the executive directors deserves much sharper criticism, particularly when, as my hon. Friend pointed out, many of the senior people involved have found themselves in employment elsewhere in the NHS, and she quite rightly asked where the individual accountability is. Staff spending their last few days stood at a shredding machine is the sort of thing that goes on in multinational companies that have been cooking the books. It is not what should be happening in an open, transparent and accountable public body. It seems that the human resources team were used as a tool to enforce management's will rather than to ensure the rules were applied fairly and consistently across the board. It is little wonder in those circumstances that staff did not feel confident that they could raise concerns freely.

I am sure we will talk about the duty of candour, but will the Minister give us assurances that this sort of situation will not happen again? Policies and good intentions can only take us so far, particularly when a culture develops that positively attacks those that raise concerns so that everyone is too frightened to raise those concerns in the first place. In my experience I have seen far too many times people who have legitimate concerns about a practice at their place of work but who do not have the confidence to raise those issues without fear of reprisal. A policy is only as good as the people entrusted to honour it and that is down to the people at the top. They set the tone and they have a duty to ensure that every person who raises a legitimate concern is protected. It only takes one bad experience or one failure to act in good faith on a concern raised and the entire system falls into disrepute.

I am sure that nobody goes into public service with the intention of creating such a culture of fear but it is clear that good intentions can be diverted by other influences and pressures. In this case, the central conclusion in the report, which needs more careful consideration, is that when the trust made the decision to go for foundation status what happened was an

“accompanying focus to reduce costs, which resulted in enormous pressures on many front line services and the emergence of a culture of bullying and harassment of staff at various levels within the organisation and the delivery to some patients of poor and in some cases sub-standard care.”

The report also said:

“For many of these concerns, it is hard to come to any other conclusion than that they were managed in the way they were in order to ensure the Trust application for NHS foundation trust status remained on track.”

That is pretty damning.

Aside from the financial pressures faced, we know that other pressures on staff are not going away, with significant numbers reporting work-related stress. We know that vacancy rates and rota gaps still remain unacceptably high and there are serious problems with staff morale across a whole range of services. I pay tribute to all NHS staff who are working hard in very trying circumstances, but we should also be realistic about the challenges they face. The staff at the trust have been key to delivering the improvements we have already seen, and the latest CQC report recognises that there have been improvements, which is not only a credit to those staff but also to the new leadership team.

It is fair to say that there is clearly still some way to go. For example, the performance of paediatric speech therapy service was worse than at the last inspection to the extent that the trust had to suspend the waiting list for a year. It was also noted that, despite some improvements, too many patients are developing serious pressure ulcers, which is something that ought to be eradicated altogether. Inspectors also highlighted “significant improvements” in the culture of the organisation and praised the trust for the measures it has introduced to keep staff safe, which is clearly one of the biggest and most important changes that was needed.

Whether that change in culture is permanent can only be tested by events, but we should reinforce at every opportunity the importance of speaking out with confidence. In that regard, it appears the future of the national whistleblowing helpline is still being considered. I would like to see the local guardians as complimentary to, rather than a replacement for, the national helpline. I would be grateful if the Minister will address whether any decision has yet been taken on the future of that national helpline.

In conclusion, I add my voice to the calls made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire for an independent clinical review into patient harm associated with the leadership failings at the trust. We also need an investigation into the adequacy of the actions taken at the same time by NHS Improvement, NHS England, the clinical commissioning groups and their predecessor organisations. Only then can we move into a position from which we can confidently say this is something that will never happen again.

5.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer): It is a great pleasure to respond to this debate that you are chairing, Mrs Main. I echo the compliments paid by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), to the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Rosie Cooper). The hon. Lady has been very brave in pursuing this cause, which she has taken up on behalf of her constituents. I agree that it is striking that this matter would not have come to the fore had she not had very sad and unfortunate personal experience of the failure of care at Liverpool Community Health. I thank her for her persistence in the face of opposition, not just from the usual quarters but from places that might not have been considered to be inimical to a Labour party Member. That is why I particularly commend her for what she has done and for continuing to fight the cause for her constituents. It is absolutely true that as a result of what she has taken up on their behalf, the care being provided is now safer

than it would otherwise have been. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that doing this job is worth while, and she has done that in great measure for herself and other Members of Parliament.

I would like first to offer an apology. It is right that the Government recognise it when things go wrong even if they are not within the direct control of Ministers. Everything in the NHS is the responsibility ultimately of the Secretary of State and of the ministerial team, and I am sorry that the NHS in this instance let down the hon. Lady’s constituents. At the same time as saying that, I hope that she and other hon. Members recognise that it is partly through the measures put in place by the previous Government that we have been able to flush out some of the problems that she identified. It was a Care Quality Commission inspection, under the new regime, that really began to unearth the problems in LCH, and it has been the tougher management of failing trusts that has meant we have been able to bring reform to this trust quickly. Not all is perfect; not everything is right in terms of the CQC or of the Trust Development Authority or its new iteration, but we are a great deal further forward now than we would have been five years ago. To be completely fair, we would have been further forward five years ago than we would have been 10 years before that. We are on a journey, and I appreciate the collegiate atmosphere that has been created in this debate and elsewhere.

I will answer the specific points and questions, because I do not want to reiterate the excellent exposition given by the hon. Member for West Lancashire. She asks who polices HR departments. The simple answer is that the Care Quality Commission, in its well led domain, as it looks at organisations will continue to look at the quality of leadership within an organisation. I will talk in a second about the kinds of thing that I think it should be looking for in the new round of inspections that it will begin in due course.

The hon. Lady asks about the fit and proper persons test. As it is currently constructed, it is for boards to be judging people by the fit and proper persons test. That is the way I think it should be, and there is consensus on that, but clearly those boards need to be properly constituted and know what they are doing. I think that that gets to the crux of what she is saying.

To answer the point made by the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston about training for non-executive directors, that is, funnily enough, something we are actively looking at to try to improve the quality of boards precisely so that they can ask the questions that are needed, not just in terms of a fit and proper persons test but in order to hold their executive directors fully to account.

The hon. Member for West Lancashire asks about the need for a review, and I know that that is the main purpose of bringing this matter to the attention of the House. I have commissioned NHS Improvement to do a review or at least to ensure that a review happens. As she will be aware, there has been some discussion about the terms of reference for that. I know that Jim Mackey has talked to her about it; she is in communication with him. I, too, am in communication with Jim and I hope that in the course of the next few weeks I or my successor will ensure that that review is as robust as it needs to be. The hon. Lady knows my view on that, which is that I do not want something excessively expensive and excessively long, because that will serve no one’s

[Ben Gummer]

interests. We need to get the balance right, so that it is timely and good value for money and we are not taking money out of the NHS that would be better spent on her constituents' care. If we can get to the root cause of these problems in a timely and efficient manner, that will serve her and her constituents well. I commit myself to ensuring that that happens quickly.

The hon. Lady asks about conflicts of interest. As it happens, NHS England is looking at precisely that at the moment. It is an area that we need to be much better in. However, I hope that as we see an evolving NHS, which is far more about collaborative working than the purist approach to competition that was the drive under the original foundation trust mechanism set up in the early 2000s, it will be less of a problem than she correctly anticipates it might be in this instance.

The hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) makes a number of important observations about her experience in Scotland, but I am afraid she is wrong on two points. NHS Improvement is not just interested in money; it is very firmly an improvement agency that deals with quality as well as financial performance. She will know that the two do go hand in hand. The best run trusts tend to be those that look after their money as well as their patients. We can see that relationship in the CQC inspections and their relationship with deficits. I suggest that she speak to the director of quality in NHS Improvement, Dr Mike Durkin, who was moved across from NHS England precisely so that NHS Improvement could become a true quality organisation. I am sure she will know him from the past. He is a globally respected expert in the issues of quality and institutional learning.

The hon. Lady is also wrong to say that the national guardian was an NHS manager. She is one of the leading chief nurses in the NHS, and I am sad that she felt unable to continue with that role. The hon. Lady will be pleased to know that her replacement, Dr Henrietta Hughes, is also a clinician—a practising general practitioner. It is very important that we give the right message to whistleblowers, and that is as much the case in Westminster Hall as it is outside in the public space.

Dr Philippa Whitford: The feedback that I have had from whistleblowers is that they see the new replacement national guardian as someone who is in an NHS manager role, and they feel that that is not sufficiently independent for the national guardian for whistleblowers. They are talking about the new guardian.

Ben Gummer: The new guardian is a practising GP and her office is deliberately set aside from the Department of Health; it is not part of our structures. The purpose

of that is to ensure that the person is independent. I hope that that will give confidence to whistleblowers. I have asked her to make a decision on the helpline, because it is important that she makes that decision, not I, in the future.

Finally, I come to the questions asked by the shadow Minister. He talks about FT status. Much was right about the drive for foundation trusts, but a lot of things went wrong. We saw that at Mid Staffs and we have certainly seen it in this instance. I think that he will have noticed a far more considered approach to the FT pipeline in the past few years than previously. I know from experience of my own hospital, which failed to get FT status but is now a very good hospital, that the two do not necessarily correspond.

In all of this, we have to strike an important balance whereby we ensure that hospitals are performing while spending public money properly. The best hospitals and community care organisations do that by energising their staff, eradicating bullying and harassment and ensuring that people are free to speak up and exercise the duty of candour. That is why the thrust from the Department in the past 18 months to two years has been about living the values of the Francis inquiry. We have been putting that into practice in terms of the duty of candour, the whistleblowing apparatus that we have set up, and freedom to speak up.

We are at the beginning of a long journey. There is much to do to make the NHS the world's largest learning organisation, but we have begun that process. I hope that the report that comes out—the further clinical review for the hon. Member for West Lancashire and her constituents—will be a further step on that journey, not just to correct and expose the failings in her area, but to ensure that the system as a whole, including the Department of Health, learns from them so that they are not repeated elsewhere and we continue to make the NHS the best healthcare organisation in the world.

5.29 pm

Rosie Cooper: May I quickly thank the Minister for his genuine, honest approach? But hearts were dropping—I have been getting texts—during his response about the CQC and HR. All they can do is require improvement—that does not stop this and does not change it. The TDA was supposed to look after boards and it did not spot this failing board.

5.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statements

Wednesday 13 July 2016

DEFENCE

Veterans' Healthcare

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): The Armed Forces Covenant is the Government's commitment to service personnel, their families and veterans who have made enormous sacrifices on recent operations and to ensuring that those seriously injured receive the care and support they deserve. I would like to update the House on some of the steps we have taken to enhance this provision.

The Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre (DMRC) at Headley Court has long provided world-class rehabilitation and prosthetic support to our serving personnel. I am pleased to tell the House that a number of veterans with amputation-related complications can now also receive prosthetic support at Headley Court, through the recent establishment of a veterans' Complex Prosthetic Assessment Clinic (CPAC) at the DMRC. Access to the CPAC is being offered to veterans with the most complex needs on a case by case basis, after referral by and with the support of their NHS specialist. Early feedback has been good and the Government are working closely with BLESMA, the limbless charity, and other service charities to ensure veterans and NHS clinicians are aware of this initiative and its benefits.

A small number of those referred to the CPAC might also meet the clinical criteria for the direct skeletal fixation (DSF) pilot, for which the Government announced £2 million of LIBOR funding in November 2015. The DSF pilot, which is due to run for another two years, has already enabled some service personnel and veterans to have potentially life-changing surgery in this country at public expense.

I can also announce a plan to improve the care received by the most seriously injured service personnel and veterans. Currently such support is funded and delivered by a number of separate agencies, including the NHS, Ministry of Defence, local authorities and charitable organisations. A pilot, commencing in September will see care of this kind co-ordinated and delivered by a new Integrated High Dependency Care System (IHDCS), producing a joined-up and improved system of care for the individual. This will provide confidence for this small number of individuals, and their families, that their clinical, health and social support needs will continue to be met when they leave the armed forces and for the rest of their lives.

The Government and the nation will never forget the hard work, great bravery and sacrifice of all current and former service personnel and I will ensure the House is kept informed of this continuing and vital work.

[HCWS86]

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Offshore Energy Strategic Environmental Assessment

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): I am today announcing the outcome of the offshore energy strategic environmental assessment (OESEA3) regarding future offshore energy developments.

The Department has completed an offshore energy strategic environmental assessment (OESEA) of a draft plan/programme to enable further offshore licensing/leasing for oil and gas, gas storage including carbon dioxide transport and storage as part of carbon capture and storage (CCS), and offshore marine renewables including wind, wave and tidal energy.

The renewable energy elements of the draft plan/programme cover the relevant parts of the UK exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and the territorial waters of England and Wales; for hydrocarbon gas storage it applies to UK waters (territorial waters and the UK EEZ), and for carbon dioxide storage it applies to UK waters (the UK EEZ and territorial waters excluding territorial waters in Scotland) and for hydrocarbon exploration and production it applies to UK territorial sea and the UK continental shelf.

An eight-week public consultation on the OESEA3 environmental report closed on 29 April 2016. All comments received on the draft plan/programme and the environmental report have been considered by the Department and a post-consultation report for OESEA3 has been prepared and placed on the gov.uk website: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/offshore-energy-strategic-environmental-assessment-sea-an-overview-of-the-sea-process>. This summarises stakeholder comments and the Department's clarifications and responses to them. The environmental report and the comments received have informed the Department's decision on whether to proceed with the draft plan/programme.

The Department has decided to adopt the draft plan/programme, with the area offered restricted spatially through the exclusion of certain areas together with a number of mitigation measures to prevent, reduce and offset significant adverse impacts on the environment and other users of the sea. On the basis of the evidence set out in the environmental report, which discussed the alternatives to the chosen approach, and the comments received during consultation, the Department concludes that there are no overriding environmental considerations that would prevent the achievement of our draft plan/programme of offshore marine renewables leasing (wind, wave and tidal technologies), offshore oil and gas licensing, and offshore gas storage and carbon dioxide storage leasing/licensing, provided appropriate measures are implemented that prevent, reduce and offset significant adverse impacts on the environment and other users of the sea. In all cases, the relevant competent authority should undertake any appropriate assessments(s) prior to awarding licences or leases, where screening shows this to be necessary. This meets the requirements of EU Council directive 2009/147/EC on "the conservation of wild birds" and Council directive 92/43/EEC on "the conservation of natural habitats and wild fauna and flora", and UK implementing regulations. Although the UK has recently voted in favour of leaving the European Union, there will be no immediate changes in the way the UK undertakes its obligations under EU legislation. The adoption of the draft plan/programme demonstrates we are continuing to deliver on our energy and climate change agenda.

The environmental report sets out the environmental considerations relevant to the plan/programme in more detail and section 6.1 includes recommendations that take into account these environmental considerations.

The post-consultation report responds to comments made on a number of environmental considerations, which have also been taken into account.

The Department will monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan/programme, as described in section 6.2 of the environmental report.

OESEA3 paves the way for the Oil and Gas Authority to make preparations for further rounds of offshore licensing for oil and gas and to consider future licence applications for gas storage and carbon dioxide storage to ensure that the UK continues to have a diverse, affordable and reliable mix of energy sources as we continue to move towards a low-carbon economy. The Oil and Gas Authority is currently an Executive agency of the Department, but it is expected to become a Government company later this year.

OESEA3 also paves the way for future leasing for offshore marine renewables, including wind, wave and tidal which will contribute to the UK renewable energy targets. The environmental report highlights that siting and consenting processes for offshore renewable energy developments must remain flexible to allow for technological innovation, including any mitigation measures.

[HCWS84]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

GuarantCo: Callable Capital Agreement

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Sir Desmond Swayne): 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 Minister concerned to present a departmental minute to Parliament 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 statement, except in cases of special urgency.

I have today laid a departmental minute outlining details of the liability of up to £40 million which DFID has undertaken in respect of the Private Infrastructure Development Group (PIDG).

GuarantCo was established in 2003 as an investment facility of the PIDG. PIDG encourages and mobilises private investment in infrastructure in the frontier markets of sub-Saharan Africa and south and south-east Asia. PIDG makes it viable for private investors to participate in infrastructure deals, using limited sums from its publicly funded trust to crowd-in many times that value in private capital. The US \$1.2 billion committed by PIDG donors since 2002 has leveraged over US \$20 billion in private investment and a further US \$9 billion in investment from partner international and development finance institutions.

PIDG supports private investment throughout the project development cycle from its earliest stages, through a number of separate facilities or companies. GuarantCo supports local currency lending for infrastructure projects in developing countries by providing guarantees to banks

and bond investors. This helps to remove the risk of currency devaluation for investors and allows them to structure tailored financial instruments. In this way, it helps to promote domestic infrastructure financing and self-sustaining capital market development in low and lower-middle income countries.

GuarantCo's business model requires it to demonstrate the capacity to issue guarantees for transactions it is discussing with counterparties. GuarantCo expects to only have a minimal number of defaulting projects. However, it needs to have a legally solid call on sufficient capital for it to pay out against called guarantees.

Currently DFID supports GuarantCo through paid-in capital. To ensure better value for money for UK taxpayer funding, however, DFID is proposing to enter into an agreement with GuarantCo for callable equity (capital). This will allow cash to remain with HM Government. It also responds to a key recommendation of the National Audit Office in its report "Oversight of the Private Infrastructure Development Group" (HC 265) in July 2014 to improve how DFID

"critically reviews its funding of the activities of multilateral bodies such as PIDG, only releasing funds once there is a clear need for the money and the capacity to make good use of it. This will enable it to compare PIDG with other options and avoid large unused cash balances".

GuarantCo will still be able to leverage its increased equity base as it will have a sovereign guarantee of callable capital. Consequently, it will be able to continue its development objectives and expand its pipeline of projects.

DFID's total contingent liability for GuarantCo would be £40 million under this callable capital agreement. This is part of the overall approved budget for PIDG under its current business case. The sole purpose of this arrangement is to achieve better value for money for taxpayers by providing callable capital instead of cash while achieving the same development outcomes.

The agreement would be in place for 10 years and capital can be called by GuarantCo if the value of its guarantee portfolio is more than five times its equity. This would require GuarantCo to lose about 60% (or US \$166 million) of its paid-in equity at a guarantee portfolio of US \$1 billion. DFID considers the risk of this happening to be low but not negligible. Even if called towards the end of the agreement, it would still provide better value for money than DFID providing cash now. DFID will continue to review the financial performance with GuarantCo regularly and GuarantCo will be required to report quarterly on the risk of the capital being called. In the circumstance where the contingent liability is called, provision for any payment will be sought through the normal supply procedure.

The Treasury has approved the proposal in principle. If, during the period of 14 parliamentary sitting days beginning on the date on which this minute was laid before parliament (i.e. 13 to 21 July and 5 to 15 September), a Member signifies an objection by giving notice of a parliamentary question or by otherwise raising the matter in parliament, final approval to proceed with incurring the liability will be withheld pending an examination of the objection.

[HCWS85]

Petition

Wednesday 13 July 2016

OBSERVATIONS

TREASURY

Closure of Lloyds Bank in Bredbury

The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that the proposed closure of the Bredbury branch of Lloyds Bank will have a negative impact on the local area; further that vulnerable members of the community will struggle if the bank closes as most do not use online banking; further that the bank staff deal with many different situations with dignity and care which is vital in a community where there is a large elderly population; further that a number of dedicated staff will be made unemployed; and further that a local petition on this matter has been signed by 580 individuals.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to stop the closure of the Bredbury branch of Lloyds Bank.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by William Wragg, *Official Report*, 19 May 2016; Vol. 611, c. 242.]

[P001696]

Observations from the Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin):

The Government thank the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (William Wragg) for his petition on the planned closure of the Lloyds Bank branch in Bredbury.

The Government are sorry to hear about the disappointment of the residents of Bredbury at the planned closure of their local Lloyds Bank branch. Although we can understand their concerns, decisions on opening and closing agencies are taken by the management team of each bank on a commercial basis. As with other banking service providers, Lloyds Bank will need to balance customer interests, market competition,

and other commercial factors when considering its strategy and the Government do not seek to intervene in these decisions.

However, the Government believe that banks should act in the best interests of their customers and continue to serve the needs of the consumer as well as the wider economy. In March 2015, the major high street banks, consumer groups and the Government signed up to an industry-wide agreement to work with customers and communities to minimise the impact of branch closures and put in place alternative banking services. This protocol commits the banks to:

- work with local communities to establish the impact of the branch closure, prior to its closure

- find suitable alternative provision to suit individual communities

- put satisfactory alternative banking services in place before a branch is closed. Options for this will include free to use cash machines, the proximity of alternative branches, and Post Office branches and mobile banking arrangements

The British Bankers' Association has appointed Professor Russel Griggs to carry out an independent review of the protocol. The review will consider and identify best practice in implementation of the protocol and, if appropriate, make recommendations for amendments to the protocol to ensure it continues to meet its objectives. The Government look forward to seeing the conclusions of the review later this year.

It may be useful to note that many bank account providers already have an arrangement with the Post Office to provide access to their bank accounts, where customers can withdraw money, deposit cash and cheques and check balances at all 11,500 Post Office branches in the UK.

If other banks in the local area have more extensive facilities, and the residents of Bredbury wish to consider moving to an alternative bank, they may be interested in using the Current Account Switch Service. The switch service is free to use, comes with a guarantee to protect customers from financial loss if something goes wrong, and redirects any payments mistakenly sent to the old account for 36 months, providing further assurance for customers.

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Wednesday 13 July 2016

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