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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Tuesday 11 October 2016**

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# House of Commons

*Tuesday 11 October 2016*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### HEALTH

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### GP Interventions: Physical Activity

1. **Julie Elliott** (Sunderland Central) (Lab): What steps he has taken to support GPs in prescribing effective interventions to change behaviour and promote physical activity. [906489]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Nicola Blackwood):** The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence recommends that exercise referral schemes should be provided for people at increased risk of ill health, and it is right that such schemes are developed on a local basis to meet the needs of the population. Our NHS five year forward view strategy prioritises prevention, and the GP physical activity clinical champion programme has taught more than 4,500 healthcare professionals to provide advice on physical activity in routine clinical consultations.

**Julie Elliott:** In the north-east, only 33% of adults participate in weekly sport, compared with 38% in London. This has a knock-on effect on people's health throughout their lives. What are the Government doing to address these geographical health inequalities?

**Nicola Blackwood:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise this question. Inactivity costs England an estimated £7.4 billion a year, and regular physical activity reduces the risk of developing many health conditions by between 20% and 40%. People who exercise regularly can reduce their risk of developing certain kinds of cancer. We are particularly pleased that, in addition to the GP physical activity clinical champion programme, Public Health England has secured funding from Sport England to pilot an education cascade model involving midwives, physiotherapists and mental health nurses and, with the support of the Burdett Trust for Nursing, will soon be launching a pilot involving 21 clinical nurse champion programmes to embed this knowledge in practising nurses. It will, however, be up to local areas to ensure that they make the best of these programmes by targeting them at their local area.

**John Cryer** (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): On the behaviour part of the question, what can the Minister do to combat what seems to be an emerging picture of over-consumption of painkillers and to enforce NICE guidelines on their use?

**Nicola Blackwood:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue relating to drug and alcohol misuse. We have prioritised this question as one of the local statutory requirements. We have given £16 billion to local health authorities for public health delivery, and we will expect them to prioritise this issue.

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): Lack of physical activity contributes to obesity. With today's Health questions falling on World Obesity Day, as I am sure the Minister is aware, it is vital that we recommit our efforts to reversing rising obesity levels in the UK. An opportune moment would have been the childhood obesity strategy—sorry, the plan—that was published over the summer, but sadly it did not go far enough. Therefore, will the Minister commit today to ensuring that the plan is fully realised as a preventive strategy to change behaviours and help to make the next generation healthier than the last?

**Nicola Blackwood:** I congratulate the hon. Lady on her appointment. I am particularly pleased to see her in her place. She has played an important role in the all-party parliamentary group on breast cancer. We are very proud of the childhood obesity plan. It is based on the best available evidence, and it will make a real difference to obesity rates in this country. The Government are also consulting on the soft drinks industry levy, and we have launched a broad sugar reduction strategy. She is absolutely right to say that we must now work hard to ensure that we deliver on that with the NHS, local authorities and other partners as we move into the delivery phase of the plan. We are proud that it is a world-leading plan.

#### Health and Social Care: Plymouth

2. **Johnny Mercer** (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): If he will visit Plymouth to discuss how its city council has pooled health and social care budgets. [906490]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat):** Plymouth has gone further and faster in integrating health and social care than many parts of the country have done. The integrated fund that it has set up covers housing and leisure as well as health and care. I would be delighted to visit Plymouth and to learn more about how the fund is working in practice.

**Johnny Mercer:** As my hon. Friend points out, Plymouth has taken innovative steps to try to address some of the funding inequalities at play within the Northern, Eastern and Western Devon clinical commissioning group. However, between the calculated spend and the actual spend, there is a funding shortfall of £30 million. Will he agree to work with local MPs, stakeholders and those involved in the wider Devon sustainability and transformation plan to develop a written agreement to address these inequalities?

**David Mowat:** My hon. Friend refers to the time lag that can exist between target and actual funding. When I visit, I will be delighted to meet stakeholders not only to understand the allocation issues to which he refers but to congratulate the health and social care leadership on the progress they have made with their fund and on the above-average satisfaction ratings that have been achieved in Plymouth.

12. [906501] **Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): When the Minister is in Devon, will he meet patients' groups and NHS staff, who are very worried about the proposals under the Government's Orwellian Success regime, which include the closure of scores of community hospital beds, including the only community hospital beds in Exeter at Whipton hospital? Although it may make sense to integrate, and it certainly makes sense to move money from beds and buildings to better care for people in their homes, does he accept that it is simply not deliverable against a backdrop of massive cuts in social care budgets?

**David Mowat:** Yes, I am happy to meet in that context. The right hon. Gentleman is right that the Success regime is about a transfer of resources from the community hospitals to care at home and domiciliary care. That is not necessarily the wrong thing to do, but it must be done right, and I am happy to meet.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): I welcome greater integration, but the Minister will be aware that there are grave concerns about the effect of cuts to social care on the NHS. More and more patients are spending greater time in more expensive settings in hospital when they could be better looked after in their own homes or in the community, but cuts to social care make that impossible. Will the Minister set out what appraisal the Government are making of the effect and the damage to the NHS of cuts to social care?

**David Mowat:** My hon. Friend is right: social care funding is tight. It is also true to say that those parts of the country that do the best in this regard—there are some that do considerably better than others—have integrated social care and health most effectively. On the budget itself, there is some disparity among different local authorities. About a quarter of local authorities have increased their adult social care budget by 5% or more this year.

### Alcohol Consumption Guidelines

3. **Simon Danczuk** (Rochdale) (Ind): If he will publish the full scientific evidential basis for his Department's alcohol consumption guidelines; and what representations he has received on those guidelines. [906491]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Nicola Blackwood):** The scientific evidence for the UK chief medical officer's low-risk alcohol guidelines is available on the gov.uk website. The guidelines were published in August, following testing through public consultation to ensure that the advice is as clear and usable as possible. We received 1,019 responses to the consultation.

**Simon Danczuk:** There is an overwhelming scientific evidence base that shows the health benefits of moderate drinking—something to which I can attest. Does the Minister not agree that the chief medical officer should highlight those benefits more?

**Nicola Blackwood:** For many people, drinking alcohol is part of their normal social lives, and we are perfectly clear that these guidelines are advisory. They are in place to help people make informed decisions about how they drink and decide whether they want to take fewer risks with their drinking. They are not designed to label everyone who drinks as a problem drinker or to prevent everyone who wants to drink from drinking, but I point out to the hon. Gentleman that Rochdale has more than double the number of admissions to hospital where alcohol is a factor than the best authorities in England.

**Byron Davies** (Gower) (Con): Following on from that answer, will the Minister reassure the House that public health guidance given to consumers of alcohol is realistic and will not undermine responsible drinking campaigns, penalise responsible drinkers or damage the vital role that pubs play in our communities?

**Nicola Blackwood:** As I have said, these guidelines are simply intended to be advisory. They are intended to give the best possible information and advice and to put all the evidence in one place so that people can make the best possible decisions with their drinking.

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): Campaigners on alcohol abuse have acknowledged the importance of the pub, which is a controlled sociable environment in which to enjoy a drink compared with the unrestricted supermarkets. Will the Minister have a word with her colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government who continue to preside over a system in which profitable wanted pubs are demolished and in which supermarkets are built on the site against the wishes of local communities?

**Nicola Blackwood:** The hon. Gentleman plays a very important role as chair of the all-party save the pub group and has been a dogged campaigner for the pub. We are very clear that social drinking is not the target of these low-risk guidelines. I am happy to meet and discuss this issue with my DCLG colleagues.

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): Sadly, very few people are aware of the link between alcohol consumption and obesity and of the long-term impacts of life-limiting diseases—not just cirrhosis. To ensure that the impact of obesity is integral to the alcohol consumption guidelines, will the Minister, on World Obesity Day, put tackling both adult and childhood obesity even higher up the Department's agenda?

**Nicola Blackwood:** The hon. Lady is right to raise the hidden risks of alcohol consumption, which is exactly why a widespread analysis of the evidence was conducted through this guideline exercise. She is right to say that obesity should be a top priority for the Government. We will analyse her question and look into it.

### PFI Health Projects

4. **Rob Marris** (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): What estimate he has made of the value of assets funded by PFI health projects which will remain in private ownership after the contracts for those projects have concluded. [906492]

**The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne):** Between 1997 and 2010, 103 NHS hospital PFI schemes reached financial close, creating liabilities for the NHS of £77 billion. Three legacy PFI schemes have been signed since 2010 on stricter terms, with liabilities of £1.7 billion, and one scheme has been signed under the new PF2 model, worth £340 million. In nearly all cases, except for a few of the early schemes, ownership of the hospital reverts to the NHS at the end of the PFI contract. But even in those schemes, the NHS always has the first option on whether to end or continue with the contract.

**Rob Marris:** Effectively, those figures will mean even more debt for the next generation. Will the Minister commit the Government to abandoning all PFI? It always was an idiotic scheme. No more PFI, no more PF2, etc—just abandon it, Minister.

**Mr Dunne:** The hon. Gentleman has a consistent track record in opposing PFI, even when the vast majority of the schemes were put under contract by the Government of which he was a member—so I will not take any lectures from him about how to deal with PFI. We will continue to use the new stricter terms as and when appropriate.

**Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): The National Audit Office concluded that the PFI contract for the Norfolk and Norwich hospital was a bad deal for the taxpayer and for the NHS, yet last year Octagon Healthcare made a record profit as the Norfolk and Norwich's finances sank ever further into the red. Will the Minister consider making a formal approach to Octagon Healthcare to ask it to forgo part of its profit to help confront the enormous financial black hole that the trust faces?

**Mr Dunne:** We have provided access for seven of the worst affected trusts with obligations under PFI to a support fund of some £1.5 billion to help them with those obligations. I am not sure whether Norfolk is one of them; I suspect that it is not. I would be happy to talk to the right hon. Gentleman about this, but rather than raising his hopes inappropriately I have to say to him that many of the schemes are too costly to divert resource to pay them off completely.

### Clinical Commissioning Groups: "Five Year Forward View"

5. **Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): If he will take steps to ensure that clinical commissioning groups publish their proposals for implementing the NHS "Five Year Forward View". [906493]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat):** The "Five Year Forward View" will be delivered through sustainability and transformation plans which are currently being developed by clinical

commissioning groups in collaboration with local authorities and providers. NHS England expects that all STPs will be published, although in some areas discussions are already taking place.

**Mr Baker:** I am led to understand that in Wycombe we should expect no dramatic changes and possibly no publication of a strategic plan. Does my hon. Friend agree that public confidence would be much enhanced by the clear articulation in public of a strategy for meeting the "Five Year Forward View"?

**David Mowat:** I agree with my hon. Friend, and I will try to give a clear answer. NHS England is determined that all 44 areas will publish their plans shortly. For those that have not already done so, publication will take place after the formal checkpoint review at the end of October. Areas are working to different timescales, but the plans will all be published by the end of November. For the avoidance of doubt, that includes the STP for Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): The NHS "Five Year Forward View" called for a radical upgrade in prevention and public health. How does the Minister square that with the Government's subsequent cuts to public health, including £200 million in-year cuts and further cuts expected by 2020?

**David Mowat:** The STP process is an attempt to upgrade our public health and mental health provision and cancer outcomes. Every STP will be expected to provide an assessment of local public health priorities and the timetable for progress towards that.

**Mr Edward Vaizey** (Wantage) (Con): Wantage community hospital in my constituency has recently closed because of the threat of Legionnaires' disease, and it will not reopen until we have finally concluded consultation on the sustainability and transformation plan—if it reopens at all. This consultation has been delayed, and that naturally worries my constituents. Will the Minister join me in urging Oxfordshire to get on with consulting on this very important plan, so that we can have a reasonable discussion?

**David Mowat:** I will join my right hon. Friend in doing that. I am not familiar with the specifics of the Wantage case, but it does not sound right that it is an ongoing thing that is not fixed quickly.

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): May I congratulate the Minister on his appointment to the Front Bench, as well as the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), on hers? I am sure that they will do a terrific job in their posts.

As a type 2 diabetic, I am very concerned about the fact that local clinical commissioning groups are just not providing information on preventive work against diabetes. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that diabetes will be referred to once these plans have been published?

**David Mowat:** I will confirm that. There is a national diabetes plan, as the right hon. Gentleman will be aware. Diabetes is one of a number of long-term conditions in which these plans are charged to deliver improvements,

and it would not be acceptable for a plan to be signed off or completed unless progress on diabetes had been made.

**David Tredinnick** (Bosworth) (Con): When the Minister looks at new treatment options in the forward view, will he consider the example of Velindre NHS Trust in south-east Wales, which treats 1.5 million cancer patients every year and is now using reflexology, reiki healing, aromatherapy, and breathing and relaxation techniques to alleviate anxiety, pain, side effects and symptoms? If that was more widely spread over the health service in England, cost savings and patient satisfaction would increase.

**David Mowat**: The STP process is locally led, not led from the centre, but I would expect clinical judgments of the type mentioned to be made if they could be confirmed on the basis of scientific and trial-based evidence.

**Julie Cooper** (Burnley) (Lab): Central to the aim of the five year forward plan for the NHS is a sustainable health service in which all patients receive the right care at the right time in the right place. With that in mind, can the Minister tell me what action he is taking to address the problem of delayed hospital discharges, which have risen by 20% so far this year? That amounts to an additional 926 people every day condemned to stay in hospital longer than is medically necessary.

**David Mowat**: First, may I welcome the hon. Lady to her post and wish her luck in the new job? There has been an increase in delayed discharges in England over the past year. Only a part of that increase is due to difficulties in the integration between social care and the NHS—a large part of it comes from within the NHS itself—but it is not uniform across local authorities. Indeed, many local authorities are improving in this regard. What is very clear is that those making the most progress the most quickly are those that have gone furthest in integrating social care and healthcare.

### Lyme Disease

6. **Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): What the timetable is for the review of the diagnosis, treatment and transmission of Lyme disease announced on 10 May 2016. [906494]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat)**: The Department of Health has commissioned three separate reviews on the diagnosis, treatment and transmission of Lyme disease. The work will be carried out by the epicentre of University College and be clinically driven and evidence-based, and it will be published in late 2017.

**Michelle Donelan**: Although I am delighted that the Government are looking into this serious and important disease, as the reviews progress thousands of people contract Lyme disease each year, particularly in areas such as Wiltshire, and they can receive inadequate treatment, so will the Minister look into speeding up these reviews?

**David Mowat**: It is fair challenge that this work is high priority, and we need to go as fast as possible, but we are working with research teams. The work will be trial-based and needs to be as definitive as possible.

In the meantime, early diagnosis is the key way to make progress. Public Health England continues to work with GPs and the public on it.

**Richard Arkless** (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): My mother recently died of motor neurone disease. In some areas of my constituency, there are 13 sufferers per 10,000 people, whereas the UK average is two per 100,000. Will the Minister please agree to meet me and representatives of the Motor Neurone Disease Association to discuss how the UK Government could lend their weight to combating this awful and debilitating disease?

**David Mowat**: Yes, I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss that subject.

**Mr Speaker**: I am extremely grateful to the Minister for his response on that matter.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Bearing in mind that cases of Lyme disease have quadrupled in the past 12 years, and that some of those cases have been in my constituency of Strangford in Northern Ireland, what has been done with the devolved Assemblies in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to ensure that a UK-wide strategy is put in place to address this trend and to provide effective diagnosis and treatment?

**David Mowat**: The principal thing that we need to do with Lyme disease is to make progress on diagnosis, treatment and transmission through a definitive approach. When the results of the study that I mentioned are published, of course they will be available across all parts of the United Kingdom.

### NHS Procurement

7. **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve NHS procurement. [906495]

**The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne)**: I agree with my hon. Friend that this is an important area. In his report earlier this year, Lord Carter identified potential annual savings of £700 million from reducing the variation in procurement performance between providers. We have announced a first tranche of 12 standardised products for all NHS providers to use; this will boost procurement volumes and bring about economies of scale, securing lower prices. These initial products, including commodity items such as gloves and needles, cover £100 million of trust spending. We expect this to result in savings of up to 25%.

**Andrew Bridgen**: Innovative private sector suppliers have successfully partnered with the NHS since its inception, and it is quite right to say that for that relationship to be sustainable, those suppliers must make a profit. However, does the Minister agree that rogue companies that exploit the NHS's lack of commercial expertise could be named and shamed, because they are making a lot of money at taxpayers' expense?

**Mr Dunne**: We believe that the right approach to securing procurement savings is to take advantage of the immense amount of data available across the NHS.

That is why we have set up the purchasing price index benchmarking tool. Data on more than £8 billion of expenditure, covering over 30 million separate procurement transactions, has been collated and will be analysed. We will use that information judiciously to save the taxpayer money. We think that that is the right way to start, rather than naming and shaming.

**Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): I urge the Minister, when thinking about national procurement and national commissioning, to look at the national strategies that can underpin them—for example, at why we need to renew the national stroke strategy. Some 100,000 people a year suffer a stroke, and nearly 1 million people in this country have had a stroke. They care very much about rehabilitation and other services.

**Mr Speaker:** The Minister's challenge is to relate that very important matter to the equally important issue that happens to be the subject of the question: procurement.

**Mr Dunne:** I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker, for drawing the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that the topic is procurement. The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the fact that we have looked at an acute heart treatment strategy. We are creating centres of excellence across the country to ensure that if people suffer from an acute heart incident or a stroke, they are treated by the specialists who will give them the best prospects for recovery.

#### Hospitals in Special Measures

8. **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What progress his Department is making on turning around hospitals in special measures. [906496]

**The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** In the last four years, 29 trusts have been put into special measures; that is more than one in 10 of all NHS trusts. Of those, 12 have now come out, having demonstrated sustainable improvements in safety and quality of care. There are nearly 1,300 more doctors and 4,200 nurses working in trusts that have been put into special measures.

**Sir Henry Bellingham:** The Secretary of State will be aware because he visited it last year, that the Queen Elizabeth hospital in my constituency has come out of special measures. It has made excellent progress, not least by introducing Saturday lists for in-patients and putting in place numerous measures to transform the out-patients department. Will he join me in paying tribute to all staff of the hospital, particularly the chief executive, Dorothy Hosein, and the chairman, Edward Libbey, for the excellent progress that they have made?

**Mr Hunt:** I am very happy to do that, and I very much enjoyed my visit to the QE with my hon. Friend a couple of years ago. This is a very good example of how trusts can be transformed when they go into special measures. Since coming out of special measures, the QE has opened a state-of-the-art laparoscopic theatre, got a dedicated breast unit, and expanded its A&E. It has got 72 more nurses over the past few years. It is a good example to many other trusts in special measures, and it shows that that really can be a turning point, bringing about benefits for patients and staff.

**Derek Twigg** (Halton) (Lab): The problem is that many trusts are still in a financial mess and have a deficit. If hospitals and the wider health service are to solve that, they need more funding, and councils, too, need funding for care. What is the Secretary of State doing to fight for more funding for his Department to ensure that we deal with those problems properly?

**Mr Hunt:** The hon. Gentleman will have noticed that in last year's spending review the NHS got the biggest funding increase of any Government Department. We have committed to the NHS's own plan, which asks for £10 billion more a year during the course of this Parliament in real terms. However, I do not disagree that there are still very real financial pressures in the NHS and particularly in the social care system. The trusts that are delivering the highest standards of care are those with the lowest deficits. Delivering unsafe care is one of the most expensive things people can do, which is why this is an important agenda.

15. [906505] **Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating all the staff at Bolton NHS Foundation Trust, which has recently been rated "good" by the Care Quality Commission just four years after it was deemed to be a red risk. It is now in the top 25% of trusts.

**Mr Hunt:** The staff at Bolton have done a fantastic job. I absolutely congratulate them, and I thank my hon. Friend for his work in supporting them as well.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State will know that in my own area of Calderdale and Huddersfield there is a dreadful situation for the trust that has been caused by the behaviour of the clinical commissioning group and the way in which it procures. He has received a large petition from thousands of people in the Huddersfield area about the closure of the A&E. Will he look at that seriously and intervene, because the competence of local CCGs is not up to the mark?

**Mr Hunt:** I am well aware of that issue and have received a number of representations from hon. Members on both sides of the House. There is a mechanism by which these issues end up on my desk—they have to be referred by a local council's overview and scrutiny committee and then I get an independent recommendation—but I will look at this carefully if that process is followed.

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): To cope with rapid population increases in my constituency, Basingstoke has advanced plans to build a critical treatment hospital and cancer centre, with the support of more than three quarters of the population. Does my right hon. Friend expect sustainability and transformation plans to provide clear, timely direction on plans for this new model of care in the community?

**Mr Hunt:** I can absolutely reassure my right hon. Friend on that. One of the main purposes of STPs is to make sure that we deliver our cancer plan, which will introduce a maximum four-week wait between GP referral and ultimate diagnosis. If we get it right, that might result in around 30,000 lives a year being saved, so this is a big priority for every STP.

### NHS Staff Recruitment and Retention

9. **Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): What steps he plans to take to address shortfalls in staff recruitment and retention in the NHS. [906497]

**The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne):** I join the Secretary of State in welcoming the dedication and commitment of everyone who works in the NHS. We are taking active steps to encourage more people to become doctors, nurses and support staff. Only last week, my right hon. Friend announced a commitment to recruit an additional 25% of doctors to train in the NHS, which is 1,500 more doctors on top of the 6,000 currently trained every year.

**Imran Hussain:** Net temporary and agency staff expenditure has risen by 40% since 2013. It accounted for 8% of total staff expenditure in 2015-16, which equates to £4.13 billion. Does the Minister agree that rising agency costs point to a recruitment crisis, and will he make a statement to the House outlining his plans to address that crisis?

**Mr Dunne:** We recognise, absolutely, that bills for agency staff have become unsustainable, which is why we have taken deliberate action, including by introducing price caps on hourly rates last November, which has had a significant impact on reducing agency costs. In the year to date, agency costs are some £550 million less than they were last year.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): I welcome last week's announcement about the increase in the number of medical school places. What plans does the Department have to ensure that there are sufficient clinical training places for those medical students?

**Mr Dunne:** I can reassure my hon. Friend that there is considerable excess demand from UK-based students to train to become a clinician in this country—only half of those who apply to train in medical school are accepted at present—so we are confident that there will be plenty of take-up for those extra places. With regard to clinical placements, we are in discussions with universities, colleges and teaching hospitals to ensure that there are adequate numbers of places.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I welcome the 25% expansion in medical student places, but I reject tying that to the elimination of 25% of overseas doctors who currently work in our NHS. With 10% of posts unfilled and ever-rising patient demand, the Secretary of State must know that we will always need international graduates in the future. Does he not recognise that he is creating unrealistic expectations and conflict with this idea of a British-only medical service?

**Mr Dunne:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving me the opportunity to set the record straight and stop this scaremongering, which is undoubtedly unsettling many of the very valuable doctors, nurses and other foreign nationals who are currently providing vital services to the NHS. Last week's announcement was about adding more doctors to be trained who are UK-based.

We are not changing any of the present arrangements for international students being trained here, or doctors and nurses working here.

**Dr Whitford:** The Government might not be changing their position right now, but with one in 10 posts currently unfilled, and given the rhetoric used last week, how does the Minister expect us even to retain foreign doctors, let alone attract them to fill those posts?

**Mr Dunne:** There was no rhetoric used. In making that announcement, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister used no rhetoric whatsoever regarding the very valuable contribution of foreign clinicians to our health service, and that remains the case.

**Nick Boles** (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): Staff shortages this summer led United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust to introduce a temporary closure of Grantham A&E, causing huge concern to my constituents. Will the Secretary of State agree to meet me and Jody Clark, the founder of a local campaign group, to discuss how we can resolve this unacceptable situation?

**Mr Dunne:** I am well aware, from representations made by my hon. Friend and other neighbouring MPs, of the concerns that that has caused locally. The Secretary of State has already indicated to me that he does intend to meet my hon. Friend and campaigners in due course.

**Jonathan Ashworth** (Leicester South) (Lab): The Minister says that no rhetoric or scaremongering was used last week. Can he explain to the House what the Prime Minister meant when she said:

“there will be staff here from overseas in the interim period until the further numbers of British doctors are trained and come on board in terms of being able to work in our hospitals”?

What did that mean? What should we expect next—ambulances plastered with “Go home” slogans?

**Mr Dunne:** That is exactly the kind of ill-judged remark I have been talking about, and I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman has used it in his first appearance in his new post. By the way, I congratulate him on that new post, but I very much hope that he will use more measured language in the future, rather than spreading that kind of inappropriate rumour. The interim period referred to is the period during which doctors will be trained. We will not get new doctors coming in under the increased allocation until 2023, and during that time we will clearly need to use all measures to ensure that we fill the spaces that I acknowledge we have across several of our hospitals.

**Jonathan Ashworth:** I appreciate the Minister's warm welcome, and I can tell him that I am very much looking forward to shadowing the Secretary of State, but his comments on ill-judged remarks should be directed at the Prime Minister, not me. We have seen 8,000 fewer nurses, student nurse bursaries are set to be cut, there is a reliance on agency staff and a failure to train enough doctors, and now, after six years in office, the Government are talking about self-sufficiency. Given the concerns that these plans do not go far enough, will the Minister tell us what steps he will take to ensure that

no staff from the EU lose their jobs, and will the NHS still be able to recruit from the EU if necessary post Brexit?

**Mr Dunne:** Health Ministers have been very clear about reassuring all the 53,000 EU citizens working in our NHS that their roles are secure. Regarding clinicians, I remind the hon. Gentleman that, although we have some vacancy rates, which are acknowledged, we now have 7,800 more consultants employed in the NHS than in May 2010, 8,500 more doctors than in May 2010, and over 10,500 more nurses working on our wards. We have gone through a very consistent policy of recruiting more people to work in the NHS under this Government.

### Cancer Diagnosis

10. **Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to model the potential cost savings to the NHS budget of earlier diagnosis of cancers. [906498]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat):** The independent cancer taskforce highlighted the report “Saving lives, averting costs”, which identified cost savings resulting from earlier diagnosis, in particular for colon, rectal and ovary cancers. We have committed to a further £300 million for earlier diagnosis, one major product of which will be the 28-day diagnosis standard to which the Secretary of State referred earlier.

**Mr Baron:** In welcoming the Minister to his post, may I highlight evidence to show that early diagnosis, in addition to making for better survival rates, offers substantial cost savings? Colon cancer costs £3,000 per patient per year to treat at stage 1, compared with over £12,000 if it is diagnosed and treated at stage 4. We have a shortage of health economists in the NHS, so will the Minister go further and actually commission a study to look at this issue on behalf of the taxpayer, because it requires further detail?

**David Mowat:** We agree that early diagnosis saves lives and can lead to cost savings. Just as an example, we know that GP referrals are up by 91% since 2010—an additional 800,000 people are getting early diagnosis—and we are beginning to see the results of that coming through in the one-year survival figures. On my hon. Friend’s specific point about further study, Public Health England and Macmillan have commissioned recent studies on modelling, one part of which will be on the cost impact of earlier diagnosis, and we look forward to seeing the results of those studies.

**Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): GPs play a central role in the early diagnosis of cancer. In the 1990s, Sunderland was one of the most under-resourced areas in England in terms of the GP workforce, and we now face a similar and growing problem, even though action was taken then. Will the Minister set out how he intends to make sure not only that we train more family doctors, but that they are encouraged to work in areas where there is an acute shortage?

**David Mowat:** We are training 3,250 extra GPs every year, and we have a target of 5,000 additional doctors working in general practice by 2020. However, as well as new GPs, we must do much better with retention. That means keeping the GP population that we have, and there are a number of steps that the Government are taking to do that. On the specific point about Sunderland, there is a bursary scheme that is aimed at attracting GPs to areas where they may not necessarily have wished to work previously.

### NHS Efficiency Savings

11. **Sir Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con): What estimate his Department has made of the amount accrued to the public purse from efficiency savings in the NHS since May 2010. [906500]

**The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne):** In 2010 a target was set by NHS leaders to make £20 billion of efficiency savings by 2015 in order to make more funds available for treating patients and to allow the NHS to respond to changing demand and new technology. Under my right hon. Friend’s inspirational leadership as a Health Minister, the NHS broadly delivered on this original challenge, reporting savings of £19.4 billion over this period. All these savings have been reinvested into front-line NHS services.

**Sir Simon Burns:** As Members would imagine, I warmly welcome that answer from the Minister. Would he confirm that those savings were achieved through greater efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of care and by cutting waste in the NHS that occurred between 2002 and 2007? Can he confirm that the benefit of that achievement to the NHS is that not a single penny of those savings goes to the Treasury, but is reinvested in the NHS and front-line services?

**Mr Dunne:** My right hon. Friend managed to include several questions in his impressive supplementary. I can confirm that much of the waste that took place in the years he cited—2002 to 2007—related to projects of the previous Labour Government that they themselves then cancelled, such as the IT project. I can also confirm that savings generated in the NHS are kept in the NHS. Lord Carter, whose report I referred to earlier, has identified £5 billion of efficiency savings, which we hope to deliver during this Parliament.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): There is a distinction to be drawn between realistic efficiency targets and systematic underfunding. Only last month, Simon Stevens told the Public Accounts Committee that for three of the next five years “we did not get what we originally asked for”.

Chris Hopson, chief executive of NHS Providers, also said last month that

“we’ve got a huge gap coming... it’s the chairs and chief executives on the front line...who are saying they cannot make this add up any longer.”

On funding, the Government keep saying that the NHS is getting all that it has asked for; those actually running the NHS say something quite different. Who is right?

**Mr Dunne:** The hon. Gentleman stood on a manifesto 18 months ago in which his party was not prepared to commit the funding that our party was prepared to commit. Labour committed £5.5 billion to the NHS; we committed £8 billion, and we have delivered £10 billion.

### Male Suicide

13. **Colleen Fletcher** (Coventry North East) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of men who take their own life. [906502]

**The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** Tragically, suicide is now the biggest single cause of death in men under 50. There are 13 suicides every day, of which three quarters are men. I am currently reviewing our suicide strategy to make sure we leave no stone unturned in trying to reduce the totally unacceptable level of these tragedies.

**Colleen Fletcher:** Yesterday marked the launch of the mental health awareness and suicide prevention campaign called “It takes balls to talk” across Coventry and Warwickshire. The campaign is a public information programme targeted at male-dominated sporting venues, which aims to direct men to help and support when they need it to promote positive mental health and reduce the incidence of male suicide. With suicide being the single most common cause of death in men under 45, will the Secretary of State take the opportunity to welcome and support this important new campaign?

**Mr Hunt:** I am happy to do just that. I would like to thank the hon. Lady for bringing up this very important and difficult issue. We are making progress in reducing suicide rates, but we can do an awful lot better. The thing that troubles me most is that nearly three quarters of people who kill themselves have had no contact with specialist NHS mental health services in the previous year, even though in many cases we actually know who they are because, sadly, most of them have tried before. I am very happy to commend the “It takes balls to talk” campaign. She may want to put the campaign in touch with the national sport mental health charter, which is another scheme designed to use sport to try to boost the psychological wellbeing of men.

**Helen Jones** (Warrington North) (Lab): A recent survey showed that one in four members of the emergency services experienced mental health problems, and that a number of them experienced suicidal thoughts. What is the Secretary of State doing to protect our vital paramedics and other ambulance staff, and to ensure that they get the support they need in dealing with absolutely appalling situations?

**Mr Hunt:** Again, I thank the hon. Lady for raising that. She will be pleased to know that the NHS has introduced a scheme, backed with funding, to encourage NHS trusts to look after the mental wellbeing of their own staff. I particularly want to pay tribute to the courage of people who work in the air ambulance service, because they see—day in, day out—some of the most difficult and distressing cases. They have to cope with the pressure of that when they take it home every day, and we all salute them.

### Elderly Patients (Care Support)

14. **Oliver Dowden** (Hertsmere) (Con): What clothing and other support the NHS provides to elderly people discharged from hospital into care homes for the first time. [906504]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat):** Every patient discharged from hospital into a care home should have a care plan or discharge assessment. This should include a clear assessment of their needs, covering transport, carers, GP notification, medication and, where necessary, clothing requirements.

**Oliver Dowden:** I have been approached by a number of constituents concerned about cases of elderly and vulnerable people who have been discharged from hospital straight into care homes, often without any basic personal effects or clothing because their family cannot or are not willing to supply them. Does the Minister recognise this, and what can the Government do to tackle it?

**David Mowat:** As I said earlier, there is a national process in the form of the care plan. Where the family is not able to or will not provide support, typically the voluntary sector is asked to do so. If that does not work, local authorities can increase the personal expenses allowance to provide clothing. I am interested to hear about the cases that my hon. Friend mentions in his constituency, and I am very happy to talk to him to understand better why the process has failed there.

**Mr Speaker:** And have a cup of tea with the fella.

### Topical Questions

T1. [906469] **Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** Last week, I announced plans to make the NHS self-sufficient in the supply of newly qualified doctors by the end of the next Parliament. We recognise the brilliant work that is done by the many outstanding overseas doctors who work in the NHS and have made it clear that, whether or not they are from the EU, we wish that work to continue post-Brexit. However, as the fifth largest economy in the world, Britain should be training all the doctors it needs. While there will always be beneficial exchanges of doctors and researchers between countries, we have a global obligation to train enough doctors for our own needs, otherwise the inevitable consequence will be to denude poorer countries of doctors whose skills are desperately needed.

**Luke Hall:** Thornbury health centre is crying out for redevelopment to cater for the growing local population. Will my right hon. Friend meet me, representatives of the health centre and NHS Property Services to see how we can take a co-ordinated approach that will move the health centre forward?

**Mr Hunt:** I can do better than that, because I have said that I am prepared to go to the health centre. I remember a very good visit to Thornbury community hospital during the general election campaign. I understand

what those at the health centre are trying to do and they are absolutely right to be thinking about how they can improve out-of-hospital services.

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State look into the creation of a sideways move for a chief executive of a trust that was criticised for failing to investigate patient deaths? Six weeks after the special recruitment exercise by Southern Health, Katrina Percy has resigned from her advisory role, with a substantial 12-month salary payoff that has been signed off by the Department of Health and the Treasury. The campaign group, Justice for LB, has called that “utterly disgraceful” and I agree. Will the Secretary of State investigate?

**Mr Hunt:** I agree with the hon. Lady that the way this case was handled was by no means satisfactory. The truth is that it took some time to establish precisely what had gone wrong at Southern Health. As this House knows, because we made a statement at the time—I think it was an urgent question, actually—there was a failure to investigate unexplained deaths. I do not think the NHS handled the matter as well as it should, but we now have much more transparency and we do not have a situation where people go on and get other jobs in the NHS, which happened so often in the past.

T4. [906472] **Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): What will the Government do to scrutinise and assist the London ambulance service, which has had an appalling and consistently poor record on call-out times for category A emergencies?

**The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Philip Dunne):** My hon. Friend is right to highlight the fact that the London ambulance service is in special measures and has been for some time. I visited it this summer and am pleased to confirm that some £63 million of additional funding has been provided to the ambulance service since April 2015. The service is starting to make significant inroads in increasing the number of paramedics who are available on call, with some 250 more being added over the last couple of years.

T2. [906470] **Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): Last October, the then Health Minister, the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), confirmed that my constituency fell far below the national average in terms of NHS dental provision. In fact, it is one of the worst in the country. Unfortunately, nothing has changed since then. Does the Secretary of State believe it is acceptable that my constituents, including many children, are unable to get an NHS dentist?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat):** It is clearly unacceptable if the situation that the hon. Lady sets out is the case. I am happy to meet her and work with her to take the action that is needed to make things better.

T6. [906474] **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): The Government have provided a welcome increase in funding for mental health support, yet it does not appear to be reaching my constituency effectively, particularly for children. Now there are concerns that the Millbrook unit at nearby Macclesfield hospital might close. Will the Secretary of State look into those concerns?

**Mr Jeremy Hunt:** I am very happy to do that. My hon. Friend is right to highlight the fact that the provision of mental health services to children is one of the biggest weak spots in NHS provision today. It is an area that we are putting a big focus on. I would be happy to talk to her about the situation in her constituency.

T3. [906471] **Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): I know that this is a devolved matter, but I look forward to the Union working together on it. In Northern Ireland, the health service is in crisis. To give cancer as an example, 6.7% of those with breast cancer are called in to be checked within 14 days—not 100%—and yet we have 392,000 people on the waiting list. Will the Secretary of State or his officials meet us to find a better way forward, so that we can all work together?

**David Mowat:** I have made it clear that we should all be working together to defeat cancer. We know that the best way of doing so is early diagnosis. We have made a lot of progress on that in England over the past few years but have a lot further to go. We are of course willing to talk to the devolved Administration about what they can learn from us—and perhaps vice versa.

T7. [906475] **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): Will the Secretary of State look again at the decision not to fund second stem cell transplants for adults and children with blood cancers, given the significant clinical evidence of their benefit for those who relapse? He should not just take my word for it but should take it from the Anthony Nolan Trust and the 36 specialists who have written to him asking him to review the decision.

**David Mowat:** This is a very difficult area, but decisions on priority are clinically driven and must continue to be based on peer-reviewed data. The most recent review determined that less than one third of second transplants would result in survival after five years; that is why they were not funded. There will, however, be a further review next April, and to the extent that the data have changed there will be a new evaluation at that time.

T5. [906473] **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): Deer Park medical centre in Witney faces closure, and patients will be dispersed a long way into other practices in an area where one in four already waits more than a week to see their GP. Duncan Enright, who is Labour’s candidate in the Witney by-election, is campaigning to save the centre. Will the Secretary of State reward his campaign by saving it today?

**Mr Jeremy Hunt:** The Conservative candidate in the Witney by-election will be saying very clearly that because of the extra funding from this Government we are aiming to have 5,000 more doctors working in general practice by the end of this Parliament, something that would not have been possible with the increase of less than half that amount promised by the Labour party.

T8. [906477] **Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): As Ministers will be aware, this week is baby loss awareness week. Access to neonatal cots and neonatal transport services are vital parts of the care of premature and sick babies. What assurances will my right hon.

Friend give that his Department is continuing to review the findings of the Bliss report, and when can we expect to hear more?

**Mr Dunne:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising baby loss awareness week. I am sure that, along with other hon. Members, she will be participating in the Backbench Business debate on that later this week. In February the independent maternity review, *Better Births*, made a number of recommendations, including on neonatal critical care. We are studying those recommendations and are due to report initial findings from our work in December.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I listened very closely to the Secretary of State's comments earlier on mental health. On 9 December he stood at that Dispatch Box and said that

"CCGs are committed to increasing the proportion of their funding that goes into mental health."—[*Official Report*, 9 December 2015; Vol. 603, c. 1012.]

However, my research shows that 57% of clinical commissioning groups are reducing the proportion they spend on mental health—yet another broken promise. When will we have real equality from this Government for mental health?

**Mr Jeremy Hunt:** I will tell the hon. Lady what this Government have done. We have legislated for parity of esteem for mental health. We are treating 1,400 more people every single day for mental health conditions compared with six years ago. We have a new plan that will see 1 million more people treated every year by 2020, including a transformation of child and adolescent mental health services. That is possible because we are putting into the NHS extra money that her party refused to commit to.

T9. [906478] **Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government have a moral obligation to end the raid on poorer countries for their skilled doctors and nurses and to make our NHS recruitment more self-sufficient?

**Mr Hunt:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I find it extraordinary that the Labour party said that our plan to train more doctors was "nonsense". We currently have 800 doctors in the NHS from Sri Lanka, 600 from Nigeria, 400 from Sudan and 200 from Myanmar. They are doing a brilliant job and I want them to continue doing that job, but we have to ask ourselves whether it is ethical for us to continue to recruit doctors from much poorer countries that really need their skills.

**Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): I was alarmed to read at the weekend that NHS chiefs are warning that hospitals in England are on the brink of collapse. Is it the Government's intention to cut the public supply of healthcare in order to create demand for a private healthcare system, or will they give the NHS the additional funds it needs?

**Mr Hunt:** Let me remind the hon. Lady that the party that introduced the most outsourcing to the private sector was her Labour Government under the previous Health Secretary, Alan Milburn. Our view is that we should be completely neutral as to whether local doctors decide to commission their care from the public sector or private sector. We want the best care for patients.

**Seema Kennedy** (South Ribble) (Con): I welcomed last week's NHS Improvement report which states that there are now sufficient staff for Chorley and South Ribble hospital's A&E department to reopen, but I am dismayed that the trust is delaying the reopening until January next year. Will the Minister reassure me that he will work with me and other stakeholders to oblige the trust to open as soon as possible?

**Mr Dunne:** My hon. Friend has been a doughty champion of Chorley, in combination with another Member of the House and local campaigners, who visited the Houses of Parliament yesterday to meet local MPs. While welcoming the reopening of the A&E from January, I am happy to continue to work with my hon. Friend to see whether it can be brought forward.

**Mr Speaker:** The other doughty champion of the hospital is of course the right hon. Member for Chorley (Mr Hoyle), who regularly deputises for me in this Chair. I am sure the House will want to acknowledge that important fact.

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): I heard the Minister's response earlier. He was of course right that sustainability and transformation plans are led locally, but he failed to acknowledge that the Government have given a mandate to make cuts attached to STPs. Without consultation, my local hospital has been downgraded. What on earth will the Secretary of State say to my constituents who may lose loved ones because they have had to travel miles further to another hospital?

**David Mowat:** If I may, I will give a quote:

"To reshape services over the next 10 years, the NHS will need the freedom to collaborate, integrate and merge across organisational divides."

That comes from the 2015 Labour manifesto. The STP process is designed to bring about better care and health, and better productivity. We should be critical friends of the process because we all want a better national health service.

**Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): Local health commissioners have concluded that Telford's brand new women and children's centre, which serves some of the most deprived populations in the country, should be closed and moved to a more affluent area where health is better than the national average. The commissioning process has lost the confidence of local people. Will the Secretary of State intervene and ensure that local health commissioners fulfil their legal duty to reduce health inequalities?

**Mr Jeremy Hunt:** I thank my hon. Friend for standing up for her constituents—it is absolutely right that she should do so. She would agree that that has to be a local matter led by commissioners locally, but she can be reassured that we are always watching what is happening to ensure that people follow due process, and that the results of any changes proposed benefit patients as intended. I will therefore watch very carefully what is happening in Telford and in Shropshire more broadly.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): About half a dozen times in the last hour, the Secretary of State has bragged about the extra money he is putting in to the national health service, so why is Bolsover hospital, like

many others that have been referred to in the past half hour, due to close? Why are neighbouring hospitals in countless constituencies in Derbyshire closing? Why does he not use some of that money to save the Derbyshire hospitals?

**Mr Hunt:** The extra money we are putting in to the NHS is going to better cancer care, better mental health care and better GP provision—it is going to all the things that Members on both sides of the House know matter. It will also mean that we can support our hospitals better. With our ageing population, we will continue to have great demand for hospital care, but the best way to relieve pressure on those hospitals is to invest in better out-of-hospital care, which has not been done for many years.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** Kettering general hospital is treating a record number of patients with increasingly world-class treatments, yet despite being located in an area of rapid population growth, due to an historic anomaly, the funding for the local clinical commissioning groups is among the worst in the country in relative terms. What can Her Majesty's Government do to correct that?

**Mr Hunt:** I am happy to look at that particular funding issue for my hon. Friend. I know that Kettering hospital is under a great deal of pressure. The one thing that it could do to relieve its financial pressures is to look at the number of agency and locum staff that it employs. As with many hospitals, there are big savings to be made in that respect in ways that improve rather than decrease the quality of clinical care.

**Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab):** The Secretary of State will be aware that the Public Accounts Committee has questioned both the Department of Health and NHS England on the parlous state of NHS accounts this year, following the comments by the Comptroller and Auditor General. It is clear that STPs are the only plan on the table. Will the Secretary of State make clear his support to the NHS to deliver the STPs in the teeth of opposition from his own Back Benchers? If he will not, what is plan B?

**Mr Hunt:** I do not recognise the picture the hon. Lady paints about opposition to STPs. We need to ensure we have good plans that will deliver better care for NHS patients by bringing together and integrating the health and social care system, and improving the

quality of out-of-hospital plans. While we are in a period where those plans have not been published there will obviously be a degree of uncertainty, which we will do everything we can to alleviate, but she is right to say that these plans are very important for the future of the NHS. The process has our full support.

**Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con):** The Secretary of State will be aware of the concern in my constituency about the future of Paignton hospital, which prompted hundreds to turn up to a recent meeting. Does he agree with me that it is vital the clinical commissioning group, in publishing its plans, does not just publish what it will remove but the details of what it will replace them with?

**Mr Dunne:** Considerable efforts are going into sorting out some of the historical challenges in the provision of both acute and community care in Devon. I hosted a meeting for a number of colleagues who are concerned about this and I am happy to continue to engage with colleagues across the county.

**Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab):** Two years ago, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS trust privatised support services, including cleaning, handing them over to Carillion in an effort to save money. Since then there have been shortages of equipment, shortages of staff and an appalling decline in standards of cleanliness. Will the Secretary of State condemn Carillion for putting patients at risk? When will he ensure that hospital services in Nottingham are properly funded?

**Mr Jeremy Hunt:** The decision on whether to outsource services must be a matter for local hospitals. I know that that hospital has been struggling with its deficit. I have been to visit the hospital myself and I know it has been trying very hard to improve clinical care. If the contract is not working and the quality is not right, I would expect the hospital to change it, but it must be its decision.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I am sorry, but, rather as in the health service under any Government, demand has exceeded supply and we must move on.

**Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab)** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I was keeping the hon. Lady waiting for only a moment, so that there was a due sense of anticipation in the House. That sense now definitely exists.

## Point of Order

12.37 pm

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is rather frustrating to hear Ministers and some Back Benchers continually referring to the Government having invested, or intending to invest, £10 billion into our NHS over the course of this Parliament. You may be aware, Mr Speaker, that I sit on the Health Committee. I would like to read you the following extract from a report:

“Last year’s Spending Review announced that the NHS would receive an additional £8.4 billion above inflation by 2020-21. But whilst previous spending reviews define health spending as the whole of the Department of Health’s budget, the 2015 Spending Review defines it in terms of NHS England’s budget, which excludes, for example, spending on public health”—

**Mr Speaker:** I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady. She is nothing if not persistent and she has put that thought on the record. I say to her in all courtesy, however, that she is not the first person to do this—I probably did it myself in the very distant past—and I do not suppose she will be the last. It is a very interesting point, but it is a continuation of debate. There is no matter for the Chair here. For that reason, and that reason alone, I must ask her to desist at this stage, but I have a feeling she will find ingenious ways of returning to her point on other occasions.

Perhaps we can leave it there, because we are short of time and I want to proceed. Unless there are further points of order—I am not exactly looking for them—then we will come on to the ten-minute rule motion. I call **Conor McGinn**.

## Unlawful Killing (Recovery of Remains)

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

12.38 pm

**Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a presumption against eligibility for parole in cases where a person, convicted of unlawfully killing another person, has not provided relevant knowledge in their possession for the purposes of facilitating the location and recovery of the remains of the victim; to create a separate offence of withholding such information; to make provision about the available sentences for such an offence; and for connected purposes.

For a parent to suffer the anguish of losing a child is beyond words, but the horror of having such a loved one murdered is surely too awful even to contemplate, so it is harder still, if even possible, to imagine the pain of being denied the chance to hold a proper funeral and lay that loved one to rest. My constituent Marie McCourt does not need to imagine it, because for 28 years she has been forced to endure what she describes as the special kind of torture of knowing she could die without ever discovering where her daughter’s body is or being able to lay her daughter to rest with the dignity she deserves.

Marie’s daughter Helen was murdered at the age of just 22 by Ian Simms in February 1988, as she travelled home from work in the village of Billinge in my constituency. In a landmark conviction, he was found guilty of murder based on overwhelming DNA evidence, even though Helen’s body was not found. For almost three decades, Marie has been tormented because he refuses to reveal what happened to her daughter’s body. Despite this brutal act of callousness and lack of remorse, he could soon be released from jail. This is not the justice that Marie and her family deserve. Killers who inflict this kind of suffering on their victims’ families should not be released on parole. That goes to the heart of the Bill I am bringing forward today.

Before I continue, I want to say something about Marie. She had Helen taken from her in the cruellest circumstances, only to be denied the sacred right to bury her daughter. Few could have found the strength to carry on, let alone mount such a formidable campaign to have the law changed so that others do not suffer in the way she has suffered. Her quiet dignity and powerful determination are an example to us all.

Our campaign for Helen’s law, led by Marie, calls on the Government to introduce a “no body, no parole” policy for murderers. The online petition has already attracted the support of over 340,000 signatures, and in February I was honoured to accompany Marie to No. 10 Downing Street to present the petition. The Government responded to the overwhelming public support for the campaign by asking the Parole Board to review the guidelines around convicted murderers. We await the outcome of that review, which is at least welcome progress, but as Marie has so eloquently and repeatedly said, this campaign is not just about her or Helen; it is about ensuring that others who find themselves in such horrific circumstances do not have such added pain visited on them.

Just yesterday, the Home Office revealed to me that since 2007 alone there have been 30 murders in England and Wales where no body has been recovered, but as it currently stands the English legal system does not require

a convicted murderer, at the end of their determined tariff, to admit guilt or reveal the location of a victim's remains before being released. Marie believes that if parole is granted to Helen's killer, her hopes of finding her daughter will never be realised. As I have said, she is also determined that no other family should have to live that ordeal.

My Bill seeks to acknowledge, and in some cases mitigate, the pain and distress caused to the families of missing murder victims. There are three main elements to it: first, denying parole to murderers for as long as they refuse to disclose the whereabouts of their victim's remains; secondly, passing a full-life tariff, denying parole or release, until the murderer discloses the location and enables the recovery of their victim's remains; and thirdly, applying the rarely used common-law offences in murder trials without a body of preventing the burial of a corpse and conspiracy to prevent the burial of a corpse, disposing of a corpse or obstructing a coroner. In essence, the proposals are simple: if a convicted killer refuses to give information to reveal the location of a victim's body, they should not be considered eligible for parole and they should stay in prison. The proposals would effectively mean a whole-life tariff for murderers who refuse to disclose the location of their victims and enable their remains to be recovered to give families a chance to pay their last respects.

Let me be clear: the modern system of parole is widely understood to involve a prisoner earning their conditional release through good behaviour. I believe in and support the rehabilitative purpose of our penal system, but while the current tariff system for the most serious crimes reflects the consensus that the majority will at some point be able to rejoin society, one is bound to ask in what sense a murderer who is content to torment the family of their victims in such a way could ever have earned their freedom.

In recent years, Parliament and the legal profession have begun to take the rights of victims more seriously, and I believe that this Bill would be a further step towards ensuring that victims are at the heart of our criminal justice system—where they should always be.

Let me make it clear that the proposals in the Bill would not affect any individual's fundamental right to maintain their innocence. The law changes I propose would not impinge in any way on the rights of convicted killers to retain full access and full recourse to the appeals process. It is worth noting, however, that in the case of Helen McCourt's killer, his guilt has only been further confirmed at every single appeals stage because of enhanced DNA evidence against him.

Let me also say that my Bill will have no impact on the work of the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains in respect of those referred to as "the disappeared"; nor would it impact on arrangements set out in relation to sentencing for offences committed during the troubles or indeed any future arrangements

on addressing the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland. I want to acknowledge, however, that the pain and anguish felt by the families of the disappeared are the same as for any family who has lost a loved one in such awful circumstances.

We are not alone in this country in seeking to find a workable legal solution. In Australia, "no body, no parole" laws have already been passed at state level and are being examined at federal level. Quite simply, the introduction of Helen's law is the only chance that the McCourts and other families like them have of securing some peace and the justice they deserve.

I want to acknowledge some of the families who are visiting Parliament today to attend this debate. Sheila Dolton and her daughter Nina are here. Their son and brother, Jonathan, was murdered in 2004. The family has continually written to his killer, begging for information about the son's body, but has received no reply. Sam Gillingham was just 16 when her mum, Carole Packman, disappeared from the family home in Bournemouth in 1985, while Tracy Richardson's mum, Michelle Gunshon, vanished in December 2004 while working at the NEC in Birmingham. Sadly, this Bill comes too late for Winnie Johnson who went to her grave never knowing where Moors murderers Ian Brady and Myra Hindley buried her 12-year-old son, Keith Bennett. But there is still time for Marie McCourt and other grieving mothers such as Joan Morson and Jean Taylor who also saw their children's killers go to jail without revealing where their victims' bodies lay. Denying a final resting place is perhaps the last heinous act by killers who have no place in a civilised society. The agony and torment caused to those who cannot lay a murdered loved one to rest is incalculable.

The families of victims quite rightly expect the law to act in their favour, instead of seeing the justice system rewarding with parole killers who decide to remain silent. For those who have had to face the loss of a loved one at the hands of a callous murderer, there is nothing we can do to make up for their loss, but if there is a way to help them receive the justice they deserve, we must take it. If there is a way to compel those who have committed the most awful crimes to assist in this task, we must do it. Most importantly of all, if there is a way to ensure that no family has to endure the suffering that Marie McCourt and so many others have, we—in this of all places—have a duty to act.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Conor McGinn, Tom Tugendhat, Mr George Howarth, Siobhain McDonagh, Tom Elliott, Vernon Coaker, Marie Rimmer, Nusrat Ghani, Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson, Carol Monaghan, Diana Johnson and Mr Alan Campbell present the Bill.

Conor McGinn accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 February 2017, and to be printed (Bill 73).*

## Aleppo and Syria

12.49 pm

**Mr Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in Aleppo and more widely across Syria.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this emergency debate on the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in Aleppo and more widely across Syria. Although it was I who moved the motion applying for the debate under Standing Order No. 24, it has the strong support of the all-party parliamentary group for Friends of Syria, particularly my co-chairman, the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), and my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). I am most grateful to them for the work that they do in the all-party group.

I am particularly pleased to see that the Foreign Secretary is present. The whole House will be grateful for the importance that he attaches to the debate. He has written and spoken about Syria, and I know that it is a subject on which he feels strongly. We are very pleased that the House is to hear from him this afternoon on what I think will be his first debate as Foreign Secretary.

Yesterday, Mr Speaker, you had a choice between a Standing Order No. 24 application for a debate on Brexit and another for a debate on Syria. Everyone in the House will know that you made the right decision, and you explained your reasons, but I now submit that the effects of the crisis in Syria on our children and our grandchildren will be every bit as great as the effects of Brexit. Today's debate will be watched by many people: civil society across much of the world will take an interest in the tone and the view that the House of Commons adopts this afternoon, and that is a very good thing.

At about 10 o'clock this morning there was a series of further air raids on civilian areas in Aleppo, and there are already reports of yet further casualties, maimings and deaths. As we look back at the Syrian crisis over recent years, we see that, at every turn, progress towards a solution has, alas, eluded us. First, at a relatively early stage, there was the plan put forward by Kofi Annan, the former United Nations Secretary-General, who stated specifically that as Assad was part of the problem he would by definition be part of the solution. Kofi Annan believed that Assad should be part of the negotiations, but that was vetoed by the Americans, and indeed—alas—by the British Government. Now, many years later, we understand how important it is that Assad should at least be present at the initial negotiations. He is not going to be beaten militarily, in my view, and it is clearly right for him to be there for the early part of the negotiations, as the Syrian opposition accept. However, more time has been lost.

Secondly, there was Obama's failure to stand by the red lines that he had clearly asserted on the use of chemical weapons. That was a disastrous decision, and one from which we will suffer in the future.

Thirdly, there was the failure to provide safe havens. Much of civil society believed in the importance of providing refuge for the—now—more than 5 million

Syrian men, women and children who are on the move in Syria, having been driven out of their homes. Those safe havens could, with political will, have been set up in both Idlib, which is in the north of Syria, and Daraa, which is near the Jordanian border in the south. We could, as many people have advocated, have set up no-bombing zones, but we have not done so. Today, 5 million people in Syria and 6 million outside are on the move, often unprotected, unfed and unsheltered. That is the reality: nearly half the country's population of 22 million are on the move, either inside Syria or beyond its borders.

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a powerful case. Does he agree that, militarily, there is no reason why we could not enforce a no-fly zone when so many people are being affected? The helicopters that are dropping barrel bombs could easily be brought down by rockets based in Turkey or Lebanon, or, indeed, by our own type 45s in the Mediterranean.

**Mr Mitchell:** My hon. Friend knows far more about such military matters than I do. That is my understanding of the position: that a no-fly zone—and I will say more about this later—is perfectly feasible. It is a question of whether the international community has the political will to face down the Russians and the Syrian helicopters by setting one up.

Fourthly, there was the failure to secure unfettered access for the United Nations. It is unprecedented in recent years for those bent solely on looking after their fellow citizens to be unable to gain unfettered access to very dangerous zones. This gives me an opportunity to pay tribute to the extraordinary bravery of those who work in the humanitarian world, doing nothing other than try to assist their fellow human beings and bring them sustenance, help, medicine and support.

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): What roles does the right hon. Gentleman envisage for Syria's near neighbours and for the west, including Britain, in the protection of people in the safe havens to which he referred earlier?

**Mr Mitchell:** That is an extremely good point, and I shall come to it shortly.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Is not the tragedy of Syria that none of us can imagine a future Syrian Government who would have both the power to take charge and the wisdom to govern in a peaceful and unifying way?

**Mr Mitchell:** I shall come to that point as well, but let me say now that the whole purpose of the efforts of the International Syria Support Group—and those of other elements, under Staffan de Mistura—is to answer the question that my right hon. Friend has so eloquently posed.

The fifth failure lies in the surrounding countries, particularly Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Although they have acted heroically in dealing with the extraordinary number of people who have fled across the borders, often under gunfire, there has been a lack of support from the international community for countries whose populations have ballooned, given that one in three of

the people in Jordan and Lebanon has fled from Syria. Britain has undoubtedly done her stuff. I am pleased to see that the Secretary of State for International Development is present; she can be extremely proud of the Department that she has inherited for the outstanding work that Britain has done in helping refugees in the surrounding countries—more, I might add, than has been done by the whole of the rest of the European Union.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): My right hon. Friend may well be aware that, in a fairly short space of time, far more Syrian than Lebanese children will be being educated in Lebanese state schools. Does that not speak volumes for the hospitality of the Lebanese?

**Mr Mitchell:** My hon. Friend has made his point with great eloquence.

We are not using the opportunity—if I may put it in that way—to provide an education for the children in the camps, given that they at least constitute a captive audience. Every child in a camp in one of the surrounding countries should be receiving an education. There should be education and training, and, indeed, there should be opportunities for the countries that are receiving all the refugees to have free access to the European Union for their goods and services. That is not happening. Moreover, because some countries have failed to pay their dues to the United Nations in some of the camps, the children and adults there are receiving only half the rations that they should be receiving, and they are down to starvation rations at that.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I recently received a parliamentary answer from the Minister of State, Department for International Development, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), on the subject of air drops. He stated:

“The use of air drops to deliver aid is high risk and should only be considered as a last resort when all other means have failed”. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would seem that “all other means” have indeed failed?

**Mr Mitchell:** Not in respect of the camp. On the basis of my knowledge of these matters, I think that my hon. Friend the Minister of State was right to say that air drops should be used only as a last resort, but clearly they should be used if we reach that point.

The sixth and final barrier to progress has, of course, been the reception of refugees in Europe, where there has not been proper processing. Many of these people have cast themselves into the hands of the modern-day equivalent of the slave trader in the hope of reaching a more prosperous and safer shore. I think that Europe as a whole—which, admittedly, has its inward-facing problems—has failed to address this problem adequately, and to show proper solidarity with Greece and Italy as they tackle a very severe problem.

There are only two ways in which this can end: a military victory by one side or the other, or through negotiation. I submit that there is no way in which a military victory will be secured by any side in Syria. We must therefore hope that the fighting stops as soon as possible in order to create the space in which negotiations for the future can take place. We have all seen the heroic work that has been done by Staffan de Mistura, and the

backing provided to him and the International Syria Support Group is essential. I will say more about that in a moment. To bring about a cessation in fighting we need the influence of the United Nations, of the great powers and of the countries in the region who have influence over some of the protagonists, in particular Iran and the Saudis. Where a country is able to exercise influence to stop the fighting and create the space for politicians to engage, in Geneva and elsewhere, it is absolutely essential that it should do so.

**Nadhim Zahawi** (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for securing this debate. Does he agree that the Russian military has a deep history with the Syrian military, and that it is in Russia’s gift to deliver a peace process? When we visited Russia as part of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Russian politicians kept reminding us they wanted to be taken seriously by the whole world and that they were a serious power. In order to be taken seriously, however, they really should be following the rule of law and international law. They should not be aiding and abetting war criminals such as Assad.

**Mr Mitchell:** My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point.

The extraordinary misfortune of timing that I mentioned is being exacerbated by international attention being elsewhere. In Europe, Brexit, the issues with the euro, Greece, the German banks and the focus on migration have all meant that the focus has been on the symptoms rather than the causes of this conflict. In the United States, politicians have turned in on themselves as the election approaches, and Obama has underwritten an isolationist approach. However, there are people such as Senator Lindsey Graham and Secretary Kerry who are seized of the importance of this moment in tackling what Russia is doing. Then of course there is Russia, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) has alluded. It is behaving like a rogue elephant, shredding international humanitarian law and abusing its veto powers in the UN Security Council. It is using the veto to protect itself from its own war crimes.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The right hon. Gentleman is making an incredibly compelling case. The situation in Aleppo is beyond appalling. Does he agree that our own Government should follow the example of the French in supporting a referral of Russia to the International Criminal Court? Also, I completely understand the case that he is making for a no-fly zone, but does he recognise the risks involved in establishing such a zone? How would he best protect against the risk of an expansion of the mission if it were not initially successful?

**Mr Mitchell:** I shall come on to the hon. Lady’s second point in a moment. On her first point, I agree with her. The UN Secretary general called for such a referral only yesterday.

The attack on the convoy marked a new low, with 18 humanitarian workers killed, food and medicines destroyed and warehouses and medical facilities seriously damaged. We should be clear about what is happening in Aleppo. The Russians are not attacking military

[Mr Mitchell]

formations. They are not engaging with militias and fighters. They are attacking hospitals and a terrified population, which is now down from 2 million to under 250,000. People are hiding in the cellars and the rubble that is Aleppo today. Last week, the M10 underground hospital was attacked by bunker-busting bombs to break through its roof and by cluster bombs aimed specifically at harming and injuring individual people. The location of that hospital was known to every combatant. There is no doubt that attacking that hospital was an international war crime.

**Mr Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making an incredibly strong case. When it comes to Russia, are we not living in some kind of parallel universe? On the one hand, we see the Russians dropping bunker bombs on hospitals. On the other, we are allowing them to come and trade in our country as though nothing was going on. Do we not need a general review of our relationship with Russia?

**Mr Mitchell:** The Russians are doing to the United Nations precisely what Italy and Germany did to the League of Nations in the 1930s, and they are doing to Aleppo precisely what the Nazis did to Guernica during the Spanish civil war.

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): I join my right hon. Friend in supporting no-bombing zones, as well as aid drops in memory of our former colleague and my Yorkshire neighbour, Jo Cox. On the issue of no-fly zones, I served in the Royal Air Force on the no-fly zone over northern Iraq. Does he agree that one message we could send out from this House today would be that, using our E-3 Sentry AWACS reconnaissance aircraft, any war crimes perpetrated by air forces would be identified and logged, and that the perpetrators would feel the full force of the law as a result?

**Mr Mitchell:** My hon. Friend is on to an extremely good point.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Gentleman mentioned Guernica. In the 1930s, there was united condemnation of what the Nazis and their air force were doing in Spain in support of the fascist regime. Is it not time that we had a united, unambiguous, explicit, direct condemnation of what Putin is doing in support of Assad in Aleppo at this moment, not just from the Government but from the Opposition Benches unanimously?

**Mr Mitchell:** The hon. Gentleman is on to an extremely good point. What is needed is a concerted effort by the international community uniting to make Russia feel the cost of its support of and participation in the barbaric bombardment of Aleppo.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. His comparison with the actions of the Nazi regime and the League of Nations is very powerful. Is this not a warning to the United Nations that unless

it fulfils its duties and faces up to the atrocities that Russia is perpetrating, it might well go the same way as the League of Nations did?

**Mr Mitchell:** That is the very point I was making.

We should single Russia out as a pariah. Like any bully, the Kremlin craves relevance, and it is winning as long as no one stands up to it. Russia must be confronted for its attacks on innocent civilians, both diplomatically and using hard power including sanctions and economic measures. We must seek to build support for multilateral military action to discharge our responsibility to protect. This is not about attacking Russia. It is about defending innocent civilians. It is about basic humanitarian decency and protection from the kind of barbarism and tyranny we hoped we had consigned to the last century.

**Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I completely concur with the right hon. Gentleman's words about Russia and the atrocities that it is committing against the people of Syria, but should we not also look at this in the context of Russia's previous actions in Ukraine and Crimea? Ought we not to remember that Russia as a state is increasingly out of control? It is not playing by the rules, and we absolutely have to confront its behaviour internationally.

**Mr Mitchell:** The hon. Lady makes an extremely powerful point. We cannot do this alone. We must use Britain's outstanding connections, not least through our diplomatic reach, our membership of NATO, our relationship with America and our centrality in the European firmament—Brexit notwithstanding.

**Robert Ffello** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, not only for securing this debate but for allowing so many interventions. Would it not be appropriate for the Government to bring forward a debate asking this House to put forward its views on Russia's behaviour not only in Aleppo but in previous situations? We need the Government to lead on such a debate, so that the House can send out the very clear message that we are watching what Russia is doing and will not forget what it is doing, and that, when it comes to it, we will see those responsible answering for their war crimes.

**Mr Mitchell:** I think the hon. Gentleman would agree that, by having this three-hour debate today, we are moving some way in that direction.

I have a number of specific questions for the Foreign Secretary to address when he answers this debate. First, he has said that the UK is taking the lead on sanctions on Russia. Will he tell the House what steps the Foreign Office has taken towards increasing bilateral or EU sanctions on Russia itself? Secondly, there are plans for a new addition to the Nord Stream gas pipeline running from Russia to western Europe—Nord Stream 2—allowing Russia to bypass transit countries and, therefore, transit costs in eastern Europe. Will the Foreign Office be working with our east European allies to block the new pipeline?

**Graham Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): I presume that we are talking about the gas pipeline that runs from Kurdistan through Turkey and the Black sea and bypasses Ukraine

and the eastern provinces. The signing of that deal was agreed yesterday between Erdogan and Putin. A relationship seems to be building up between those two. Does the right hon. Gentleman have any view on that, because that movement of Turkey towards Russia is concerning?

**Mr Mitchell:** The Foreign Secretary has recently been in Turkey. I am sure that the House will be interested in his comments.

My third question for the Foreign Secretary is, what work has been done to catalogue and record human rights abuses—both individual and collective—in Syria? Will he update the House on the work of the Foreign Office, which was started and commissioned by the National Security Council in 2011, to collect evidence that can be used in the future to hold human rights abusers to account no matter how long it takes?

Fourthly, what steps has the Foreign Secretary taken with his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence to explore the feasibility of imposing and enforcing a no-fly zone over specific areas in Syria? Does he agree that, with the use of naval and air assets in the eastern Mediterranean, it is entirely possible both to monitor and enforce a no-fly zone with our allies? What steps will he take to make it clear to the international community that a no-fly zone is a matter of will and not of practicality?

**Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con):** I have operated under a no-fly zone. It is practical and it can work, but it is quite difficult at a low level. That requires us to have seriously good surveillance over the target areas. If we have that, we can deal with it. We cannot have just a no-fly zone; we need good surveillance as well.

**Mr Mitchell:** I have no doubt that the Foreign Secretary will want to comment on those remarks, to which my hon. Friend brings his expert knowledge and understanding.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab):** As one of the four Opposition Members who did not oppose military action on that fateful day in August 2013, I fully support any measure to impose a no-fly zone. I assure the Government that, if they were to bring forward such a proposal, I will vote with them, and I guess quite a lot of my colleagues will do so as well.

**Mr Mitchell:** That is extremely welcome news both inside the House and outside.

I have one final point on the no-fly zone. Will my right hon. Friend make a specific point of meeting the former Prime Minister John Major to explore his experiences in imposing a no-fly zone and a safe haven in northern Iraq during the 1990s?

**Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con):** I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way and I congratulate him on securing this debate. Given the discussion that there is over a no-fly zone, does he share my concern that Russia has moved very advanced surface-to-air missile systems into Syria when clearly Daesh or the al-Nusra front do not have a fast-jet capability. At whom might those missiles be targeted?

**Mr Mitchell:** My hon. Friend makes a good point, but those S-300 missiles do not affect the viability of imposing a no-fly zone.

My final question for the Foreign Secretary is, what steps are he and his Department taking to support and enhance the work of the International Syria Support Group? Staffan de Mistura has said that the suspension of bilateral negotiations between the two chairs, US and Russia, “should not and will not” affect the existence of the group. What steps is Britain taking to provide financial, diplomatic and political support to the International Syria Support Group? This group includes all of the five permanent members, Italy, Turkey, Japan, Iran, and the key Arab countries. It represents the UN, the EU and the Arab League. It needs to be greatly expanded. There should be an office, for example, working with and adjacent to the Geneva talks. It should carry out work on the key ingredients for a peace whenever that may come, and we should give very strong support to it.

**Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab):** May I add a question to the ones that the right hon. Gentleman has posed to the Foreign Secretary? He has spoken very powerfully. Members of the House have described Russia as a pariah. He has compared it with the Nazi regime of the 1930s. Is it not utterly ludicrous that, in two years’ time, the greatest sporting spectacle on earth—the World cup—will be held in Russia, but not a single country is pulling out of it? If we are really serious about sending a message to Putin that is heard on the ground, should we not be questioning whether the World cup should take place in Russia?

**Mr Mitchell:** The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely good point. I hope that when he is considering sanctions, both economic and otherwise, the Foreign Secretary will have a view on that.

The international community faces a choice. Are we so cowed and so poleaxed by recent history in Iraq and Afghanistan that we are incapable now of taking action? Was all the international handwringing after Rwanda, Bosnia and Srebrenica when we said “never again” just hot air? Is all the work on the responsibility to protect—RtoP—which was unanimously adopted by the United Nations Security Council and agreed by the entire international community just so many words? Let us at least be clear here among ourselves. We have a choice: we can turn away from the misery and suffering of children and humanity in Aleppo; we can once again, on our watch, appease today’s international law breaker, Russia, and continue to find eloquent excuses for inaction; or we can be seen to take a lead to explore the situation energetically and with determination with our allies in NATO, Europe, America, and the United Nations and refuse to take no for an answer. We can look at every possible way of ending this barbarism and this tyranny, which is threatening the international rules-based system, destroying international order and engulfing the Syrian people.

1.17 pm

**Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab):** May I start by welcoming the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel) to her new position? I also welcome to his post the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), whom I have not seen in this place until today. I hope that they will both find their new roles fulfilling.

[Emily Thornberry]

I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) for securing this debate, and for the eloquent and passionate way in which he has spoken up for the people of Aleppo. He spoke up for them throughout his time as International Development Secretary. He stood on the side of the poor and oppressed throughout the world, and he has done so again today. He also understood how much the commitment to spend 0.7% of national income on helping those most in need mattered, which is something from which his successors could learn. He agrees with me that Britain's work in international development reveals the better part of ourselves and is something about which we should be inordinately proud.

The situation for innocent civilians in Aleppo is truly a hell on earth. They are trapped, impoverished and desperately in need of food, clean water and medical care. That would be bad in any circumstances, but they are also living in daily fear of death coming from the skies—from airstrikes in the east of Aleppo and from mortar bombs in the west. The scale of suffering is beyond our comprehension. We should be in no doubt that the parties responsible for that—whether it is the Russian forces and the Assad regime on one side, or the jihadists of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, otherwise known as the al-Nusra Front or al-Qaeda—stand equally condemned in the eyes of public opinion and are equally guilty of crimes against humanity. In time, there must be a reckoning for those crimes. That is why we support the efforts of France to enforce a tougher approach at the Security Council to the violations of international humanitarian law. Will the Foreign Secretary be supporting the French Government in those efforts?

Equally, the effort to hold the Russian forces and others to account for their actions, and the anger that people rightly feel here, must not prevent us, difficult as it is, from seeking to work with the Russian Government to restore the Kerry-Lavrov peace process. That means securing and maintaining a ceasefire, isolating the jihadi extremists, opening safe—

**Mr Bradshaw:** There is no ceasefire.

**Emily Thornberry:** Absolutely there is not a ceasefire now; that is what I am moving on to. Of course there is no ceasefire, and there needs to be an initiative. In the end, we all know that we can move forward only by way of negotiations, and that no negotiations will happen without a ceasefire.

**Angela Smith:** Can my hon. Friend present us with the evidence that she clearly has that it is realistic to believe that the Russians will seriously engage in further ceasefire negotiations? Does she think for a minute that they will stop bombing Aleppo while they are doing that?

**Emily Thornberry:** I have thought about this a great deal and spoken to a number of experts about it, and I have some suggestions that I wish to make to the House and to put before the Secretary of State. We want to be helpful. If she will give me a moment, I will explain.

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): If the peace that we all want is not achievable, will the hon. Lady support the application of military force, if it is needed?

**Emily Thornberry:** I am not a pacifist, personally. I believe in using military force when it can be effective, if we can achieve the ends that we have identified, and if we know what we want to achieve. I believe that in a multi-layered, multifaceted civil war such as that in Syria, the last thing that we need is more parties bombing. We need a ceasefire and for people to draw back.

**Tom Tugendhat:** While we all look for peace, does the hon. Lady agree that sometimes backing down, looking weak and hiding one's head achieves quite the reverse? It encourages violence, treachery and the brutality that we are seeing today.

**Emily Thornberry:** Yes, I agree, but let us be strong about this and let us put forward a plan that might work. If the hon. Gentleman will give me a moment, I will explain what I am suggesting.

I was recommending that, despite the difficulties and the anger that many parties feel, we work with the Russian Government to restore the Kerry-Lavrov peace process. That means securing and maintaining a ceasefire, isolating the jihadists and opening safe channels for humanitarian aid—we should make that the basis to negotiate a lasting peace. Looking at the situation today, we accept that that could not look further away or seem more difficult, but we need to have that goal in mind. It is the only conceivable solution and the only way to bring relief to the people of Aleppo, so how do we do it?

**Mr Bradshaw:** We had a ceasefire; it was brutally blown apart by Russian and Syrian air power. I still have not heard from my hon. Friend a clear and unequivocal condemnation of Russia's and Assad's action. I have not heard her call it out as it is—a war crime.

**Emily Thornberry:** I apologise to my right hon. Friend. I thought that that was exactly what I said. For the avoidance of any doubt—obviously, it is now in *Hansard*—of course the actions of the Russians can well be seen as war crimes. A number of war crimes have been committed during this terrible war, and as I said at the outset, there are the war crimes of Assad and Russia, and the war crimes of the jihadists. In time, we will expect those war crimes to come before the international courts, and those people should and must be held to account. It was for that reason—perhaps my right hon. Friend did not hear me—that I urged the Government to support French efforts to ensure that more initiatives are taken to bring the parties to international justice.

Mr Speaker, many people are getting impatient that I have not yet put forward my plan, so perhaps I will not take any more interventions at the moment so that I can actually do that.

What is the only conceivable way of bringing relief to the people of Aleppo? I believe that it will require strong statesmanship on all sides and not more brinkmanship. We need to talk to experts in the field. Their concern is not just how we stop the conflict as it stands, but how we avoid it escalating further. Yesterday, one expert said to me:

“On the ground, we are just one bad decision away...from Russian and American forces ending up in armed conflict.”

Facing that chilling prospect, we must all work for the alternative, and we need to start by looking carefully at the plan put forward by the UN Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield has already referred to it, and I respectfully agree with him. Staffan de Mistura has bravely promised that if the jihadi forces of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham agree to leave the city of Aleppo, he will personally escort them from the siege to Idlib, or wherever they wish to go. Such a move would isolate the jihadi fighters from the moderate rebels inside Aleppo and remove from the Russians and the Syrian forces their current pretext for the bombardment of east Aleppo. That process could—I stress it only could—provide the basis to restore talks on a ceasefire and on opening up the humanitarian channels that we all wish to see.

There is a precedent for such a step in the way the Jabhat fighters were escorted out of Homs and other towns in Syria. While we must treat the Russian assurances with caution, it is an approach that Sergei Lavrov has said they are ready to support and can persuade the Assad regime to agree to, so will the Government lend their support to the plan put forward by the United Nations? The Government have yet to respond to the initiative at all. I believe that it is a serious initiative with some prospect of hope in it, and that it should not be ignored. Will they persuade their French and US counterparts to do likewise and seek to use this pragmatic proposal as the basis to restart talks?

While we are rightly focused on Syria today, we know that many other countries in the world will listen to what we say about Syria, look at the values that we claim to uphold and ask whether we are true to those values when it comes to other countries and conflicts. Today we will hear Members from all parties rightly condemn Russia and Assad for the airstrikes against civilian targets. We will hear calls for independent UN investigations into breaches of international humanitarian law. We will hear calls to take further action against Russia to oblige it to cease the bombardment. While that is all correct, if we say those things about Russia and Aleppo, we must be prepared for what is said about Saudi Arabia and Yemen. We cannot condemn one and continue selling arms to the other. We cannot call for investigations into one and say that we are happy for the other to investigate themselves. We cannot pour scorn on the assurances of one that they have not hit civilian targets while blithely accepting the assurances of the other. Most of all, we cannot cry for the people of Aleppo and the suffering that they face while turning a blind eye to the 1 million children in Yemen facing starvation today. So I ask the Foreign Secretary to tell the House how the actions that the Government propose in Syria compare with the actions that they are taking in Yemen.

The suffering of Aleppo has gone on for too long. Every day that it continues, we must redouble our efforts to end it. We suggest a four-point plan to the Government. We suggest that we begin with more statesmanship and less brinkmanship. Secondly, we must adopt the UN plan to escort the jihadis from Aleppo. Thirdly, the Kerry-Lavrov plan needs to be revived and we must work together towards a lasting peace. Fourthly, we must de-escalate overseas military involvement in the conflict from all 14 other nations involved, including

ourselves. That is how we will create safe corridors for aid, stop the destruction of Aleppo by Christmas and end the suffering of its people.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Before we proceed further, I have seen how many people wish to contribute. I do not want to impose a time limit on Back-Bench speeches at this stage, but if, by voluntary co-operation, we can achieve the objective, that would be better. If each Back Bencher spoke for no more than seven minutes, everybody would get in, and there should be general contentment. There is never universal contentment, but I would settle for general contentment. We will be led in this mission by no less a figure than Mr Alistair Burt.

1.29 pm

**Alistair Burt** (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I start by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) on initiating the debate and on opening it in such an extraordinary fashion. His deep personal commitment, which he has exhibited over a number of years, to those in the Syrian National Coalition and the High Negotiations Committee and others has been evident in what he has said. He has long championed their needs, and that was evident today.

I thank the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), who spoke for the Opposition, for proposing a difficult case in trying to find an answer. There are no easy answers, but I hope that a little bit of background will help further.

I pay tribute to those in the Syrian National Coalition and those who have worked for peace in Syria over a lengthy period. I met members of the Syrian National Coalition. I met them in Gaziantep. I met them in Jordan. I met them Paris. I met them in London. I met Riad Hijab. Part of the background is to recognise that what has happened in Syria today did not just spring out of events in 2011—the Syrian regime has long been repressive, and the roots go back a long time and are very deep—but not to recognise the extraordinary courage of people in Syria to make a political case for change, which has been the cause of so many deaths in Syria over many decades, is to miss something. They have consistently proposed a plan for a democratic Syria, with the engagement of all elements of the community, and they have done so for several years. Again, any future for Syria must recognise that the SNC and the High Negotiations Committee have had a plan for a long time, and I wish they had been listened to even earlier.

While in Gaziantep in Turkey I met members of the White Helmets. At that time, the Foreign Office was working to support its members and give them training in their work, and they have done an extraordinary job in the chaos and disaster that is Syria. The work of the White Helmets has been quite extraordinary. Again, we need to pay tribute to the White Helmets, as we do to those such as David Nott, the surgeon who has worked in the extraordinary circumstances of the hospitals in Syria and who writes so eloquently on the subject.

The United Kingdom has to look at many parts of this issue in terms of what has been achieved. We have played a part in trying to alleviate some of the suffering. There is little need, I am sure, to elaborate further on

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the degree of suffering. We have seen it on the television. We have seen the brave films produced by BBC “Panorama”, giving cameras to people. There has been what our excellent ambassador to the UN, Matthew Rycroft, described only last week as “an onslaught of cruelty” in Aleppo, which he said could not possibly be the work of the Syrian forces on their own.

The tragedy of Aleppo and Syria is that it is an entirely human construct devoid of any natural disaster component. It has happened in front of our eyes—eyes that have witnessed in my time as a Member Rwanda and Srebrenica too. It has happened with so many other memories of previous conflicts in our minds. It has happened because of, as much as despite of, international mechanisms such as the UN and the International Criminal Court—mechanisms that we have all hidden behind, to a certain extent, believing that they could find the answer, as we watched them being stripped of their authority, week by week, action by action in Syria, and actually reduced to ridicule. If international mechanisms cannot prevent an Aleppo, what actually can they now prevent?

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who was one of the best Ministers in the Foreign Office over a long period, for bringing great knowledge to the House from what he did in the Foreign Office. Many Syrians in my constituency—I meet them regularly—say that they just want people to give them some help. He mentions some international organisations, but does he think that the UN is doing enough? If it is not doing enough, do we need to consider reforming that organisation, so that it can help in such crises?

**Alistair Burt:** The point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield and myself, and the point of the hon. Gentleman’s question, is that Syria demonstrates the failure of these international mechanisms now. If a veto is continually used on the UN Security Council, what can we do? My right hon. Friend rightly argued—this was recognised on both sides of the House—that the League of Nations was damaged by the stripping of its authority. That is the point that we have reached, and if we cannot rely on these mechanisms, what are we now going to do?

**Bob Stewart:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Alistair Burt:** I shall give way very briefly, but I am being fair to Mr Speaker by trying to keep the intervention short.

**Bob Stewart:** The veto in the Security Council by Russia will kill any plan stone dead. Perhaps this is a chance for the General Assembly to get some power and do something about it.

**Alistair Burt:** There may be international mechanisms that involve talk, but perhaps there are other things that we can do, and I think that that will be the mood of the House.

A little bit of history will provide a pointer forward; we need not review it all. Assad knew exactly what he was doing when the revolt started in 2011. Syria was not beset by radical Islam, but he released prisoners from

his prisons to join radical Islamic bands because he wanted to create the narrative of his providing stability against terrorism. The narrative has succeeded. It gave him the excuse to attack his own people. That reached a nadir in 2013, with chemical weapons attack on his people. That was a fundamental point. I am not going to rehearse what was said in the House—there are reasons for colleagues to make the decisions that they did—but by stepping back at that moment, the moment not to destroy Assad but to get him back to the negotiating table by convincing him that something would stand in his way was lost.

**Nadhim Zahawi:** Inaction has consequences, and the consequences of inaction in 2013 are seen in Aleppo today.

**Alistair Burt:** They are; we learned that intervention has consequences, but so does non-intervention. We talk about non-intervention, but Syria has had intervention from Russia, from Hezbollah and from the Iranians. I remember briefings in the House, talking to colleagues and saying that, if the ultimate answer to Syria is a victory for Assad, for Russia, for Iran and for Hezbollah, and if we think that that will be in the United Kingdom’s best interests, I think we ought to think again. So we move on, and it is all very well to hear the history.

The involvement of Russia, which the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury bravely mentioned, is a crucial part. Russia needs to understand that savagery stokes terrorism; it does not end it. Russia is rightly concerned about the possibility of radicalism in Chechnya and all that, but its efforts to deal with it are failing. Part of this discussion is being very clear that what is happening and what Russia is doing will fuel the terrorism of the future and will do nothing to prevent it.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one of the reasons why some of us are so concerned about the Government’s approach to Russia is the evidence in Syria that Russia is not targeting ISIS? The number of air strikes by the Russian forces against ISIS has decreased by 10% in the past year alone, so it is clear that they have another agenda, and they should be called out on that, and rightly so, as soon as possible.

**Alistair Burt:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. Anyone who thought that Russia had any other agenda was fooling themselves. Russia’s agenda in the area is very mixed. First, it is to provide a bulwark against radical Islam in its own country. Secondly, it is to demonstrate to people in the region that it is now a power, as it has seen the United States retreat. Thirdly, it is to consolidate its own interests, which do indeed go very deep. But that vacuum is now being seized, so what do we do?

I turn to what my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield said towards the end of his remarks. This is about an effort of will. The fundamental failure in Syria in the past couple of years has been to give an impression that no one would stand up against the attacks on people in Syria because we have lost the will, not to advance an ideological agenda, but to defend and protect people. That is what R2P is about. The calculation is whether trying to enforce a no-fly zone, trying to

protect the people on the ground, would be challenged by the powers of Syria and Russia, or whether that would be the point at which they would say, “No more killing,” and proceed on the way of negotiation and peace. That is actually the point that we have now reached.

**Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. Does he agree that the reason why we have not managed to secure no-fly zones is that people are understandably concerned that they would escalate tensions, and even conflict with Russia? However, the proposal is that the answer to any air attacks against civilians in no-fly zones would be carefully targeted strikes against the Assad regime’s military assets only. That could provide a real answer that would protect Syrian civilians and hopefully get the peace process back on track.

**Alistair Burt:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, because what she says is exactly right. Those who are killing civilians in Aleppo are relying on the fact that we fear escalation and we worry. People therefore do nothing. We did not know what the consequences of 2013 would be, and we worried about intervention. However, we know now, and accordingly, we know what will happen in Aleppo over the next few months if nothing is done. That is the point that we have reached. Ultimately, we are talking about an act of will. If a force determined to do the unspeakable is met with moral argument but little else, the determined force will win. We have reached the stage at which we have to declare—I look forward to the Foreign Secretary making this clear—that that is a point beyond which we are no longer prepared to go.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) made a succinct speech from the Front Bench; that is the length of speech that I know the Scottish National party spokesperson will seek to imitate.

1.41 pm

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am aware that a lot of colleagues want to get in. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) on securing the debate, and thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting the House leave to hold it. It is an emergency debate in every sense of the word; it is urgent and necessary for us to have the debate, because the situation in Aleppo and across Syria has dramatically worsened from the already nearly catastrophic state that the conflict has brought about.

As others have said, the turning point in recent weeks seems to have been the bombing of the UN aid convoy on 19 September. If that and other atrocities are called out as being war crimes, they should be investigated, and the perpetrators must be brought to justice. That event ended the tentative ceasefire; hostilities, particularly by Russia, have increased since then. Some 275,000 people in eastern Aleppo, over 100,000 of whom are children, face daily bombing. The UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, described the situation as “worse than a slaughterhouse”, and others, including rebel groups inside the city, effectively see the enactment of a scorched

earth policy by the Assad regime. Over 1 million people have been killed since the conflict began in 2011, so we should not be surprised at the comparisons with Rwanda and Srebrenica. It was absolutely right to make time for today’s debate.

I want to consider briefly responses so far from across the UK and the world, and the options available to the UK Government and the world community. The Scottish National party has consistently been opposed to military action, and has consistently called for a negotiated settlement and significant humanitarian intervention. When this House debated whether to join the bombing campaign, we warned that becoming a party to the conflict would reduce the UK’s ability to be an arbiter in any resolution, and so it has proved. We welcome the response, led by the Department for International Development, in terms of humanitarian support, but there is further to go. We have consistently said that what people in Syria need is bread, not bombs. If we have the technology to drop bombs, surely we have the technology to drop or deliver bread and aid.

The Scottish Government, with their limited power and resources in this area, have played as active a role as they could. In March 2013, they donated £100,000 to the Disasters Emergency Committee, and they later doubled that to £200,000. Earlier this year, the First Minister accepted an invitation from the UN special envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, to host an international women’s summit in Edinburgh, focused on supporting Syrian women, so that they can engage in communication, negotiation, and post-conflict planning, and become a key part of the peace process.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): I am sure that all of us want a negotiated end to the problems in Syria, but does the hon. Gentleman not accept that the timid approach of America and other allied forces has led to the encouragement of the Russians, who have escalated their military involvement and its brutality?

**Patrick Grady:** I will come on to the geopolitics and relations between the United States and Russia, but the answer has clearly not been for the UK to dive in and continue to add to the chaos and bombing.

The Scottish Government have continued to try to play a role. They announced in August 2015 that they would contribute up to £300,000 to the 1325 Fellowship programme facilitated by Beyond Borders Scotland—another initiative that trains women in prevention and resolution of conflict. It was set up in response to UN resolution 1325, which reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. We in Scotland and the Scottish Government have been keen to make a positive contribution wherever possible. Of course, many people across the country have joined in the efforts to welcome refugees, especially from Syria, who have come here seeking stability and peace.

Peace in Syria seems as far away as it was at the start of the conflict. Russia and the United States have completely different aims for the region, particularly as regards President Assad’s role, or otherwise, in the country’s future. There is a worrying risk of the situation becoming a proxy for broader tensions between the two countries, and indeed of further backsliding in international relations more generally. That is why the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield is right to question the

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stalemate's impact on the role of the United Nations. It has never been more necessary for the UN to play a role, yet in this area at least, it seems that the impasse has never been more difficult to breach.

There have rightly been calls for the General Assembly to be more outspoken where the Security Council cannot reach agreement; that would be a start, but the GA still lacks the teeth of the Security Council. The UK's seat on the Security Council is supposed to be one of the great defining assets of the Union, putting the great into Great Britain. While I welcome the strong words of the UK representative at recent meetings, strong words are increasingly not enough. It is for the United Nations and the International Syria Support Group to facilitate a peaceful settlement, and the United Kingdom Government should seek to make sure that the UN has the mandate and the support that it needs.

In the meantime, there must be more that the Government can do, either independently or with allies. I have already said that if we have the technology to drop bombs, surely we have the technology to drop aid, but we also need the ability, stability and permission to provide aid, especially to areas controlled by the Assad regime. Negotiating a safe space for that ought to be part of the UK's diplomatic efforts. If that means that a no-fly zone could help, then that should be explored, but it needs to be properly enforced.

Getting aid—medical, food and non-food relief—into the country, and into Aleppo in particular, should be the No. 1 priority for humanitarian agencies in the country. If the big and multilateral agencies are having difficulty with that, more support should be given to local actors, especially those coming from faith-based or community-based organisations. I join in the tributes paid to the White Helmets, who are thoroughly deserving of their Nobel prize nomination. If there are practical ways that the UK Government, through partners, can support that work on the ground, they should be acted on.

Support also has to be provided in the refugee camps, both in Syria and in the surrounding areas. I was visited last week by a former constituent, Tony Collins, who now lives in Lebanon, where he assists the aid effort on the ground—in the camps. He describes the situation as no longer an emergency, but endemic, and as having a major impact, as we have heard from Members, on the future of Lebanon. UK humanitarian support has to provide emergency relief, but also look at long-term economic development, and the impact that these profound movements of people are having.

The Minister of State, Department for International Development, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) is still here; the Secretary of State for International Development has left. I sound notes of caution about DFID's role and response. I have said many times that while conflating some aspects of security and aid spending may be permitted under OECD rules, it is not what people expect to happen when the Government say that they are meeting the target of giving 2% of gross national income to NATO and the 0.7% target for aid spending. These targets should be met and accounted for separately; the situation in Syria in particular shows why that is necessary.

DFID also needs to think about the longer-term impacts of its policies, and consequential effects that might not be seen at the time. The withdrawal of programme partnership arrangement funding from many organisations is leading them to withdraw from areas, or wind up altogether, and that has a long-term impact that might not be seen at present, yet need is vastly increasing. Of course, support for refugees here needs to increase as well. The UK is committed to taking 20,000 over five years, but that is nowhere near our fair share.

**Dame Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): While the UK Government are right to focus their efforts on providing aid in the region, the refugees we have agreed to take, particularly under the community sponsorship scheme, include only 2% of Christian refugees from Syria, despite the fact that religious minorities constitute up to 12% of the Syrian population. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need to make more effort to reach out to frightened religious minorities in Syria?

**Patrick Grady:** Yes, absolutely, I agree that persecuted minorities need to be given special attention. The House as a whole has given the Government a mandate to act on the genocide of the Yazidi community. The support provided for refugees needs to go beyond simply meeting physical requirements. I have constituents who are traumatised by their experiences in Syria and elsewhere, and mental health support will be increasingly important.

I am conscious of time. The Government say that they are leading the humanitarian response, but that does not mean that they cannot go further. They must rethink their military objectives. We were told in December last year that UK air strikes would cut off the head of the snake, but the chaos has only increased, and the people of Aleppo are paying the price. The UK urgently needs to rethink its military strategy, and it needs to commit to working across borders and interests to find a sustainable and lasting peace. While that goes on, the aid effort must be stepped up for the sake of people in Aleppo, Syria, the region and, indeed, around the world.

1.51 pm

**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). I shall keep my speech brief, but I want to begin by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) on securing the debate and commending him for the way in which he made the case yesterday and brought the matter to the attention of the House. It was a powerful, passionate speech that was also practical, and I trust that Ministers listened to every word and will consider the recommendations and suggestions he made. He was exactly right yesterday to describe the situation in Aleppo as an “unfolding humanitarian catastrophe”.

I share the deep, deep concern that my right hon. Friend expressed, and I believe that the House should send the strongest possible signal at this time, both to our own Government and to other Governments, that the present suffering of innocent civilians in Aleppo is unacceptable; that the criminal acts of the Syrian and Russian forces are unacceptable, not least the bombing of hospitals, schools and humanitarian supplies; and

that the seeming impotence of the international community in the face of such acts must not, and cannot, be allowed to continue.

As the debate on the statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union demonstrated, the attention of the House in the coming months will be consumed, overwhelmingly and necessarily, by issues relating to our withdrawal from the European Union. We will debate and argue about how best we protect our national interest in the Brexit process and how we give our nation the best chance of future prosperity to protect the quality of our lives and those of our children. We will even have debates about debates.

Today's debate, however, demonstrates that the House remembers its duty to look outwards and have regard for that part of humanity that does not live within our borders. With you in the Chair, Mr Speaker, I am confident that the House will always make time available for us to speak with clarity and unity when confronted with suffering on the scale that we have witnessed in Syria in recent days. We should not underestimate the interest of the outside world in what is said in the House. A number of us have received emails today from groups within Syria who are watching the debate, and who want that clarity and unity expressed by hon. Members.

I pay tribute to the clarity of voice that our Foreign Secretary has brought to bear on the international stage on the subject of the Syrian conflict. He was one of the very first to describe the attacks on the Red Crescent aid convoy three weeks ago as a war crime—that was exactly what they were—and directly to implicate Russian forces. However, in commending the Foreign Secretary may I ask him to update the House on his most recent discussions with Foreign Minister Lavrov about the events in Aleppo and what further representations he plans to make? Will he leave us in no doubt whatsoever of his determination to ensure that the Russians know that we will keep up the pressure in the wake of their illegal acts in Syria, and that as the days slip by our anger and disgust at the acts for which they are responsible will not subside?

As has been said, President Hollande of France has stated in the past 24 hours that there should be a role for the International Criminal Court in holding Moscow to account for its actions. What consideration has my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary given to that suggestion and any other processes, including at the UN, for upholding international law on Syria?

**Bob Stewart:** On the International Criminal Court, I am worried that any action would be hamstrung by Russia in the Security Council, which in some way controls the ICC. I speak as someone who has given evidence in five trials there.

**Stephen Crabb:** My hon. Friend is right to express those concerns. The ICC has not proved itself effective in many respects in upholding international law, but we have a new opportunity. As my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) said, a lot of this boils down to an effort of will on the part of the international community. I shall come on to address that point.

**Emily Thornberry:** Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that one problem with the ICC is that not enough countries, including some influential ones, are members. Perhaps an international lead from some of our larger friends would be of great assistance.

**Stephen Crabb:** The Opposition spokeswoman makes an important point. Far too many countries have not signed up to the ICC, and a job for our diplomacy in the months and years ahead is to encourage buy-in to the court. Will my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary update us on any discussions that he has had with his French counterpart before the scheduled visit by President Putin to France next week, and on the need to ensure that there is a united stance by international allies when discussing the latest events in Syria?

I welcome the business-like tone struck by the Prime Minister when she met President Putin at the beginning of September at the G20. It is right that our initial posture should be one of reaching out and seeking improved relations with Moscow, but one can be forgiven for thinking that Putin is taking the west, including us, for fools, in the belief that the distraction of a US presidential election and Brexit means that there is neither international interest nor resolve to try to stop the brutal and so far effective power play that he has undertaken in Syria.

Aleppo is a litmus test of whether Russia wants to play a constructive role in the region and whether it is willing to work in collaboration with the international coalition to bring peace to Syria, acknowledging that its interests may be different in key respects. Unfortunately, the events of recent weeks demonstrate that it has failed that test and that its behaviour is not consistent with that of a responsible actor. It behaves instead like a thuggish gangster regime flouting international law at will.

We can be business-like in our relations with Russia, but that does not mean business as usual when Russia behaves shamelessly in attacks on innocent civilians in Aleppo and then defeating attempts at the UN to secure some respite from the hostilities. The bombing campaign in Aleppo amounts to a war against children. Almost half of the casualties since the current attack began have been children, as bombs and mortars have landed on hospitals and broken through underground bunkers that sometimes also serve as schools. Last week, newspapers carried photographs of children playing in water-filled craters in the ground created by bombs and mortars—images, I suppose, of innocence amidst the conflict. The images that we should hold before us are others that we have seen in the past fortnight: the lifeless, dusty, broken-limbed bodies of children being removed—exhumed—from bombed-out buildings and piles of rubble. This is indeed a war against children.

In conclusion, the point has been made several times this afternoon that there are no easy solutions. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield described in some detail the complexity of the challenge before us. My right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire made a really powerful point when he discussed the effort of will needed from the international community, with leadership from us, to show that there is a resolve to make progress and to hold Russia in particular to account for its actions, given its responsibilities

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as the key player at this moment in time in achieving respite from the bombings to secure an enforced ceasefire, including safe passage for humanitarian supplies while allowing room for a diplomatic process that might possibly stand a chance of achieving some lasting peace.

We have heard practical suggestions this afternoon, such as having a no-fly zone and discussion of economic sanctions as a way of bringing more pressure to bear on Russia. I will be particularly interested to hear the Foreign Secretary's response to those two suggestions, and on what more the Government can do to show leadership and increase the international resolve and will.

2 pm

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Much has been written about Syria and Aleppo in recent months. Parliament has not been sitting, so some of us have been left to tweet our continuing concern about the events unfolding in that country day after day. One of the best articles on Syria that I have read recently was in *The Guardian* on Saturday, under the headline "We are watching the destruction of Aleppo. Where is the rage?" It was written by Natalie Nougayrède. It was very poignant, and I suggest that other Members look at it.

That is the question: where is the rage? Where are the demonstrations that we have seen on so many previous occasions—I have taken part in them myself—for example on Iraq, East Timor and Cambodia. Where are those demonstrations now? I want to see—I challenge the people listening to this debate—2 million, 3 million or 4 million people outside the Russian embassy day after day. Let us show them what we think of their actions in Syria and their refusal to bring peace to that country. Russia used carpet bombing tactics in Grozny, and we all know what happened there. The west cannot stay silent, because we know how this could end.

The current UN special envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, is an old friend of mine; in the past we worked together on Iraq. He has warned that rebel-held eastern Aleppo could face total destruction by Christmas and that thousands of Syrian civilians—not terrorists—could die if the current assault on the city by Russian and Syrian forces is not stopped. He has called for the shelling of the city to stop immediately and for the UN to be allowed to take aid supplies into rebel-held areas. Eastern Aleppo has received no humanitarian assistance for the past three months, and food and medical supplies are running at dangerously low levels.

Staffan de Mistura has also offered to go to the besieged area of the city and personally escort al-Qaeda-linked fighters out of the city, in an appeal to stop the current bombing campaign. At least 250,000 people are thought to be trapped in eastern Aleppo, where rebel supply lines were cut off by President Bashar al-Assad's troops in July. According to the UN, a renewed aerial and ground campaign to retake opposition-held areas has left hundreds of civilians dead and damaged hospitals, water plants and bakeries. Médecins sans Frontières has reported 23 attacks on medical facilities in eastern Aleppo since July, and all of us have seen on "Newsnight" and other programmes the bravery of the doctors and nurses in those hospitals—there is probably only one

hospital remaining—saving lives by video link. We are particularly grateful to the British doctor who has been doing that.

A psychologist on the ground has said that 75% of children in Aleppo have post-traumatic stress disorder, and that 50% of those between the ages of nine and 13 are incontinent as a result. More than 100 children were killed only last week. The US Secretary of State, John Kerry, has said that the bombing campaign is a targeted strategy to terrorise civilians and kill anybody and everybody who is in the way of Syrian and Russian military objectives. The UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, has called eastern Aleppo "worse than a slaughterhouse". Syria, backed by Russia, says that it is targeting militants in the city who use civilians as human shields. However, as Staffan de Mistura has pointed out, the presence of about 900 former or current Jabhat al-Nusra—it now calls itself Jabhat Fatah al-Sham—fighters cannot justify the destruction wrought on the city in the past two weeks, following the collapse of a US-Russian-brokered ceasefire.

Staffan de Mistura has also said:

"There is only one thing we are not ready to do: be passive, resign ourselves to another Srebrenica, another Rwanda, which we are sadly ready to recognise written on that wall in front of us, unless something takes place."

He warned that history would judge decision makers in Damascus and Moscow for the misery imposed on eastern Aleppo citizens through the fighting. Our own Foreign Secretary—he is sitting on the Front Bench—along with the US Secretary of State, has accused Russia of war crimes and said that the country should be held accountable for allegedly bombing aid convoys in Syria.

We do not have to wait for the International Criminal Court. Indict, an organisation that I chaired, collected evidence on Iraqi war crimes years before they were heard. That can be done again, for example through the Foreign Office. The testimony that we collected from hundreds of people about Saddam's regime was subsequently used in the trials in Baghdad. I sat there myself to hear some of the people accused of those dreadful war crimes being judged, so it can be done.

US attempts to establish a long-lasting ceasefire and further talks have been thwarted, with the US finally breaking off talks with Russia, citing Moscow's unacceptable backing of Assad's Aleppo campaign. An attempt made only this weekend to pass a Franco-Spanish-sponsored UN Security Council resolution, which called for an end to the bombing of the city by Syrian and Russian jets, was vetoed by Russia, which argued that the distorted resolution would provide cover to terrorists. During heated exchanges in the Security Council on Saturday, the UK ambassador to the UN, Matthew Rycroft—I also worked with him on Iraq over a period of time—said:

"This council cannot stand by while such misery is meted out on the people of Aleppo. And yet, thanks to you, Mr President,"—the Russian President—

"that is exactly what we are doing. Thanks to your actions today, Syrians will continue to lose their lives in Aleppo and beyond to Russian and Syrian bombing. Please stop now."

What is the international community going to do? We have heard several suggestions this morning. How are we going to prevent another Rwanda? If Russia will not end its military aggression in Syria in support of President Assad, and there is no sign that it will do so any time

soon, with the Russian Parliament having voted recently to give Putin authority to keep war planes in Syria indefinitely—and with the Russian military obliquely warning that it would use anti-aircraft missiles to attack any US jet that tried to strike the Syrian regime—are we doomed to watch this unfolding tragedy, this genocide in the making? Will we continue to feel utterly impotent?

I would like quickly to suggest a few things that have been advanced from a number of quarters today. We must better protect civilians now and in future, because in the middle of this appalling conflict civilian protection has to be prioritised. First, we have to get assistance to Syrian civilians in eastern Aleppo and other besieged areas fast. It is now over four months since the International Syria Support Group set a deadline of 1 June for airdrops and airlifts to communities under siege—a proposal the UK took credit for. In those four months, there has not been one single airdrop or airlift to territory under siege by the Assad regime. As of 5 October, there have been 131 UN airdrops to regime-held Deir Ezzor, which is under siege by ISIS, and 104 airlifts to the regime-held al-Qamishli airport. There have also been airdrops by regime aircraft to the besieged regime towns of Foua and Kefraya. However, despite the large number of UN airdrops and airlifts to regime-held territory, the Assad regime will not grant the UN permission to drop aid to the areas the regime is besieging. As well as alleviating human suffering in the short term, airdrops to those areas could play an important part in alleviating human suffering in the longer term by breaking the Assad regime's stranglehold over aid.

The UK Government should therefore now ensure that their own proposal can be implemented. The UK has the experience and the capacity to airdrop food and medical aid to besieged communities from its bases in Cyprus. It has the military might to deter attacks on its aircraft. Suitable partners on the ground are available—through local councils, medical care and relief organisations, and others—to co-ordinate drop zones and aid distribution. Putin is already carrying out airdrops every day to help those he protects. The UK military and its allies delivering airdrops and airlifts should be understood not as a logistical second-best option for delivering aid but as a means of pressing for proper ground access for humanitarian organisations.

Secondly, the international community should and could institute a no-fly zone for Syrian helicopters. It is Syrian helicopters that drop the illegal barrel bombs full of napalm, chemical weapons and high explosives. It is estimated that such a no-fly zone could reduce civilian deaths by roughly 90%. In that respect, I shall always be grateful to John Major. When I was shadow International Development Secretary, I went to Kurdistan. People there asked me whether I could ask the Prime Minister to institute no-fly zones. He asked to see me, and I went to see him. Within a week, those no-fly zones were in place. It can be done—it has been done, and it could be done again.

Thirdly, we must ensure that Russians and Syrians responsible for this cruel and constant bombing are ultimately held to account. The UK and others should track Russian and Assad regime aircraft and publish regular timely reports on which aircraft, from which base, are responsible for each potential war crime. The UK has military assets in the region that could make the difference. An aircraft-tracking system that named

and shamed Russian and Syrian aircraft bombing hospitals might encourage Putin to stop this slaughter. UK AWACS aircraft and Type 45 destroyers already based just off the coast of Syria could monitor and police such a system. That would establish that evidence was being collected for future prosecutions and that all those responsible in the chain of command risked being implicated. Although Russia would be able to use its Security Council veto to block any attempt to refer it or the Bashar al-Assad regime to the International Criminal Court, other avenues to obtain justice should be explored. Earlier this week, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights called for countries to be stripped of their veto powers if they blocked war crimes investigations. The vast majority of countries around the world support the idea of denying the possibility of a veto in situations of mass atrocities.

Finally, in the light of the UN Security Council's current intransigence, the UN General Assembly should hold an emergency meeting, demand an end to unlawful attacks on civilians in Aleppo, and explore avenues for accountability. We have to make it crystal clear to the Syrian and Russian Governments that their actions are deplorable. We need to speak up for and on behalf of our common humanity. I therefore call once again on everyone who cares about the plight of Syrian civilians to picket the Russian embassy in London and its embassies in capitals around the world from today. Two million, 3 million, 4 million people—it can be done, and it has been done in the past. That should carry on until the bombing campaign stops and all the relevant players are forced to get around the table to end this horrible war.

2.15 pm

**Stephen Twigg** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), who has been such a powerful, consistent and long-standing voice on these issues in the House. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) for securing this important debate.

The situation in Syria is truly horrendous, and I want to focus on the humanitarian catastrophe. In Aleppo and the Idlib governorate, 2 million people are living without water or electricity, and there are attacks on health facilities. Across Syria as a whole, there are 470,000 people who have lost their lives, 8 million people who are internally displaced and more than 4 million refugees.

We can rightly be proud of our role in providing aid in the region, and I welcome the Under-Secretary of State for International Development to his place. We have seen £1.35 billion in UK aid to the region since 2012—money well spent. However, concern has been raised by a range of humanitarian, civil society and human rights organisations that the Assad regime is controlling deliveries of aid to the detriment of rebel-held areas. That raises serious questions for the United Nations—questions I would like the Government to raise with it.

May I echo what the right hon. Gentleman said about the heroic efforts of Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey in coping with the massive numbers of refugees coming

[Stephen Twigg]

to their countries? The International Development Committee recognised that in its report in January on the Syrian refugee crisis. We also said in that report that we would welcome a decision by the Government to resettle 3,000 unaccompanied children. I would like an update today from the Government on what progress they are making on the former Prime Minister's pledge to take 20,000 vulnerable people through a resettlement scheme, on the pledge to take 3,000 vulnerable children from the region and on the pledge to take children from Greece, Italy and France. I raised that yesterday with the Home Secretary, who said that around 50 children have been accepted so far. I would like to see that accelerated, because we have a duty to act here, in the same way that we have a duty to act there.

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an extraordinarily powerful point. However, the resettlement programme is absolutely stuck in the mud. In Greater Manchester, agreement cannot be reached between the city authorities and the Government because the Government refuse to pay the money that is required to get these children and other Syrian refugees to Manchester, where we are willing to accept them. Does my hon. Friend agree?

**Stephen Twigg:** I do agree with my hon. Friend. The people of Liverpool have made a similar pledge, as have the city council and the mayor of Liverpool. The National Audit Office published a report last month on this very issue, in which it praised the progress made by local government in the last year but pointed to some of the issues my hon. Friend has highlighted—not least that it is not clear what funding will be available to support local authorities beyond the first-year costs.

Will the Foreign Secretary address another aspect of the current crisis? Some 70,000 Syrian refugees are currently in what is known as the “berm”, which is a demilitarised zone between Syria and Jordan. Those 70,000 people are, effectively, being prevented from going to the safe space of Jordan. Our former colleague, Stephen O'Brien, who is now the head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, has described conditions at the berm as truly dire. My understanding is that a plan to deal with the crisis has been agreed by the United Nations but not yet by Jordan. Will the Foreign Secretary use his good offices to pursue this as a matter of urgency with the Jordanian Government?

Earlier this year the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield and another former International Development Secretary, Clare Short, brought to the International Development Committee's attention the issue of the unintended consequences of counter-terrorism legislation for the delivery of aid. Several non-governmental organisations have been in touch with the Committee in recent weeks to raise that question and, in particular, two areas that require action from the Government.

The first area is the need to ease the concerns of banks. My understanding is that even when NGOs are fully compliant with counter-terrorism legislation, banks are sometimes nervous about lending, leading to delays in processing payments and the aid not getting delivered. The second is the need to use our good offices with

Turkey. My understanding is that it is not always easy for NGOs to function on the Turkish side of the border region between Syria and Turkey. For example, Syria Relief UK has told us that it has been waiting for its application to establish an office in southern Turkey to be processed, and that the Turkish authorities can be overly restrictive about the means by which they allow funds to be transferred to Syria. I realise these are rather technical points, but they are about how aid can most effectively be delivered, and I would be grateful to Ministers if they addressed those points during this debate.

The scale of the challenge is truly enormous. The heartbreaking scenes mentioned by colleagues on both sides of the House, particularly those in Aleppo, touch us all. They touch our constituents and they touch people in all parts of this country. I am pleased that several speakers have reaffirmed the important principle of the responsibility to protect, which arose from what happened in the 1990s in Rwanda and the Balkans. In the meantime, we need urgent action to secure the safe delivery of aid to all parts of Syria.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): There have been suggestions that the International Development Secretary is disinclined to allow officials to shovel money out of the door towards the year end to meet a 0.7% target if those projects are not up to scratch. She is quite right to say so, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that, given the state of need, there is no shortage of very effective ways of spending that money?

**Stephen Twigg:** I entirely echo what the right hon. Gentleman the former Minister says. I entirely agree. The scale of need in Syria, but also, frankly in other parts of the world, including Africa, should mean that we can both deliver the 0.7% target and do so with true efficiency and value for money.

The safe delivery of aid is clearly urgent, but as others have said, we need to move forward to some kind of political process, with a return to the ceasefire. We need to explore every option: no-fly and no-bombing zones; airdrops; and we need to look at the role that Russia is playing.

**Stella Creasy:** My hon. Friend is making a very powerful case for helping the people in the region. Ultimately, however, what will help them is to end the civil war in Syria. Some are saying we should wait until the presidential elections are over, but we know that the people in Aleppo do not have the luxury of waiting. Does he agree that there is absolutely a role for sanctions to get Russia back to the table and to start the process again?

**Stephen Twigg:** I absolutely concur with what my hon. Friend says about sanctions against Russia. I support the description of Russia's role given by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield in his opening speech. The Russians should hang their heads in shame for the role they are playing in Syria, and we should use every available means we have, including further sanctions, to put pressure on President Putin. This is a colossal failure of the international system. It is a stain on our humanity, and all of us must do all we can to redouble our efforts to bring peace to the people of Syria.

2.23 pm

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting time for this debate. Until today, we had not debated the atrocities in Syria substantively since June, so it is thanks to the work of brave journalists at “Channel 4 News” and elsewhere, and to fearless humanitarians in Syria, that the killing and maiming of Syrian people has not passed unseen in this country despite our recess. In this House, we can make sure that the call for help from the Syrian people does not go unanswered.

Let me thank the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell). I am privileged to work with him as the co-chair of the all-party friends of Syria group. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) and the other officers and members of the all-party group for their work. I was a member of the International Development Committee when the right hon. Gentleman was the Secretary of State, and I am not ashamed to say that I took pleasure in trying to find questions he could not answer. However, today I stand united with him. He is a relentless champion for human rights and international law, and I pay tribute to him. I also thank the Foreign Secretary for attending today’s debate, alongside the International Development Secretary, who was in the Chamber earlier.

Just a few weeks ago, the fragile ceasefire in Syria was shattered in a disgraceful attack on a UN aid convoy carrying desperately needed humanitarian aid to the people of Aleppo. The brave drivers and volunteers in that convoy risked everything to help the people who need it most, and they represent the best of humanity. It is an outrage that they have paid for their decency with their lives. The peace in Syria had lasted barely a week. At the time, the ceasefire was very welcome, arising shortly after the publication of a transition plan from the opposition Syrian high negotiations committee just a few weeks earlier in London. However, through the callous targeting of civilian aid—let us be very clear that that is a war crime if it is shown to be deliberate—the Syrian regime has shown it is interested not in peace, but only in suffering. This is not the only war crime committed by Bashar al-Assad and his allies.

These are the facts. More than 400,000 people are dead. Millions have fled for their lives. Hospitals, which are supposedly protected by international law, are now attacked as a matter of routine. Some 600,000 people are still besieged in eastern Aleppo, under constant bombardment from the regime and the Russians. As we have heard, Aleppo, which is under bombardment today, is just one of about 17 besieged cities, and many neighbourhoods and entire towns have been razed to the ground. One report suggests that three quarters of children in Aleppo now suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Anas, a little boy there, spelled out what it is like to grow up in Syria today:

“All the days are similar to each other; the only new thing is what time the shelling comes...the shelling is the thing which scares us a lot and it is not possible to get used to it.”

No child should have to live like that.

It is a fact, as a recent report from Human Rights Watch revealed, that incendiary weapons similar to napalm have been dropped on civilians in the opposition-held areas of Aleppo and Idlib. Napalm, a weapon all

of us might once have thought had been consigned to the worst chapters of history, is being dropped on civilians in the 21st century.

It is also a fact, as established by the UN joint investigative mechanism in August, that the regime is using chlorine gas as a weapon by dropping barrels of it on densely populated civilian areas. This gas, when dropped in barrels from helicopters, disperses quickly and fills the lungs of people who inhale it with fluid until they choke. Such gas attacks are taking us back to the worst times of the first world war. As a result, experts are warning of the risk of normalising chemical weapons after decades of sustained international effort to keep them beyond the pale. Meanwhile, Syrians on the ground talk of hearing the sound of helicopters and praying that they are carrying just explosives and nothing worse.

It is important to be clear not just about what is happening in Syria, but about who is to blame. Clarity is necessary because confusion results in equivocation, indecision and inaction. When the Serbs were slaughtering thousands in Bosnia, international action was delayed by false claims that Bosnian Government forces had staged attacks against civilians to try to provoke an international response against Karadzic. The result was that the Major Government—to their shame, I am afraid—opposed arms sales to the Bosnians and at first resisted a no-fly zone.

The same campaign of misinformation and propaganda is being waged today. We have seen the denials and the lies about what is happening and who is to blame before, and they cannot stand. The truth is that British airstrikes are targeted at Daesh and are hundreds of miles from Aleppo, where the worst suffering is occurring. The truth is that the vast and overwhelming majority of civilian casualties in Syria are the victims of Assad’s aggression against his own people, sparked by the democratic uprising of the Arab spring.

I recognise the concerns of many about how we must think through the consequences of our actions. However, as others have said, let us be clear that it is not just when we choose to act that the consequences of our action must be accounted for, but when we have the capacity to act and choose not to. When we choose to look away, that has consequences, too.

Of course, it is natural to feel powerless in the face of such horror, but our knowledge of horror must drive us to action, not transfix us with despair. So what can be done? First, with bombs raining down on the people of eastern Aleppo as we speak, it is urgent that the ceasefire be salvaged, if at all possible. If it is not possible, there are still actions that the UK can take. We should volunteer to take the lead in tracking aircraft over Syria, using our assets based in the region. There must be absolute clarity about who is responsible for these crimes, not just in the hope that the aggressors will change their tactics, but to keep alive the possibility of prosecutions. We have Type 45 destroyers and monitoring aircraft off the coast that could do that job and make a difference.

Speaking of accountability, I hope that there is now consensus in this House that we can support the French initiative to send Syria and Russia to the International Criminal Court, and the strongest possible sanctions against Russia to show that there are consequences for

[Alison McGovern]

what it is doing. The Foreign Secretary has said this before and I agree with him: we have to be at the forefront of applying sanctions.

In the longer term, the protection of civilians from aerial bombardment, along with the destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles, must be the aim. There is a legal precedent in Kosovo for the establishment of a no-fly zone without Security Council backing. My view is that that must not be off the table if it can be shown to be the most effective way of protecting civilians.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** We must be absolutely clear as a House precisely what we mean by this demand for a no-fly zone. The right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) pointed out how that worked in Iraq, where we had to take down Iraqi planes. This would require the will to take down Russian planes. Perhaps that is the right answer, but we must be aware of what we are contemplating.

**Alison McGovern:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He anticipates the very point I am about to make.

Given that barrel bombs and chemical weapons are mainly delivered by helicopter, experts have calculated that a no-fly zone just for helicopters could reduce civilian casualties by up to 90%. Even failing that, there are things that we could do. We can push for bigger windows to get humanitarian aid into the worst-hit areas and look at using other assets to drop aid into besieged areas. We can also get more support to the heroic White Helmets, the Syrian volunteers who risk their lives to save as many people as they can from the death raining down on them. Many people will have seen the White Helmets in the news in recent weeks because of their nomination for the Nobel peace prize. These heroes risk it all every day to save lives, often running towards the sound of the shelling and risking being caught in second strikes. They need our support. Even if the only result of this debate is that all those people watching make a donation, it will have been worth it.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** Will my hon. Friend be clear about what support she is seeking for the White Helmets? Are we talking about greater access to technical help and advice from doctors over the internet during surgery, increased donations or sending medical equipment—I am unclear?

**Alison McGovern:** All of the above.

**Emily Thornberry:** I just want to make sure that the record is absolutely accurate. The difficulty with taking Syria or Russia to the ICC, as things stand, is that they are not members. The French initiative is to try to get an International Criminal Court prosecutor to set up a way of prosecuting. That we certainly support.

**Alison McGovern:** I thank my Front-Bench colleague for that clarity.

Finally, we can certainly offer support to the credible, inclusive plans the Syrian opposition are putting forward.

I cannot help noting that, in serving as co-chair of the friends of Syria group, I am taking up the role of my friend, Jo Cox. She would have been here and she would have known what was needed. Most of all, I think she would have said that we should help refugees fleeing Syria—not just 20,000 by 2020, but many more and much more quickly.

On London's south bank, there is a memorial dedicated to the international brigades—those who fought for democracy in the Spanish civil war. On one side of the sculpture, there is an inscription that reads:

“They went because their open eyes could see no other way”.

In Syria today, the world is confronted by unspeakable evil and unimaginable suffering. Some of us might have hoped that the advent of social media and new means of technology would have opened eyes even more so than in the 1930s, but the pictures we see make us want to close our eyes and turn away from the horror. But we cannot unsee what we have seen and we must not turn our backs on the greatest crime of our century. The people of Syria are suffering; let us do everything we can to bring them relief.

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the hon. Lady for her speech. There have been some exceptionally powerful speeches in the debate already.

As I am keen to accommodate everybody and for everybody to have the chance to make a decent length speech, and in anticipation of us all wanting to hear the Foreign Secretary respond comprehensively to others' speeches, I appeal to colleagues to try to stick to seven minutes each. I call Mr Gavin Robinson.

2.36 pm

**Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP):** You caught me slightly unawares, Mr Speaker, but I appreciate being called at this juncture.

It was right that the comments of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) moved towards geopolitics and the constraints we have in finding a positive resolution, and also the willingness to do so. Although he, like many other Members, has not had as much time as he would have liked to focus on the compassionate reasons why he is motivated by this case, those reasons are well grounded. In paying tribute to him and all colleagues who serve on the friends of Syria APPG, it is important that we always remember the rationale for engaging in this discussion and those people who are suffering continually in Aleppo and beyond.

I have been encouraged by a great number of the contributions that have been made this afternoon, save one. When I listened to the shadow Foreign Secretary, I despaired. I despaired for the people of Syria and I despaired of the paucity of positive policy proposals she had to make. I am glad that that has not been reflected by Back-Bench Members. What we heard can be summed up like this: more statesmanship and less brinkmanship—platitudes. Withdrawal was mentioned—withdrawal from every other country that we associate ourselves with and that we are allied with to do a good job, leaving the Syrian people by themselves. It is appeasement: allowing the jihadists safe passage out of Aleppo in the hope that—these were her words—we will get “lasting peace” by December. That would let the

jihadists live to fight another day—to be parasitical and go and find another host community in which they can do their evil deeds. I think it is appalling.

**Emily Thornberry:** Has the hon. Gentleman seen what happened in Homs when it was being besieged? The proposed action I have put before the House today in relation to Aleppo worked in Homs, and lives were saved as a result. Does he not think that we should look at that?

**Gavin Robinson:** Where did those people go and what did they do? I will take no lectures from Labour Front Benchers about the appeasement of terrorists, whether it is in Northern Ireland or Aleppo. I am glad that what has been shared from the Labour Front Bench has not been reflected in what has been said by the honest, decent and caring individuals who sit behind it. We recognise how serious this matter is.

The Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary have a big job to do in considering how we, as a country, can appropriately and responsibly deal with Russia. It is an age-old saying that, “Mine enemy’s enemy is my friend.” Here, that is turned on its head, because in the case of Russia, mine enemy’s enemy is my enemy. It is as stark as that. Russia is moving nuclear weapons to Kaliningrad. It has sorties day after day, whether in the Baltic sea, the Black sea or the North sea, in contravention of NATO. Having shot down a Russian jet a number of months ago, Turkey, a NATO ally, signed a deal with Russia just yesterday. What is the NATO view of that? How will Turkey’s future engagement be affected when our ally is signing a trade deal for gas and a deal for military intelligence with Russia?

Those are huge questions, yet the immediate consideration must be the people of Aleppo. The ICC has been mentioned, and there is concern about whether Russia is a member. My understanding is that Russia has signed, but has not ratified membership of the ICC. I am keen to hear from the Foreign Secretary whether that is an impediment to progress. Last night the BBC was suggesting that, given the nature of previous prosecutions focused on African states, there is the ability to pursue the French option to pursue the Russian state, but there is no will to do so.

**Sammy Wilson:** Given that Russia is a key part of this conflict and the problems faced by the people in Aleppo, it has been suggested today that we impose trade sanctions, take people to the ICC and impose no-fly zones. Does my hon. Friend accept that that will need huge political will, as we will be taking action against a country that thinks that it can do what it wants?

**Gavin Robinson:** I do entirely—it will. Reports at the weekend have suggested that Russia is succeeding in the electromagnetic war. It is succeeding in jamming signals and removing the cover and support for Syrian rebel fighters, meaning that it can attack them. It is succeeding in drone strikes, and is operating those strikes in a way that we do not. Russia is succeeding comprehensively. Is a no-fly zone an easy option? No, it is not, but if it is the right option for the people of Syria and the wider region, this party will not be found wanting; it never has been when it comes to support for the security of the Province and this country, or internationally.

I hope that the Foreign Secretary can give us some reassurances. The task ahead is not an easy one, but I hope he understands from the tenor of debate in this Chamber and from all the positive contributions he has heard that the resolve is there, that there is the will to do the right thing and that, as a country and as individual representatives, we need to be counted.

2.42 pm

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): It has been a privilege to be in the House today for some of the best—although I also have to say some of the worst—traditions of where our democracy is at the moment. I will say briefly that there is no one better to seek to step into the shoes of our dearly missed friend, Jo Cox, than my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern). We will all do our best.

I want to dwell for a little longer on what happened on 19 September. It is no mean feat to put together a cross-line convoy. Some 31 lorries had been assembled by various nations under the clear banner of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. I will read from a couple of eye witnesses. One said:

“The bombardment was continuous, continuous.”

Someone else said:

“I saw the bodies of men on the ground...I was told they were truck drivers and volunteers who had been unloading...medicine, food and other desperately needed items”—

desperately needed by the people of Aleppo.

That bombing went on for more than two hours. It came from helicopters and land forces, and started immediately after a Russian drone that had been directly overhead disappeared. There is no doubt as to who was the perpetrator of this grotesque war crime. It was President Putin of Russia. He was sticking two fingers up to the United Nations and the international community of which he still has the audacity to claim he is a working part.

I have to say this: shame on anyone, from the UN official report to Members of this House to members of my party, who fails to acknowledge that grotesque war crime. I hear the platitudes about bread, not bombs, but the bombs are destroying the bread, and when the people who are making the platitudes are obstructing the possibility of any peace in the region I say that they are directly complicit in what is happening. It is time for us to choose—as individuals in this Parliament and as a country—which side we are on. Do we want to act or to stand by?

Last week I was in Istanbul, where I met the leadership of the Syrian opposition coalition in its headquarters. Those people are of course exiled from their country, where they still have families. Members of their communities live in fear of their lives there and their lives are taken every day. I met the president and the secretary-general, a man called Abdulelah Fahed. He does not speak English, so spoke to me through an interpreter. He looked at me with cold and cynical fury in his eyes, and said, “We are grateful for the sugar that is sent to us from the international community and is bombed by the Russians. We hope you send more sugar that will be bombed. But actually this is not primarily a problem of a lack of aid being sent. It is that the aid is being bombed by the regime and by Russia, and until you

[John Woodcock]

help us with tackling that at source no amount of goodwill and humanitarian handwringing is going to help to solve this situation.”

There are different interpretations of what a no-fly zone or a no-bombing zone would mean. I recognise the grave danger of escalation in saying that we would be prepared to shoot down a Russian plane. I will say two things. My sense—and I would like to hear the Foreign Secretary’s initial views on this—is that a no-bombing zone could work. We could say that every time the Assad regime and Russia committed one of these atrocities in the full of view of the international community, the coalition that is currently fighting Daesh would respond, primarily with naval assets, by targeting part of the regime’s infrastructure. No one would be bombing Russia or taking down Russian planes, but we would target that infrastructure every time they committed an atrocity. Each time they killed civilians we would respond, targeting only the military.

The Foreign Secretary knows his history. We could also say that he knows a thing or two about bullies. President Putin is a classic bully. Over the past few years, and in fact beyond that, the international community has cowered every time he has advanced. When you do that with bullies, they go further and further. I say to the people who say every time that we must not do something because we will enrage Russia and we do not want another world war, that their cowardice is making conflict more likely—both the continuation of conflict in Syria and the possibility of further conflict in Europe. The only thing to do with bullies is stand up to them.

We are going to have to do that, sooner or later. I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy). The people of Syria do not have three months to see how the presidential handover goes and what the new president is like; they are being killed in their hundreds every single day.

**Angela Smith:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**John Woodcock:** Okay, really quickly—we are getting frowned at by Mr Speaker.

**Angela Smith:** I will be very quick. Does my hon. Friend agree that the suggestion from the Labour Front-Bench spokesperson that we go through a different process, which involves engaging with the Syrians at various levels, will not work, because we have no time whatever, as Aleppo will have disappeared by Christmas?

**John Woodcock:** Who are we kidding? There is no process, because no one is standing up to the Russian regime’s bombs. People understand that, but they do not want to get involved. The question is ultimately for the Foreign Secretary and the Government, because my party is making itself more and more of an irrelevance with every pronouncement from the Front Bench. Are we prepared, as the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) said at the beginning, to oversee another Guernica or a collapse of the UN, like the League of Nations before it? Are we going to be a latter-day generation of Neville Chamberlains, or are we going to take courage and act in the manner of the great Winston Churchill, which the Foreign Secretary knows very well from his time as his biographer?

2.50 pm

**Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP):** I, too, commend the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) for securing the debate. May I appeal to Members to bear in mind the subject under discussion, and the subject on which you have agreed to a debate, Mr Speaker? The debate is about a humanitarian catastrophe. It has been caused by the breakdown of political processes, crimes against humanity, acts of terrorism and lots of things, but first and foremost we are talking about an imminent mortal threat to 100,000 children. Every one of those children lives every second of their life not knowing whether they will see the next second. Surely that must be a priority. Establishing a peaceful, democratic and legitimate Government in Syria is important, as is stopping the Russian war machine and neutralising forever the threat from Daesh. All of those things are important, but right now, 100,000 children—our brothers and sisters—are in immediate danger of death. Addressing that must be the top priority.

I sometimes think that it is like four different fire engines turning up to a fire and spending time arguing about whose fault the fire is, while in the building the children are screaming for somebody, anybody, for God’s sake to put out the fire. When the emergency services turn out to a suspicious fire, the priorities are to get people out, extinguish the fire and then investigate whether it was caused by a criminal act, and then, if necessary and appropriate, to take action against those responsible. A lot of matters that have been raised in the debate are important, but we can never lose sight of the fact that, if we spend another three weeks looking for a negotiated settlement, it will be another three weeks of children being killed in the raids, starving to death or dying from basic simple illnesses because they cannot get the treatment they so desperately need and absolutely deserve.

There are probably 35 doctors left in Aleppo. They cannot possibly cope with the demands being placed on them. Each and every one of them risks their life every day. We know they are being targeted. I cannot imagine a situation where being a doctor or a nurse meant risking life every day to go to work. That is what those people are doing—heroes each and every one of them. We know that the largest hospital in the city was hit seven times in a single morning. That was not an accident or a navigational error; it was a deliberate war crime. When the time comes, it should be treated as such. Just to make the point, they went back and bombed it again the next day. It is a deliberate tactic by the Syrians and the Russians to attack civilian targets on one day, wait for the emergency services to respond, and then go in and target them again.

We also need to re-evaluate the part the UK is playing. We need to go back to the reasons why the United Kingdom got involved in military action and reassess whether it is still appropriate. The former Prime Minister, in arguing in favour of military action, described the Brimstone missile as a “unique” asset

“that no other coalition ally can contribute”.—[*Official Report*, 26 September 2016; Vol. 585, c. 1262.]

That unique asset was deployed by the United Kingdom nine times in the seven months between February and August. It was used more than that in January and December last year, but it does not seem to me like a compelling argument for continued military action.

We were also told that there were likely to be 70,000 moderate troops ready to join in the struggle against Daesh—one requirement for a just war is a reasonable chance of success. I hope the Foreign Secretary can tell us where those 70,000 moderate troops are and whether they still exist. If they do not, how many are there?

The former Prime Minister expected and hoped that, if we supported military action, we would have a transitional Government in Syria in about six months. Those six months passed in June. Will the Foreign Secretary tell us how far away we are now? Are we within six months or, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) said, are we further from a peaceful solution than we have ever been? We must face up to those difficult questions. On this occasion, I am asking not because I want to trip up those on the Government Benches. I am asking from the heart. Please can we look to ensure that the part we are playing, whether through military action or anything else, contributes to the solution rather than makes the problem so much more worse?

Can any of us really imagine what 12 million refugees look like? A great many are refugees in their own country, and millions of them are scattered across the globe. I for one would welcome many more if only we were allowed to do so. Nine million of those refugees are women and children who have played no part in any war or any crime. They are utterly innocent. Thirteen thousand children have lost their lives. Are we going to allow that to get to 14,000, 15,000 and 16,000, or are we going to accept, ultimately, that the first priority is to save the lives of those who are left to prevent those appalling statistics from getting any worse?

I am a great fan of the Scots-Australian singer-songwriter Eric Bogle. I did not get his permission to quote his song, but I hope he will not mind the breach of copyright. Many years ago, in response to another conflict, he wrote:

“And have you seen the madmen who strut the world’s stage  
Threatening our destruction as they prance and preen and  
rage?

Rattling nuclear sabres as humanity holds its breath

Feeding on fear and bigotry as the children starve to death”.

The children are starving to death today. Our first priority must be to feed the children by whatever means needed, and then we can deal with the rest of the mess that the Russians, the Syrians and Daesh have created.

2.56 pm

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Perhaps I am one of those men who prance and preen in the way the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) described, but I regret strongly the fact that when the House had the opportunity three years ago to leave open the option of military action it chose not to do so. I felt that leaving the option open was the appropriate thing to do at the time, but a majority of Members of the House felt that it was not.

I am pleased that we have the debate today—I congratulate the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) on securing it—because it enables the Government to give us the quarterly update on Syria. Notwithstanding what is happening on the other side of the channel with Brexit, the House wants regular updates from the Government on progress in Syria. I look

forward therefore to the Foreign Secretary giving greater clarity on what discussions the UK Government have had with the other players in the peace process, and on what role we have been playing to try to promote peace in Syria.

I welcome the role the UK Government have played in sanctions on Russia and hope that it will continue when the UK leaves the EU—the UK has played a prominent role in the EU in relation to Ukraine. In passing, I hope the Government look more carefully at sanctions in relation to Magnitsky and the Russians’ responsibility for that.

The Foreign Secretary drew attention to his view that the Russians may have committed war crimes and spoke specifically of the double tap manoeuvre, which I understand to mean that a strike takes place, there is a gap to allow the emergency services to turn up, and the site is hit again. I hope he sets out precisely what evidence he has for that, because it is clearly a very serious allegation. I want to draw his attention to the fact that, in Yemen, the Saudis are alleged to have used the same double tap manoeuvre. If rightly he expresses concerns about war crimes committed by Russia in Syria, I hope he will consider whether the Saudis’ use of that manoeuvre in Yemen also amounts to a war crime.

A lot of Members have contributed positively on the issue of recording information about where Russian planes and Assad’s helicopters have been active. I hope that that information is being recorded, because we will want evidence if there are war crimes prosecutions at some point in the future. I hope that when the Foreign Secretary responds he will be able to say something about whether the UK is considering using our universal jurisdiction to bring the Russians to account if there are no other means for doing so. Given that the Russians are engaging in a propaganda war—we have seen the activities of some of its news outlets here in the UK—I wonder whether there is no military reason why we could not put online 24/7 the flight paths of every Russian plane, with an identifier on it, so that people can go online and make a clear connection between that flight and a bomb. I put that suggestion to him and I hope the Government will consider it.

We are in favour of transparency. The Foreign Secretary will be aware of the joint policy for the military coalition to investigate civilian casualties. I do not think that that has yet reported. I hope it will come forward, so we can see that we are dealing effectively with any casualties that might have been caused by the coalition.

On air drops, I quoted the parliamentary answer from the Minister of State, Department for International Development, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), and I will do so again:

“The use of air drops to deliver aid is high risk and should only be considered as a last resort when all other means have failed”.

It seems to me that all other means have failed. The first half of that has been satisfied. The second half is that airdrops require certain conditions to be met for a successful delivery. It may be on that basis that that is being rejected, but the possibility of air drops must be actively pursued by the Government.

On the reporting of what is happening in Syria, I draw Members’ attention to the case of Zaina Erhaim, an award-winning Syrian journalist who had her passport removed by the British Government when she arrived in

[Tom Brake]

the UK. Apparently, the Syrians reported that her passport had been stolen. Given that we think Syria is a pariah state committing crimes against humanity, the fact that we would act on a request from it to seize someone's passport is bizarre. I hope the Foreign Secretary can explain why that action was taken.

The international community and the UK Parliament failed Syria three years ago. Today, we must give the Government the strongest steer possible that they must act to stop the murderous activities of Russia and Syria. If we are back here in three years debating Syria again, it will be to pick over the skeleton of a country destroyed, flattened and obliterated, with its people scattered to all four corners of the world.

3.2 pm

**Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) on securing this important debate. My party, Plaid Cymru, like others believes that the perpetrators of repeated attacks—the bombing of civilians, hospitals and the aid convoy on 19 September—should be brought before the International Criminal Court. I will be brief and limit my remarks to this one specific point. In his response, I ask the Foreign Secretary to inform the House of the Government's stance on this matter.

Others have been quite clear. On Sunday, the Socialist President of France, François Hollande, said that

“these...are the victims of war crimes. Those that commit these acts will have to face up to their responsibility, including in the ICC”.

On Monday, France's Foreign Minister, Jean-Marc Ayrault, called on the International Criminal Court to investigate Russia for possible war crimes in Syria. He told French radio:

“France intends to get in touch with the prosecutor to find out how the probe can be launched.”

That was referred to earlier in this debate. This followed calls on Friday by the US Secretary of State John Kerry for Russia and Syria to face a war crimes investigation for their attacks on civilians. The case against them is clear and is backed up by firm evidence. I do not need to elaborate on that today.

My party opposed the bombing of Syria by the UK. We were told that such bombing would be carefully controlled to exclude danger to civilians. Russia and Assad's Syrian regime take no such precautions. Indeed, the evidence is that they target civilians. They should answer for that before the International Criminal Court. I realise that there are substantial difficulties. The Rome Statute, which established the Court, has been ratified by 123 countries. The United States, Russia and Syria have not done so. I understand, however, that a case could be made to the ICC through a UN referral. I think that that is what the French Government have in mind.

The Security Council has been deadlocked over Syria. Russia vetoed a French resolution in May 2014 to refer the situation in Syria to the ICC. On Saturday, Russia again vetoed a UN resolution, drafted by France, demanding an immediate end to the bombing campaign. A rival measure put forward by Russia, which called for

a ceasefire, made no mention of a halt to airstrikes. This was also rejected, blocked by the United Kingdom and the United States.

The UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, had said prior to the meeting of the UN Security Council that if urgent action is not taken to address the situation, thousands of Syrians would be killed and towns, such as eastern Aleppo, could be totally destroyed by the end of the year. The need for action, therefore, is pressing and the UK has the power and the influence to act. We believe the Government should use that power and influence ever more effectively, as others do, to put even more pressure on Russia in particular. It was confirmed this morning that President Putin will not visit Paris next week, after declining to meet François Hollande for talks on Syria.

I do not need to say that the situation is desperate, but both the Assad regime and Russia are accused, rightly, of perpetrating war crimes. We uphold international law. There are mechanisms for bringing perpetrators of war crimes before the ICC. On what possible basis might we not do this? Rather, we should do as our European partners do as well as fulfilling our duties as a permanent member of the Security Council. We believe that bringing such a case before the ICC would only increase its credibility. The ICC has been seen as weak, and strong countries are not signed up to it. It has been criticised, particularly by the African Union, for its focus on Africa—it has brought charges only against black Africans. We believe the ICC's credibility can only be enhanced by such a case.

3.7 pm

**Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): I apologise to the House for my lateness in attending the debate; I was chairing the Environmental Audit Committee.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) on securing the debate and my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) on her passionate and heartfelt speech. I echo her sentiments about how much we miss the good sense and the good will of our lost friend, the late Member for Batley and Spen.

I visited Lebanon last September as Labour's shadow International Development Secretary and saw at first-hand the scale of the appalling humanitarian crisis spilling out from Syria and across the middle east. I stood in a sandstorm on the Beka'a valley on the road to Damascus, just 12 miles from Assad's presidential palace. I certainly felt very close to everything that was happening. A charity worker from Islamic Relief said to me that just six miles away there were Jihadi fighters. I had been live tweeting a lot of photos from the camps and at that point I thought it best to turn off the geo-location from the Twitter account and not do any tweeting until we got back to our safe haven of Beirut. I must admit that I felt like a bit of a coward doing that.

What we know about Syria is that 400,000 people have been killed in this humanitarian catastrophe, 5 million Syrian refugees have fled their country and 8 million more are displaced within its own borders. They are fleeing the terror of Assad, ISIL and now Russia. I met a woman called Hadia who told me how her husband was killed in Homs while working as a Red Cross volunteer. The UN had offered to take her and her children to Germany, but she declined because her

mother was unable to accompany them. Four of her adult children are still trapped in Homs. Cases like Hadia's demonstrate the terrible choices refugees face: you lose your husband, you bring your mother with you and then you are forced to leave your mother behind in order to seek safety for your children.

I also met a man who had a pacemaker fitted in Damascus and who, upon his return to Lebanon, was deregistered as a refugee because he had left freely and returned. This left him and his wife destitute. He was 65 years old and unable to work. He was destitute, lying on his back in a camp.

The vulnerability of those refugees in the Beka'a valley and elsewhere in Lebanon is growing, as we heard in the speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg). Their food allocation has been cut. They are on pretty much starvation rations, capped at five family members. I met 10-year-old girls labouring for seven hours a day in the fields, earning \$4 a day and working one hour a day just to pay the rent for their family to pitch a little ragged tent on a disused onion factory. Those children's childhoods have been stolen. Eight million people have been displaced internally in Syria, having suffered attacks from cluster munitions and chemical weapons, and the collective punishment of siege warfare.

At the last meeting of the all-party group on Syria that I attended with the then hon. Member for Batley and Spen, Jo Cox, we heard about 60,000 people disappearing and their families paying extortionate sums of money for news of their loved ones or just to receive their bodies for burial. We are seeing Assad carry out the extermination of his people. He has destroyed his country. He has destroyed one of the oldest civilisations in the world. He has destroyed the economy and destroyed all good will in that country. It is now a wartime economy, based on looting, corruption, arms and people smuggling. People are living under siege, their access to basic services denied. Eleven per cent of Syria's population—2 million people—have been wounded or injured, and we have seen the terrible suffering of Syria's children.

In August 2013, this House voted against military action in Syria. I shared the regret of many on our side of the House and of the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) at our cowardice on that occasion. We are now living with the consequences of that inaction. That vote was prompted by a sarin gas attack on civilians in eastern Damascus that killed 1,400 people, 426 of whom were children. The UN doctrine of the responsibility to protect allows military intervention to protect civilians from genocide and war crimes by their state and provides a valid legal basis for intervention. That responsibility to protect weighs upon us as heavily today as it did on that August day in 2013, when, after the vote, we went home, turned on our televisions and saw that Assad had carried out a napalm attack on a school. Using chemical weapons on sleeping children is a war crime. We know all the reasons for that vote, but we now know that we have to protect civilians from Assad and, now, from Russian intervention as well.

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that what the Russians are doing now to Aleppo is exactly what they did to Grozny? We need to learn the lessons from that.

**Mary Creagh:** Absolutely. The Russian war crimes in Grozny were bravely documented by Anna Politkovskaya and another woman journalist whose name escapes me, both of whom were assassinated by the Russian regime. Of course, truth is the first casualty of war, but we do not have the fog of war to hide behind in this case. People in Aleppo are tweeting their situation and their circumstances.

We heard from the Secretary of State for Defence yesterday about how Daesh have used the conflict in Syria to recruit jihadi fighters from all over the world and to spread their terror across to Iraq. We know that the airstrikes that we are carrying out against them in Iraq and Syria, backed by a coalition of 67 countries, are slowly pushing them back in Iraq, but they will never be defeated in Syria until this conflict is sorted.

**Tom Tugendhat:** The hon. Lady is making some very powerful points. This is a fight not only for the people and the children of Aleppo—a point made so powerfully by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell)—but very much for ourselves: the international order we all rely on, the migrant crisis we all see and the expansion of Russia we all feel. NATO, the west and the UK demand action.

**Mary Creagh:** I agree totally with the hon. Gentleman. Russia's positioning of nuclear-capable warheads in Kaliningrad is another example of its aggression towards NATO countries.

A war that we wished was none of our business is our business. Syrian children have drowned in our seas and millions of Syrians have turned up in our continent seeking shelter. I am pleased that Wakefield has offered to take 100 Syrian refugees. We are a city of sanctuary and we look forward to welcoming them among us. These are people like us. They had cars, apartments, solar panels and satellite TV, but were forced to flee bombs, napalm, sarin gas and cluster munitions from a Government who target schools and hospitals—a Government who are aided and abetted by Russia, whose sole aim is to preserve access to the Mediterranean through its port at Tartus in Syria. Russia attacked the first humanitarian aid convoy to enter Aleppo for weeks, destroying lorries filled with baby milk and anti-lice medication.

I want to hear more from the Foreign Secretary about what plans he has for further sanctions against Russia, but we cannot claim ignorance or hide behind the fog of war. Washing our hands like Pontius Pilate and choosing not to act is no strategy at all. I was too scared to tweet from the Syrian border, but brave people in Syria are tweeting their lives and filming the deaths of others as they happen. Omar Ibrahim is a neurosurgeon, removing bomb fragments from the brains of children on the floor of a destroyed hospital, and one of 30 doctors left in eastern Aleppo. Bana Alabed, a seven-year-old girl from eastern Aleppo, tweeted last week. She wanted to live like the children of London: "No bombing!" It is not too late for us to save Omar and Bana. They are relying on us. We need to do what we should have done in 2013. We need a no-fly zone over the city of Aleppo and the skies of Syria. Omar and Bana are watching. We must not let them down again.

3.16 pm

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): May I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting the time for the debate this afternoon? May I also join colleagues from across the House in congratulating the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) on securing today's debate?

There is, as we have heard, an unimaginable humanitarian disaster happening right now across Syria, and nowhere more than in the largest city, Aleppo. As we have heard, 400,000 people have already been killed, 15,000 of them children, with in excess of 1 million people wounded since the onset of the war in 2011. As a result of the war, 5 million Syrians have been displaced and have had to flee the country. Five million people is equivalent to the entire population of Scotland, displaced, homeless and impoverished.

If I may, I would like to pay tribute to the people of my constituency of Argyll and Bute, who, with the full support of Argyll and Bute Council, the Scottish Government and the Argyll community housing association, have responded magnificently and have warmly welcomed 15 Syrian families to the gorgeous island of Bute, with more scheduled to arrive in the not-too-distant future. I have met the Syrian families and enjoyed their kind hospitality. I am delighted to report that they are settling in well and are being supported by a thoughtful and generous local community. I am sure this House would like to put on record its appreciation for the welcome shown by the people of Bute to the innocent men, women and children of Syria in their hour of greatest need.

Like the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), Bute has shown what we can do. I sincerely hope that we in the United Kingdom can accommodate far more Syrian families—not just in Argyll and Bute or in Scotland, but across the UK. However, those few families on Bute are the very lucky ones, because they managed to escape the hell on earth that their country has become. Although many of the people I met were born and bred in Aleppo, I doubt very much whether they would recognise it today, as just last week the UN envoy to Syria said that he feared that the eastern part of the city could be totally destroyed within two months.

This claim follows on from the bombing of Syria's largest hospital, which was hit by seven airstrikes on the morning of 1 October. Then, as the repairs started, it was hit again the following day. As we have heard, in a shocking attack—undoubtedly a war crime—a UN aid convoy was deliberately targeted, killing 20 people. The World Health Organisation said that in the week to 30 September, at least 338 Aleppo residents, including 106 children, were killed.

There is overwhelming evidence that the Assad regime and his Russian allies are now deliberately targeting civilians, hospitals and the emergency medical teams and first responders. As the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) said, the regime, with its allies, stands accused of using a method known as two-tap strikes, in which they bomb an area, circle round, giving sufficient time for medical responders to attend, and then return to bomb the rescuers. If that is true, it is a despicably cynical tactic that, even amid the horror of this conflict, leaves one speechless at its depravity.

Today, in eastern Aleppo, a city officially under siege, there are only 35 doctors to care for a quarter of a million residents. It is the biggest besieged area by far. People still ask, "What can we do, when there is so much chaos on the ground and in the skies above Syria?" I would say to the Government that, as protagonists in the conflict, it is absolutely incumbent on the United Kingdom to be part of the solution. The Government must produce a coherent plan and a sensible strategy immediately to halt the airstrike campaign in which the UK is involved. The Foreign Secretary said on 19 August:

"It is only when the fighting and bombing stops that we can hope to deliver the political solution".

I say to the Foreign Secretary that that means everyone's bombs, including our own.

Andy Baker of Oxfam has said:

"It's not only Russia, it is other nations, too, Britain among them, that have fuelled the fire of this conflict, continuing to support one side or another and failing to deliver peace."

The Foreign Secretary and Oxfam are right: adding UK jets and bombs to this prolonged and agonising war has not and will not bring about a lasting peace.

**Sammy Wilson:** Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the UK should unilaterally stop its actions in Syria? If so, how does he think Russia and Assad would react to such a withdrawal?

**Brendan O'Hara:** The United Kingdom unilaterally joined this fight in December last year, promising that it would be a pivotal turning-point in the campaign. It has singularly failed to do so, so we have to take a different tack. We must have the bravery and the courage to stand up and say that we were wrong to do what we did last year. As I say, we have to take a different tack.

Almost exactly a year ago, we asked the Government a series of questions, none of which was answered in the headlong rush to join this conflict, so I ask again: how, when more than a dozen different countries are engaged in military action, have UK airstrikes brought peace and stability closer to Syria? Where is the UK Government's detailed plan for winning and securing the peace? Where is the money for the reconstruction of Syria going to come from when the bombing ends?

We need to act, and act decisively with our allies and friends. As the French Foreign Minister, Jean-Marc Ayrault, said last week,

"If we don't do something, Aleppo will soon just be in ruins and will remain in history as a town in which the inhabitants were abandoned to their executioners."

3.22 pm

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I, too, thank the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) for bringing forward this debate, and I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting it. As I rise to speak today, I am mindful that it is little under a year since the vote on whether the UK should join the US-led coalition airstrikes against Daesh in Syria. SNP Members did not support the military action, and any case for airstrikes that the Government believed to exist has now completely fallen apart.

There is a very clear need for a revised military strategy. It is needed urgently, and it must not ignore the extreme humanitarian situation in the country. When the former Prime Minister addressed the House on 26 November last year, he said:

“All these elements—counter-terrorism, political and diplomatic, military and humanitarian—need to happen together to achieve a long-term solution in Syria”—[*Official Report*, 26 November 2015; Vol. 602, c. 1492.]

Regrettably, it very much appears that these words have not been followed up with any coherent strategy that would have them realised. The humanitarian element is seemingly discarded when at the expense of a military agenda. I know that the response from the Government will be to inform us of how many billions of pounds have been spent, and will be spent on rebuilding Syria after the war. The great problem is that these words are presently meaningless to Syria’s suffering civilians.

According to the Syria Campaign, more than 100,000 children are being bombed in Aleppo, while figures from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights place the total number of children killed in the conflict at over 13,000. Since the ceasefire collapsed fewer than three weeks ago, more than 100 children have been killed out of a total of around 600 civilians. Please stop to think about that—it is the equivalent of a primary school class being slaughtered every five days.

The humanitarian crisis in Syria just continues to get worse. More than 400,000 people have already been killed since 2011. The UN estimates that more than half the country’s pre-war population of 23 million is in urgent need of humanitarian aid. Millions of people have been displaced: 4 million are living as refugees outside Syria, and at least 8 million more are displaced inside the country. Amnesty International estimates that for every hour of the conflict, 50 families have been uprooted from their homes in Syria. Humanitarian aid is being blocked by the Assad regime from getting to those who need it. Hospitals are being systematically targeted by Assad and Russia, while an estimated 382 medical facilities have been destroyed.

**Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con):** The hon. Lady is understandably painting a heart-rending picture of what is happening in Syria. It seems to me, having listened to two speeches, that the SNP’s position is to equate our military intervention with that of Vladimir Putin, and to argue that we should step aside from this carnage and hope that a unilateral act of disarmament on our part will somehow instil in Bashar al-Assad a spirit of generosity towards his own people that he has not yet shown. Does the hon. Lady not realise how absurd the SNP’s position is? Does she not recognise that it is only through both military engagement and humanitarian work that we will be able to bring relief to the suffering people of that country?

**Mr Speaker:** That is the gravamen of the point, for which we are grateful.

**Margaret Ferrier:** The right hon. Gentleman misses the fact that we are not denying that the brutality inflicted by Assad and Russian forces is beyond comprehension. However, the role that we can and should play is a humanitarian and diplomatic one. That, I believe, should be our role.

In an utterly shocking attack—one that possibly amounts to a war crime—a UN aid convoy was struck in an airstrike, which killed at least 20 people. The reality is that there is utter chaos on the ground and in the skies over Syria. Just last month, the MOD confirmed that

the UK was involved in airstrikes that killed at least 62 Syrian Government troops. We have become part of the chaos.

Other Members have mentioned the work of the White Helmets, which I want to mention, too. They have saved thousands of lives, and continue to do so on a daily basis. They were recently nominated for the Nobel peace prize. As the bombs rain down, the White Helmets do not stop. They rush in to save civilians. They are the heroes in this conflict.

The UK Government need immediately to halt their airstrikes in Syria, and present Parliament with an alternative coherent plan. We need a sensible strategy—one that actually ensures that the humanitarian situation is not cast aside. We can make a difference in this conflict. We can play some part, no matter how small, in minimising the human suffering in this horrific war. However, it is time for the Government to admit that doing so will require a complete change of strategy.

3.28 pm

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson):** I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) on securing this valuable debate and commend him for the power of his speech. I also thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting the debate. We have heard speeches or interventions from 43 right hon. and hon. Members, and I think that every one has made clear the horror of the House at the suffering being endured by the people of Aleppo, where rebel-held districts have come under furious attack from the Assad regime and from Russia, with the help of Iranian-backed militias.

Let me spell out some of the consequences. At this moment, the 275,000 inhabitants of eastern Aleppo are under siege. They are isolated from the outside world, subjected to constant bombardment, and prevented from receiving humanitarian aid. Their power and water supplies have been cut off in what has become a signature tactic of the Assad killing machine: the besieging of civilian populations. What we are now seeing in eastern Aleppo is the biggest and, potentially, the deadliest siege since the outbreak of Syria’s civil war more than five years ago.

Last week the United Nations special envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, warned that eastern Aleppo might be “totally destroyed” by the end of the year. In the past two weeks, at least 376 people—half of them children—have been killed, and another 1,266 have been injured. Every hospital in eastern Aleppo is believed to have been bombed, some more than once, and several have been put out of action. Hospitals have been targeted with such frequency and precision that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this must be deliberate policy. As the House will know, intentionally attacking a hospital amounts to a war crime.

It is time, I think, for all these incidents to be properly and fully investigated with a view to assembling the necessary evidence and ensuring that justice is done—and, yes, I say in answer to questions that have been raised by several Members today that we do think that there could be advantage in the procedures of the International Criminal Court. I remind the House that in recent history, war criminals have been successfully prosecuted decades after their offences.

**Sir Nicholas Soames:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that this catastrophe represents a terrible failure of the security order that protects our very civilisation, and that if these prosecutions are not made, a terrible, terrible failure will be laid at our door?

**Boris Johnson:** I certainly agree with my right hon. Friend that we are all judged in the House by our actions and our resolve. I think it was my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield who spoke of the will of the House. I am afraid that that was absent three years ago when, as several Members pointed out, we took an historic decision not to intervene. I hope that we will show a different measure of resolve this afternoon. Those who are conducting this bombing and who are, in my view, culpable of these crimes should realise that the mills of justice grind slowly, but they grind small.

The same penalties should apply to those involved in deliberate attacks on humanitarian convoys. As many Members have pointed out, on 19 September a UN aid convoy was destroyed near Aleppo and at least 20 people were killed. The vehicles were clearly marked, and the convoy had official permission from the Assad regime to deliver those desperately needed supplies. Satellite photographs that are in the public domain leave no doubt that the convoy was struck from the air. The incident took place after dark; by Russia's own account, the war planes of Syria's regime cannot strike targets after dark, and—also by Russia's own account—its aircraft were in the vicinity at the time. All the available evidence therefore points to Russian responsibility for the atrocity.

I trust that the UN board of inquiry will establish exactly what happened, and we in the United Kingdom Government stand ready to help. I emphasise that it is the UK which, week after week, is taking the lead—together with our allies in America and France, and all like-minded nations—in highlighting what is happening in Syria to a world in which, I fear, the wells of outrage are becoming exhausted.

I listened to the passionate speeches from the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), the co-chair of the all-party friends of Syria group, who is carrying on the tradition of Jo Cox, whom we mourn. I listened to all the speeches that made the point that there is no commensurate horror among some of the anti-war protest groups, and I agree with the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley: I would certainly like to see demonstrations outside the Russian embassy. Where is the Stop the War coalition at the moment?

It is up to us in the Government to show a lead, and week after week in the UN we are indeed doing what we can to point out what the Russians are up to and to build an international understanding of what is going on in Syria. I believe that we are having some effect. As Members have pointed out, the Russians have now been driven to mount a veto in the Security Council to protect their own position five times. This is not some anti-Russian campaign; we are not doing this out of any particular hostility towards Russia. Indeed, the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, did his utmost to negotiate an agreement with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, that would at least have reduced the killing. Anyone who has studied the Lavrov-Kerry talks will know that John Kerry threw himself into that task in a Herculean

way. However, on 3 October, he was driven to abandon his efforts by the attack on the aid convoy and the pounding of Aleppo, which destroyed all hopes of a ceasefire. The US Secretary of State has concluded, I think rightly, that Russia was determined to help Assad's onslaught against the women, children and families of Aleppo regardless of any agreement.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): Will the Foreign Secretary take this opportunity to tell the House whether he supports the French proposal that, in the case of war crimes and crimes against humanity, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council should voluntarily undertake to give up their veto in order to enable the Security Council to take action when these heinous crimes are being committed, as is clearly the case in Aleppo at the moment?

**Boris Johnson:** We are in constant touch with our French colleagues about this proposal. As I said earlier, I am personally very attracted to the idea of holding these people to account before the International Criminal Court, so that is certainly something that I would like to pursue.

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): Does the Foreign Secretary not think that more weight would be attached to the strength of his words about the International Criminal Court if the regime of President al-Bashir of Sudan—who has also been bombing his people from the air, who has recently been seen to be using chemical weapons against them, and who has been indicted by the International Criminal Court for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity—was not now being embraced by the UK Government through the UK-Sudan strategic dialogue as a partner in countering terrorism and managing migration?

**Boris Johnson:** I take that point very sincerely, but it is vital that we concentrate our efforts and our censure on the Russians and on the Assad regime, who are primarily responsible for what is going on in Syria now. We can get lost endlessly in all sorts of moral equivalences, and I heard a few earlier from the Scottish National party, but it is vital that we focus on what is happening in Syria. That is the question before us this afternoon.

I must say bluntly to the House that if Russia continues on its current path, that great country is in danger of becoming a pariah nation. If President Putin's strategy is to restore the greatness and glory of Russia, I believe that he risks seeing his ambition turn to ashes in the face of international contempt for what is happening in Syria. Russia tries to justify its onslaught on Aleppo by saying that its sole aim is to drive out Jabhat al-Nusra, or Fatah al-Sham as it now calls itself, which is the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda. No one questions that these people are terrorists, but their presence in that city cannot justify an assault on 275,000 innocent people, still less the imposition of a siege, which is, by its very nature, a wholly indiscriminate tactic. I agree with the phrase of Staffan de Mistura who said that the Russians should not be able to use the presence of Jabhat al-Nusra as an alibi.

**Emily Thornberry:** The right hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech. I wonder whether he will go further in relation to Staffan de Mistura. Is he in a position to

say today that the British Government will support Staffan de Mistura's initiative to escort the jihadi fighters out of eastern Aleppo so that the Russians no longer have an excuse to bomb that section of the city?

**Boris Johnson:** I will come to the way forward for Aleppo in a minute. Let me remind the House of all the ways in which the UK is trying to be of use and trying to salve the situation. Like other Members, I pay tribute to the White Helmets, who rescue men, women and children from the rubble of bomb sites. Many Members have met them. Funded partly by the UK Government, they are doing an heroic job. Of the 3,000 volunteers, 142 have been killed in the line of duty and 400 have been wounded.

Britain is at the forefront of this humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis. We have pledged £2.3 billion—our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis—which makes us the second largest donor after the US. We can be proud in this country of the help that we are giving to hundreds of thousands of people. Britain has done a huge amount to mobilise the international community. I pay tribute to my hon. and right hon. Friends on the Front Bench for their work in that regard. In February, we co-hosted a conference and secured pledges of more than \$12 billion, which is the largest amount ever raised in a one-day conference.

Let me answer the question about whether we are taking enough refugees asked by the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg). Yes, of course we should take our share, and we are doing so, but Members will agree that the overwhelming priority is to help those nearest the centres of conflict in the berm and elsewhere and to keep them as near to their communities as we can.

Let me turn to the questions that were raised by the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) and repeatedly by other Members. Many have expressed the view strongly that they want this country to go further. Others have spoken about no-fly zones, or no-bombing zones. I have every sympathy with those ideas and the motives behind them. We must work through all those types of options with our allies, especially as this House is not committed to putting boots on the ground. As my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) said, we cannot commit to a no-fly zone unless we are prepared to shoot down planes or helicopters that violate that zone. We need to think very carefully about the consequences.

**Liz Kendall** *rose*—

**Boris Johnson:** I am really sorry, but I must make some progress.

We must consult on this as widely as possible, and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield suggested, I will certainly be talking to everybody involved in the 1991 effort to provide no-fly zones over northern Iraq. We must ensure that we have innovative ways of getting aid into Aleppo and, as several Members have said, we must step up the pressure on Assad's regime and on the Russians through sanctions. I listened carefully to what was said. The House will accept that there is a certain friability in the European resolve to impose sanctions on Russia, given the large dependency

of many European countries on Russian gas. It is vital that our country remains at the forefront of keeping that resolve from crumbling, which is what we are doing.

In the long term—to get to the point made by the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury—the only realistic solution is to persuade both sides to agree to a ceasefire and then to work towards a political solution. It is of course true that that process has been stopped since April, when the ceasefire was destroyed. That does not mean that the process is dead, and it must not mean that the process is dead. On the contrary, this country and this Government have worked to keep that flame of hope alive and have worked for a settlement. On 7 September we hosted a session in London with the high negotiations committee of the Syrian opposition, which set out a detailed and progressive vision for how to achieve a transition in Syria towards a democratic, pluralist administration in which the rights of all communities in that country would be respected, but would also preserve the stability and institutions of the Syrian state while getting rid of the Assad regime.

**Emily Thornberry:** Before we run out of time, may I refocus the right hon. Gentleman on the question that I asked about getting rid of the jihadi fighters from eastern Aleppo?

**Boris Johnson:** As the hon. Lady will understand, one cannot get rid of the jihadi fighters from eastern Aleppo as long as the population of Aleppo is being bombed in a ruthless aerial bombardment that is driving people into a position in which they will do anything to fight and resist the Assad regime. Our best hope is to persuade the Russians that it is profoundly in their interests to take the initiative, to win the acclaim of the international community, to do the right thing in Syria, to call off their puppets in the Assad regime, to stop the bombing, to bring peace to Aleppo and to have a genuine ceasefire. That is the way; that is the prelude. I am perfectly prepared to look at Staffan de Mistura's proposals for leading out al-Nusra and all the rest of it, and perhaps to bring in a UN contingent—that all sounds eminently sensible—but a ceasefire and the end of the Russian bombardment has to come first, and I hope that the hon. Lady agrees.

I think that millions of people in Syria are yearning for that outcome and for a return to talks. I hope that they will hear the passion of this afternoon's debate. They will recognise that, of course, there are no easy solutions and no pat answers to this. They also know that this House and our constituents are disgusted by the behaviour of Assad and his regime. I hope that in Moscow and Damascus they will hear the message from British MPs that we are willing to consider anything honestly and practically that can be done to bring peace and hope back to Syria. I am grateful to all Members who have spoken so passionately this afternoon.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in Aleppo and more widely across Syria.

**Mr Speaker:** May I thank colleagues for taking part in the debate and for the succinct and comprehensive way in which they have addressed this important issue?

## Small Charitable Donations and Childcare Payments Bill

### *Second Reading*

**Mr Speaker:** If colleagues who are leaving, unaccountably, could do so quickly and quietly, that would be greatly appreciated.

3.49 pm

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jane Ellison):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I obviously welcome the number of colleagues who have remained in the Chamber after the important debate that has just happened. I am sure that they will contribute to the debate on this important and, I hope, uncontroversial topic, as we set out to give further support to our fantastic charity sector. Although the Bill proposes relatively minor changes, they are really important none the less, because they can further the practical support that we give to our outstanding charities sector in this country, and the childcare payments provisions will help families with childcare. I shall take both aspects in turn and start with the measures to help the UK's charity sector.

I am sure that I speak for everyone in the House when I say that I am enormously proud of the fantastic work done by charitable organisations in this country. Obviously, as the Member for Battersea, I might be forgiven for pausing to make special mention of just one of those charities: the fantastic animal charity, the Battersea Dogs and Cats Home—one of the most famous animal charities in the world, let alone in this country, which finds new homes for more than 8,000 animals every year. Indeed, the Treasury has been a beneficiary of its efforts recently, with the appointment of the new chief mouser, Gladstone the cat, which managed to make me only the second new arrival from Battersea to the Treasury over the summer.

Right across this country and our constituencies, we see charities of all shapes and sizes right at the heart of our communities, whether large charities working here in the UK and across the world, researching cures for diseases or running relief efforts for those who suffer from conflict or crisis—obviously, Haiti is in our minds at the moment, and the House has just debated Syria, where so many charities are doing such brave and important work—or the smaller, more specialised charities run by just a handful of dedicated volunteers. We want to give them all the support that they deserve.

Last year alone, we provided more than £5 billion to help our charities to do more of that brilliant work. Of course, one of the biggest ways that we give them that additional revenue is through gift aid, which was worth about £1.3 billion last year. We want as many charities as possible to benefit from that, but as things stand, it is not always practical or feasible for charities to claim it. If people are out there, collecting money with a bucket, for example, they can hardly ask someone to fill in a gift aid declaration form, alongside giving a handful of small change. That is why, as many colleagues who were here during the last Parliament will remember, we introduced the gift aid small donations scheme in 2013, to allow charities and community amateur sports clubs to claim a gift aid-style top-up payment on donations received in circumstances where it is difficult or burdensome to obtain a gift aid declaration.

It is important to point out that that scheme is not a replacement for gift aid. Where charities can obtain a gift aid declaration, they should do so. Unlike gift aid, which is a tax relief linked to donors' tax contributions, the gift aid small donations scheme is a public spending measure, under which the Government pay a top-up of 25p for every pound of eligible donations received, regardless of the donor's tax status. This scheme was designed to complement gift aid. When we introduced the scheme, we promised that we would review how it was working after three years, and we have done so. It is therefore a pleasure, as a result of that review, to introduce three measures in the Bill that will make further improvements to the scheme.

**James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con):** I thank my hon. Friend for giving way before going into more detail. I fully appreciate the need for extra simplicity. Would not a bold step be to assume that all charitable donations are subject to tax relief overall? I appreciate that that cannot be done straightaway because enormous sums are involved, but could that be the trajectory that the Government take ultimately to make the tax treatment of charities incredibly simple indeed?

**Jane Ellison:** My hon. Friend is right to suggest that we are seeking as much simplicity as we can get, but I will perhaps come on to and tease out during the debate why we want to ensure that that simplicity and light touch goes alongside a degree of assurance. Finding that balance is perhaps one of the areas where a range of views will be expressed. We are keen to have a degree of assurance about the claims made and the public money given to charities.

On the consultation that took place, it might help colleagues to know that John Low, the chief executive of the Charities Aid Foundation, has said:

“The inclusion of a Small Charitable Donations Bill could be good news for charities, particularly for smaller organisations which have often struggled to unlock the benefits of Gift Aid. This provides a real opportunity to simplify the scheme”—

that is the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge)—“and make it fit for the 21st century”.

**James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con):** Small charities in my constituency include the Leasowes walled garden project, which is part of the Halesowen Abbey Trust—a small organisation dependent on small donations. What plans does the Minister have to communicate to those small charities the benefits of the scheme that she is outlining?

**Jane Ellison:** My hon. Friend might be interested to know that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has a team that goes out promoting these schemes. I was really impressed to read that since 2014 it had given more than 600 presentations to charities of all sorts of sizes, up and down the country, but he is right to say that we can always do more. I really hope that as a result of the Bill and this debate, colleagues will feel that they, too, can play an important role in telling charities in their area the good news that the scheme just got easier. Obviously, we all have a lot of contact with smaller charities in particular, and we get to know them over the years in which we represent them.

The changes are the result of months of consultation and constructive discussion with the charity sector. I thank the hundreds of charities, representative bodies and other organisations that worked with HMRC to make this review work.

Let me turn to the first of our proposed changes. The Bill will make an important change to the criteria for eligibility for the gift aid small donations scheme. Currently, to be eligible, a charity must have been registered for at least two full tax years, and have claimed gift aid in at least two of the previous four tax years, without a gap of longer than a year; obviously, that is around the assurance process. The Bill removes both those criteria, allowing newer and smaller charities to access the scheme sooner. As we all know, for a charity, those early years are important. The change will provide a welcome financial boost when it is most needed. This is a substantial simplification of the scheme; the only remaining eligibility criterion that charities and community amateur sports clubs will need to meet is the gift aid matching requirement, under which charities must claim £1 of full gift aid for every £10 claimed under the small donations scheme.

There are two reasons why we feel it is necessary to retain this rule. The first is to incentivise charities to engage with the full gift aid scheme, which will provide them with even greater income over the longer term. The second is to protect from fraud the small donations scheme, which has substantially fewer record-keeping requirements than gift aid—an important factor that was looked at when the scheme was first designed back in 2012. It is by retaining the rule that donations under the scheme must be matched with gift aid donations that we can best do that. We are simplifying the rules on eligibility as far as possible to allow as many charities as we can to benefit, while protecting the integrity of the scheme.

**James Duddridge:** While I fully support the point that the Minister makes, I can conceive of a time when it is decided in a review that that link is not the correct one. Will the Minister consider adding a clause in Committee that would allow us to take out that requirement without going through the cumbersome primary legislative process in this House again? That would effectively allow her successors to make a slightly different decision in future, without having to come back to the House.

**Jane Ellison:** Clearly, all the points that colleagues make on Second Reading will be carefully considered and debated again in Committee. I understand my hon. Friend's direction of thinking, but perhaps that will be discussed further in Committee.

The second important change enabled by the Bill is the future proofing of the small donations scheme to ensure that charities that use modern, innovative ways to collect money such as contactless donations will still be able to benefit. The small donations scheme was never intended to cover other methods of donation such as direct debit, online and text messaging, for which well-established and well-used processes for claiming gift aid exist. That remains the case, but we recognise that cash transactions have declined as new, innovative payment technologies have become more prevalent. We believe that the gift aid small donations scheme should keep pace with these amazing modern techniques.

Contactless donations collected using dedicated charity collection terminals share many of the same practical problems as bucket collections. Transactions are instant, and there is little opportunity for fundraisers to engage with donors to solicit a gift aid declaration. The Bill will therefore extend the scheme so that donations made using contactless technology will be eligible for top-up payments.

**Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con):** I welcome that decision by the Government. I should say, as I tabled an amendment to the original Bill to suggest exactly that future proofing, that I am glad that the Government have got there, perhaps a few years later than they might have done. However, is it really fair to end up with a different treatment if I swipe my phone cleverly at some terminal rather than if I happen to text the number that comes up on my screen? My sense is that I would not be willing to give details of my address through my mobile phone provider, so can we not be a little more generous and allow text donations in that situation?

**Jane Ellison:** Text messages can, as my hon. Friend knows, be gift aided, so we do not expect problems in that regard, but the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Mr Wilson), will seek to respond more fully on those points at the end of the debate.

The final change proposed in the Bill is simplifying the rules on the top-ups that charities can receive on donations that they receive in their community buildings. Those rules were designed to ensure fairness and parity of treatment for charities structured in different ways. Without those rules, some charities are entitled to hundreds of thousands of pounds more than others simply because of differences in their historical structures. The gift aid small donations scheme is particularly well used by local churches. That was made clear by the Archbishops Council, which recently noted that in 2014 parishes could claim record levels of gift aid, with a significant part of the increase arising from the use of the gift aid small donations scheme. We want churches to continue to benefit from the valuable extra income provided by the small donations scheme, but it is important that the scheme continues to deliver the policy intention of providing fair and equal outcomes regardless of structure. The Bill will therefore address an anomaly in the original legislation.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP):** I support the Bill, and I am grateful to the Minister for her explanation, but does she accept that the majority of charities, especially in my constituency, are small and rely solely for governance on volunteers? There has been a reduction in volunteer numbers across the United Kingdom. For many the Bill does not go far enough in promoting equal access to fundraising opportunities for charities that do not rely on staff.

**Jane Ellison:** Perhaps that is something that we can look at in more detail in Committee.

These are important simplifications. Throughout the consultation, we received supportive comments from charities, as demonstrated in the quote I gave earlier. There are always additional asks, and we would all want to be open to ideas about how we can further support

[Jane Ellison]

charities. However, we think that the measures that we have introduced in the Bill are important next steps to make it easier for charities of all sizes.

**Dr Daniel Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): There is a lot of merit in the Bill, which reaches out to ensure that smaller charities benefit from the scheme. Does my hon. Friend recognise that many smaller charities do not even know that the scheme exists, so part of the challenge that we face is communicating with them properly so that they know that the scheme will be a lot less complex and that they can benefit from it? What measures will she put in place to ensure that that happens?

**Jane Ellison:** I have already mentioned HMRC's outreach work, which I will certainly be encouraging. More promotional opportunities are planned, and I know that the Minister for Civil Society will say more about that at the end of the debate. It is a fair point and we want to make it easier, but obviously there are people who just do not know about this and still perceive barriers, so everything we can do to challenge that is welcome. We are extremely keen to hear thoughts from across the House on how we can do that, so we are always listening. I am very happy to put those suggestions to HMRC, and I know that my ministerial colleague will be happy to consider that in his Department as well.

Let me clarify the anomaly and how we are addressing it. The anomaly in the original legislation allows some charities to claim more than others, based only on how they are structured. The Government welcome the supportive and constructive approach adopted by the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church and other religious groups during the recent consultation on the change.

The Bill also considerably relaxes the rules on where charities can receive donations that are still eligible for the gift aid small donations scheme. Currently, the scheme's so-called community buildings rules mean that charities can claim top-up payments only on donations received during charitable activities that take place within the community building. However, we know that many local charities, although based in community buildings, carry out most of their activities in the local community, away from the building itself, which means they are unable to benefit fully from the small donations scheme. The Bill therefore relaxes the rules to allow charities based in community buildings to claim top-up payments on donations received outside the building but within the local community area. Colleagues will be delighted to know that, among the many small, local civil society groups, the scouts and guides, the air and sea cadets and other local uniformed groups, in particular, will benefit significantly from this change and will be able to receive the support they deserve for the vital work they carry out in our communities.

Taken together, this package of reforms has the potential to provide a real boost to many charities, particularly the up to 9,000 new charities that apply for recognition by HMRC each year. Based on provisional estimates, these changes are expected to benefit charities by £15 million a year, a significant increase that underlines the Government's commitment to supporting a greater number

of charities and a greater number of donations. The final figures will be certified by the independent Office for Budget Responsibility as part of this year's autumn statement.

So far I have talked about the changes that will further support our charities. Let me turn briefly to the tax-free childcare aspects of the Bill, which will help us ensure that it is easier for hard-pressed parents to receive the support they need. In the previous Parliament we legislated to introduce tax-free childcare. That will provide up to £2,000 of Government support for childcare costs per child a year, which parents can use with any childcare provider they choose. The idea is that they can simply apply online to open an account for each child, and that for every £8 a parent pays in, we will pay in an additional £2. The system will be trialled later this year and then gradually rolled out to parents from early next year.

During our user testing of the system to date, we have found a couple of minor technical issues that we need to resolve in order to make it as straightforward as possible for parents. The Bill therefore makes two minor technical amendments to ensure that the scheme operates as intended. The first technical change relates to the duty of parents to confirm that they remain eligible to receive tax-free childcare each quarter. The Bill will allow greater flexibility over when parents are asked to make this confirmation. It will mean that once a quarter parents can confirm their eligibility for all their children at the same time, rather than having to do it separately for each child if they registered them at different times.

The second technical change will mean that parents can use a standard online form if they want to query a decision. That will make the process much more straightforward and convenient. We still want to ensure that everyone can ask for a review, so anyone who would struggle to get online will still be able to raise their queries in other ways.

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): Can the Minister confirm that what she has said is that credits will be available for each child, and that there will not be a two-child limit, as is proposed for working families tax credits? Can she compare the regime that will be offered under this Bill, which has shown great consideration to parents, with what would be the case for families on working families tax credits?

**Jane Ellison:** I might have to come back to the hon. Gentleman on the latter point about the comparison, because it is not really within the scope of the Bill. I can confirm that we are proposing only two changes—everything else is unchanged from the original legislation, and we are not proposing that there should be any other changes in the Bill.

As I said at the outset, the changes made through the Bill are relatively minor and technical, but they are important, whether they are making it easier for more of our charities to claim extra funding to support the fantastic work they do up and down the land in our constituencies, or whether they are making sure that hard-working parents can access tax-free childcare in the most simple and efficient way possible when it is introduced. The Small Charitable Donations and Childcare Payments Bill delivers against both those objectives, and I therefore commend it to the House.

4.10 pm

**Rebecca Long Bailey** (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): It is a pleasure to debate opposite the Minister today, as always.

The Bill primarily makes changes to the gift aid small donations scheme and some technical changes to the tax-free childcare scheme. The Opposition are broadly supportive of the specific measures in this nine-clause Bill, but we have a few concerns, which I will briefly outline.

The gift aid small donations scheme was established, as many are probably aware, in 2012 with cross-party support. The idea behind it was that, in situations where it is impractical to get a gift aid declaration in the usual way, such as through collection boxes or church plates, a charity can claim a gift aid-style top-up payment from the Government. A charity can claim 25% on cash donations of £20 or less, up to a yearly total that is now at £8,000.

Since April 2016, a charity has been able to claim £2,000 in a tax year from the Government under the scheme. However, that is subject to a number of qualifying criteria, which must be met if a charity is to access the scheme in the first instance. The Bill removes a number of those qualifying rules to make it easier for smaller charities to access the scheme. I will run through those changes only briefly, as the Minister has already given a fantastic overview of them.

The scheme currently includes a requirement to have been registered as a charity for at least two full tax years—the two-year eligibility rule. The charity must also have made a successful gift aid claim in at least two of the previous four tax years, with no more than two years' gap between claims—the two-in-four-years claims rule. Clause 1 removes those two rules entirely and makes consequential amendments to the Small Charitable Donations Act 2012 and the secondary legislation that provides for the administration of the scheme.

Clause 2 amends the definition of a small payment to include donations via contactless payments, as we have heard. Clauses 3 and 4 widen the community buildings rules. Clause 3 would essentially allow a charity to claim £8,000 for small donations raised anywhere or up to £8,000 for donations collected from each community building it has. In the latter case, donations would include those

“made in person in the local authority area in which the community building is situated”.

Clause 4 would make a series of amendments to the rules for connected charities making claims, where one or more of the charities runs charitable activities in a community building. A group of charities would then be entitled to make a claim of up to £8,000 for small donations made in the local authority area in which each community building is located. Alternatively, it would be able to make a claim of up to £8,000 for small donations made anywhere in the UK.

When the gift aid small donations scheme was implemented, Labour was generally supportive of the initiative, as the Minister is aware, but we raised concerns at the time that it was quite complex and could create barriers for small charities that could be eligible to claim the top-up payment. Indeed, the Opposition spokesperson at the time said:

“The Bill will make a difference to charities and perhaps changes will be made after the three-year review.”—[*Official Report*, 26 November 2012; Vol. 554, c. 110.]

The complexity has since been confirmed by the charity sector in practice, and I am pleased that, in this Bill and the consultation preceding it, the Government have acknowledged that there is a problem. However, I am aware that the charity sector has expressed disappointment that the Government have not gone further, a little of which has been reflected in the interventions made so far. The Charity Finance Group, for instance, has said the changes were a missed opportunity for widespread reform of the scheme and that the Government were “locking in future failure”.

In particular, some charities have been calling for changes to the matching requirement, which stipulates that to make a claim under the small donations scheme the charity needs to receive gift aid donations in the same tax year. The total of eligible donations on which the charity can claim a top-up payment is restricted to an amount equal to 10 times the amount of the net donations on which gift aid is claimed for that year. Charity organisations have made representations arguing that changing the matching requirement would remove a significant barrier, particularly for small charities. Indeed, a survey carried out by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations found that 50% of respondents with an income under £10,000 want the matching requirement to be removed or reduced. Will the Minister take the opportunity when summing up to explain in more detail why the Government have not addressed the charity sector's main concern about the matching requirement?

When discussing eligibility criteria for any kind of Government grant, the issue of fraud must be considered. The Opposition have several concerns about how loosening the eligibility criteria could have an impact on that risk. It is widely known that some charities have been abused in the past, being used as a vehicle to avoid tax and indeed to launder money. In the 1960s and 1970s, there were some high profile cases involving large companies, such as Metal Box and Imperial Tobacco, which used supposed charities to provide education for the children of the UK, but actually spent the money solely to pay the school fees of their directors' children. That may seem a long time ago, but I am trying to make the point that there is always scope for abuse in such schemes. I hope that the Government will look carefully at any potential loopholes. We must make sure that any loosening of the rules for access to Government grants or tax reliefs does not provide a further incentive for tax avoiders, albeit a small minority, to set up a charity.

I will turn briefly to the elements of the Bill relating to tax-free childcare. Clause 5 will make three minor technical amendments to the tax-free childcare scheme. As the explanatory notes to the Bill explain, under the tax-free childcare scheme, parents will receive top-up payments quarterly and will have to reconfirm at the end of each quarter that they still meet the eligibility criteria. This entitlement period is currently three months, but can be varied by no more than one month by secondary legislation. Clause 5 changes that period to two months, which simply allows for the alignment of eligibility periods for additional children. The other minor change is to the way in which applications for a review of a decision by HMRC can be made. The Bill will allow secondary legislation to be introduced to enable such applications to be made digitally.

Although I appreciate that the Bill makes only minor changes to the tax-free childcare scheme, I believe it is within the scope of a Second Reading debate to discuss

[*Rebecca Long Bailey*]

the wider policy background. As the Minister will be all too aware, the Opposition have some concerns about tax-free childcare. In particular, the policy is hugely regressive. For instance, the saving is capped at £2,000 per child, as an additional 20p from the Government on top of every 80p spent by the parent, so to get the maximum benefit people would need to spend £10,000 a year on childcare. That is not an option for many working families, and it is not therefore the most efficient way of providing Government support to cover the cost of childcare.

Families certainly need help with childcare costs, which have soared in the past six years of Tory Government. Parents now spend £1,600 more each year than they did in 2010, according to Labour party analysis. According to new data taken from freedom of information requests, costs in some local areas have risen by more than 200%. Labour has established a childcare taskforce, led by the shadow Secretary of State for Education, to bring forward proposals for a comprehensive system of universal, affordable and good quality childcare.

**James Duddridge:** Quite often in these debates, we hear the House of Commons Library quoted, but very rarely do we hear the words “Labour party research”. In order that we can look at those figures in a little more detail, would she be prepared to put that work and the workings that underlie her assertion in the House of Commons Library, so that we can all probe them and reassure ourselves that they are correct and valid figures?

**Rebecca Long Bailey:** I certainly would. If the hon. Gentleman contacts my office directly, I shall be happy to have a chat or to provide him with details directly so that he can peruse them at his leisure.

I want to point the Minister in the direction of the findings of Labour’s childcare taskforce when they become available. I hope the Government can glean some good ideas from it, because they have a bit of form for borrowing ideas, shall we say, of late. I am pleased that the Chancellor has gleaned some good ideas from the Opposition, especially in respect of investing in our economy. However, I am digressing slightly, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I confirm that the Opposition are broadly supportive of the Bill and the steps within it that will make the gift aid small donations scheme more accessible to smaller charities. That said, we do have some concerns, which I have outlined, and I hope the Minister will address them when he sums up.

4.21 pm

**Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con):** I have to declare an interest, as I am sure will many Members who are present, as a Member of Parliament who has set up a charity. In fact, I have set up two. The fact that, 20 years on, only one still exists shows part of the experience of people who set up charities for good causes, because it is often hard to sustain the funding. The first is a charity that supports people who suffer from substance abuse and it is flourishing, but with the second, which was set up to support the victims of domestic violence, I found it hard to continue to secure funds. That is the nature of charitable work and it will

not stop any of us from setting up new charities. Hopefully, the Bill will encourage more of us and our constituents to take such opportunities.

Speaking on behalf of the Church of England, I welcome the Small Charitable Donations and Childcare Payments Bill because it contains important provisions to ensure that gift aid donations are effective and benefit as many charities as possible. The Lloyds Bank Foundation and the NCVO, to which the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (*Rebecca Long Bailey*) referred, have found that donation income has been falling for small charities and that the scheme that was put in place in 2013 has not fulfilled the potential for which it was invented. We are here today to improve that situation.

Conversely and encouragingly, parish churches across the country raised a record sum of £953 million in 2013. That is why the Minister referred to the fact that the Church received record levels of gift aid in 2014—the two things go hand in hand. That figure represents a combined increase of £24 million on the previous year, and that happened despite the economic challenges parishioners face in the post-2008 world.

In addition to supporting the work of the Church at parish, diocese and national level, parishes continue to give more than £46 million to other organisations working around the world, from food banks and local children’s charities to international aid appeals—the range is huge. Contrary to the general trend of reducing donations to small charities, church congregations have clearly been giving sacrificially. I am sure that they would give more still if we made it easier, simpler and more compelling to do so. That is what I believe the Bill will achieve.

The changes the Government are proposing should produce a simpler and more equitable system. Some churches and charities found the previous system complex. Technically, they were eligible to claim up to £8,000 for donations received during charitable activities and to use the so-called top-up elements for donations collected in home communions and wall safes, but not those collected in services.

It is clear just from my trying to explain it to Members that that is quite a complex distinction, and it proved difficult for record keeping. I am sure all of us have had the experience, during our constituency duties, of sitting in a civic service, conscientiously filling out the little envelope in the pew in front of us—of course while paying absolute attention to the sermon being preached. Every time I have done that, I have thought to myself that I do not envy the church treasurer’s task in trying to decipher my writing. I cannot help but feel that the innovative suggestions of my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (*James Duddridge*) could be applied to a better way of doing that in future—one feels there just must be a better way.

More than 100 parishes and dioceses responded to a call for evidence from HMRC and the Treasury. The Government have clearly listened to their concerns about the perceived imbalance between the two elements of the original scheme. The greater simplicity of the revised gift aid and small donations scheme should bring greater equity and greater compliance, especially for small churches. I do have a few questions for the Minister, however.

I want to ask about the progression towards contactless payment, provision for which is made in the Bill. How does that sit with the responses that the National Council for Voluntary Organisations received from 340 charities

that showed that cheques were the most favoured method for inclusion, and that more than two thirds of respondents wished cheques to be added to the scheme? Two thirds of charities also wanted one-off online donations to be included. Events give rise to occasions when people want to give a donation on a one-off basis. Will the Minister look at that?

Perversely, only 36% of respondents wanted contactless donations included, yet those are in the Bill. Now, far be it from me to look backwards in time to the way in which things have always been done; we must of course look forwards, and make contactless giving the way of the future, especially so as to embrace the next generation. But we should acknowledge that many older donors are among the most generous. There is no question but that for them the trusty old cheque book is one way of making sure, for their own records, that they know how they are managing their money and where they are giving money. I hope the Minister will be able to reassure me that there will be no demographic discrimination as a result of the Bill.

Our society has a strong tradition of philanthropy, reflecting its Judaeo-Christian origins, in which we are enjoined to help those less fortunate than ourselves. With so many good causes, and challenges facing us every day, surely we should be doing all we can to promote that tradition of digging deep and giving as much as we possibly can to those who need it. We need to make sure that more charities are able to benefit, and I am pleased that the Bill will assist new charities. Hardly a day goes by without the need for a new charity to be born, even perhaps at the hands of a Member of Parliament acting as its midwife. I hope that the Bill will reinforce the tradition—a hallmark of British society—of being willing to give to others in need.

4.28 pm

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I am a fairly new Member of Parliament and was not here when the Small Charitable Donations Act 2012 was passed, so it is interesting to hear some of the history of how the small donations scheme started and how it has got to where it is just now. It was also interesting to hear about some of the changes being made as a result of looking back, three years in, and thinking about how the scheme has worked. I am pleased that the Government have taken on board some of the suggestions charities have made, to ensure that the scheme works as well as possible for those charities using it and for the Government, who have to administer it.

Some of the measures in the Bill are welcome. The SNP welcomes the removal of the eligibility criteria for new charities. That is a sensible way to go—it is sensible to make changes particularly in respect of the two-in-four-year criteria. The inclusion of contactless payment is to be welcomed. There was an interesting comment about text donations. I am not entirely sure how they fit in, but I would be keen for text donations to be included in the small donations part of gift aid and not just in the general part of gift aid, because so many people nowadays give by text message—it is a very easy way for people to give—but do not follow up with a text about their address. I have done the same thing.

I could be wrong, but from my reading of the Library briefing, I understand that the UK Government have the ability to change the matching requirement without

the need for further primary legislation, as introduced in the Small Charitable Donations Act 2012.

Like the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey), we have concerns about the 10:1 ratio. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) mentioned charities that are run solely by volunteers. Some of those charities do not do gift aid because the paperwork is far too cumbersome. Doing general gift aid and gift aid small donations claims paperwork would be doubly cumbersome, particularly for those that do not have staff. Those are among our smallest charities. In some cases, they never get donations of more than £20. They work in our most deprived communities and therefore are most in need of those donations—they get £3 here and there but it is just too complicated for them to jump through the hoops of any of those schemes. They believe that they are unable to deal with the small donations scheme because of the requirement additionally to take part in the matching for the gift aid scheme.

It would therefore be good for the Government to consider the impact on small charities. As was mentioned, for those small charities, it will not involve huge sums of money and people spending thousands of pounds sending their children to private schools. For example, a local organisation in my constituency buys shovels so that people can clean the pavements in the winter time—they are smaller-use pavements that the council does not get to. It receives a very small amount of money, but is most in need of access to those schemes and is being excluded because it does not have the staff and the ability to fill in the paperwork. If the Government could consider that and the matching requirement, it could have an impact on small charities.

**Dr Poulter:** The hon. Lady is making a thoughtful and constructive speech and highlights some of the challenges for smaller charities that are mostly comprised of volunteers, who do not always have the understanding of and expertise in complex legislation when they are in post. That will clearly be the challenge of this and other legislation in the field. In that respect, is she saying—there may be merit if she is—that some of the anti-fraud measures are too restrictive and add complexity in respect of the funding requirements? Given the other anti-fraud measures in charities legislation, is there an argument for scrapping some of those measures altogether?

**Kirsty Blackman:** I would worry about the unintended consequences for anti-fraud legislation—I would not want to scrap those measures for very large charities that deal with large sums of money. We need to consider how very small charities, which cannot defraud the Government out of thousands of pounds in gift aid claims because they get donations of only £500 in total in a whole year—they will not break the bank—will access both the gift aid small donations scheme and the gift aid scheme in general. That is the majority of what I wanted to say on the gift aid small donations scheme.

On tax-free childcare, I cannot declare an interest in having set up a charity. As the parent of a five-year-old and a three-year-old, however, I can declare an interest in the current childcare voucher scheme and I am likely to be a beneficiary of tax-free childcare from next year when it is introduced. The childcare voucher scheme has been useful but limited, so I welcome some of the

[Kirsty Blackman]

changes that will come in through the tax-free childcare scheme. These schemes will be easier to access for parents from less traditional employment backgrounds. That is a positive benefit, as is the uplift in the amount of money they will be able to claim. However, the UK Government's proposals do not go far enough.

The Bill's proposals on flexibility of dates and the ability to make requests digitally are hugely positive. The childcare voucher scheme has sometimes fallen down because of the inability to make some changes digitally. I know parents who have not changed the amount they claim when they needed to because it takes 15 days or so to make a change, and it involves a lot of printing out, posting and so on. The three-month rule is much clearer.

The UK Government's proposals on childcare and inequality are not universal enough. The Scottish Government pledged in their manifesto to almost double the free early learning and childcare to 30 hours a week. Both my children have benefited from the uplift in free childcare and nursery places, and that has been hugely positive. Nursery places are now for three hours and 10 minutes a day. That is a length of time one can do something with, whereas two-and-a-half hours is not. By the time you get home and make a cup of tea, your morning has gone, whereas you can pop out and do a full shop in three hours and 10 minutes. Having those extra few minutes makes the biggest difference. The additional changes will make even more of a difference, with full days for two, three and four-year-olds. It is important that the changes are not just for three and four-year-olds, but some two-year-olds too. The changes mean that some three and four-year-olds will receive free school meals. Primary and one, two and three-year-old children in Scotland already receive free school meals. Again, that is a huge benefit. Again, I declare an interest as someone whose child receives free school meals—they are absolutely brilliant and he loves them. Nursery children will now also receive these meals.

The benefits that families in Scotland receive are universal, not means-tested. There is not a complicated means-testing system to decide which families receive them. There is no requirement for both parents to be working. Children across the board receive the benefits, which benefit both children and families. All children, whatever their demographic or socioeconomic background, are benefiting from high-quality free childcare.

We are also introducing baby boxes, again on a universal basis. They are an import from Finland and they have been hugely successful. The issues with the tax-free childcare scheme relate to it not being universal and not being provided to enough families. Some of the families most in need will not benefit from access to free childcare, particularly if they are going through the process of job seeking or anything like that. They are the ones who would benefit most from free childcare, which would enable them to access appointments, interviews and interview preparation, so the lack of universality is a concern.

We are largely supportive of the specific proposals in the Bill. We have concerns about gift matching and we will likely return to that next week, but I appreciate the opportunity to speak today.

4.39 pm

**James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker; it is great to catch your eye. It has been a while since I spoke from the Back Benches, and I have certainly never before spoken after the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman).

This place is at its best when we can use real-life examples and be a lot more passionate than when we are simply reading from a briefing document. Whether we are talking about the two-and-a-half hours, or however long it takes to make a cup of tea, about charities shovelling snow, which we do not have in Southend—I suspect we do not have the snow, which is something my children would very much like—I share with the hon. Lady some understanding of the credits. My youngest is five, so I greatly sympathise with her. In particular, I thank her for pulling me up and correcting my intervention about whether it was possible under the existing legislation to change the 1:10 ratio, although I would like to return to that in a lot more detail later in my speech.

This is the first time I have spoken from the Back Benches in some time and it is a particular pleasure to do so on the subject of charities. My constituents are an awful lot more interested in charities and what we can do for them in Southend than they are in some of the very good work that I did overseas. Important as that work was, charity begins at home, and in this case it begins in Southend.

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): Does my hon. Friend not agree that there are some tremendous small charities founded in our communities that seek to help communities abroad, whether by helping orphanages or schools? Does he agree that we need to support them as much as our charities at home?

**James Duddridge**: I thank my hon. Friend for pulling me up. In fact, round the corner from my office is a charity that supports people in Uganda, which was within the geographic patch that I was responsible for. It is indeed a Southend charity and it would receive some of the benefits of this legislation.

The Second Church Estates Commissioner, my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman), mentioned the great value of churches in the community. Like perhaps other Members, I want to pepper my speech with examples from my constituency. I want to pay particular credit to the Southend Association of Voluntary Services, which pulls together charities and best practice and allows charities to be given the expertise to utilise the types of benefits that the Government are introducing.

It seems like only a hop, skip and a jump since 2006, when I remember throwing two lever-arch folders into my bin in Portcullis House, in the knowledge that I would never again have to look at charities legislation. I should have kept those two Bills, but I went back and looked at the Charities Act 2006. It was a much bigger Bill, with 78 clauses, rather than the nine clauses we are considering today. There are a lot of things that are still relevant today: the debate about whether schools should be charities, and whether education is in itself a charitable good or whether charities need to go out and prove themselves over and over. A lot has changed. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner) was

speaking from the Opposition Front Bench, and there was also a gentleman from Doncaster North—a junior Cabinet Minister with great, or maybe not so great, things ahead of him—who did a good job on that Bill.

One charities issue that was raised during the passage of the 2006 Act was “chugging”, or charities mugging. I notice that the short title of this short, nine-clause Bill is quite wide, so there are perhaps opportunities to insert a few more clauses, whether proposed by Her Majesty’s official Opposition or enthusiastic young Members of Parliament such as myself, or—[*Laughter.*] It does not say “Pause for laughter” in my notes; that was not a joke. Maybe the Minister will bring forward a review of charities mugging. Even now we get harassed at tube stations, and it is a distraction from the passion for charitable giving that, really, everyone wants to engage in.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr Rob Wilson):** It would probably help my hon. Friend to know that we have reformed the self-regulation of charities. There is a single regulator that is now responsible for those activities, rather than the three that there were before, so we are in a much better position to deal with complaints from the public.

**James Duddridge:** I thank my hon. Friend for that; perhaps he will take this as a complaint from a humble member of the public. If he joined me in trying to get from Fenchurch Street station to Tower Hill in the morning, on the way to the House of Commons, he would see not only the appalling works and the way people are funnelled through, but that the number of charities operating there creates a physical boundary between the two stations, which is a real problem for commuters who otherwise would donate. There are quite a few instances when I have felt less positive about charities, which I am naturally passionate about. I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting the work. Perhaps I could review what has been done while I was looking at other things since 2006, and also perhaps invite him for a cup of coffee on the corner of Fenchurch Street to meet some of my constituents coming into London and encountering the problem.

We are debating the “Small Charitable Donations” Bill, but I am not quite sure what “small” is. A Southend charity set up by Charles Latham and Howard Briggs has looked to provide a capital amount that could be used to provide small loans to micro-opportunities—non-charities but, in some cases, registered charities as well. That developed from a level of £60,000 or £80,000 to become a £1 million or £2 million fund. Even at that level, it considers itself small and has to do all its fund management via the Essex fund. My constituency predecessor, Sir Teddy Taylor, is involved in that fund. It deals with small charities, but I am not sure that it would be helped by the definition of small charities in the Bill.

I am generally a believer in small being beautiful—my wife is very petite—and in relation to charities, the closer the charity stays to an individual cause, the better. The shovels example is, I think, great. Southend’s charity that wants to do something for targeted HIV/AIDS patients within a certain age category is another fabulous example. There are, however, some bigger charities—I am not going to name them; they do good work—that have somewhat lost their way. These are

the ones that we see on the back pages of *The Guardian*, in case any of my hon. Friends sully themselves with such things—they are very good for the fireplace. We can often find a job with such a charity paying significantly more than an MP’s salary—shock, horror. This could be running a charity, or doing a junior, second-tier director job, but, as I say, small is beautiful and the more we can help small charities with the sort of provisions in the Bill, the better. At the moment, there is a flight for merging charities, meaning that charities get much bigger. When they do, I fear they move too far away from their communities. We should encourage those charities to stay small but numerous.

**Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con):** My hon. Friend is making an amusing but serious point. If I am fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr Deputy Speaker, I, too, will mention some charities in my constituency. When it comes to small charities, does my hon. Friend agree that many of them are struggling at the moment, and that the measures in the Bill will give them boost, especially if we help to publicise them?

**James Duddridge:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that some charities are struggling and that there is a constant shift in funding. I remind Southend charities not to believe all the doom and gloom that was talked pre-Brexit. We are still growing strongly; we are the strongest-growing economy in the G7. Rather than squirreling away money for the rainy day that might come, we should encourage people to spend, enjoy and donate some of that money to charities. The Bill’s measures should allow more of such money to come back to charities.

In common with previous speakers, I should like to mention a charity with which I was involved, although I did not start it up. I was appointed by a charity known as the Bulldog Trust, which is based just down the road from here. Its website said that it was a philanthropy organisation. I thought that it was no good for me because I do not have any significant cash to give to it—it would certainly be a £20 donation from me rather than a £20 million donation—but what this charity does is to link up people who have a skill and want to use it within a charitable organisation. That sent me to the Grow Movement, which at that time was a charity operating in Uganda, Rwanda and Malawi.

I mention that example because I am a little unclear about what happens when a charity such as the Grow Movement is UK based but international. Of the trustees, I think I was the only one domiciled in the UK; it has an international virtual board. We need to make sure that small sums, wherever they might come from, can go to such organisations. At one time it was inconceivable that someone would send a few quid from France or the United States, but now, because of the way the internet is set up, when we purchase something we are quite often asked to “click here” to enable an extra £2 to go to a charity. I urge the Minister to review the position and ensure that charities like the Grow Movement can benefit from this and future legislation.

**Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con):** My hon. Friend is making a series of good points about the impact that the Bill could have on small charities. He has mentioned

[Richard Graham]

several in Southend, and I suspect that all of us could mention others in our own constituencies. Is he aware that the inability to reclaim through texts is a possible issue for some of those charities, and does he think that the Minister should reflect on that when winding up the debate? May I also ask what he thinks might be the impact on charities such as scouts groups that sometimes, for example, raise funds using buckets outside supermarkets. Under the new provisions, I think that they will be able to—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman is doing a Whip's job, and I do not mind that, but what we cannot have is the making of speeches rather than interventions. I want to try to help everyone, but I cannot allow myself and the Chamber to be tested by a speech rather than an intervention.

**James Duddridge:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, My hon. Friend suffers from having far too many ideas, and I look forward to—

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. It might help if we heard them over a period rather than all in one go. That would help the hon. Gentleman, and it would help me.

**James Duddridge:** I am sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker. I in no way meant to challenge your ruling, but I did want to deal with the issue of SMS messages. I have absolute confidence in these two excellent Ministers, and I look forward to what will be said today. I shall go into a fair amount of detail about different payment methods later, but at this juncture, suffice it to say that SMS messages are absolutely right for this purpose. As many people have pointed out, people do not necessarily want to give all their details. There is also a demographic issue. My mother-in-law would be very happy to text a £5 donation, but if you ask her to use a smart phone or contactless payments, she thinks you are speaking a different language. It is discriminatory not to enable her to donate by text.

As for the point about the scouting movement—my eldest is going up to the scouts, and they collect—I understand that it will be included, but I hope that the specialists on the Front Bench will clarify the position. Earlier in the debate the changes involving buildings were welcomed. It will still be possible to collect money outside a building rather than inside.

**Jane Ellison** *rose*—

**James Duddridge:** One of our excellent Ministers leaps to her feet.

**Jane Ellison:** I hope I can reassure my hon. Friend and, indeed, the whole House that this is a very positive measure for bob-a-job schemes up and down the country. I am sure that scouts and other uniformed youth groups will welcome it.

**James Duddridge:** The Minister takes me back to my own bob-a-job days in the Scouts. There was the Whip thinking that bob-a-job was something that one did on the Back Benches in order to progress in the future.

**Richard Graham:** Contrary to what has been suggested, Mr Deputy Speaker, this is not a bob-a-job contribution. Does my hon. Friend agree that this could also be incredibly helpful to armed forces cadets and other charities? I am thinking particularly of those who help people to pack items that they have bought in shops. Small amounts of money will often be collected in buckets to go to small causes, and the Minister has just confirmed that that will be covered.

**James Duddridge:** Another point is that charitable giving then begins to be inculcated in young people in particular. Their small donations, to both small and big charities, bring them into the system. Certainly, when I see someone under the age of 16 collecting for poppies or Help for Heroes, I feel that the future of the country is in safe hands.

I intervened on the Minister to ask about deeming all donations tax-free. I am sympathetic to Her Majesty's Opposition's points about complexity. The points have been made well today, just as they were three years ago, as Opposition Front-Bench Members pointed out. The sooner we can get through all this complexity and decide that the basic rate of tax should come back from all moneys en bloc that are given to charities in small amounts, the better. I will say more about how we define "small amounts" later.

I shall turn now to the specifics of the Bill. Clause 2 deals with the meaning of the term "small donation", and subsection (3) refers to the United Kingdom. However, clause 6, which deals with the extent of the Bill, refers to England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Forgive me if I am being stupid, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I think that they amount to the same thing. I would be grateful if that provision could be amended, if only as a tidying-up exercise, or if the difference could be explained.

**Michael Tomlinson:** Before my hon. Friend moves on from the question of cash amounts, does he agree that £20 is a sensible figure? Opting for a larger amount could involve a risk of fraud or misuse, but £20 is still a substantial enough amount to make a significant difference.

**James Duddridge:** I do not know how to say this gently—no, I do not think that that is a sensible amount. I understand what my hon. Friend is saying, but I think that that is an arbitrary amount. Why not choose £10 or £25? Is it because we have £20 notes but not £25 notes? I worry when I see legislation that cites numbers but makes no provision whatever to take account of inflation. Would such an amount be uprated annually? If that is the case, we would end up with odd numbers in subsequent years. Alternatively, should we let things drift and conduct a review every five years, and then put the amount up by 25%? I would like the figure to be set an awful lot higher.

**Michael Tomlinson:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for being patient about this point. Can he not see that the amount could be reviewed over a number of years? In fact, it has been reviewed in that way in the past, and there will doubtless be opportunities for it to be reviewed again in the future, if not by this place, perhaps through an order to be dealt with by the Minister. Would that not be a sensible approach?

**James Duddridge:** To review is sensible, but I think that the process should be carried out periodically to take account of inflation, instead of wasting a Minister's time every three years. I would not want to have to come back here to review this Bill in another three years. We should be much more permissive about what we allow Ministers to do. On my hon. Friend's underlying point, yes there could be fraud, but there can be fraud in any system. Do I think that the good people who are involved in charities would commit fraud for such a small sum of money? I do not.

I have a large number of points that I would like to make. I hope that I will be able to make them in the Public Bill Committee, if I am selected to serve on it in the coming days and weeks.

4.58 pm

**Susan Elan Jones** (Clwyd South) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge). I think it was four years ago that we served on the Committee considering the original Bill, which later put in place the gift aid small donations scheme. I think that the hon. Members for Foyle (Mark Durkan) and for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) were also members of the Committee. At the time, we were all quite enthused about the programme; indeed, we still are. We recognise the importance of giving gift aid-style relief on small donations, especially in a way that will help small charities.

Some real improvements to the Bill have been suggested today. The introduction of contactless payments is good, although I fully agreed with what the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) said about the lack of provision for cheques. I want to dangle a little carrot in front of Government Members by saying that when the original Bill was discussed in Committee, it was discovered that—shock, horror—it was not only £5, £10 and £20 notes that would be eligible for gift aid-style relief, and that even if someone dropped in a few euro notes, they would be eligible as well. If one can have relief for euros and other currencies, there is no reason why it is not possible with cheques. That would be a welcome improvement along with contactless payments and a look at text donations as well. The increase in the upper limit is very welcome, and it shows how this scheme has developed and how it has the potential to help small charities. We need to realise that this Bill is all about helping small charities, because it is those charities and community groups for which this Bill was created.

In the Committee that considered the Charitable Donations Act 2012, we quibbled away at the long-suffering Ministers about the ratio between gift aid eligibility and donations. At the time, in the original draft of the Bill, we were talking about a ratio of 3:1, 4:1 or 5:1. We asked persistently why it was one ratio and not another. The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East just asked why there should be any link at all with gift aid. The survey from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, the Charity Finance Group, the Institute of Fundraising and the Small Charities Coalition sets out much the same view. Even if it was felt that, for reasons of fraud, we needed that link with gift aid, why is the 10:1 ratio on a tablet of stone?

We discovered in that earlier Bill Committee that ratios of 3:1, 4:1 and 5:1 were pretty expendable. Why, if a charity is registered and has about £10 in gift aid, is that not enough in terms of fraud detection? Furthermore,

I am not 100% convinced of the link with fraud. When we had that previous debate, I remember someone raising the issue of the Cup Trust, which was—I will try to put this diplomatically—involved with various fraudulent practices. We innocently asked whether it was registered for gift aid. Well of course it was, which does not suggest that there is much link between fraud and gift aid. If that is something that the Government genuinely believe is a problem, I really cannot see for the life of me why the ratio has to be 10:1; it just does not make sense.

On balance, this is a good Bill. We welcome it, but I urge the Minister, the Government and all members of the Committee to look again at the whole matching requirement, how it is constituted, and why oh why the ratio has to be 10:1.

5.3 pm

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am very pleased to follow the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) who made some very sensible points about euros. I also welcome her positivity about the Bill in general. We have had some fascinating insights into the charities in our constituencies. It is very heartening to hear how interesting and fascinating they are and also what a charitable lot people are on the whole. That must be welcomed.

Like many Members, I have been at the end of the supermarket check-out shaking my bucket. I have helped to pack people's groceries into bags in the hope that they will put some money into my box. I usually put on my environmental hat as well and check that they have a recycled bag. I have often been there supporting charities with my children, my friends and my family, and I know that so many other people in my constituency do that on a regular basis for so many deserving causes. For example, there is the Young Farmers Club, the West Hatch scouts, and village school fundraisers.

The SURE cancer charity in my constituency earns most of its money from small collections such as the bucket collections I have referred to. They are essential. Many of our amateur sports clubs have to collect money in that way. I have collected money with the Blackbrook tennis club, Taunton Vale hockey club and many more besides. Usually small sums of money are collected, but they are so useful. The charities really do rely on such collections.

I applaud the people who go out day in, day out collecting for small charities in my constituency, gathering money to do good work that really needs to be done—often to protect vulnerable people.

**Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is fantastic that the changes in the Bill also include community amateur sports clubs? I know that that will be particularly welcome to groups such as bowls clubs and various other clubs in Wiltshire and up and down the country, which will help us to tackle obesity and champion healthy lifestyles.

**Rebecca Pow:** I welcome that intervention. I will come on to sports clubs. I know that my hon. Friend is sporty herself, as am I. Everything that we can do to help sporting charities is welcome. She raises an important point about the connection between health and wellbeing. Anything that we can do to help such clubs should be encouraged, and the Bill will definitely help.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Rebecca Pow:** Of course I will give way to another hon. Friend from the west country.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** While my hon. Friend is on about sport, may the Bill not help Somerset win the county championship for the first time ever, after coming second this year? Would that not be a real triumph after Yorkshire and Middlesex stitched it up?

**Rebecca Pow:** I know that my hon. Friend was down at the county ground not very long ago, because I had so many comments about the fact that he had been there. I am sorry that I missed him, because I was down there every day of that championship. I am not sure that Somerset is allowed to collect on the streets with buckets, but smaller sporting charities would be very much helped by the new enabling measures in the Bill.

**Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): This is not just about fantastic sporting charities. I am sure that colleagues will be able to list the events going on in their constituencies, because this also concerns sporting activities. People put a great deal of effort and determination into training perhaps for a marathon, and that is a wonderful source of fundraising for local causes.

**Rebecca Pow:** I agree with my hon. Friend. I will come on to a bit in my speech about that because I want to mention a number of these issues. My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

**Richard Graham:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Rebecca Pow:** Would my hon. Friend mind if I ploughed on just for a minute? I will lose my train of thought. Would he intervene in a minute?

Whenever I visit charities in my constituency, which I do as often as I can, I ask what I can do in Westminster to help them. So often they say that they want access to gift aid. One of their biggest issues is raising funds and then being able to get the right benefits and aids. Another colleague said that often small charities do not even know what they can or cannot claim. So anything that can be done to ease that will help, and I think the Bill will do so.

Whatever we can do to help small charities retain the money that they have worked so hard to collect would be beneficial. If it could be increased with top-ups and things, that would be welcome. While the current system has many good points, it has been criticised for being complex and inaccessible especially for small and newer charities. That is why I am pleased that the Government are listening. I was pleased to hear the Minister speaking earlier, and I am sure that the Bill will help to make life simpler in terms of funds collected and the submissions that small charities are required to make for gift aid.

I welcome the proposed simplifications through this gift aid small donations scheme. I was also pleased that so many stakeholders took part in the consultation and so many charities fed in, and that the Government are listening and taking on board lots of their views. The scheme

will definitely help those charities for which it is not practical to obtain an individual gift aid declaration for every small donation made. That is where we come back to bucket collections, the bob-a-job collections that my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) referred to, and even sponsored events. I am sure that Mr Deputy Speaker has done some himself, such as a sponsored bike ride. I did a mini-triathlon to raise money for charity. People give their support, but only with small amounts, and gathering all the intimate details that charities are required to input is often too much for them, so they do not go to the effort of claiming back what they could claim and get the benefit. We would definitely like to help all those charities, and the Bill will do so.

I welcome the reforms that will allow charities to benefit from the top-up system that has been worked into the Bill, so I will now come on to community amateur sports clubs. I am pleased that the Minister particularly addressed areas for them, especially the point that they had to be in one building to raise their money. I am pleased that that slightly ludicrous little piece of the legislation will be relaxed.

I am an ardent advocate of the benefit of sport in our communities, cricket included. We have marvellous cricket facilities in Somerset, many of which operate from the county town, Taunton, working from entry level at school right the way up to the county ground, where my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) often goes. I particularly work with a number of sporting charities. I have helped to bring forward a water sports centre, which is being completed on the river in Taunton, with the charity, COACH—the Centre for Outdoor Activity and Community Hub. My hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) mentioned bowling. I have helped to attract funds for the bowling club in Wellington, and it is now winning major trophies right across the region. It was in the *Wellington Weekly News* only this week. Amateur sporting charities, such as Taunton football club, all need to raise funds, and the small change that we will make in relation to the venues where money is raised will really help them to retain more of their own money and make more of it. I welcome all that.

I will make a small nod to the eminently sensible provisions on childcare payments. A simple extension of the timescale for parents to input their children's details to claim the correct tax free childcare bonus will make life much easier for many families, particularly those families whose circumstances have changed. For example, when two families join together, which happens quite frequently now, and people end up with their own children and some stepchildren, opening and expanding the window for people to input all the data will help all the children under one roof. I very much welcome that and hope that it will all make progress.

All the things in the Bill are really helpful. They will help individual families with childcare payments, and very many charities, particularly smaller and newer ones, will be helped by the new provisions on donations. The Bill certainly shows that the Government are listening. They have listened to all those stakeholders and charities. That is what we should be doing in government—it is absolutely right—as well as working towards making life run much more smoothly, particularly for those who really need it.

5.13 pm

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), who rightly says that there are practical and positive measures in the Bill that we should welcome. However, I believe that the Bill could have gone forward and been even more practical and positive and offered even more flexibility.

As the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) said earlier, she and I served on the Committee that considered the Small Charitable Donations Bill back in 2012. Indeed, the point about euros emerged as a reassurance to me, as I represent a border constituency in Northern Ireland. I pointed out that when a number of charities in my constituency raise money, whether with bucket collections or other ways such as church events, they find euros in their collections, and I asked whether they would have to sift them out or whether they could honestly declare them. In fairness, the then Minister, now the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, came forward with the clarification that that money could certainly all be counted.

The hon. Member for Clwyd South is right to say in that context that, when the 2012 Bill was being considered, the refusal to allow donations in the form of cheques or contactless or various other foreseeable electronic payments was odd. I wonder whether even now the Minister will consider allowing, in Committee, an enabling clause giving Ministers the power to permit payment by cheques and so on in future, so that these measures would not have to come back before the House. As the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) said, he made that point in the Committee on the 2012 Bill.

In the Small Charitable Donations Act 2012, the Treasury was given significant powers to change things by order; it was given the power to change the connected charities amount, the community buildings amount, the remaining amount, and the capped total. It could amend the gift aid matching rule, abolish it, and reinstate it, if previously abolished, with or without amendment; it could even, by order, amend the meaning of “eligible charity”, and the limit on the value of individual donations. Sensibly, the Treasury was given the power to make significant working changes to the scheme by order. It seems strange that in this further bit of primary legislation there is not similar flexibility around, say, the use of cheques. That flexibility could be introduced in Committee.

I had the unusual experience of arriving in the 2012 Bill Committee to find that the Government had tabled an amendment to take up a point that I made on Second Reading. The penalty provisions stipulated that a charity that had suffered a penalty from HMRC would be barred from the scheme for a period, but there was no provision for an appeal against or possible overturn of the penalty, and where the penalty had been imposed but subsequently reviewed and set aside there was no provision to say that the period of barring would no longer apply. Sensibly, the Government listened. That proved to me that sometimes, when it comes to small Bills, the Government have a flexible ear and will listen to points made on Second Reading; in the case of small Bills, they can handily concede points, and indeed take the initiative and leapfrog Committee Members in making sensible amendments.

The Minister was right to say that some sensible working adjustments are made in the Bill, but they are

all ones that were advocated by members of the 2012 Public Bill Committee—not just by members of the Opposition, or by me, but in many cases by Conservative members of the Committee. Members were teasing out the implications with practical ideas. Many of us were concerned that the Small Charitable Donations Bill was in danger of tilting into becoming the petty conditions Bill, given the number of different traditions, trips and traps that people could get into. I still wonder whether the Government could be a bit more generous or expansive in how they take the Bill forward. After all, it is clear that the whole matching requirement issue still causes charities problems. We should listen to charities as we take the Bill forward.

**Susan Elan Jones:** Does my hon. Friend remember that among the examples of charities that the small charitable donations scheme could help were small ones such as talking newspapers? We were very aware that if their admin staff were overburdened, they might not be able to claim what they should rightly claim.

**Mark Durkan:** Yes, the hon. Lady is exactly right. Members in all parts of the Committee raised many pertinent, practical examples of charities that we would want to be ready beneficiaries of the scheme, but that would be prohibited from taking part in it.

At the time, perhaps because this was a first move in this direction, the Minister took a narrow and highly precautionary approach, but smaller charities have not claimed the amount of small donations relief under the 2012 Act that the then Chancellor said they would; when he announced the scheme, he said that it would be £100 million. The indications to date are £25 million a year with an uplift of perhaps £15 million, going by what the Minister has said about the Bill, but we are still talking about something well short of what was promised to the charitable sector when the concept was introduced. Our challenge is how to get closer to the £100 million. We have to look at the things that are standing in the way. I acknowledge that the Government, in the consultation and in the Bill, have moved to address some of the difficulties on community buildings, but there are still some issues on the question of connected charities. The matching requirement, however, is still there, and I wonder whether the Minister can tell us whether or not are examples of fraud in the gift aid small donations scheme in the past three years. Are there any indications of whether matching requirements would have prevented fraud, or simply prevented access to the scheme?

We want to know why the ministerial team are content with arriving at an amount that is only half the amount of support originally intended—in fact, it is less than half. I therefore hope that Ministers are prepared to continue to listen to hon. Members who serve on the Bill Committee and to the charitable sector so that we can improve the scheme and make it much more effective for all the causes and examples that hon. Members have discussed, including that and so on.

As well as amending the Small Charitable Donations Act 2012 the Bill amends the Childcare Payments Act 2014. In an intervention I said that the Minister rightly presented the childcare payments scheme under the Bill—with the original Act as the source—as applying to each child. However, the Government are inconsistent, because the childcare element of universal credit is

[Mark Durkan]

restricted to two children. Working tax credit rules apply to two children, but childcare payments under the 2014 Act are not restricted to two children. What is the reason for the Government's cognitive dissonance? Why are there different rules on support for different families? The Minister explained how the provisions in the Bill ensure that changes can be met more responsibly by the system, but will Ministers consider the difference in experience and bureaucratic contact for parents accessing childcare payments under the Bill and the original Act and for parents who apply for the childcare element of universal credit? Under the childcare payments scheme, it is a bankable allowance, but it is not a bankable allowance for people on universal credit. They have to spend the money first, then claim it back within a short time. There is an unfair difference in treatment. Some parents are treated more generously and supportively in the way in which the system relates to them and engages with them than others, which is wrong. As legislators, we should try to ensure a more consistent approach to the principle of childcare in all the important and positive forms that it takes.

That is not to say that the childcare payments provided for are not positive and practical; I just wish that the universal credit childcare element could be made more comparable and, similarly, that if the Government see fit not to visit a two-child rule on the childcare payments system, they will abandon the idea of having such a rule for working family tax credit as well.

5.25 pm

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan). He and I often have many common concerns at heart, and I echo a number of the points he has made today. I hope that Ministers will note that similar points are being made across the House today. Before saying anything more, I will follow the proper example set by my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) by declaring my interests. Not only am I patron of a number of charities, but I am still the senior partner in a law firm that for over 25 years has had charity law as one of its specialisms.

Like many other Members who have spoken, I served on the Committee that scrutinised the Small Charitable Donations Bill in 2012, so I welcome the amendments set out in this Bill to make the donations scheme more effective and flexible for small charities, particularly new charities, and also to make it simpler. One reason I particularly welcome anything that makes running a charity simpler is that over the years I have had many clients in my law firm who have a brilliant idea for setting up a small charity but find it increasingly difficult to recruit people as officers, and particularly for the role of treasurer. I very much welcome anything that makes being the treasurer of a small charity easier.

The term "small charities" is something of a misnomer, because often it is those charities that pack the biggest punches. For example, there are a number of charities in my constituency who work to improve the local environment, and the extent of their contribution to local people's enjoyment of that environment is staggering. I think of the Sandbach Woodland and Wildlife Group and Dane Valley Woods. Those two groups alone have

improved acres of local countryside, public footpaths and areas for local people to enjoy. I also think of the friends of a number of railway stations in my constituency, such as Alsager station, Congleton station, Sandbach station and Goostrey station. Those groups are often the unsung heroes of our communities, yet they add so much to the enjoyment of our environment.

I also welcome the inclusion of community amateur sports clubs in the Bill, because their contribution to our communities can be substantial. They of course contribute to health and wellbeing, but they also strengthen community ties and foster a sense of belonging, particularly for children. I want to pay tribute to three clubs in my constituency, Triton hockey club, AFC Alsager and Alsager cricket club. They have been at the forefront of a successful campaign over several years to ensure that the former site of Manchester Metropolitan University in Alsager is reopened for use as a community sports facility. It is their dedication over many years, combined with their understanding of the community's sporting needs and their contribution to encouraging literally thousands of young people to take up sport that has ensured the recent success of that campaign. I pay particular tribute to those groups this evening.

I welcome the Bill because, according to the Government's figures, the take-up of the scheme we debated and then brought forward under the Small Charitable Donations Act in 2012 has been regrettably low—far beneath hoped-for levels, as has been said. In 2014-15, the Government budgeted £84 million for the scheme, but the actual spend was £21 million, which was a clear shortfall. The number of charities accessing the scheme was just under 20,000, far fewer than the 65,000 we would have expected if the £84 million spend had been achieved. I therefore very much welcome the Bill's intention to increase take-up by simplifying the eligibility criteria, but I ask the Government to ensure that there is some real and effective promotion of the scheme once the Bill is passed, as I hope it will be.

I echo other Members' requests that the Government look again at simply dropping the matching criteria—again, a most effective method of increasing uptake. As has been said, the eligibility requirements could be simplified to make them the same as those for gift aid, so that if the charity knows it is eligible for gift aid, it will be eligible to gain access to funds from the scheme. I understand that there have been concerns about fraud, which the Minister has expressed, but, again, I concur with other Members and ask what evidence there is of that. I am told by charities that there is actually little, if any, evidence that fraud has been a problem with the scheme or that the matching criteria have been effective at highlighting those intent on making fraudulent claims. Will Ministers review the issue, and provide any evidence in Committee? Alternatively, will they look at whether fraud is in reality a barrier to consideration of dropping the matching criteria altogether?

I draw the attention of the House to a joint survey by a number of groups. The Association of Independent Museums, the Charity Finance Group, the Institute of Fundraising, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Small Charities Coalition surveyed more than 340 charities across a range of sizes, from those with fewer than 10 employees to those with more than 500. They found that the take-up of the current scheme in percentage terms was, as we would expect,

and as Members have indicated, far higher in very large organisations than in very small ones; in fact, it was 71% in large organisations, compared with 41% in smaller ones. While the sample was small, there is a clear indication that organisations at the smaller end of the spectrum use the scheme less frequently, so anything that can be done to assist them to access it is to be welcomed.

The charities were also polled on accessing information about the scheme. Some 22% of medium-sized organisations said they found it difficult to access information, and 26% of small organisations found it difficult or very difficult, but 41% of very small charities found it difficult or very difficult. That goes to show how important it is that the Government focus on the promotion of the scheme. Many survey respondents were still unaware of the scheme or that they could be eligible. It would be a far simpler message to charities if we simply said, “If you are registered for gift aid, you are eligible for the scheme.”

Let me touch on the issue of cheques. I concur with other Members and ask that the Government consider making small cheque donations, as well as contactless payments and cash donations, eligible for the scheme. I welcome the contactless payment proposal, but many donors—particularly elderly ones—still write cheques for £10 or £20. The logic behind allowing cheques to be included in the scheme is very similar to that for allowing contactless or small cash donations—namely, that it can be administratively burdensome to get declarations from cheque donors, particularly if those donations are irregular and small charities do not have the resources to chase up donors. Making such a change will arguably help small charities even more than allowing contactless payments to be included, because contactless technology is expensive. Small and local charities, perhaps set up by someone who has retired, may not possess the technical capability to process contactless payments, while they might very well receive a good number of cheques.

In conclusion, I suspect that most of my points are not novel—many have been raised this evening, or were raised with the Government during their consultation—but I hope it will be helpful for the House, and indeed for the thousands of charities in the country, if further reflection on such issues is conducted as the Bill travels through the House.

5.35 pm

**David Warburton** (Somerton and Frome) (Con): It is a pleasure to support a Bill that, although pretty straightforward and simple in outlook, as we have heard, is likely to have a significant impact on the small groups and charities that need it most.

In my constituency in Somerset, the uniquely spectacular levels of community spirit and the astonishing energy with which people are keen to help those around them mean that there is a huge number of such smaller charities, all inevitably fighting for survival. For them, not only every penny, but every second counts. Their time is also very precious. They do not have the capability or reach to spend hours sifting through accounts to satisfy various complex financial rules and regulations; they just want to get on with the job.

The simplification and easing of access to the benefits of the gift aid small donation scheme, as well as the more sensitive approach of the tax-free childcare scheme,

are really to be welcomed—it sounds as though they are—on both sides of the House. I am pleased that the extensive consultation that, as I understand it, went into putting the Bill together has resulted in a broadly positive reaction to the proposed changes from charities.

Of course, any step in any direction is only one step, and there may well be subsequent steps to take—there may well be more to add to the process—but we are taking a firm leap in the right direction for innumerable small organisations, and certainly for those fabulous and uniquely special organisations in my constituency.

The scrapping of the two-year rule and of the two-in-four requirement will make the environment far simpler and fairer for those charities—and not just for them, but of course for their workers and volunteers. It is worth mentioning that charitable giving, especially at this level, is often a very spontaneous gesture, and such spontaneity ought to be reflected in the gift aid scheme. That is exactly what the Bill sets out to achieve.

HMRC’s financial assessment of the reform suggests that 71,000 charities will benefit, which is a huge number, and that its receipts will decrease by some £15 million a year. We all of course feel great sadness for HMRC’s loss, but it is very nice when a decrease in revenues is used as a measure of success. That is not perhaps a principle to be applied more widely.

We have a Bill that makes the original intentions of the gift aid small donation scheme—its first aspirations—far closer to being realised. It is the Government’s duty to narrow the gap between what I have described as the astonishing and spectacular altruism up and down the country, but most particularly in Somerset, and the way in which that impulse is realised and felt by the charities and organisations in most need. The Bill will certainly go some way towards achieving that, and I therefore warmly welcome it.

5.39 pm

**Mr Ranil Jayawardena** (North East Hampshire) (Con): It gives me great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (David Warburton), who made important points on how charities will be supported by the Bill. I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) for saying that it is not just charities but churches that need our support, because churches, like charities, support communities across this country. It is good to support those who support others, and that is why I rise in support of the Bill.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) said to the British people in his Budget at the start of the last Parliament,

“Do the right thing for a charity, and the Government will do the right thing for you. It is a big help for the big society.”—[*Official Report*, 23 March 2011; Vol. 525, c. 962.]

I shall speak about how the Government could do even more to join up policy and deliver those objectives.

First, I should declare an interest as a member of the parochial church council in my village. I spoke to the gift aid administrator of the PCC, who said that the changes that the Government have introduced are most welcome and that things are working very well. That said, there is always more that can be done. These initiatives demonstrate that the Government are listening and that they want to help smaller organisations that

[*Mr Ranil Jayawardena*]

often raise money through loose change. It is therefore important that the Bill makes progress and is implemented. The current rules do not always deliver the policy intention; the Bill will certainly help to redress the balance for those charities that get lower allowances than others.

I should declare another interest, given my former employment at Lloyds Bank, because small donations by contactless payment will qualify from April 2017. Such modern fundraising is most welcome. That said, I cannot quite see sidesmen going up the aisle in my local church with contactless card machines or presenting such machines at the altar.

It is therefore important that the Government support cheques and do not repeal or adversely amend the Bills of Exchange Act 1882, as amended by subsequent Acts such as the Cheques Act 1957. It is important that cheques are retained as a method of payment. The Payments Council—the institution set up by the banks—must be under no illusion about the Government’s intention to protect cheques as a way for people to give money. We should surely be in favour of people giving money to charities, churches and worthy organisations however they wish to do so. It is an honourable intention and something that the Government should support.

Turning to tax-free childcare, it is good that we are making childcare more affordable. Tax-free childcare was legislated for in the Childcare Payments Act 2014 in the last Parliament. It is good that we are enabling people who wish to work or to take up more work to do so. That said, I have two suggestions for the Government. The first relates to the marriage allowance, which the previous Government also introduced. Just as the Government top up £2 for every £8 in this initiative, I suggest that they should do more to support families where, out of choice or necessity, only one spouse wants to work or can work, or where one spouse is not in work for any other reason.

Quality childcare is important, but so is strengthening the family, whether a parent is working or not. A comprehensive review of academic research on the impact of divorce and separation shows that the children of separated parents are at increased risk of growing up in households with lower incomes, living in poorer housing, having behavioural problems, performing less well in schools, gaining fewer qualifications, needing more medical treatment—the list goes on. That is why it is important that quality childcare and the strengthening of families remain at the heart of what the Government are trying to achieve.

I believe that the marriage allowance that was introduced in the last Parliament, alongside tax-free childcare, exemplifies the principles of social justice, bringing families into the heart of Government and building a country that works for everyone.

As the former Prime Minister said:

“Families are the bedrock of our society. It’s families who raise our children, look after our old and keep our country going.”

I would therefore suggest that there is room to improve the marriage allowance. It should go further. After all, married couples do not share only 10% of their lives and responsibilities, but 100%. They share 100% of the work behind caring and providing for their children. They share 100% of their financial responsibilities, and

those responsibilities can be strained if only one person can work. Tax-free childcare is most welcome, but we should make sure that we do not discriminate against those households where only one person is in work. I fully support more childcare through the tax system, but I urge the Government, either in this Bill or in future legislation, to consider extending the marriage allowance so that families can better look after themselves and their children.

As families need to pay for childcare, I urge the Government to look at an area of childcare policy allied to this one—the 30 hours of free nursery care. Whether paid or free, nursery care must be of the highest quality. My concern is that, whether or not people take advantage of the tax-free childcare available, the national average cost intended for the 30 hours of free childcare is less than £5 an hour. That is not sufficient in rural areas with small nurseries, given the high cost of rent and so on.

I urge the Government to think about these policies in the round. The intentions are all admirable. Should the scheme progress as planned, perhaps the tax-free childcare provision could help to top up the 30 hours. That is not currently allowed. At present, if a nursery’s costs exceed the amount it will get from the taxpayer it has to bear those costs itself. Allowing people who have contributed, and have been supported through the tax system to pay for more childcare, to top up—whether because of a high-cost nursery, because they want more hours, or for some other reason—would be a very helpful initiative. I suggest that introducing further flexibility into the system is the way to go.

That said, I fully support the Bill’s intentions. I look forward to its progress through the House and hope that the Minister will deal with some of the points I have raised in due course.

5.47 pm

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena), who made some excellent points with his customary eloquence. I agree with what he said.

Today’s debate gives me an opportunity to showcase one or two examples of charitable works in Dorset that go particularly well. I will start by mentioning Wimborne rotary club and its yearly Great Santa fun run. Picture, Madam Deputy Speaker, 100 men, women and children running around the local point-to-point course dressed up as Father Christmas the week before Christmas. It sounds fun and of course it is. Gone are the heady days when we aimed to win the competition—merely completing the course is a prize in itself these days. Each year, the run raises several thousand pounds for charities and good causes.

Back in 2013, when the Small Charitable Donations Act came into force, my wife was the parish church treasurer and gift aid administrator, so I know how welcome were the changes that simplified and reduced bureaucracy, as people no longer had to fill out complicated forms to secure gift aid on gifts of £20 or less.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): My hon. Friend is giving an excellent speech. Does he agree that the key point to remember is that churches are not just places of worship on a Sunday but living, breathing parts of the community?

For example, the Living Room initiative at St Mary Magdalene church in my constituency provides tea, coffee and bacon sandwiches for many people who have nowhere else to go.

**Michael Tomlinson:** I could not agree more with my hon. Friend, who makes an excellent point. The Bill will help all groups—not just church groups, but many others—in reclaiming gift aid and slimming down bureaucracy. I warmly welcome the Bill's aim of further reducing bureaucracy by, for example, getting rid of the two-year rule. That will help new charities enormously and will encourage those thinking of setting up charities to do so.

**Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con):** My hon. Friend makes an important point about cutting bureaucracy and time. Often, small charities rely on volunteers, whose time is far better spent out there promoting the charity rather than dealing with paperwork and red tape. The Bill will be very welcome in his constituency, as I am sure he will explain.

**Michael Tomlinson:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's timely intervention and will come to exactly that point in one or two moments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) mentioned sport. As a keen sportsman, I warmly welcome the fact that the policy will be open and available for amateur sports clubs. That is very much a step in the right direction.

I want to mention one charity in my constituency, Waggy Tails Rescue. It does not rival the Minister's Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, but it does play an important part in the constituency of Mid Dorset and North Poole as a dog rescue charity that re-homes dogs in east Dorset and west Hampshire. I had the pleasure of visiting it in the recent past and it explained the difficulties of being a small charity and facing the bureaucracy that can be involved. As my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) mentioned, such charities have few if any professional staff, and therefore the more time they can spend undertaking charitable works rather than carrying out bureaucratic office functions, the better.

One concern or criticism is whether enough awareness has been raised. I suspect that each of us as Members of Parliament can play our own part in raising the profile and awareness of the scheme.

I warmly welcome the childcare payments measure. This has not been mentioned during the debate, but the Bill will open the scheme up to parents who are self-employed. As someone who was self-employed, I often felt left out of tax schemes in the past. The measure will be warmly welcomed by those in the community who are self-employed, but perhaps I could invite the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Mr Wilson), to say how he will raise awareness so that all families who are eligible can take up that excellent scheme.

5.52 pm

**Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con):** It is a pleasure to follow so many fantastic contributions from Members on both sides of the House, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson), who relayed his personal experience.

I am pleased that the Bill seeks to simplify and increase access to the gift aid small donations scheme, which has been criticised by some charity bodies for being too difficult for small charities to access. By scrapping the 2012 requirement that charities must have made successful gift aid claims in at least two of the previous four years, the Bill will enable newly formed charities to access the gift aid scheme. That will be especially helpful for volunteers working for charities when they have less administrative experience and smaller charitable organisations.

I am pleased that broadening the scheme will allow charities to make an additional claim in respect of donations raised as part of charitable activities in community buildings.

**Michelle Donelan:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the scrapping of the two-year rule will prove invaluable for new charities, because it is in their first few years that they either succeed or fail? I am the trustee of a charity in Chippenham called Helping Victims of Domestic Violence. It is flourishing but overcame a number of problems in its first few years and would have benefited invaluablely from the measure.

**Chris Green:** I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. In that sense, charities are a little bit like small businesses. The most challenging time for both is at the beginning.

The Bill gives freedom of movement for charities such as churches, meaning that donations do not necessarily have to be made on the site of the church for the gift aid scheme to apply.

Like many constituencies, mine boasts many charitable organisations that do fantastic work for the community. I should take this opportunity to thank them all for their work. I have always appreciated the various different charities in and around my constituency but it was only when I became a Member of Parliament did I appreciate how much work is done. The Horwich Community Working Together event, which involved 50 different charitable organisations coming together to share ideas and best practice, was such an eye-opener. Westhoughton Community Network is another fantastic organisation that works to bring together different charitable organisations to share that experience and knowledge, and to stand in solidarity with one another.

**Maggie Throup:** When my hon. Friend goes to different events across his constituency, does he find that the same people represent a number of different charities? The Bill will make it easier for them to give even more back to their communities. I come across constituents who are members of the Canal & River Trust as well as the Rotary—it goes on and on. Does he agree that groups of charities in his constituency will benefit in the same way?

**Chris Green:** Absolutely; I agree entirely. I was just thinking about the fantastic work done, often in hazardous conditions, by the Bolton Mountain Rescue Team. It is not just the team itself that raises money. Rotary clubs and other organisations raise a lot of money for them, too. Civic society is so important. We ought not always rely on central or local government to do everything for us. We ought to look to civic society for many important things in our daily lives. By celebrating, recognising and

[Chris Green]

communicating that as widely as possible, we provide the opportunity for more people to hear about such work and get involved in these organisations. Recently, I worked a shift in the local Bolton Hospice Macmillan Cancer Support shop. Little did I realise how much time and effort goes into running the small charity shops on our high streets. A fantastic amount of effort and organisation goes into them. The relationship between the volunteers and professionals is also fantastic. Professionals in charities are able to provide continuity and a political edge.

**Kevin Foster:** My hon. Friend talks about how charities are supported by volunteers and professionals working together. The Torbay Community Development Trust supports a number of small charities by providing an administration hub. The Bill will reduce administration, but there will still be a need for this kind of support so that volunteers can get on with the job that they want to do.

**Chris Green:** I agree entirely. That support network is often vital and it really sustains people. People who run charities can think they are in a uniquely difficult place, so it makes it so much easier if they can share ideas and overcome problems. Colleagues have talked about the importance of communication and awareness. Local media have a key role in communicating these changes. I am looking forward to a “Wearing it Pink” event for breast cancer awareness, which will take place on a week on Friday. I have been assured that there will be a pink buffet with pink marshmallows and pink drinks. I just haven’t decided what to wear. If hon. Members have any ideas, please let me know. I am sure the whole House would like to wish them well.

The Bill will allow charities to claim gift aid from contactless payments of £20 or less. This respects the modern way in which people now pay and donate to charities. The scheme is not a replacement for gift aid itself. It is important that gifts are made in person to retain the local link, as required by the scheme. It is important, too, to recognise that £20 is a reasonable amount of money. It is not excessive. I think that for most people £20 will be seen as a reasonable small donation. Keeping in mind the sense of a country that works for everyone, I am more than happy to support the Bill.

5.59 pm

**Peter Dowd** (Bootle) (Lab): May I begin by thanking all hon. Members who have made such valuable contributions to today’s debate? There were 11, alongside interventions, starting with the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman), who talked about her involvement in the setting up of charities and the challenge she had in worshipping at the same time as filling out an envelope. She also talked about the demographic discrimination in relation to cheques and the need for them to be included in these proposals.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) welcomed the measures, but again raised the plurality of methods of giving and the challenges faced by smaller charities, which these proposals do not assist with. The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) managed to get his wife, his

mother-in-law and a shovel into his speech, which was an achievement, but importantly he also raised the issues of cheques, SMS messages and people’s ability to get their money into the charitable system through a plurality of methods of giving.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) talked about the importance of supporting charities and the improvements that the Bill may bring and, again, raised the question of cheques as a way forward. The hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), who is not in the Chamber, referred to the bucket shaking that she does regularly and applauded those who go out collecting for various charities. She also welcomed the simplification introduced by these proposals.

The hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) also talked about the flexibility of methods of giving that are not in the Bill. He, too, pushed that issue. The hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) also talked about the need for cheques and the ability of older people to participate by giving cheques. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (David Warburton), worshipping in his church, welcomed the simplification and the spontaneity in giving, as did the hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena), who again had a challenge: could the church get a contactless machine up the aisle at the same time as worshipping? That seems to have been a theme today. The hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) talked about the Great Santa fun run raising thousands of pounds and, touching everyone’s heart, the Waggy Tails Rescue dog re-homing charity.

We on the Labour Benches want to thank the charitable sector for all the remarkable work it does for all the communities we represent. Without its valuable role, many services in our communities would simply not exist, so the Opposition are broadly supportive of the content of the Bill. As such, I will keep my closing comments fairly brief. My hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) has already made reference to our concern that loosening the eligibility criteria could increase the risk of fraud. That is important. The fact that a charity would not need to be registered for two years raises the question of whether just about anyone could set up a charity and relatively easily receive £2,000 of taxpayers’ money. That is an important point, so does the Minister have any figures on the amount of fraud that has taken place in the gift aid small donations scheme thus far?

The question of the risk of fraud is extremely important, given the inadequacy of the regulation of charity taxation. We hear about Government funds being mismanaged in elements of the charity sector or about charities being set up merely for the purpose of tax avoidance.

**Kevin Foster:** Does the shadow Minister agree that the call should be to ensure that the appropriate due diligence must be undertaken in new charity registrations, in particular by the Charity Commission, before a charity registration number is issued? I take on board his point about potential fraud via this scheme, but of course any charity being registered can start collecting and we need the public to have that confidence.

**Peter Dowd:** I completely understand that. At the end of the day, the process has to be sufficiently robust to ensure that fraud does not exist.

In that regard, the Charity Commission has identified the estimated levels of abuse, mismanagement, fraud and money laundering in charities today, in a succession of reports entitled “Tackling abuse and mismanagement”. It has identified an increase in the incidence of fraud in relation to charities, and a range of cases in which the commission gave evidence in criminal prosecutions, including against trustees who stole £350,000 from a charity for the relief of the people of Afghanistan, which is shocking. The number of compliance cases brought by the commission almost quadrupled between 2012 and 2013, demonstrating both that the commission needs our support and that we ought not be complacent. In that light, when proposed legislative changes come before the House, it is incumbent on us all to be vigilant. I do not want to rain on the party, but we need to be vigilant.

The problem is not just straightforward crime. There is something worrying in our corporate and tax-avoidance cultures that see charities as a means of making money. In recent years, a prime example is the Cup Trust, about which the Public Accounts Committee produced a damning report in 2013, while there was a judgment in the High Court earlier this year about the same issue. The report summarised:

“Despite its declared charitable aims, it is clear that the Trust was set up as a tax avoidance scheme by people known to be in the business of tax avoidance.”

In the meantime, the Cup Trust has claimed gift aid of £46 million. Regrettably, such tax-avoidance schemes are not isolated. As Professor Alastair Hudson, an expert on these matters, put it:

“There is something about the ‘goodness’ associated with charities, which made people reluctant to investigate or to criticise them.”

It is worth noting that when Northern Rock collapsed in 2007, it came to light for the first time that the bank had created a corporate structure known as “Granite”. This included what has been explained by academic commentators as a discretionary trust involving a small charity in South Shields among its beneficiaries. It appears that the charity was named without its knowledge. Moreover, it appears that the only purpose of this structure was to be “tax-efficient”. The presence of the charity in the structure appears to have been unconnected to working “for the public benefit”. We cannot be complacent about the law on charities, while that sort of activity is considered to be an ordinary part of corporate life. While tax avoidance is legal, it is, as Lord Denning said, “not yet a virtue.”

Of the 164,000 charities in the UK, a large number still do not lodge accounts with the regulators. It is difficult to know whether they are moribund, carrying on work “for the public benefit”, or being used for other less charitable purposes, so to speak. That does charities no good at all—and we need to protect them. Even the highest-profile charities such as Kids Company can be sources of mismanagement and bad financial practice.

Notwithstanding the best intentions of these proposals—namely, the loosening of eligibility criteria—it is vital that sufficient safeguards are in place to prevent fraud when Government funding or tax breaks are provided, as in this case, to the charity sector. I think that sentiment would get cross-party support.

That said, and as I indicated earlier, we are broadly supportive of the measures contained in the Small Charitable Donations and Childcare Payments Bill and we

will not oppose it on Second Reading. We will, however, seek to improve the Bill in Committee next week, and I hope that the Government will support us in that.

6.8 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr Rob Wilson):** I think you will agree, Mr Speaker, that this has been an entertaining and enlightening debate. Speaking as the Minister with responsibility for civil society, it is always encouraging to hear right hon. and hon. Members share examples of the excellent work they see being done by charities throughout the country.

I would like to thank those who spoke in the debate: my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton West (Chris Green), for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena), for Somerton and Frome (David Warburton) and for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson); the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones); my hon. Friends the Members for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) and for Congleton (Fiona Bruce); the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan); my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow). I am also grateful for the Front-Bench contributions. We can be extraordinarily proud of our strong and diverse charity sector. That is why building an environment in which a modern and resilient charity sector can thrive remains a priority for this Government.

The Government already provide significant support to our charity sector. They do so through generous tax reliefs and grants to support good causes, but also through contracts and payments for services. Indeed, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations reports that in 2013-14 the charity sector received £15 billion from Government bodies, with 81% coming from contracts and fees.

The Government have developed the world’s leading social investment market to support charities and social enterprises. We have established Big Society Capital, and are in the process of providing it with £600 million of start-up capital in partnership with the UK’s banks. We have set up the Access Foundation with more than £50 million to allow access to the social investment market, and we have introduced social investment tax relief, which is set to unlock nearly half a billion pounds’ worth of investment over the next five years.

As my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary said in her opening speech, the Government support charities and donors through a substantial package of tax reliefs, worth more than £5 billion last year. Almost £1.8 billion of that comes in the form of business rate relief on charities’ premises. A further £300 million is provided in VAT relief, and £280 million is received from relief on stamp duty land tax. In addition, donors are encouraged to give more to good causes through tax relief on gifts and bequests, and that is worth nearly £1.5 billion every year.

**Kevin Foster:** The Minister mentions the benefit to charities of what are effectively business rate exemptions. Has he had a chance to look into the possible impact on the figure he mentions of the revaluation that has just been announced, which will take effect on 1 April next year?

**Mr Wilson:** I have not had a chance to look into it myself, but I am sure that the Financial Secretary will be happy to speak to my hon. Friend after the debate.

After business rates relief, gift aid is the most highly valued tax relief available to the sector. Since its introduction in 1990, it has grown substantially. It is now worth £1.3 billion a year to the sector, and robust and well-used processes have been developed to facilitate gift aid claims on most forms of donation. That includes text message, online and direct debit donations, and even the donation of goods to charity shops. The gift aid small donations scheme is a natural complement to gift aid, covering circumstances in which it is not feasible to obtain a gift aid declaration. I am particularly proud that the importance of the scheme to the charity sector has been acknowledged, and that the principles of the Bill have been welcomed throughout the House.

The changes in the Bill will make the gift aid small donations scheme significantly more flexible and generous. HMRC's provisional estimates suggest that the reforms could benefit charities by up to £15 million a year, given that the 9,000 new charities that apply for recognition by HMRC each year are now entitled to claim top-up payments much sooner. Those figures will be certified by the Office for Budget Responsibility as part of the autumn statement.

Questions have been asked today about poor take-up and a lack of awareness of the small donations scheme. I can tell the House that 21,300 charities took advantage of the scheme last year, claiming a total of £26 million of Government support. We recognise that that is less than was forecast, but we want as many charities as possible to benefit from the scheme. That is why we are removing a number of the eligibility requirements and relaxing the community building rules, which will make it much simpler and easier for smaller charities to claim.

**Kirsty Blackman:** The changes in the eligibility criteria will make things easier for the charities that already claim, but I think that things will become more difficult for the established charities that have no staff support and must rely on volunteers. I do not think that they will benefit from the changes.

**Mr Wilson:** I think that the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. We constantly keep these matters under review.

As my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary said earlier, an outreach team in the Treasury is working on face-to-face presentations. So far, 650 charities have taken up that opportunity, and it has increased take-up. The feedback from the sector has been extremely positive, but we will continue to work on awareness and take-up with representative bodies in the charity sector. We are also launching a local charities day, which we hope will take place in December. That will provide a good opportunity to profile what local charities are contributing, and to ensure that awareness of the small donations scheme is at the forefront of their minds.

The Bill is a culmination of months of consultation and constructive discussion with the charity sector, and I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the hundreds of charities, umbrella bodies and others that took the time to engage with the Government during the development of the Bill. Our engagement with the sector will not end with the conclusion of this

review, however. A number of charities told us that a lack of understanding can contribute to unclaimed gift aid. We will therefore continue to work closely with charities and sector representatives to raise awareness of both gift aid and the small donations scheme, to maximise the relief claimed on eligible donations.

A number of hon. Members raised the matching rule, and I would like to take the time to go through that in a little more detail. I know that the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) was particularly exercised by the proposed changes. This tax relief rightly benefits charities established and run by honest, committed people who are motivated to do good and who work hard for their beneficiaries. Unfortunately, the generous nature of these tax reliefs also attracts a dishonest minority who seek to exploit charitable status for criminal purposes. HMRC works closely with the Charity Commission for England and Wales, the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator to protect our charity sector from those unscrupulous individuals. In 2015, more than 275 suspicious activity referrals were passed between HMRC and the charity regulators for further investigation.

Unlike gift aid, the gift aid small donations scheme does not provide a full audit trail to allow HMRC to link donations back to a specific named donor. The gift aid small donations scheme is therefore much more vulnerable than gift aid to fraud. That is why it is necessary to operate gift aid alongside the small donations scheme, so that we can best protect the scheme against fraud and exploitation by ensuring that funds are used only to support the important work done by bona fide charities. Public trust in charities has already declined due to poor fundraising practices. We really must ensure that, with the small donations scheme, we do not leave the door open to any future scandal and its consequent impact on public trust and confidence. I am sure that all hon. Members across the House will agree with me on that.

**Kirsty Blackman:** On the point about charities acting fraudulently, does the Minister not see that the charities that could benefit the most from the change to the matching rule are those that earn very small amounts of money, such as £500 or £1,000 a year? That is not going to cost the Treasury a massive amount of money, and there would not be a risk of massive financial fraud.

**Mr Wilson:** I want to stay on the subject of fraud, because we must guard carefully against it in the legislation. It might sound as though we are opening up quite small pockets of money, but when we put them all together, they add up to a much bigger total. The figures relating to the gift aid small donation scheme are not available in isolation. However, it is an unfortunate fact that unscrupulous individuals seek to exploit charitable status for criminal purposes. In May this year, three individuals were jailed for a total of 22 years for defrauding HMRC of £5 million in fictitious gift aid claims. In April this year, three individuals were jailed for a total of 11 years for submitting fraudulent gift aid claims totalling £340,000. In January this year, two individuals were jailed for a total of five years for attempting fraudulently to claim £500,000 in gift aid from HMRC. That is a really important point to make. We must make sure that this small donations scheme is not open to fraudulent activities.

The Bill removes two of the existing eligibility criteria that help HMRC to assess compliance with the wider gift aid scheme—the two-year registration requirement and the gift aid history requirement. The Government initially consulted on relaxing the gift aid history requirement to only one year rather than two. However, after listening to the views of the sector we have taken the decision to remove that requirement entirely, which is a significant simplification for charities. It is therefore necessary to retain the match-funding rule as a means of protecting the integrity of the scheme. As the Financial Secretary said in her opening comments, the scheme was always intended to be linked with the wider gift aid scheme, and the Government made that clear in 2012 and that remains the case today.

It is important to be clear that the gift aid matching requirement is not intended to disadvantage smaller charities. That is why the rule is progressive and is set at a modest ratio of 10:1. This means that a charity needs only to claim gift aid on donations of £10 to gain a small donations scheme allowance of £100. To benefit from the maximum small donations allowance, a charity must collect gift aid donations of just £800. Most would see that as a reasonable position to take. Requiring charities to match a proportion of their small donations with a small amount of gift aid donations incentivises charities to maximise their gift aid claims.

Unlike the small donations scheme, gift aid relief is not capped, relief can be claimed on donations of any size and it is not limited to small cash donations. Furthermore, the process of obtaining a gift aid declaration allows charities to develop ongoing relationships with their donors and can lead to a more resilient funding stream in the longer term. In terms of awareness for charities as well, the Government have funded the small charities fundraising training programme, which is worth more than £100,000. The Government appointed the Foundation for Social Improvement in partnership with the Small Charities Coalition and GlobalGiving UK as training providers to help charities with an annual income of up to £1 million to fundraise much more effectively than they have done in the past.

The hon. Member for Clwyd South asked why the matching ratio was set at 10:1. During the passage of the Bill in 2012, the matching rule was originally set at 1:1, but that was reduced to 10:1 after listening to representatives from the sector.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden asked about gift aid and SMS donations. SMS text giving is a really easy way for donors to give to charity. Donors simply send a short code to a six-digit number to donate a set amount via their phone bill. There is an established process for donors' gift aid SMS donations. Following the initial message, a reply is sent to the donor thanking them for their donations and asking for their name, house number, postcode and confirmation that they are a UK taxpayer. If the donor replies with that information, gift aid is added to the donation.

We also had a question about why cheques were not allowed. The aim of the gift aid small donations scheme is to allow charities and community amateur sports clubs to claim a gift aid style payment on cash donations received in circumstances where it is difficult or impractical to collect donors' details. Giving by cheque means that the donor is giving their details to the charity and the extra amount of information needed to make a gift aid

declaration is therefore relatively small. If it is practical for a donor to write a cheque, it seems reasonable to assume that it is practical for a donor to make a gift aid declaration.

I will briefly cover contactless debit and credit cards, because those donations face the same fundamental problem—a lack of opportunity for charities to stop and engage with their donors. Anyone who has passed through a tube station ticket barrier at rush hour will be able to attest to the speed of contactless technology, allowing individuals to tap their card to pay and walk through without breaking their stride.

I am very grateful to representatives of Cancer Research UK who took the time during the Government's recent consultation to demonstrate a prototype contactless donation terminal currently being piloted by a number of large UK charities. These terminals, which are set to fixed donation amounts, allow individuals to donate quickly and easily in a similar way to donating cash. Extending the small donations scheme to include these types of donation will future-proof the scheme, allowing more charities to benefit as the technology becomes widely available.

We had a fairly lively discussion about the cost of child care and the importance of Government support for hard-working families. I hope that we can all agree that the amendments within the Bill are positive, making it easy for parents to access help with the cost of child care. I also hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends from all parties in the House can join me in welcoming the imminent introduction of tax-free child care. This new scheme will provide much-needed support with child care costs for the first time to working parents who are self-employed as well as those who are employed.

The Bill will make the gift aid small donations scheme more flexible and generous so that it can benefit a greater number of charities and donations. It will also make it easier for parents to access tax free child care. It is good news for civil society and good news for working parents, and I hope that all hon. Members will join me in supporting it. It is a Bill to make life simpler and easier for charities and working parents, and I commend it to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time.*

#### **SMALL CHARITABLE DONATIONS AND CHILDCARE PAYMENTS BILL (PROGRAMME)**

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),*

That the following provisions shall apply to the Small Charitable Donations and Childcare Payments Bill:

#### *Committal*

The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

#### *Proceedings in Public Bill Committee*

Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 18 October 2016.

The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

*Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including  
Third Reading*

Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading.

*Other proceedings*

Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—(*Jane Ellison.*)

*Question agreed to.*

**SMALL CHARITABLE DONATIONS AND  
CHILDCARE PAYMENTS BILL (MONEY)**

*Queen's recommendation signified.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),*

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Small Charitable Donations and Childcare Payments Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—(*Jane Ellison.*)

*Question agreed to.*

**Standing Orders and Select Committees**

6.27 pm

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington):** I beg to move,

That, with effect from 17 October 2016, the following amendments and related provisions be made in respect of Standing Orders:

**A: Select Committees Related to Government Departments**

(1) That Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended in the Table in paragraph (2), in item 1, by leaving out “Innovation and Skills” in each place it occurs and inserting “Energy and Industrial Strategy”.

**B: Related Provisions**

(2) That all proceedings of the House and of its select committees in this Parliament relating to the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee shall be read and have effect as if they had been done in relation to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, including for the purposes of calculating any period under Standing Order No. 122A (Term limits for chairs of select committees).

**C: Liaison Committee**

(3) That the Resolution of the House of 10 September 2015 (Liaison Committee (Membership)) be amended, in paragraph (2), by leaving out “Innovation and Skills” and inserting “Energy and Industrial Strategy”.

**D. European Committees**

(4) That the Table in paragraph (7) of Standing Order No. 119 (European Committees) be amended in respect of European Committee C, by leaving out “Innovation and Skills” and inserting “Energy and Industrial Strategy”.

It might be for the convenience of the House if, in speaking briefly to motion 6, I say a little about the other motions, since they all relate to each other. Motions 6 to 11 seek to change the arrangements in the Standing Orders of the House for Select Committees, following the recent changes to the machinery of government. First, they change the name of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee. Secondly, they remove references in Standing Orders to the Energy and Climate Change Committee. Thirdly, they introduce two new Select Committees for International Trade and on Exiting the European Union. The motions also allocate the Chair of the EU Exit Committee to Labour and the Chair of the International Trade Committee to the Scottish National party.

The changes allow for the usual notice periods applying to elections of Select Committee Chairs to be disappplied, and they enable you, Mr Speaker, to announce a date for an election of Chairs before 20 October, since the House has already been without effective Select Committees in these areas for quite a long time.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**STANDING ORDERS ETC. (MACHINERY OF  
GOVERNMENT CHANGES) (ENERGY AND  
CLIMATE CHANGE)**

*Resolved,*

That, with effect from 17 October 2016, the following amendments and related provisions be made in respect of Standing Orders:

**A: Select Committees Related to Government Departments**

(1) That Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended in the Table in paragraph (2) by leaving out item 6.

**B: Liaison Committee**

(2) That the Resolution of the House of 10 September 2015 (Liaison Committee (Membership)) be amended, in paragraph (2), by leaving out “Energy and Climate Change.”.

**C: European Committees**

(3) That the Table in paragraph (7) of Standing Order No. 119 (European Committees) be amended in respect of European Committee A, by leaving out “Energy and Climate Change”.

**D: Planning: National Policy Statements**

(4) That paragraph (7)(a)(i) of Standing Order No. 145 (Liaison Committee) be amended by leaving out “Energy and Climate Change”.

(5) That paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 152H (Planning: national policy statements) be amended by leaving out “Energy and Climate Change”.—(*Mr Lidington.*)

**STANDING ORDERS ETC. (MACHINERY OF  
GOVERNMENT CHANGES) (EXITING THE  
EUROPEAN UNION)**

*Motion made, and Question proposed,*

That, with effect from 17 October 2016 and for the remainder of this Parliament, the following changes be made to Standing Orders; and that such changes shall cease to have effect upon the lapse or repeal of the temporary Standing Order on the Committee on Exiting the European Union:

**A: Committee on Exiting the European Union**

(1) There shall be a select committee, to be called the Committee on Exiting the European Union, to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Exiting the European Union and related matters falling within the responsibilities of associated public bodies.

(2) The committee shall consist of no more than twenty-one Members including:

(a) the chair; and

(b) no more than twenty other Members who shall be nominated upon a motion made on behalf of the Committee of Selection as set out in Standing Order No. 121 (Nomination of select committees); and the provisions of Standing Order No. 121(2) shall apply to motions for the nomination and discharge of Members to and from the committee as if it were a committee not established under a temporary standing order.

(3) Unless the House otherwise orders, each Member nominated to the committee shall continue to be a member of it for the remainder of the Parliament.

(4) The committee shall have the power to appoint a sub-committee.

(5) The committee and any sub-committee appointed by it shall have the assistance of the Counsel to the Speaker.

(6) The committee and any sub-committee appointed by it shall have power to appoint legal advisers, and specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee’s order of reference.

(7) The committee and any sub-committee appointed by it shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place and to report from time to time the evidence taken before them.

(8) The quorum of the committee shall be six and the quorum of any sub-committee appointed by it shall be three.

(9) The committee shall have power to report from time to time, and any sub-committee appointed by it shall have power to report to the committee from time to time.

**B: Election of Select Committee Chairs**

(10) That Standing Order No. 122B (Election of select committee chairs) be amended in paragraph (1), by inserting, in the appropriate place, “the Committee on Exiting the European Union”.

**C: Liaison Committee**

(11) That the Resolution of the House of 10 September 2015 (Liaison Committee (Membership)) be amended, in paragraph (2), by inserting, in the appropriate place, “Exiting the European Union”.

**D: European Committees**

(12) That Standing Order No. 119 (European Committees) be amended as follows:

(a) in paragraph (4) by inserting after “departments)” the words “, or the Committee on Exiting the European Union”; and

(b) in the Table in paragraph (7), in respect of European Committee B, by inserting, in the appropriate place, “Exiting the European Union”.

**E: European Scrutiny Committee**

(13) That paragraph (12) of Standing Order No. 143 (European Scrutiny Committee) be amended by inserting, in the appropriate place, “the Committee on Exiting the European Union”.

**F: Public Bodies: Draft Orders**

(14) That Standing Order No. 152K (Public bodies: draft orders) be amended as follows:

(a) after sub-paragraph (b) to paragraph (1) to insert

“(c) in respect of a draft order laid by a Minister in the Department for Exiting the European Union, the Committee on Exiting the European Union”; and

(b) in paragraph (2) by inserting after “departments)” the words “, or the Committee on Exiting the European Union”.

**G: Positions for which Additional Salaries are Payable for the  
Purposes of Section 4a(2) of the Parliamentary Standards Act  
2009**

(15) That the Order of the House of 19 March 2013 (Positions for which additional salaries are payable for the purposes of section 4A(2) of the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009) be amended, in paragraph (1)(a), by inserting, in the appropriate place, “the Committee on Exiting the European Union”.—(*Mr Lidington.*)

6.29 pm

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): The Leader of the House has just told us that we have been without Select Committees to oversee international trade and Brexit. As Chair of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, I take some mild exception to that remark, because the Foreign Affairs Committee, along with a number of other Select Committees, has been working on Brexit. Indeed, on 26 April, we produced a unanimous report on the implications of whether the United Kingdom chose to stay or leave the European Union. With a Committee split down the middle, that was a remarkable piece of work, and I hope that it served to give Members a definitively unbiased account to present to their constituents before the referendum. Subsequent to the referendum, we produced a further report, in which we were particularly critical of the Government’s failure—indeed, their instruction to Departments to do no contingency planning at all in the event that the country voted to leave the EU.

I wrote to the Government Chief Whip on 30 August and copied the letter to the Leader of the House, the Clerk of the House and the Clerk of Committees to make clear my unease about the discussion then going on about the formation of a Select Committee to oversee the Department for Exiting the European Union. I would like to take this opportunity to put my concerns on the record, as I suspect that such a Committee is likely to be set up, given the arrangements that have

[Crispin Blunt]

been made. I want what I might call the gypsy's warning about how the Committee might work to be on the record.

Our departure from the EU will generate unprecedented constitutional, political and economic challenges that will affect every Department and almost all aspects of Government policy. Effective scrutiny of this process and the new Department tasked with managing it should require a made-to-measure response from the House. That response should have been to prioritise flexibility, adaptability and cost-effectiveness. I believe that what we are presented with this evening is a mistake in setting up a classic departmental Select Committee to oversee what is in a sense a project that is being organised through a Department of State but that is in the end a time-limited project that will almost certainly come to a conclusion by the end of March 2019.

The Department for Exiting the European Union is unlike any other Department. It will not originate or develop any discrete domestic policy area, and as I said, its task is time-limited. Overseeing it with a discrete Select Committee will ensure that the House is probably about six months behind the Department. No doubt, the Committee will produce reports on the Department after it has ceased to exist. The Department's website says that it will be

"responsible for policy work to support United Kingdom negotiations",

but in practice, existing Departments will have key roles in setting policy aims for when we leave the EU and be involved in the planning of how we achieve them.

The role of the Department for Exiting the European Union will be to oversee those negotiations and to ensure consistency and coherence across the Government. We already have existing Select Committees that have the understanding and expertise needed to hold Departments to account for their progress in preparing for Brexit. Several Committees have already launched Brexit-based inquiries, building on work conducted in advance of the referendum. Scrutiny of the Department's oversight and cross-Government co-ordination role would in these circumstances fall rather more naturally to the Liaison Committee and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. Select Committees could also, of course, work alongside one another, pooling resources and expertise.

There are also the resources available through the European Scrutiny Committee, which could adapt its role to go beyond simply examining European Union documents, but the House will badly need its expertise when examining the future regulatory framework beyond Brexit; that will present significant opportunities for Parliament, given the inevitable lack of clarity on what will apply in advance of the negotiations.

The Foreign Affairs Committee already oversees the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and its budget and programme, but given the very close relationship between the FCO and the people staffing the Department for Exiting the European Union, there is no reason why the Foreign Affairs Committee could not also oversee that Department's budget and resources. Indeed, it is almost certain that when the Department for Exiting the European Union ends, most of its people will be reunited with the Department that they came from: the Foreign and

Commonwealth Office. Given the likely impact, in the short and long term, on the FCO, it would make perfect sense for the Foreign Affairs Committee to take this work.

Of course, prior to the referendum, my Committee proved itself to be balanced in its assessment of the United Kingdom's options. Any new Committee that we set up is likely to be highly partisan on the subject of Brexit, and whether this will lend itself to effective scrutiny, rather than conflict with the Government's stated policy on Brexit, is frankly open to doubt. Setting up a special Select Committee with 21 members, rather than the normal 11, with the costs that involves, in terms of staff and member time, also disturbs the balance in the allocation of Committee chairmanships between the parties. I am aware that the resources available to my Committee are likely to be significantly reduced in order to service this new Select Committee.

The fundamental question that the House ought to address is whether the new Committee will improve our scrutiny, or instead duplicate the work of existing Committees, as was suggested by a senior figure at the Institute for Government. The new Committee will impose an extra layer of demands on the already hard-pressed Ministers in the Department for Exiting the European Union and their officials. My view, shared by the European Union Committee in the other place in its first report of this Session, is that the existing structures of the House would serve us best.

As I acknowledged at the beginning of my remarks, I suspect that I am in a significant minority, so I do not intend to press this matter, unless I suddenly find that my arguments have surprisingly convinced a majority of those present. I invite my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to explain to me and the House why the concerns that I have expressed will not come to pass, and how we can ensure that this new Select Committee, despite my concerns, will be able to work in a way that does not bring it into automatic conflict with the Government, rather than being an exercise of oversight, or into conflict with existing Select Committees of the House.

**Mr Speaker:** We are debating this motion separately. If the Leader of the House wants to respond briefly to the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), he is of course welcome to do so.

6.38 pm

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington):** I am grateful. May I first say to my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) that the Government, in bringing forward this motion, have absolutely no intention of in any way denigrating or downplaying the work that he and the members of the Foreign Affairs Committee and other departmental Select Committees have done, or continue to do, on European affairs? Of course, all those departmental Select Committees will continue to have oversight of the European Union responsibilities exercised by the Departments that they shadow. Indeed, scrutiny of those elements of Departments' business has always been an integral part of the responsibility of those Select Committees.

When the Chief Whip and I received the letter from my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate, we considered seriously the proposal that he made. It is true, as he

said, that the Government's intention is that the Department for Exiting the European Union should endure only as long as that work needs to be carried out. In the end, we concluded that there was merit in the long-established principle that each Government Department should have a Select Committee to which Ministers and, through them, the officials in that Department are accountable. I refer my hon. Friend to the wording of the motion, which refers to the Select Committee being responsible for scrutinising

"the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Exiting the European Union".

Given the breadth of policy areas that the new Department covers there would be a lack of clarity and lines of accountability if we tried to spread not just policy but expenditure and the administration of the Department among a number of departmental Select Committees, each having a finger in the European pie.

I would briefly make two more points. First, it remains the case that Select Committees can carry out joint inquiries. I believe that the report delivered to the Liaison Committee in the last Parliament by our former colleague, Lord Beith, advocated changes to Standing Orders that would make the co-option of a small number of members of a Select Committee to another for a particular inquiry easier to organise. Secondly, I understand what my hon. Friend said about the risks of partisanship, but the history of Select Committees shows that they are most effective when they can deliver a consensual report. It will be for the members of the new Select Committee to decide how they conduct their business, but they will go into this work knowing that their reports will carry greater weight both with the Government and with the wider public if they achieve a consensus, as the best Select Committees, including his own, have been able to do in the past.

My hon. Friend mentioned the size of the Select Committee. Yes, it is larger than normal, but that is because we wanted to make sure that for this question of Britain's departure from the European Union all parts of the United Kingdom, including all three devolved parts of the United Kingdom, had proper representation, and that all the main political parties represented in the House have representation on the Committee. I accept that we will not reach complete agreement, but I hope that my hon. Friend at least understands the Government's reasons for introducing the motion. We considered his case carefully, but we stand by the motion.

*Question put and agreed to.*

#### STANDING ORDERS ETC. (MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT CHANGES) (INTERNATIONAL TRADE)

*Resolved,*

That, with effect from 17 October 2016, the following amendments and related provisions be made in respect of Standing Orders:

##### A: Select Committees Related to Government Departments

(1) That Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended in the Table in paragraph (2) as follows—

(a) insert, in the appropriate place, the following item:

"International Trade	Department for International Trade".
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##### B: Liaison Committee

(2) That the Resolution of the House of 10 September 2015 (Liaison Committee (Membership)) be amended, in paragraph (2), by inserting, in the appropriate place, "International Trade".

##### C: European Committees

(3) That the Table in paragraph (7) of Standing Order No. 119 (European Committees) be amended in respect of European Committee B, by inserting, in the appropriate place, "International Trade".—(*Heather Wheeler.*)

#### SELECT COMMITTEES (ALLOCATION OF CHAIRS)

*Resolved,*

That, with effect from 17 October 2016, the allocation of chairs to select committees set out in the Order of the House of 3 June 2015, pursuant to Standing Order No. 122B, be amended as follows:

(a) by leaving out:

"Energy and Climate Change	Scottish National Party"
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(b) by inserting:

Exiting the European Union International Trade	Labour Scottish National Party".— ( <i>Mr Lidington.</i> )
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#### ELECTION OF SELECT COMMITTEE CHAIRS (NOTICE OF ELECTION)

*Resolved,*

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order Nos. 122B(7) and 122C(1), the Speaker may announce a date for an election of chairs of select committees before 20 October 2016 in respect of which the requirement of notice is not met.—(*Mr Lidington.*)

**Mr Speaker:** I will now announce arrangements for electing Chairs for the Select Committees on Culture, Media and Sport, Exiting the European Union, Home Affairs, International Trade, and Science and Technology. Nominations should be submitted in the Table Office by 12 noon on Tuesday 18 October. If a post has more than one candidate the ballot will take place on Wednesday 19 October from 10 am to 1.30 pm in Committee Room 16. Briefing notes with more details about the election will be made available to Members and published on the intranet.

#### PETITIONS

**Mr Speaker:** There are a large number of petitions to be presented, and I hope that it will be of assistance to the House if I set out how we shall proceed. Once the first petition relating to implementation of the 1995 and 2011 Pension Acts has been read to the House, with its prayer, subsequent petitions on the same topic should not be read out in full—not that anybody would wish to do so, of course. Members should give a brief description—I emphasise "brief description"—of the number and location of the petitioners, and state that the petition is "in the same terms." Members presenting more than one petition should of course present them together.

When Barbara Keeley has presented her petitions, she should proceed to the Table and hand her first petition to the Clerk, who will read out the title in the usual way. For subsequent petitions—what a wonderful

[Mr Speaker]

script this is—I will call the Member to present the petition briefly and then the Member should proceed directly to the petitions bag at the back of the Chair. I will call the next Member immediately after the previous Member has finished speaking.

Members who have been in the House for a while might recall that a precedent was set—although it is not obliged in any sense to be repeated—for a half-hour limit on the presentation of petitions—[*Interruption.*] No, not half an hour for each petition. Far be it for me instinctively to want didactically to adopt that approach at this stage. I do not wish to do so and I am quite happy to keep it more open. However, there are a very large number of petitions and it will in no way be acceptable for Members to speak to their petition for even one minute. I am asking colleagues to speak for around 10 seconds so that we can make timely progress. I hope that is clear and that colleagues will wish to co-operate, in the interests of efficiency and of the prospect of reaching the Adjournment debate secured by the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) on police officer safety. To present her petition, I call Barbara Keeley.

#### Implementation of the 1995 and 2011 Pension Acts

6.47 pm

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I am grateful for the chance tonight to present petitions calling for fair transitional arrangements for 1950s-born women affected by changes to the state pension age. That group of women is bearing an unfair burden. When the Pensions Act 2011 was debated, Government Ministers promised transitional arrangements to ease that burden, but those have not materialised, leaving women in my constituency and many others across the UK facing hardship, stress and worry.

I will read out the full text of the petition but, as you have said, Mr Speaker, other Members need not do so. In addition to presenting a petition on behalf of constituents in Worsley and Eccles South, I am presenting petitions from the following constituencies: Ashford; Basildon and Billericay; Basingstoke; Beverley and Holderness; Bexhill and Battle; Birmingham, Hall Green; Birmingham, Perry Barr; Blackley and Broughton; Blackpool North and Cleveleys; Blackpool South; Boston and Skegness; Bosworth; Bournemouth East; Bournemouth West; Brecon and Radnorshire; Brentwood and Ongar; Bridgwater and West Somerset; Broadland; Bury South; Bury St Edmunds; Canterbury; Central Suffolk and North Ipswich; Chichester; Chippenham; Dartford; Daventry; Derbyshire Dales; Dover; Dudley North; Ealing North; East Devon; Exeter; Folkestone and Hythe; Gainsborough; Grantham and Stamford; Gravesham; Great Yarmouth; Halesowen and Rowley Regis; Hastings and Rye; Hemsworth; Hereford and South Herefordshire; High Peak; Huntingdon; Ipswich; Kenilworth and Southam; Lincoln; Louth and Horncastle; Ludlow; Medway; Rutland and Melton; Meon Valley; Mid Dorset and North Poole; Mid Sussex; Monmouth; Newark; Newbury; Newport West; Newton Abbot; North Cornwall; North Devon; North Dorset; North East Derbyshire; North East Hampshire; North Somerset; Plymouth, Moor View; Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport; Poole; Rushcliffe;

Scarborough and Whitby; Sevenoaks; Shrewsbury and Atcham; Somerton and Frome; South East Cornwall; South West Devon; South West Hertfordshire; South West Norfolk; South Ribble; South Staffordshire; South Suffolk; Spelthorne; Stourbridge; Stroud; North Swindon; Taunton Deane; North Thanet; The Cotswolds; The Wrekin; Tiverton and Honiton; Torbay; Torridge and West Devon; Totnes; Truro and Falmouth; West Dorset; Wycombe; Wyre and Preston North; Wyre Forest; and Yeovil.

May I thank all those who have signed this petition across the country, and may I thank the Journal Office for all its work in registering the petitions?

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Worsley and Eccles South,

Declares that as a result of the way in which the 1995 Pension Act and the 2011 Pension Act were implemented, women born in the 1950s (on or after 6 April 1951) have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age; further that hundreds of thousands of women have had significant changes imposed on them with little or no personal notice; further that implementation took place faster than promised; further that this gave no time to make alternative pension plans; and further that retirement plans have been shattered with devastating consequences.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to make fair transitional arrangements for all women born in the 1950s (on or after 6 April 1951) who have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P001709]

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): I rise to present a petition on behalf of 485 residents of Delyn constituency, in north Wales, in the same terms as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South. I have had nothing but support for the petition and for justice for the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign.

*The Petition of the residents of Delyn.*

[P001710]

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of North Ayrshire and Arran in the same terms. I present today 2,534 signatures on behalf of my constituents, who are deeply concerned about this social justice issue and wish to make their voices heard.

*The Petition of the residents of North Ayrshire and Arran.*

[P001711]

**Lisa Nandy** (Wigan) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of hundreds of concerned residents of Wigan in the same terms as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of the residents of Wigan.*

[P001712]

**Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): I rise to present this petition on behalf of 350 of my constituents in Lewes in the same terms as that presented by the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of the residents of Lewes.*

[P001713]

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of many hundreds of residents of Scunthorpe constituency in the same terms as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of the residents of Scunthorpe.*

[P001715]

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): I rise to present this petition in the same terms on behalf of the constituents of Inverclyde. It received 460 signatures.

*The Petition of the residents of Inverclyde.*

[P001716]

**Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of residents of Cardiff Central in the same terms as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South. In addition, I am presenting a petition from the constituency of Wansbeck.

*The Petition of the residents of Cardiff Central.*

[P001714]

*The Petition of residents of Wansbeck.*

[P001942]

**Dr Paul Monaghan** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (SNP): I rise to present this petition containing 2,156 signatures on behalf of the residents of Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of the residents of Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross.*

[P001717]

**Corri Wilson** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of the residents of Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock.*

[P001718]

**Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): I rise to present 647 signatures on behalf of the residents of Berwick-upon-Tweed and Hexham constituencies in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of the residents of Berwick-upon-Tweed.*

[P001719]

*The Petition of the residents of Hexham.*

[P001943]

**Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of the constituency of Stroud in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of the residents of Stroud.*

[P001720]

**John Mc Nally** (Falkirk) (SNP): I rise to present this petition on behalf of 276 residents of Falkirk in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of the residents of Falkirk.*

[P001722]

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of more than 400 residents of the constituency of Stretford and Urmston in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The petition of residents of Stretford and Urmston.*

[P001721]

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Argyll and Bute in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The petition of residents of Helensburgh.*

[P001730]

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I rise to present a petition of 4,122 of my constituents in Kingston upon Hull North in the same terms as that presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South. I also present a petition on behalf of the constituency of Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford.

*The petition of residents of Hull North.*

[P001727]

*The petition of residents of Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford.*

[P001825]

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Linlithgow and East Falkirk in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The petition of residents of Linlithgow and Falkirk East.*

[P001729]

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I rise to present a petition in the same terms on behalf of 565 of my Rutherglen and Hamilton West constituents, who are rightly disgusted by this injustice and are calling for fair transitional arrangements to be put in place by the Government.

*The petition of residents of Rutherglen and Hamilton West.*

[P001726]

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Heywood and Middleton in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The petition of residents of Heywood and Middleton Constituency.*

[P001728]

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I rise to present this petition on behalf of residents of Glasgow North in the same terms as those of my hon. Friends.

*The petition of residents of Glasgow North.*

[P001724]

**Marie Rimmer** (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of St Helens South and Whiston in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The petition of residents of St Helens South and Whiston.*

[P001725]

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): I rise to present this petition, which was signed by more than 1,000 of the constituents of the beautiful city of Dundee, in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The petition of residents of Dundee West.*

[P001723]

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to present this petition, with 373 signatures, on behalf of the people of Barrow and Furness in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The petition of residents of Barrow and Furness.*

[P001731]

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of hundreds of residents of Coventry South in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The petition of residents of Coventry South.*

[P001732]

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): I rise to present a petition on behalf of the residents of Colne Valley in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South, signed by highly concerned residents in my constituency in support of fair transitional pension arrangements for women born in the 1950s.

*The petition of residents of Colne Valley.*

[P001733]

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I rise to present a petition on behalf of the residents of Paisley and Renfrewshire North in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South, in the interests of fairness, equality and natural justice.

*The petition of residents of Paisley and Renfrewshire North.*

[P001737]

**George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): I rise to present a petition on behalf of hundreds of residents of East Lothian in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South. Let justice prevail.

*The petition of residents of East Lothian.*

[P001735]

**Yvonne Fovargue** (Makerfield) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Makerfield in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South, which 780 highly concerned residents have signed in support of the WASPI women.

*The petition of residents of Makerfield.*

[P001734]

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I rise to present a petition signed by hundreds of my constituents in Denton and Reddish, and also a petition of the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South. The 1950s women have spoken—it is time for justice.

*The petition of residents of Denton and Reddish.*

[P001736]

*The petition of the residents of Redcar.*

[P001930]

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Ellesmere Port and Neston in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The petition of residents of Ellesmere Port and Neston.*

[P001738]

**Calum Kerr** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (SNP): I rise to present this petition on behalf of 760 of the residents of Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The petition of residents of Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk.*

[P001739]

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I rise to present a petition on behalf of the residents of St Austell and Newquay in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South. The petition calls on the Government to make fair transitional arrangements for all women born in the 1950s, who are most impacted by the increase in the state pension age.

*The petition of St Austell and Newquay.*

[P001740]

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I rise to present a petition on behalf of hundreds of residents of the Glasgow South West constituency in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The petition of residents of Glasgow South West.*

[P001741]

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of York Central in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South, on behalf of all WASPI women.

*The petition of residents of York Central.*

[P001742]

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): Similarly, I rise to present a petition on behalf of the constituents of the Glasgow South borough constituency in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The petition of residents of Glasgow South.*

[P001743]

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I rise to present a petition on behalf of the residents of the Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey—the concerned residents who have signed in support of the WASPI women—in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The petition of residents of Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey.*

[P001744]

**Mr Speaker:** I call Alex Chalk. Where is the fella? I call Scott Mann.

**Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): I rise to present petitions on behalf of the residents of North Cornwall and of Camborne and Redruth in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South, and on behalf of our Cornish WASPI women.

*The Petition of residents of North Cornwall.*

[P001746]

*The Petition of residents of Camborne and Redruth.*

[P001747]

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Kilmarnock and Loudoun in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South. It is signed by 160 people, but supported by many more due to the unfairness of the situation.

*The Petition of residents of Kilmarnock and Loudoun.*

[P001748]

**Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of the Chippenham constituency in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South. It has been signed by 1,656 of my constituents, reflecting the level of local discontent on the issue.

*The Petition of residents of Chippenham.*

[P001750]

**Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of 982 residents of Wrexham in the same terms as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South—thank you to her.

*The Petition of residents of Wrexham.*

[P001749]

**Stewart Hosie** (Dundee East) (SNP): I rise to present this petition in the same terms as all the others, and add the voices of the ladies of Dundee East to the campaign for pension fairness.

*The Petition of residents of Dundee East.*

[P001756]

**Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): I rise to present this petition on behalf of 473 of my constituents in the Vale of Clwyd in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Vale of Clwyd.*

[P001755]

**Susan Elan Jones** (Clwyd South) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Clwyd South in the same terms as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Clwyd South.*

[P001754]

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): I rise to present this petition on behalf of 2,249 residents of the Waveney constituency in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Waveney.*

[P001753]

**Michelle Thomson** (Edinburgh West) (Ind): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the many residents of Edinburgh West in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Edinburgh West.*

[P001757]

**Mhairi Black** (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Paisley and Renfrewshire South in the same terms, and urge the Government to correct this appalling injustice.

*The Petition of residents of Paisley and Renfrewshire South.*

[P001752]

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of hundreds of residents of Great Grimsby in the same terms as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of the UK.*

[P001751]

**Dr Eilidh Whiteford** (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I rise to present these stylishly presented petitions on behalf of residents of the Banff and Buchan constituency and the Gordon constituency in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South, with 568 and 123 signatories respectively.

*The Petition of residents of Banff and Buchan.*

[P001759]

*The Petition of residents of Gordon.*

[P001758]

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the wonderful WASPI campaigners and 455 residents of Durham city on the same basis as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South. I have been advised that I need to declare an interest because I fall into the relevant age group.

*The Petition of residents of Durham.*

[P001761]

**Caroline Ansell** (Eastbourne) (Con): I rise to present this petition on behalf of more than 700 residents in Eastbourne and Willingdon in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Eastbourne and Willingdon.*

[P001760]

**Mr Speaker:** I call Douglas Chapman. Is the fella not here? No.

**Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I present this petition on behalf of hundreds of residents of Southampton, the WASPI women of Southampton and the constituents of Southampton, Test in the same terms as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Southampton Test.*

[P001762]

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I rise to present a petition on behalf of the residents of Ynys Môn in the same terms as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South. The good people of Anglesey and north Wales want fair transitional arrangements and for the Government to act now.

*The Petition of residents of Anglesey, North Wales.*

[P001766]

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Swansea East and the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) in the same terms as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Swansea East.*

[P001767]

**Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Lanark and Hamilton East in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South. On behalf of the thousands of WASPI women, and in the spirit of true equality, I call on the Government to hear their voices and take action now.

*The Petition of residents of Lanark and Hamilton East.*

[P001768]

**Craig Mackinlay** (South Thanet) (Con): I rise to present this petition on behalf of 316 residents of Thanet South in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Thanet South.*

[P001769]

**Rebecca Harris** (Castle Point) (Con): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Castle Point in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Castle Point.*

[P001770]

**Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney.*

[P001771]

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Lancaster and Fleetwood in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Lancaster and Fleetwood.*

[P001956]

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of many residents of Gedling, Nottingham East, Nottingham North, Sherwood, Rushcliffe, Ashfield, Mansfield and Derby South, in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Rushcliffe.*

[P001877]

*The Petition of residents of Nottingham North.*

[P001886]

*The Petition of residents of Ashfield.*

[P001894]

*The Petition of residents of Gedling.*

[P001911]

*The Petition of residents of Mansfield.*

[P001914]

*The Petition of residents of Nottingham East.*

[P001916]

*The Petition of residents of Sherwood.*

[P001917]

*The Petition of residents of Derby South.*

[P001918]

**Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): I rise to present this petition from the residents of Midlothian in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South, on behalf of the many hundreds of residents who have signed.

*The Petition of residents of Midlothian.*

[P001781]

**Angus Robertson** (Moray) (SNP): I rise to present this petition, signed by 1,160 people, on behalf of the residents of Moray in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Moray.*

[P001776]

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I rise to present the petition on behalf of the residents of Birmingham, Yardley in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South, which 587 concerned residents have signed. I thank the Yardley WASPI women for their hard work in collecting the signatures.

*The Petition of residents of Birmingham Yardley.*

[P001810]

**Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): I rise to present this beautifully bound petition on behalf of 1,146 residents of Chesterfield in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Chesterfield.*

[P001875]

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Nottingham South in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South. I congratulate the magnificent WASPI women of Nottinghamshire.

*The Petition of residents of Nottingham South.*

[P001876]

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I rise to present this petition in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South on behalf of 227 of my constituents in Newcastle upon Tyne North—only a small proportion of the 4,000 women in my constituency affected by the 2011 changes alone—and also on behalf the residents of the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham). They are asking the Government to right this injustice.

*The Petition of residents of Newcastle North.*

[P001858]

*The Petition of residents of Stockton North.*

[P001940]

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I rise to present this petition on behalf of hundreds of residents of East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow, to address justice and pensions inequality, in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of East Kilbride.*

[P001813]

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): I rise to present a petition on behalf of hundreds of residents of Wirral South in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South—the brilliant Member for that constituency—with sincere thanks to the WASPI women of Merseyside.

*The Petition of residents of Wirral South.*

[P001817]

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): I rise on behalf of the residents of Livingston to present this petition of 530 signatures in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South. May this Government listen to the WASPI women across this country, and do them justice.

*The Petition of residents of Livingston.*

[P001819]

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am Spartacus, and I too rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of East Worthing and Shoreham in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South, with hundreds of signatures collected in just two hours at Shoreham farmers' market last Saturday morning.

*The Petition of residents of East Worthing and Shoreham.*

[P001821]

**Marcus Fysh** (Yeovil) (Con): I rise on behalf of the people of Yeovil to present this petition in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Yeovil Constituency.*

[P001822]

**Andy Burnham** (Leigh) (Lab): When it comes to fighting for their rights, the women of Leigh are the WASPIest of them all. That is why I rise to present one of the biggest petitions of them all, with well over 1,000 names. The message they have asked me to convey tonight is, “Prime Minister, we won’t go away until we have justice.”

*The Petition of residents of Leigh.*

[P001850]

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): It is my privilege on behalf of the residents of Glenrothes and central Fife, and of the neighbouring constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins)—my good friend—to present this petition in the same terms as those that have already been presented this evening.

*The Petition of residents of Glenrothes.*

[P001824]

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to present a petition on behalf of hundreds of residents of Ogmore in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Ogmore.*

[P001823]

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I rise to present a petition on behalf of 415 residents of Washington and Sunderland West in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South. I hope that these petitions will finally make the Government rethink their strategy and the unnecessary suffering caused to these WASPI women.

*The Petition of residents of Washington and Sunderland West.*

[P001826]

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of the South Shields constituency in the same terms as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of South Shields.*

[P001773]

**Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of the Eastleigh constituency, including Botley, Hedge End, West End, Bursledon, and of other areas, including the Southampton, Itchen and Southampton, Test constituencies, in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South; 92 signatures are enclosed.

*The petition of residents of Eastleigh.*

[P001827]

**Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): I rise to present petitions on behalf of the residents of Manchester, Withington, in the same terms as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of the Residents of Manchester, Withington.*

[P001774]

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): Ditto, Mr Speaker. I rise to present a petition for fairness from concerned residents of the Foyle constituency in the same reasonable terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of the residents of Foyle.*

[P001830]

**John Healey** (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I rise to present this petition from the residents of the Swinton and Silverwood wards in my constituency, who are among more than 50,000 south Yorkshire women hit by these unfair pension age changes, in the same terms as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of the residents of Wentworth and Dearne.*

[P001833]

**Stephen Phillips** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I know this will come as a shock, Mr Speaker, but I rise to present a petition in the same terms as those of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South on behalf of very many residents of the constituency of Sleaford and North Hykeham.

*The Petition of the residents of Sleaford and North Hykeham.*

[P001831]

**Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): I rise to present a petition on behalf of 680 residents of Amber Valley in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Amber Valley.*

[P001772]

**Robert Ffello** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): In the same terms, I salute the hundreds of WASPI ladies in Stoke-on-Trent South.

*The Petition of residents of Stoke-on-Trent South.*

[P001787]

**Dame Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): I, too, out of solidarity, wish to declare an interest. I rise to present a petition on behalf of the constituents of Meriden, but

also of the Burton WASPI group, in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Meriden.*

[P001837]

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Ross, Skye and Lochaber in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South. It is gratifying to see so many women signing the petition and so many Members in the House today. Let us hope that the Government listen, do the right thing and use the surplus in the national insurance fund to bring forward mitigation.

*The Petition of residents of Ross, Skye and Lochaber.*

[P001848]

**James Cleverly** (Braintree) (Con): I rise to present a petition in the same terms as that of the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South on behalf of the ladies of Braintree, and also, with permission, on behalf of the ladies of Saffron Walden.

*The Petition of residents of Braintree.*

[P001834]

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): I declare an interest, having been born on 7 December 1956. Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me, on behalf of my constituents of Broxtowe, to present this petition in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South.

*The Petition of residents of Broxtowe.*

[P001939]

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of Cheltenham in the same terms as the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South. I thank the Cheltenham WASPI women for their dogged and dignified campaign.

*The Petition of residents of Cheltenham.*

[P001745]

**Mr Speaker:** That was all very efficiently completed by my colleagues in under half an hour. Thank you very much indeed for your co-operation. We come now to the Adjournment. May I appeal to Members who are leaving the Chamber to do so quickly and quietly, so that the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) can present her case and be heard?

## Police Officer Safety

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Heather Wheeler.*)

7.12 pm

**Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): May I say how pleased I am to have the opportunity to raise in the Chamber the issue of police officer safety? I thank all those colleagues who have stayed for the debate. That is appreciated not just by me, but by the hard-working and dedicated police officers who we represent up and down the country. I also take this opportunity to thank all MPs who showed their support for the campaign at the drop-in session earlier today.

On Friday 5 August during the summer recess, I joined West Yorkshire police for a 2 pm till 10 pm shift to get the front-line experience, and to see just how the demands on local policing are changing. I spent the afternoon with neighbourhood policing officer PC Kim McCloskey, visiting community projects and seeing some of the great work going on at the grassroots Ovenden Phoenix football club, before spending the evening with response officers reacting to 999 calls. West Yorkshire Police Federation chair, Chief Inspector Nick Smart, had only recently been to see me to raise concerns about an increase in assaults on police officers, and to outline how depleted numbers are impacting on front-line capabilities.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): My hon. Friend rightly talks about an increase in those incidents, but does she agree that one of the most important things we need to do is collect more accurate data so that we can see precisely what is going on in that respect?

**Holly Lynch:** I could not agree more with my hon. Friend, and will come to that in more detail later.

With those concerns in mind, I was keen to see for myself just how well police officers on the front line are coping with cuts of £160 million over five years, resulting in the loss of 1,200 police officers—a reduction of 20% of the force. As an MP, I already work closely with local neighbourhood policing teams. Headed up by Inspector Colin Skeath, there is some outstanding work going on to address the underlying causes of crime, to tackle antisocial behaviour, and really to build trust and engagement across communities. I am always amazed that neighbourhood police officers seem to know the name of every kid in their patch. I pay tribute to the invaluable work they do. Long may it continue.

It was into the evening, when I moved over to response policing, that I joined PC Craig Gallant reacting to 999 calls. That was where I could really see the strain on the service. I had already discussed with the Police Federation and senior officers my concerns that, due to a combination of reduced numbers and the ever expanding responsibilities of the police, officers are now regularly being asked to respond to emergency calls on their own. Only days before my shift, a female police officer responded to a domestic call in my district. Disgracefully, she was head-butted by an offender, knocking out her teeth and leaving her with a broken eye socket.

It was not long into my time with PC Gallant that we attempted to stop a vehicle to speak to the driver. Having turned on the blue lights, the car initially sped

away. However, after a short chase the driver eventually thought better of it and pulled over. PC Gallant asked the driver to get out of the vehicle, but he refused. As he continued to instruct the driver to get out the car, a crowd began to gather, with some onlookers becoming increasingly hostile; passing vehicles also began to take an interest. A second vehicle then pulled up at speed. As the passenger from the first car got out to get into the second, the situation very quickly escalated. PC Gallant found himself surrounded, dealing with an aggressive crowd from all directions. When he was forced to draw his baton while instructing the crowd to move back, I was so concerned for his safety that I rang 999 myself, believing it was the fastest way to make contact with the control room and stress just how urgently he needed back-up. Thankfully, other officers arrived at the scene shortly afterwards to help to manage the situation. Amazingly, no injuries were sustained on that occasion, but I saw for myself just how quickly situations can escalate and how vulnerable officers are when they are out on their own.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way and for bringing this very important issue to the Chamber for consideration. The hon. Lady will be aware that in Northern Ireland police officers carry personal weapons both on duty and at home because of the threat to them. I spoke to her about this issue today and she may have a different opinion, but does she feel that it is important that we protect police officers at home and at work, and that one way of doing that is to give them a personal weapon that they can access at any time? That provides safety for them and their families.

**Holly Lynch:** The circumstances in Northern Ireland are very serious and really quite different from some of the circumstances in the rest of the country. I am asking the Minister today to consider all available options to provide the safety and resources that police officers need on the streets. That is certainly one option that could be considered, with the specifics of Northern Ireland policing.

Returning to the incident on the streets of Halifax, it gives me great pleasure to welcome PC Gallant to Westminster to join us for this debate. I think it is fair to say that he remained much calmer than I did throughout the incident.

An assault on a police officer is an assault on society. It is totally unacceptable that public servants, working in their communities to protect people and help the vulnerable, are subject to assaults as they go about their jobs. Make no mistake, these are tough jobs, and while most officers will tell you that they understand there are risks, being a punching bag should never be part and parcel of the job. In West Yorkshire alone, there were 991 recorded assaults on police officers last year, with an estimated 23,000 across the country. In addition, many attacks are going unreported or are being side-lined in the pursuit of other charges, making it extremely difficult to understand the true scale of the problem.

**Tom Blenkinsop** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): In Cleveland, a police officer has had their jaw broken twice in the past 12 months. That follows on from the fact that in the past six years,

[Tom Blenkinsop]

Cleveland has seen a 25% cut in the number of front-line police officers. Does my hon. Friend think that that is a factor? The amount of single staffing patrols has now increased to such a level that officers are exposed to increased danger.

**Holly Lynch:** There are no two ways about it. I will come on to that in more detail in my speech. That is a very serious incident. Sending officers out on their own just is not working.

When I asked the House of Commons Library for statistics, by police force, of assaults on officers, it responded by saying that there is a lack of official statistics in this area. A recent Home Office report cites that assaults on officers and police community support officers are not collected as national statistics. Instead, the figures are estimates based on two limited data sources. To be fair to the Home Office, I very much welcome the recent efforts it has made to improve the system for recording assaults on officers, but there is still a long way to go.

Last year the Home Office asked forces to provide data on assaults on a voluntary basis. However, it recognised that there were flaws to that approach, concluding that

“the figures...are not directly comparable at police force area level”,

and that

“the estimates are relatively crude, and should be interpreted with caution.”

As the data are not collected, we simply cannot answer some of the bigger questions. Is the number of assaults going up? Are some forces failing to protect their officers? Have cuts to police budgets made policing more dangerous?

**Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on her campaign. I and other Members of the House attended the police bravery awards this year, where we saw the incredible work being done by our police forces all over the country. One of the issues that has been raised for several years is that cuts in the psychiatric service have resulted in police officers having to deal with mental health issues in the custody suite. Does she agree that that needs to be addressed? This is really not what police officers should be doing.

**Holly Lynch:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We see police forces having to pick up the slack where there have been cuts to other agencies—agencies that should be taking a lead in dealing with some of these quite difficult social problems. I will come to how many vulnerable people were missing when I did my shift with West Yorkshire police and the impact that had on how many officers were available to respond to 999 calls.

To return to the statistics, I am asking the Home Office to work with police forces to standardise the process of collecting that information. Quite simply, if an officer is assaulted, in any force at any time, let us record it. Assaults on officers must be the subject of robust investigations. While officers need to play their part in that and follow up by reporting instances where they have been the victim of an assault, I also appreciate

that they will not report injuries unless they have the confidence that those involved will be investigated and prosecuted appropriately.

**Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con):** I thank the hon. Lady for raising this issue on behalf of West Yorkshire police, our local force. Will she join me in welcoming the recruitment of an extra 300 officers in West Yorkshire? Does she also agree that we need some exemplary sentences as a deterrent, so that the police can have the assurance of knowing that anyone who perpetrates violence against a police officer or PCSO will receive a harsher sentence?

**Holly Lynch:** Of course, sentencing plays a big part in deterring those contemplating assault on a police officer. I very much welcome that recruitment drive, but we have seen the loss of 1,200 officers in West Yorkshire, so the faster those new boots are on the ground, the better.

I welcome the work of the Police Federation's John Apter in Hampshire, which has been an effective means of establishing best practice. I would encourage all forces to consider rolling out similar schemes for recording and investigating assaults on officers. Police officers who are assaulted deserve the full backing of the justice system, as the hon. Gentleman has just said. Since my shift with West Yorkshire police, I have become aware of at least five more assaults on officers in my constituency in the days that followed and have been made aware of some absolutely horrific incidents reported to me by serving officers all over the country—indeed, we have already heard many more today. What has shocked me, and what thoroughly depresses police officers, is that sentences handed down to offenders for assaulting the police often fail to reflect the seriousness of the crime or, more crucially, serve as a deterrent.

**Byron Davies (Gower) (Con):** I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. After 32 years of policing in London, I can tell her that I was involved in several scuffles, with only the protection of a small piece of wood in a side pocket and a radio that was only good for throwing at decamping suspects. Does she agree that poor sentencing reduces the seriousness of assaults on police and has the effect of lowering morale and, above all, respect for law enforcement?

**Holly Lynch:** The hon. Gentleman he is absolutely right. Morale is essential in the police force. We have to get this right or we will start to lose good officers as a result.

To reiterate, we make the law here, but we ask the police to uphold and enforce it out there. To assault a police officer is to show a complete disregard for law and order, our shared values and democracy itself. That must be reflected in sentencing, particularly for repeat offenders. To give hon. Members just a couple of examples, a man who assaulted four officers in the south of England earlier this year, causing serious injury to one officer in particular by gouging their eyes, was ordered to pay compensation and received a two-month suspended sentence.

One of the most harrowing attacks on officers brought to my attention was on the front page of the *Scottish Daily Mail* in September. A man set upon two officers,

one male and one female, subjecting them to an onslaught of blows after initially seeming to comply with a body search. Footage of the incident, which was widely shared on social media, shows onlookers beginning to film the assault on their smart phones, while the officers struggle to defend themselves. In court, the offender was ordered to carry out 200 hours of unpaid work, pay compensation to the officers and placed under supervision for 18 months.

I could go on—and I really could go on—because since securing this debate, I have been sent examples from officers all over the country, most of whom have themselves been on the receiving end of violent attacks, and who feel thoroughly let down by the system.

Having looked into sentencing in more detail, I referred to the “Assault Definitive Guideline” publication, produced by the Sentencing Council in 2011. The guidelines assist all members of the judiciary who deal with sentencing. They list the measures of both harm and culpability to assess whether an assault on an officer is a category 1, 2 or 3 offence. They then state the starting point for an appropriate sentence in each of the categories, with the factors that may be taken into consideration in arriving at a final sentencing decision.

The starting point for sentencing following a category 1 assault on a police officer, which represents the greatest harm and the highest culpability, is a 12-week custodial sentence. However, the guidelines then go on to say:

“When sentencing category 1 offences, the court should also consider if the custody threshold has been passed? If so, is it unavoidable that a custodial sentence be imposed and can that sentence be suspended?”

I really struggle with the notion of a suspended sentence. It feels as though the custodial element of the sentence itself does reflect the seriousness of the crime, but its suspended nature means that victims often leave court feeling that it will have zero practical impact on the offender.

I appreciate that the Minister will most likely stress the independent nature of the Sentencing Council, which I understand, but when sentencing has the potential to be such a significant part of the package of measures used to deter those from using violence against police officers, as the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) said, I am asking the Minister to consider any and all means available to him to work with his colleagues in the Department for Justice to ensure that we use sentencing as a means of offering the police all the protection we can. In addition, there are no two ways about it, and as we have already heard, the cuts have had consequences. The danger of assault is heightened when officers are on the front line with diminished support due to pressures on officer numbers.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for the fantastic work she has done in campaigning on this very important issue. I spoke to a West Yorkshire police officer recently, who told me that there are nowadays only double crews at night. He explained that the risk was present throughout the day and that the risk did not discriminate between different times of the day. Does my hon. Friend agree that this represents a very significant risk to the safety of our police officers?

**Holly Lynch:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have seen an increase in the complexity of the crime that needs to be addressed at the same time as staggering

cuts to the number of officers available to do that work, which does impact on the safety of officers as they go about their business.

Certainly in West Yorkshire—I know this is reflected in the forces across the country—the police have had to weather staggering cuts at a time when their case load is becoming increasingly complicated. I have seen the thin blue line stretched desperately thin, as the demands on officers continue to grow. The pressures of terrorism, safeguarding and cybercrime are all serious, but tackling these problems requires the appropriate resourcing. Increased awareness of exploitation in all its ugly forms, from child sexual exploitation to human trafficking, means that, quite rightly, priorities have changed to reflect that. Any officer will tell us that one of the biggest challenges putting additional pressure on the police is the changing nature of dealing with vulnerable young people and adults, particularly those with complex mental health challenges.

In the 24 hours leading up to my time on duty, Calderdale police had safely recovered nine vulnerable missing people and were involved in looking for an additional seven the following day. The weekly average for missing people in Calderdale is 43, with 416 a week going missing across the force. Some 114 of those are deemed to be high-risk individuals.

As MPs, as we have heard, we see it all the time—people with often complex vulnerabilities struggling to get the support they need in a climate where local authority budgets have been slashed and NHS funding has been squeezed. It is becoming a massive social problem, which is increasingly falling to the police to deal with, due to the inability of other agencies to take a lead or to take responsibility.

During my time with West Yorkshire police, I was able to see the difficulties stemming from having constantly to divert police crews into locating missing people, which undermines neighbourhood policing work and eats into the number of response officers available for 999 calls. We have a responsibility to keep the most vulnerable people away from harm and exploitation. Yet the police cannot be the catch-all for all problems. With reduced numbers, it is simply not sustainable and, let us be honest, nor are the police the most appropriate agency to be doing that work. We have to look at ways of empowering other agencies to take the lead. Not having the right answers to these questions means that the police are stretched as never before. As a result, lone officers—single crews—are regularly asked to attend emergencies and potentially dangerous incidents on their own, or with fewer officers than are required to manage such situations safely.

**Thangam Debonnaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this important issue to our attention. I must declare an interest, as I am proud to say that a member of my family is a serving police officer. I worry about his safety and the safety of his colleagues, given that they are so often required to go out on their own. Does my hon. Friend agree that, as well as a system of monitoring assaults on police officers, there should be a system of monitoring the number of occasions on which they are required to attend incidents on their own?

**Holly Lynch:** I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. A police officer who is deployed to deal with a dangerous situation alone is very vulnerable. That seems to be a significant contributing factor. When I went out with a police officer who had been deployed on his own, I saw for myself how quickly situations could escalate.

**Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab):** My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. When I talk to members of the Greater Manchester police force, they mention the large number of incidents involving people with mental health issues. As a result of cuts in mental health services, we in Greater Manchester have lost more than 1,850 police officers since 2010. That is a cut of 23%. I think my hon. Friend mentioned a 25% cut, and such a level of cuts is not unusual. Does she agree that it is inevitable that officers will be stretched and, as a result, put in danger?

**Holly Lynch:** We have heard from Members on both sides of the House about the increased complexity surrounding crime, and the different types of crime with which the police are having to deal while also weathering truly staggering cuts. As a result, they are naturally more vulnerable when doing their work on the streets of all our constituencies.

When officers are deployed on their own, are they really equipped to deal with an incident when they arrive? The use of Tasers is probably a debate for another day, but, again, I ask the Minister to think about the package of measures that is needed to give officers every opportunity to manage the risks to which they are exposed on the front line. The provision of more widely available Taser units, with the training to accompany that responsibility, could be one of those measures.

**Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP):** The extent of the problem is indeed startling. I have obtained some statistics, because we take measurements in Northern Ireland. Between 2014 and 2016, a quarter of all police officers serving there—1,631—were assaulted, and nearly 500 have been assaulted in the current year. Those are atrocious figures. The Government must tell the Northern Ireland Administration, and chief constables throughout the United Kingdom, that they need to recruit more officers, and judges must impose stiff sentences on people who are caught and found guilty of such crimes.

**Holly Lynch:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that staggering and depressing intervention. We have seen what he has described far too often, and the statistics are very serious. I hope that the Minister will respond with what could be easy and effective ways of dealing with sentencing to ensure that the greatest possible deterrents exist. We quite often see repeat offenders, and that cannot be allowed to continue. We must give police officers every protection that we can possibly provide.

What additional protections might officers need? Perhaps controversially, I want to refer to spit hoods. I am all for informed debate about the issue, but the truth is that if people are politically uncomfortable about spit hoods, I can promise them that somewhere, right now, there is a police officer who is being spat at and who is even more uncomfortable. As well as being thoroughly unpleasant,

spitting blood and saliva at another human being can pose a real risk of transmission of a range of infectious diseases, some with life-changing or even lethal consequences. We have a duty of care to protect officers from that, whenever possible.

The Centre for Public Safety has published a briefing on the issue, and I thank it for the work that it has done in this regard. The briefing cited a recent occasion on which the Metropolitan police were called to a disturbance and arrested a 20-year-old woman on suspicion of a public order offence. The woman, who had hepatitis B, then bit her own lip and spat blood at three officers who had to be taken to hospital for anti-viral treatment. Anti-viral treatments are not guaranteed to prevent the transmission of infectious diseases, and an officer may have to endure a wait of over six months to find out whether the treatment has been successful.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Lady, who has been very generous in giving way, but she might wish to be aware that if she would like a reply from the Minister, he has only until 7.42 to give her that reply.

**Holly Lynch:** I am getting there, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you for that reminder.

As I was saying, I am open to a debate on spit hoods, but they might not be so necessary if sentencing was more effective and offered a tougher deterrent. However, the Sentencing Council's 2011 guidelines removed spitting as a factor increasing seriousness. In the council's assessment of the guidelines, published in 2015, sentencers attributed a shift towards less severe sentencing to that decision. A district judge went so far as to say that

“a spit in the face can't be identified as a sustained or repeated assault for greater harm. Yet in my view it is one of the most serious ways of assaulting.”

I am asking the Minister to ensure that the Home Office is collecting accurate data about assaults on police officers—data that will give us a much greater insight into the scale of the problem and empower decision makers to respond accordingly. I am asking him to work with colleagues to explore options for much tougher sentencing. If an officer is the victim of a category 1 assault, I would expect to see a sentence that sends a strong message. Assaulting the police shows contempt for our collectively agreed laws and all those who uphold them, and it will not be tolerated. It worries me that the ever-growing demands on the police are undermining their ability to do some of the basics. I am calling on the Minister to recognise that officers are routinely deployed on their own, that when an officer calls for back-up, only boots on the ground will do, and that numbers matter.

Finally, I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of all of us here, to the brave unarmed West Yorkshire police officers who apprehended the man who took Jo Cox from us on the streets of Batley and Spen earlier this year. Their actions demonstrated that we ask the police to walk towards some of the most dangerous situations, and we have a responsibility to offer them all the protection we can in doing so. We are grateful to them, and their courage is a testament to all our brave policemen and women across the country.

7.36 pm

**The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) on securing this debate on such an important subject. It is good to see so many Members here tonight.

Last month, the Home Secretary and others paid their respects at events to mark National Police Memorial Day, a day that not only enables us to pay tribute to fallen officers but serves as a stark reminder of the dangers that the police face daily. The hon. Lady ably outlined examples of those dangers this evening. As she said, this is an issue with which she has been particularly concerned since her experience shadowing members of West Yorkshire police force in her constituency this summer. Many of us spend time with the police in our own constituencies, and I visit forces all around the country. We can see the phenomenal work that members of our police service do daily and the challenges that they face in our communities.

This has been a good debate, with a speech from the hon. Lady and interventions from other right hon. and hon. Members. I think we can all agree that police officers should be able to carry out their duties without fear of assault. Let me be clear that assaulting a police officer is completely unacceptable, and anyone who is found guilty can expect to face the full force of the law.

It is important that we have a good understanding of the scale of the issue, so that chief officers can do everything in their power to keep their officers safe. We have been working for some time to improve the data available. As a first step, it was right that provisional statistics of officer assaults were published in July, despite the limitations of those data. The figures indicated that in 2015-16, there were an estimated 23,000 assaults on officers across all forces. The data also indicated that there were nearly 8,000 assaults involving injury reported by officers, and 270 reported by police community support officers.

We will continue to build on that work, and we need to make it clear that it is completely unacceptable to commit an offence against a police officer. It is not good enough for people to say that such incidents are part of the cost of a police officer going about their business. That is simply not the case, and we need to put a stop to it. We need to ensure that the public understand that a police officer is to be respected and is there to serve the community. They keep us all safe.

I can assure the hon. Lady that sentencing guidelines already provide for an assault on a police officer to be treated more severely in appropriate cases. There are also two offences specific to assaults on police officers where there is little or no physical harm. Assaults resulting in more serious injuries would result in a charge of actual bodily harm or a more serious offence. In those cases, sentencing will largely be guided by the

level of harm and offender culpability. In the most serious cases, where an individual is convicted of the murder of a police officer in the course of duty, a whole life order will now be the sentencing starting point, thanks to the work of the previous Home Secretary, as laid out in the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015. That was a landmark change, and one that the Police Federation had campaigned long and hard for on behalf of their members. It is right, as the hon. Lady outlined, that the courts still have the discretion, through the independence of the judiciary, to take account of all the circumstances of each case in determining the appropriate sentence. It is right for them to have that ability to assess in any given case, based on the facts of the case, what is the most appropriate sentence. She is also quite right to say that the Sentencing Council has a role to play in the sentencing guidelines, and that it is an independent body.

The hon. Lady touched on resources. I remind her that there has been a good deal for policing with direct resource funding to police and crime commissioners, including the precept, being protected this year. Ultimately, all decisions about local policing resources and roles are for chief constables, held to account by their locally accountable PCCs.

Single-crewing falls into the operational duty and decisions of local chief constables. Chiefs and PCCs have a duty to manage and support the police working effectively, ensuring the welfare of all officers and staff.

**Holly Lynch:** Does the Minister recognise that with the number of 999 calls to a lot of our forces, sometimes it is a choice between sending a lone officer or nobody, because those forces are that stretched?

**Brandon Lewis:** As we are limited to a few seconds of time, I will have to say that, in another place and at another opportunity, I will go through how the changing police force means that the work they are doing is changing. Having more officers on the frontline with their time focused on working with communities is a good thing. There is also the work with the College of Policing. I know that chief constables will continue to do what they can to ensure that they keep their people safe and enable them to work confidently to tackle the challenges of modern crime. We will continue to support them in this.

There is much more that I and probably other Members would like to say on this issue, but we are time-constrained. I will leave it there, but I look forward to speaking to the hon. Lady and the gentlemen who have come to watch us this evening straight after this debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.42 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

*Tuesday 11 October 2016*

[MIKE GAPES *in the Chair*]

## Forced Organ Removal: China

9.30 am

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

That this House has considered forced organ removal in China.

This is a very difficult subject to talk about, but there are those of us who have followed this issue in China and listened to people who have come to the House to present petitions and speak to us about it. We have watched the film on the issue and had a briefing in the House as well. Many Members of the House have been vociferous and outspoken on the issue. I commend the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) for the hard work that she has done on it in the House. We admire her courage, tenacity and commitment to the issue. The rest of us will add our contribution. I know that her contribution will be as important as everyone else's. I thank every hon. Member who has come today to participate. The abstract nature of the debate may have precluded many from attending. I am grateful to those who are here for acknowledging that the issue is worthy of time and attention from Members of the House.

My boys like to watch crime dramas, as many of us do. Some of them are so far-fetched that I scoff along with them. However, others are too chillingly real. The idea of someone having organs cut out of them and waking up in a bath of ice has long been an urban legend. However, today's debate is not based on a horror story as we approach Halloween; it is not make-believe. It is a horror that is all too real in China. As it has been brought to our attention, I feel that we have a role to play in returning this scenario to the realms of urban legend. That is why the debate is so important.

This story, which is almost too dreadful to believe, was first revealed in March 2006, when a woman stated that as many as 4,000 Falun Gong had been killed for their organs at the hospital in which she had worked. I had the privilege of meeting some of the families of those people in this House, and a charitable organisation was also involved, so we know some of the stories at first hand. That lady said that her husband, a surgeon at the same hospital outside the north-eastern city of Shenyang, had disclosed to her that he had removed corneas from the living bodies of 2,000 Falun Gong adherents. A week later, a Chinese military doctor not only corroborated the woman's account but claimed that such atrocities were taking place in 36 different concentration camps throughout the country. He said that he had also witnessed Falun Gong being transported in massive numbers across the country in cattle trains, at night and under the cover of tight security. People may think that that is something from the history of the second world war, but the transportation of people in cattle trains is all too real. As I said, it happens at night and under the cover of tight security.

In 2006, two prominent Canadians—David Kilgour, a former MP, and David Matas, a human rights lawyer—published a report for the Coalition to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong in China, in which they

gave credibility to claims that the Chinese authorities were harvesting organs from executed members of the group. Victims were held in concentration camps prior to dissection, after which the remains were immediately cremated, as if the authorities could get rid of the evidence of their ill deeds by cremating them so quickly.

It was in July 2006 that Kilgour and Matas published their 140-page report. It drew

“the regrettable conclusion that these allegations are true.”

The investigation uncovered the on-demand nature of organ transplants in China; there is an abundance of organs despite the lack of a functional donation system. Ten years later, on 22 June 2016, they published an update to their report. It shows the continued expansion of transplantation capacity—organ harvesting first came to light in 2006—the driving factors behind the industry's growth, and the role of the ruling party, Government agencies and individual officials in implementing and perpetuating the systematic killing of prisoners of conscience for their organs. We are talking about those of the Falun Gong belief, those of Christian beliefs, who have been persecuted, people serving time in jail and those from other ethnic groups.

The harvesting is done on an industrial scale, as some of the figures illustrate very well. Although Chinese officials typically say that China transplants about 10,000 organs a year, the update to the report shows that that figure is surpassed by just a few hospitals alone. We can say, based on Government-imposed minimum capacity requirements for transplant centres, that the total system-wide capacity since 2000 would have easily reached more than 1 million transplants. Given that the vast majority of those hospitals far exceed the minimum requirements, the number of transplants performed in China is staggering. As I said, it is on an industrial scale.

The Conservative Party Human Rights Commission heard from at least two witnesses on the harrowing practice of forced organ harvesting. Notably, it heard from Ethan Gutmann, who has spent several years investigating this appalling practice—the forced removal of internal organs from live individuals for transplant. It also notes the information provided on behalf of UK Falun Gong practitioners in the written submission. Ms Lin stated:

“There have been persistent allegations that large numbers of Falun Gong prisoners of conscience have been killed to supply China's lucrative trade in vital organs. Uyghurs and other prisoners of conscience may have been victimised in a similar way.”

Former Falun Gong prisoners report being subjected to targeted medical examinations and blood tests in custody that appear designed to assess the health and compatibility for potential transplant of their organs, Ms Lin claimed. She told the commission:

“Concern stems in part from the significant discrepancy between the number of organ transplants performed and the known sources of organs: even when we include death row inmates, the number of transplants performed in China is far too high. The short wait times achieved by transplant hospitals suggest that people are killed on demand for their organs.”

That is the horror of what is taking place in China. The House must today illustrate the issues clearly and ensure that we speak on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves—those with no voice.

Ethan Gutmann has stated, based on meticulous research into individual hospital accommodations for transplant recipients, occupancy rates and a full accounting

[Jim Shannon]

of the overall number of hospitals in China carrying out organ transplants, that the claims by the Chinese of performing 10,000 organ transplants a year are intentionally low; they are keeping them low on purpose. The new report estimates that a minimum of 56,000 and perhaps as many as 110,000 organ transplants are being conducted a year, leading to an estimated overall total of 1.8 million organ transplants since 2001. Previous speculation that approximately 40,000 to 65,000 organs were extracted from prisoners of conscience is now seen as a serious underestimate, particularly as the number of Chinese hospitals that have informally confirmed the use of Falun Gong prisoners as a primary organ source continues to grow.

I am very concerned and I have tabled questions in the House, as other hon. Members have, on the issue. Organ tourism to China takes place. People in western countries find out about an organ that may be available in China at short notice. Given how quickly these things happen, there has to be an organised, established method of harvesting the organs so that those who come from the west can come across and get the transplant that they need so much. I urge the Government to take action on that issue as well. I know that that is not exactly in the portfolio of the Minister who is here to respond, but I am very pleased to see him. I know that all hon. Members will get a positive response from him.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on putting the case and raising this important issue in so eloquent a manner. Does he agree that nations should not allow their citizens to travel to China for organs until we know that China meets the World Health Organisation guiding principles on transplantation and ethical standards?

**Jim Shannon:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention and for wisely putting the thoughts of everyone in this Chamber today on record. I totally agree with her—I think we all do—and that is one of the things we hope the Minister will respond to, because those going to China cannot close their eyes or ears to what is happening and to the question of whom the organ is coming from. The recipient cannot say, “I don’t know, but I need the organ transplant.” I am not taking away from the fact that they need the organ transplant, but there must be rules in place and China must be part of that.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, congratulate him on securing this debate and apologise that I cannot stay for the whole thing. Many of the issues he has raised are of concern to lots of our constituents; a number have contacted me about the issue and I have also lodged questions on the back of contact from constituents. Does he share my disappointment at the Government’s slight lack of engagement on the issue? We understand they have to engage positively and sensitively with the Chinese Government, but an issue of concern to so many constituents ought to be taken seriously.

**Jim Shannon:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and for clearly stating what we feel. I am going to comment on questions other people have tabled and the response from Government until now. Perhaps,

until now, we have seen inaction; today we are hoping for action that will clearly take this issue on, and we implore our Minister and the Department to respond positively.

In 2014 the Chinese medical establishment pledged that it would stop all organ harvesting from prisoners, yet the velocity of China’s organ harvesting industry does not suggest a retraction. Indeed it suggests the opposite; it suggests further acceleration of the practice. According to Ethan Gutmann, in a testimony to the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China on 18 September 2015—just over a year ago—the practice began in 1994 when

“the first live organ harvests of death-row prisoners were performed on the execution grounds of Xinjiang”.

In 1997, Uyghur political prisoners were the target for organs to be forcefully donated to high-ranking Chinese Communist party officials. This disgusting and disgraceful forced organ transplantation goes to the very highest level of Chinese government and those involved need to be accountable for their actions. By 2001, Chinese military hospitals were

“unambiguously targeting select Falun Gong prisoners for harvesting”, and by 2003 the first Tibetans were being targeted as well. There is systematic forced organ transplantation taking place of Falun Gong followers, of Christians and other ethnic groups and of those who are in prison, sometimes for minor charges. Then China goes to Tibet, where it has some control, and it targets people there as well; its horrific targeting for forced organ transplantation goes far beyond China.

Gutmann’s testimony continues:

“By the end of 2005, China’s transplant apparatus had increased so dramatically that a tissue-matched organ”—

the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) will be listening to this—

“could be located within two weeks for any foreign organ tourist with cash.”

If a person has cash, they have got the organs. There is something morally wrong with that, there is something physically and emotionally wrong with that, and action has to be taken to stop it.

At this stage I must admit I am not a conspiracy theorist. I am not someone who excels in piecing together facts to create theories, but I can clearly see that the figures do not add up. There is something horrifically wrong in the system and it needs to be addressed by the international community and our Government, who we look to for leadership at this time. Those two Canadians began the process. The US Congressional-Executive Commission on China conducted investigations, and now we are raising it in this place. We have a duty to do all that is in our power to apply diplomatically any pressure that we can to say the practice must stop. For moral decency and human rights, it cannot continue in any way, shape or form.

We have to put this into perspective and I understand the pain of those who wait for transplants every year. My own nephew, Peter, had a kidney transplant when he was just a teenager as he was so unwell. Only after he had been given the transplant did he progress and start to grow and live the life he could. I well remember the stress of the family as we waited for the call to hear that help was on the way for the child. I understand the pain

that so many people face waiting for an organ transplant. In Northern Ireland the transplant list is long as well; we had a waiting list last year of 177 people waiting for an organ transplant, and 135 transplants were available. We have a shortfall, so we need to address that issue. These are not just numbers; these are people waiting on life and death changes, which is why I urge people to ensure they carry a donor card—I have done so for many years and we have a very progressive donor donation and transplant system in Northern Ireland, which we believe we should take forward—and let their families know of their preferences should anything happen to them, so that they can save a life in their own death.

However, to take blood tests and to kill for the purpose of organ removal is murder and nothing less—it could be nothing else. Those carrying out that practice must be made to understand that it can never be acceptable, no matter what the circumstances may be. I have two granddaughters and should their lives depend on an organ transplant, I, or anyone in the close family, would very quickly give one of our organs to them for a transplant. I do not say that boastfully in any way; I say that honestly as a grandfather who loves his children and grandchildren. However, I could never take an organ from someone else by murder, and that is what is happening here. For the Chinese Government to claim that they only take from those convicts who give consent can be nothing other than an exaggeration of epic proportions, and it must be addressed by all political means possible.

It is no good burying our heads in the sand. We have the information, evidence and knowledge—we have two inquiries from Canada and the United States—and they all indicate that rightness dictates we do something with that information. My hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) raised the issue in 2013 with the then Minister, only to be told that this was being phased out by the Chinese Government. Well, it has not been phased out. Three years later it is still going strong and it is getting larger and stronger each time, so that is blatantly not the case. In July this year I asked what the plans were to discuss how to deal with the issue with the UN. I was told, just this year:

“The Government has no plans to make representations to the UN on organ harvesting in China. We pay close attention to the human rights situation in China, including allegations of organ harvesting and encourage China to implement its public commitment to stop the use of organs from prisoners.”

Words are not enough, Mr Gapes.

“Our current assessment of the human rights situation in China can be found in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy.”

We need to do more. We need to implore our Government and the western world to take this matter on board and to act quickly.

Today, Minister, I am asking for more. I am asking that direct and effective steps are taken. Today, I am asking that meetings are arranged at international level to ensure that, rather than washing our hands of the matter, we do all we can to address it. Today, I am asking this House to stand and to say that the forced removal of organs from any person in any place in the world can never be acceptable, and that this Government will be known as one that speaks out for those with no voice—many of whom, in this case, are imprisoned

owing to their religion. I speak out for religious freedom—it is something I am interested in and I am known for doing so. Again, I ask this House and this Government to take action and to do all in their power to see the end of this horror story practice taking place in our so-called modern age. The forced organ transplantation on an industrial scale is unabated and uncontrolled, and we in this House must take a stand today. I believe that we will and that this House is clearly united to make sure that it stops.

9.48 am

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing this debate and on his powerful speech.

Let us be clear about what we are speaking of here, because if what we are discussing is indeed the case it virtually defies credibility. But increasingly research and evidence is pointing towards what is being alleged, which is that the Chinese Government actively condone—indeed, are involved in—the murder of potentially thousands of their own citizens every year for the purpose of forcibly extracting vital organs including livers, kidneys, hearts and corneas, sometimes while those people are still alive, and without anaesthetic. Many of those people are in prison, mainly—we are told—for their beliefs or ethnicity. Often their families are told that they have died. They are young people in reasonable health, and their families are simply handed an urn of ashes.

Credible research findings strongly suggest that many thousands of people are being killed for their organs, particularly people in minority groups, most notably practitioners of Falun Gong—a peaceful, meditative practice—although Tibetans, Uighurs and, potentially, house Christians have also been targeted for political reasons.

The allegations that Falun Gong practitioners, Tibetans and Uyghurs have been victims of that horrific practice are well documented and strong, as I shall recount. The suggestion that house church Christians may be affected requires further research. Either way, all the allegations of which we are now aware are sufficiently strong to require investigation by the international community.

It is of the highest necessity that the UK raises the issue with the Chinese directly, and calls for an international inquiry into the matter, ideally led by the United Nations. Even if the UN will not conduct a commission of inquiry, our Government should investigate the allegations and look at alternative mechanisms to bring to account those involved in those horrific alleged practices. If Britain as a nation is to maintain its status as a people concerned about grievous violations of human rights, it is imperative that the issue is addressed loudly and fearlessly, in co-operation with the other international organisations and leading parliamentarians across the world who are increasingly expressing concerns about the issue.

The Conservative party human rights commission, which I am privileged to chair, has recently conducted an inquiry into forced organ harvesting in China. During the course of the inquiry, I have been privileged to hear, in this House, first-hand testimony of those who have conducted research into the nature of the crime, and first-hand testimony by way of a powerful statement

[Fiona Bruce]

from a former Chinese doctor, Dr Enver Tohti, who has been required to perform an organ operation on an executed prisoner—for transplant, he believes.

The House has been privileged to host the UK premiere of the film “The Bleeding Edge”, a fictional film based on the testimony of witnesses to illegal organ harvesting. It was harrowing. I am deeply grateful to Mr Speaker for hosting the film, and to the actress, Anastasia Lin, who starred in the film and gave evidence at one of the hearings of the Conservative party human rights commission. I am aware of other films on the subject, notably “Human Harvest” and “Hard to Believe”.

As I speak, the Conservative party human rights commission is releasing a report of the inquiry, which can be found on the website [www.conservativehumanrights.com](http://www.conservativehumanrights.com). It contains more information than I can relay in this debate, but I will refer to some evidence received by the inquiry. The report was written by the vice-chair of the commission, Ben Rogers, who is an expert on human rights in China and elsewhere. I pay tribute to him for his dedicated work in this field and to the work of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, the organisation for which he works.

Written evidence submitted to the inquiry included a statement from a former prisoner, Yu Xinhui, who wrote:

“Everyone in the prison knows about this”—

by which he means the removal of prisoners for organ harvesting.

“Usually in the prison, regardless of whether the person is deceased, if he is sent to the prison hospital, he faces the reality of having his organs removed at any moment. Everyone in prison knows that there exists a list of names. People...taken away, and no one will return.”

That list of names includes blood types and the health of patients’ organs so that the information is ready and available if a transplant request is made.

Yu Xinhui continued:

“I once asked a prison doctor, because this particular doctor was very sympathetic to us Falun Gong practitioners. He was especially sympathetic towards me, because we were from the same hometown. Once he told me secretly, saying, ‘Don’t go against the Communist Party. Don’t resist them. Whatever they tell you to do, just do it. Don’t go against them forcefully. If you do, then when the time comes, you won’t even know how you will have died. When it happens, where your heart, liver, spleen, and lungs will be taken, you won’t even know either.’”

Yu Xinhui had three physical examinations while in prison, the last of which was in March 2005. Many former prisoners of conscience have testified to having been subjected to physical examinations while in prison that went beyond normal medical check-ups and were clearly aimed at assessing the health of their organs.

The timing of this debate is apt, given new evidence that the scale of organ harvesting in China may now be far higher than previously estimated. The evidence has built to a point where ignoring it is not an option. There is now strong, academically well-researched information that between 50,000 to 90,000 organ transplants may occur in China every year and are, effectively, concealed by the Government. That is in a country where there is no tradition of organ donation. Indeed, Chinese official

figures put the number of voluntary donations at a total of 120 for the entire 30-year period between 1980 and 2009.

Let me quote further from the Conservative party human rights commission’s report:

“Although there are a variety of sources of evidence, there are three key reports which provide detailed research into the practice of forced organ harvesting in China”—

the hon. Member for Strangford referred to those reports. Our report continues:

“The first, published on the Internet in 2006 and in print in 2009, was a report researched and written by the former Canadian Member of Parliament and former Government Minister David Kilgour and a respected human rights lawyer, David Matas, called *Bloody Harvest: The Killing of Falun Gong for their organs*. The second was Ethan Gutmann’s book *The Slaughter: Mass Killings, Organ Harvesting, and China’s Secret Solution to its Dissident Problem*, published in 2014.”

Both David Matas and Ethan Gutmann have given evidence to our commission. The third report, which was published this year, runs to 700 pages. It updates forensically those two pieces of research, is co-authored by David Kilgour, David Matas and Ethan Gutmann, and is entitled, “Bloody Harvest/The Slaughter: An Update.” I have heard Ethan Gutmann publicly invite from anyone, particularly from the Chinese, any evidence or comments that contradict the research in the report, but as of September 2016 none has been received.

The most important point made by the report, and indeed by David Matas and Ethan Gutmann in their evidence to the Conservative party human rights commission, is that the scale of forced organ harvesting in China is significantly underestimated. Their new research is forensic—they have inquired into the public records of no fewer than 712 hospitals in China that carry out liver and kidney transplants. Their detailed research leads them to conclude that potentially between 60,000 and 100,000 organs are transplanted each year in Chinese hospitals, which almost defies credibility. If those figures are correct, organs are being transplanted on an industrial scale, as the hon. Member for Strangford said. One hospital alone, the Orient organ transplant centre at the Tianjin first central hospital, is performing thousands of transplants a year according to its own bed occupancy data. Chinese official claims state that 10,000 organ transplants are carried out each year, but the authors of the report contend that that is

“easily surpassed by just a few hospitals.”

By way of background, according to Ethan the practice of forced organ harvesting began in China as long ago as 1994, when the first live organs were removed from death row prisoners on the execution grounds of Xinjiang. Dr Enver Tohti came to London to give evidence to us, and he told us about the process. He was a cancer surgeon in Ürümqi, Xinjiang province. In 1995, while he was simply doing his job, he was instructed by two of his hospital’s chief surgeons to prepare mobile surgery equipment—in other words, an ambulance—and to wait for them the next day at a hospital gate with the ambulance, the equipment and three other assistants. The following morning, at 9 am, the two chief surgeons arrived in a car and he was told to follow them. He did not know where he was going but, about half an hour later, they arrived at Western Mountain—Xishan—an

execution ground where prisoners were taken to be executed. He described what happened:

“We had been told to wait behind a hill, and come into the field as soon as we’d hear the gun shot. So we waited. A moment later there were gun shots. Not one, but many. We rushed into the field. An armed police officer approached us and told me where to go. He led us closer, then pointed to a corpse saying ‘this is the one’.”

A few prisoners had been executed. He continued:

“By then our chief surgeon appeared from nowhere and told me to remove the liver and two kidneys. He urged me to hurry up, so we took the body into the van and removed his liver and kidneys...our chief surgeons put those organs in a special box, and got into the car. They told me to take my team back to the hospital and left. I have no idea where they went... That was the end of that. Nobody has ever talked about what we did that day. It is something I wish hadn’t happened.”

Not only is the scale of the numbers a concern; the speed at which Chinese hospitals can obtain organs is also highly suspect. Doctors will tell us that the time they have to get an organ from a donor to a recipient varies but that it is very short for sensitive vital organs. A heart or a liver cannot simply be saved in a freezer until it is needed, which is why the NHS states that in this country the average wait for a suitable transplant for an adult is 145 days—of course, we are in a country with a tradition of donation. Compare that with the many statements in Chinese medical publications that they can find an emergency liver donor within 24 hours. I understand there is even a medical journal that boasts of taking only four hours to find a donor. I am informed that the Chinese Government claim that the organs come from death row prisoners who have been executed locally to the hospital that is providing the transplant, but the coincidence of that number of prisoners happening to have, say, a healthy liver, happening to match the blood type of the recipient and happening to have been executed locally is simply too much for credibility given the numbers involved. An alternative interpretation, and sadly the one that is more credible, is that people are being killed on demand to supply their organs.

In the other place, Lord Alton has been assured by the Government that the issue has been raised with the Chinese Government as part of the annual UK-China human rights dialogue and will be raised again, for which I thank the Government. However, evidence suggests that the Chinese Government have repeatedly committed themselves to denial, obfuscation and misdirection on this issue. It is therefore appropriate that we increase our activity in light of the new evidence I have highlighted. Indeed, there is growing international pressure on this matter.

The UN special rapporteurs on torture and on freedom of religion or belief have both requested that the Chinese Government explain the sources of these organs and that they allow them to investigate. There has been no response. The European Parliament adopted a written declaration in July 2016 on stopping organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience in China that, among other clauses, states:

“There have been persistent credible reports on systematic, state-sanctioned organ harvesting from non-consenting prisoners of conscience in the People’s Republic of China, primarily from practitioners of Falun Gong peaceful meditation and exercises but also from Uighurs, Tibetans and Christians.

The international community has strongly condemned organ harvesting in China and actions should be taken to end it.

Owing to the severity of underlying abuse there is a clear need to organise without delay an independent investigation into ongoing organ harvesting in the People’s Republic of China.”

Similarly, the United States Congress unanimously passed a resolution in June 2016 condemning the practice of state-sanctioned forced organ harvesting in the People’s Republic of China. The resolution calls for visas to be denied to those involved in coerced organ or tissue transplantation. It expresses

“concern regarding persistent and credible reports of systematic, state-sanctioned organ harvesting from non-consenting prisoners of conscience in the People’s Republic of China, including from large numbers of Falun Gong practitioners and members of other religious and ethnic minority groups.”

The concerns in America are coming from leading Congressmen and Senators. I was privileged to meet Congressman Chris Smith in Washington DC last week. He is the fourth longest-serving member of Congress and is a remarkable campaigner for human rights across the world. He spoke at a joint sub-committee of the US committee on foreign affairs on 21 June. I will quote him at more length at the end of my speech if I have time, but he told the House of Representatives:

“Twenty years ago, I chaired a human rights hearing in my subcommittee with a Chinese security official who testified that he and his other security agents were executing prisoners—with doctors...there and ambulances—in order to steal their organs for transplant. Since then, this horrific practice has skyrocketed.”

The US Congressional-Executive Commission on China published its annual report less than two weeks ago; I was privileged to meet the group of young people who work for the commission and who produced the report. The commission’s chairman said:

“The Chinese government’s human rights record is utterly deplorable, continuing a downward trend over the past three years.”

That, of course, includes organ harvesting.

**Jim Shannon:** I thank the hon. Lady for her comments and for setting the scene. Clearly the world is awakening to what is happening in China; she is as aware of that as I am. Will the awakening that we seem to see in Canada, in the States and now in the United Kingdom precipitate a need for our Government to contact the Chinese authorities to ensure that they can respond now to stop this practice? The weight of evidence is growing every day.

**Fiona Bruce:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The growing international concern about organ harvesting means it is vital that this country joins in and does not lag behind the international community in condemning these practices and challenging the Chinese Government accordingly.

I have two more things to say. First, as well as politicians acting, the international medical community must do detailed analysis of the claims made by these respected researchers. It is helpful to note that the president of the Transplantation Society, Dr Philip O’Connell, said at the society’s international conference in Hong Kong this year, addressing his comments to China, that

“there remains, in many sectors, a deep sense of mistrust of your transplant programs...It is important that you understand that the global community”—

I believe he was referring to the global medical community—“is appalled by the practices”.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): My hon. Friend makes several important points. Does she agree that it would be helpful if the Minister confirmed, first, whether there is a date for the next annual human rights dialogue, and if so when it is; secondly, when the next UK Government report on human rights to the UN in Geneva is due; and thirdly whether there has been any response to the request by the Foreign Office Minister in the Lords for more information from the Chinese authorities about their response to the various accusations?

**Fiona Bruce:** I am grateful for that intervention, particularly as it comes from the chair of the all-party group on China, whose views are very much respected in this House. His questions to the Minister today are very well placed.

Yesterday evening I tabled early-day motion 502, "Forced organ harvesting in China". I ask colleagues to be good enough to sign and support the motion. I shall read it out in full for the record, because it contains my request to the Minister today:

"That this House notes with grave concern allegations of forced organ harvesting in China; further notes that victims said to be targeted for forced organ extraction are prisoners of conscience; acknowledges evidence detailed in *Bloody Harvest/The Slaughter: An Update*, by former Canadian Member of Parliament David Kilgour, lawyer David Matas and researcher Ethan Gutmann, along with other reports; notes the recent United States House of Representatives resolution 343 on forced organ harvesting in China and European Parliament written declaration 2016/WD48; calls on China to immediately end any forced organ harvesting; urges the Government to condemn forced organ harvesting and to seek a UN Commission of Inquiry to investigate this practice, or conduct an inquiry through other international mechanisms, to ensure accountability and to assess whether this practice could amount to a crime against humanity; further urges the Government to release statistics on the numbers of UK citizens travelling to China for organ transplants and prohibit British citizens from travelling to China for the purpose of receiving organ transplants; urges the Government to introduce a travel ban prohibiting medical personnel and officials who may be engaged in forced organ harvesting from travelling to the UK; and calls on the Government to give urgent consideration to other measures it could take to hold China to account for this practice and demand an end to it."

I will finish by quoting the senior US Congressman Chris Smith:

"What adjectives do we use to describe what Chinese doctors and hospitals have been doing these past decades? Ordinary words like concerned, disturbed or shocking just seem inadequate. We tend to reserve words like 'barbaric' for truly horrible crimes—and...we must call organ harvesting...barbaric."

10.16 am

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. It is a privilege to be able to speak in this serious and important debate. I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for securing it; he is a committed human rights activist in this place, and I thank him for giving us the opportunity to consider forced organ removal in China.

I hope it goes without saying that I condemn this reported practice in the strongest possible terms. I am certainly not the first Scottish National party politician to do so; my party colleague Bob Doris MSP is a long-standing campaigner on the issue. He has done a great deal to raise awareness, both over the previous

parliamentary term and since the influx of new Members of the Scottish Parliament. Bob's work has ensured that the Scottish Government continue to raise these human rights concerns when engaging with China. I put on record my gratitude to him for that. He is one of a number of politicians from all parties who have worked to raise awareness and encourage action. Many in this place, including the hon. Member for Strangford and the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), also deserve recognition for their work.

The European Parliament and the US House of Representatives have both passed resolutions expressing concern over

"persistent and credible reports of systematic, state-sanctioned organ harvesting from non-consenting prisoners of conscience".

Those concerns are echoed by organisations such as Amnesty International and Tibet Truth. The conclusions reached in the report "Bloody Harvest", updated and republished in June this year, make it clear why they deserve to be treated with the utmost seriousness. The report found:

"Organ transplantation volume in China is far larger than official Chinese government statistics indicate...The source for most of the massive volume of organs for transplants is the killing of innocents: Uyghurs, Tibetans, House Christians and"—as we have heard today—

"primarily Falun Gong".

It also called on all nations not to

"allow their citizens to go to China for organs until China has allowed a full investigation into organ harvesting of prisoners of conscience, both past and present."

In a written answer to a parliamentary question recently tabled by the hon. Member for Strangford, the Foreign Office acknowledged that, although few British people are thought to travel overseas for such transplants, "it is very difficult to prevent UK citizens travelling to less well-regulated countries"

to do so. When the Minister responds to the debate, perhaps he would care to elaborate on that, as well as on the various difficulties faced. What assessment has been made of any potential methods to restrict travel of that kind? I am sure he will also explain the diplomatic efforts to end the practice of forced organ removal in China. I would like to hear today an undertaking that such efforts will be stepped up. There are signs that the matter has fallen off the radar at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

**Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): I am pleased that this debate is taking place. It is not only interesting but informative. I pay tribute not only to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), but to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) for her fantastic report, which I have read.

Does the hon. Lady agree that the UK Government's policy of speaking to the Chinese behind closed doors—or behind their hands, so to speak—has not worked? We now need to speak publicly about the human rights abuses that are occurring in China to make them seek to change how they treat their citizens.

**Margaret Ferrier:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. It is interesting that we hear about conversations going on behind closed doors not only with China but with other countries, because of certain

difficulties. We have to be careful how we deal with countries such as China. We do a lot of trade with China and with some countries in the middle east that unfortunately have poor human rights records. If talking behind closed doors is not working, it is time to bring things into the public domain. I hope the Minister will take that on board.

Although the FCO's 2014 corporate report into human rights in China noted that the country

"announced in December that it would cease harvesting organs from executed prisoners by 1 January 2015",

there is simply no mention whatever of the practice in the 2016 report. Will the Minister commit to taking action to demonstrate the Government's ongoing commitment to tackling organ harvesting? Will he give an undertaking that the UK will make representations to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on efforts to investigate forced organ removal in China?

As we have heard, thousands of religious prisoners in China have had their livers, kidneys and corneas ripped out while they were still alive. It is absolutely horrific to think of that. Will the UK use its position to push at EU level for high-level European action to address the practice? Forced organ donation is abhorrent. It is a practice that makes a mockery of even the most fundamental and basic universal human rights. As journalist Ethan Gutmann stated:

"We acknowledge a terrible atrocity only after it's over."

We have to change that and always speak out against what we know in our hearts is fundamentally wrong.

In closing, I shall quote Dr Martin Luther King, who said:

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Dr King's words ring as true today as when first spoken. If human rights are truly universal, we must uphold them everywhere, and challenge violations wherever they occur.

10.23 am

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for securing such an interesting and informative debate. We may not have heard from many speakers, but the quality of information that has been imparted has been superb. The hon. Gentleman said two things that I will repeat, because they sum up the entirety of the debate for me. He said that what is happening in China is "almost too dreadful to believe", and he underlined the stark reality that the message that has to go out is that people are being killed on demand for their organs.

I must admit that, prior to the conference recess, I was one of those people who saw this issue as almost an urban myth. My research for this debate made me incredibly uncomfortable, but it brought home clearly the horror of forced organ removal. I found a number of well researched documentaries and reports, which only magnified the horror by showing the enormity of the scale of the practice. Unlike the hon. Member for Strangford, I am not going to use the term "industrial", because I think it dehumanises the experience, but it is hard to come up with an expression that quantifies the sheer scale of this practice.

The hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) made one of the most informed speeches I have heard on this subject, after all the research I have done. She summarised wonderfully some horrific cases that really bring the message home. I commend her for the work she has done on the issue and for highlighting it clearly and succinctly. I spent hours over the conference recess watching documentaries and trying to read the 2016 report by David Matas and David Kilgour, and the best way I can describe it is "spine-chilling". I started by watching their documentary; I probably should not have done so, because every time I read the documents it brought back some of the images I saw. We are discussing definitely some of world's worst crimes against humanity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) highlighted her own condemnation of the practice and that of our Scottish National party colleagues. I reiterate that point: we totally condemn the practice of forced organ donation—although "donation" is probably not the best term to use. My hon. Friend also highlighted the good cross-party work done by our colleague in the Scottish Parliament, Bob Doris. I am pleased to say that the Scottish Parliament made organ trafficking illegal in Scotland through the Human Tissue (Scotland) Act 2006. That legislation is based on the principle of people freely indicating their wish to donate organs after their death. It prohibits the trafficking of organs and provides for severe penalties for anyone found guilty of doing so. That is an example of good practice from the Scottish Parliament.

The SNP calls on the UK Government to step up their diplomatic efforts to end this practice in China. Forced organ donation, or removal, is absolutely abhorrent, and it flies in the face of basic human rights. I know that successive UK Governments have expressed concerns about claims of organ harvesting, often in the context of the ongoing UK-China human rights dialogue and the UK-China strategic dialogue. The issue is not mentioned in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's latest human rights update on China, published in July, which is part of its annual human rights and democracy report. However, it was mentioned in the 2014 report, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West said, stated:

"In a positive development, China announced in December that it would cease harvesting organs from executed prisoners by 1 January 2015."

The updated report from earlier this year proves that, woefully, that is not the case. With 60,000 to 100,000 organs being forcibly transplanted each year, we need to take drastic action.

We call on the UK Government to step up their diplomatic efforts to end this practice in China. The UK should make representations to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on efforts to investigate forced organ removal and use its position in the EU to push for high-level European action to address the practice. Let me be clear: I am not suggesting that we should isolate China, but we should engage in a constructive dialogue and deepen relationships in order to get a result.

10.28 am

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim

[*Catherine West*]

Shannon) on securing this important debate. He is right to say that this is an increasingly worrying international issue, so well done to him for bringing it to our attention.

The hon. Gentleman is also right to say that this matter is not new to the House of Commons. A number of parliamentary questions have been asked about it. I read through the questions that Ministers have answered over the years, and there appears to be a contradiction: although the Chinese Government sometimes give assurances that organs from executed prisoners will be used for transplantation only with their consent, on other occasions there is a complete, flat denial that any of this is going on. There seem to be two levels of dialogue, which are curious when read all at once as a sort of transcript from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. When the Minister responds, will he clarify whether he believes that that is an issue? If so, what are the Government doing about it?

I want to highlight some of the excellent points that have been made in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) commented, correctly, on the demand side of the problem and on the fact that many foreign people are travelling to China for what is called in the literature “transplant tourism”. She was right to ask what the Government are doing to educate people who may wish to travel from this country to China to receive medical treatment. I would be grateful if the Minister could let me know whether, for example, the NHS has any background information about patients who may be particularly tempted to consider having this kind of operation. Also, can he say what cross-referencing there is between the NHS and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in that regard?

The hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) is well known for her concern about human rights across the globe. She made some important points today. She was right to say that the United Nations should be carrying out a full investigation and that our Government should play a crucial role in that. She was also correct to say that Mr Speaker held an excellent event, the screening of “The Bleeding Edge” film, to highlight the issue of the forced removal of organs in China. Sadly, owing to pressures on my diary in the summer, I was not able to attend, but I believe that the film is compelling and I will certainly put it on my list to watch at Christmas.

**Fiona Bruce:** I just inform the hon. Lady and other Members that so much interest has been expressed in that film that our commission is proposing to put on a further screening in this place shortly. I hope that she will be able to attend that.

**Catherine West:** I thank the hon. Lady for that information. I will indeed try to attend the second screening of “The Bleeding Edge”.

**Jim Shannon:** May I recommend to those people who have not seen that film that they do so? However, if anyone does come to watch it, they should come prepared for some horrific viewing; many people seeing the film have felt unable to continue watching it and have had to close their eyes. It is a very effective film but it is also very hard to watch. I urge those who have not seen it to go and see it, but they should prepare themselves.

**Catherine West:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I think it was the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) who suggested that this issue is just so horrific to think about. We are talking about it in the cold light of day now, but I think that people will need quite a strong constitution to watch the film.

The hon. Member for Congleton talked about Dr Enver Tohti’s time working as a surgeon in China. I will be interested to follow up on his personal testimonies about the executions and subsequent organ harvesting. I am sure that the Foreign Office is looking carefully at those reports in order to come to a judgment on how to substantiate those claims and on what action to take as a result. Any suggestion of “on-demand killing” for organs is too terrible even to contemplate.

I press the Minister on the issue of a travel ban. Does he believe that that strategy could work? Furthermore, the hon. Member for Congleton talked, in the light of the allegations, about the increased activity in recent years. I note that in the briefing prepared for today’s debate there is quite a lot of fresh information from 2015 and 2016. We do not feel reassured that this activity is being reduced. We need to ask further questions.

I will briefly put on the record my appreciation of the comments by the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) and of his forensic questioning about exactly where we are in relation to the human rights dialogue. He is right to remind the House that we already have a vehicle in place to examine human rights in all countries about which we have concerns, particularly in relation to the groups that are highlighted in the reports.

In the context of the alleged organ harvesting, the Uyghurs, the Tibetans, the House Christians and Falun Gong tend to be the groups that come up again and again in the human rights legislation, in the recordings and in other evidence. Therefore, could the Minister respond to the questions put by the hon. Member for Gloucester—what is the existing framework and what are the dates for ongoing dialogue and challenge? Also, can he explain why there is no mention of this issue, which is clearly of concern to so many people, in the July 2016 FCO report?

I thank all Members for being here today and for putting on the record their concerns and questions. May I press the Minister on the question of an independent investigation by the British Government and of the Government working closely with the UN on the issue? What are the levers we can use around some of our relationships in the wider sense? We meet regularly to talk about trade. We meet regularly to talk about ongoing concerns and ongoing positive elements of our relationship. How can we develop the balance that we so desperately need in relation to countries that are so important to us in the post-Brexit climate? The European Union has, I think, taken a lot of responsibility for human rights work over the years. How can we again make that part of a more balanced approach to relationships with China?

Can the Minister clarify the question of allowing citizens to go to China for organs? How can we look at whether there are practical ways to establish a travel ban until we are absolutely sure that this is not happening? Also, can he explain how we can monitor any ongoing allegations, so that we can be absolutely sure that we are dealing with the facts?

10.36 am

**The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan):** Thank you, Mr Gapes, for calling me to speak; I am very pleased to respond to this important debate. Of course, normally it would be the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma), who would reply, but he is in Indonesia. So I am very pleased to take his place, in order to respond to the concerns about this issue that have been so graphically expressed in this debate.

I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for securing the debate, and let us be very clear from the outset that any form of involuntary organ removal violates established medical and legal principles. However, the concerns that Members have expressed today relate to the most disturbing form of involuntary organ removal—“organ harvesting”. Organ harvesting is the notion that members of minority groups and religious groups in China are held in detention, are unable to communicate with the outside world, and are killed specifically for their organs, virtually “to order”. To hon. Members—and indeed the citizens of this country—the notion of organs being “harvested” and used for transplant, virtually “to order”, is particularly abhorrent. There is also the separate ethical and moral question of involuntary organ removal from executed prisoners, with or without their alleged consent.

As we have heard, recent publications, including some that have been referred to in this debate today, have brought the issue of alleged “organ harvesting” into the spotlight. The authors of such reports believe that this practice is happening in China today and that the victims are mostly innocent people who just wish to practice their religion peacefully.

My officials consider the Kilgour, Gutmann and Matas report to be a very important source of information about China’s organ transplant system. It highlights how difficult it is to verify the number of organ transplants conducted in China each year, and states that it is almost impossible to identify the source of those organs.

The report rightly questions the lack of transparency in China’s organ transplant system. However, the authors of that report make it clear that they have no definitive evidence to justify their allegations. They are necessarily forced to rely on assumptions, and sometimes on research techniques that are less than rigorous. Although I do not doubt the need to maintain close scrutiny of organ transplant practices in China, we believe that the evidence base is not sufficiently strong to substantiate claims about the systematic harvesting of organs from minority groups. Indeed, based on all the evidence available to us, we cannot conclude that this practice of “organ harvesting” is definitely happening in China.

**Jim Shannon:** The information coming from the US congressional commission is that it has such evidence in its possession. Also, I understand that the Canadian Government have initiated some evidence taking, which shows that there is what they refer to as systematic forced organ transplantation. If that is the case, and the evidence exists—I believe that it clearly does—will the Minister look at that evidence, that information, and on the back of it take the action we all wish him to take?

**Sir Alan Duncan:** My understanding of the congressional report is that although it is broadly very critical of human rights in China, the report mentions organ harvesting only once. However, I will undertake to ask officials to write to the hon. Gentleman and expand further on the exact details of that point, in the hope that such comments will satisfy him about what I am saying.

**Fiona Bruce:** By necessity, there are no witnesses to the removal of the organs—the people involved are dead—but does the Minister not agree that, although we have talked about huge numbers, even one transgression of human rights caused by the involuntary removal of an organ is grossly wrong? Despite the fact that the authors of the report have challenged—indeed asked—the Chinese Government to reject their assertions, to come out and say that they are incorrect, there has been complete silence. There has been no rejection of the research or the information, or indeed of the authors’ conclusions.

**Sir Alan Duncan:** At the outset, I stated the principles by which we ought to look at the entire issue, and in that sense I totally agree with my hon. Friend. She is right to say that the difficulty of the issue is that, by its very nature, if it goes on it is hidden. Therefore, to establish the evidence is a very difficult exercise, but in respect of engagement with the Chinese Government I hope that in a moment I will be able to offer my hon. Friend a bit of reassurance about some progress we have been making.

The Government have serious concerns about restrictions on the freedom of religion or belief in China, including for Falun Gong practitioners. The freedom to practise, change or share one’s faith or belief without discrimination or violent opposition is a fundamental right that all people should enjoy, yet we have solid evidence, from multiple sources, of the persecution of religious minorities. Christians, Muslims and Buddhists, as well as Falun Gong practitioners, are persecuted through different means, with reports of their being detained incommunicado, being tortured and receiving inhuman treatment, and also being subjected to interference in their places of worship and in their religious teaching and customs. Everyone should be free to practise their religion according to their beliefs, in accordance with the international frameworks to which both the UK and China are party.

I assure the House that the Government pay close attention to the human rights situation in China. Indeed, no fewer than three British Ministers have raised individual cases with their Chinese counterparts in the past few months. As the former Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), stated to the House on 12 July, we have raised concerns about reports of organ harvesting, as well as of the torture and mistreatment of detainees, during our annual human rights dialogue with China, and I can let my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) know that the next such exchange will be on 27 and 28 October, here in London. At that exchange, we will raise our human rights concerns, including the treatment of Falun Gong practitioners and the lack of transparency in China’s organ transplant system. So the debate is timely, and I will ensure that hon. Members’ concerns are raised at that dialogue.

[*Sir Alan Duncan*]

The use of the death penalty in China is also a subject of great concern, with the number of prisoners being executed a closely guarded secret and, therefore, difficult to estimate. We oppose the death penalty in all circumstances and campaign actively worldwide for its abolition. In the past, organs were taken from executed prisoners without prior consent. China committed to end the practice of involuntary organ removal from January 2015. Although that was an important and positive step, the degree to which it has been implemented is not clear. There are also complex ethical questions about the ability of condemned prisoners to give free and valid consent.

Following representations to the Chinese authorities, we received information on their organ donation policy yesterday. Although we have only just received the information—officials are scrutinising it—I would like to share it with the House. The information states that all organ donations in China are handled within a clear legal framework that meets international standards, including those of the World Health Organisation. There is a registration centre for managing information about the origins of organs used for donations, and statistics are shared with the WHO. The Chinese authorities provided statistics for 2015, which stated that 7,785 organs were donated from 2,766 donors. We intend to contact the WHO to try to validate that information. We have, however, received no detailed information about the treatment of prisoners' organs. We therefore believe that, based on the evidence we have, it is likely that executed prisoners remain a key source of organs for transplant in China.

The hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), who is no longer in her seat, and the Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), raised the issue of people travelling to China for medical treatment, including what might be described as organ tourism. We do not collect data on that, but we believe that few people in the UK choose to travel to China for that purpose. The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green asked if we would ban such travel, but the British Government cannot prevent individuals from travelling. We can, however, flag the risks and ensure that individuals are aware that other countries might have poorer medical and ethical safeguards than the UK does. Travelling abroad for any treatment, including organ transplant, carries risks. Medical staff have a responsibility to inform patients who are considering that route of the risks and of the fact that organs might not have been donated freely.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) mentioned the Conservative party human rights commission report. Although the Government were not asked to give evidence to the commission, and as such the report does not entirely reflect Government policy, there is much in it with which we agree. We are already pursuing an approach that is consistent with many of the report's recommendations but parts of the report require further investigation to substantiate some of the claims made. Officials have offered to meet the authors, and as there is—I think—a plan to produce a separate report on organ harvesting, they have tried, but so far without success, to engage with the process of compiling that report.

**Fiona Bruce:** With respect, I believe that the Minister is referring to the wider report on human rights in China, which was produced by the commission some three months ago. Indeed, the commission said that it would produce a supplementary report on organ harvesting, and it is that report, published today, to which I referred and at which I hope officials will look. The commissioners, Members of Parliament and Members of the House of Lords would, I know, welcome the opportunity to meet Foreign Office officials to discuss both reports further.

**Sir Alan Duncan:** In the spirit in which my hon. Friend is entering into this, I can confirm that we would be pleased for her to come and speak to officials to discuss all the details and the evidence to see whether we can share information in order to understand exactly what the facts are, and therefore what the policy should be.

There was also a reference to a meeting of the UN Human Rights Council in September. We vigorously raise all human rights concerns on such occasions, although on this occasion not specifically organ harvesting.

**Jim Shannon:** I just want to recap on the organ tourism issue that the shadow Minister and the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) talked about. Have the Government had an opportunity to raise the subject with other western countries? For instance, are the Government aware of what other countries do about it? Is there a chance we could work together to address the issues of organ tourism and those who go abroad specifically to get an organ? It is forced organ transplantation, so we have concerns. It would be better if the western countries could work together on that. Is there an opportunity to do that?

**Sir Alan Duncan:** It is probably true to say that there has not been much discussion with other countries on this particular issue. The hon. Gentleman, of course, has a point: when countries work together they can be more effective. Again, I will ask officials to write to him about such an initiative.

**Fiona Bruce:** May I intervene one final time?

**Sir Alan Duncan:** Of course.

**Fiona Bruce:** Will the officials ascertain which countries have already banned travel for organ tourism? I believe that Israel and possibly others have done so.

**Sir Alan Duncan:** It may not be practical to police it, but I can assure the House that the UK works with like-minded partners to strengthen the rules surrounding organ transplantation worldwide. This includes the development of the World Health Organisation guiding principles to ensure that organ removal for transplant takes place only according to agreed guidelines. We also support the declaration of Istanbul, which encourages all countries to draw up legal and professional frameworks to govern organ donation and transplantation activities. In the past eight years, more than 100 countries, including China, have endorsed the principles of the declaration and subsequently strengthened their laws against the commercial organ trade.

Contrary to some reports, our trading relationship with China does not prevent us from having frank discussions with the Chinese authorities on issues of concern such as this. We will continue to engage with them on the full range of issues, including organ transplants and the wider human rights agenda. We will continue to promote the universal values of freedom and respect for human rights and the importance of international co-operation.

10.53 am

**Jim Shannon:** I thank everyone who came along to support and participate in the debate and who made valuable contributions. I thank everyone who made speeches, particularly the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), who has worked hard on this issue. I did not say this earlier, but I will say it now. Some children of those of the Falun Gong religious belief came to a presentation in the House, and Becky James took part in a Ride to Freedom event to highlight the issue. The children were able to portray clearly what the issues were. I urge the Government to work hard to internationalise the issue to bring us all together to ensure that we can effectively persuade China to stop forced organ transplantation. If we can do that, this House will be working in unison with those in the rest of the world who want to see this disgraceful and awful transplant of organs stopped.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered forced organ removal in China.

10.54 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Coventry City Football Club

11 am

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of Coventry Football Club.

We have known each other a very long time, Mr Gapes, but I think this is probably the first time that I have taken part in a debate that you have chaired—if I am wrong, I am not far off being right. I take this opportunity to thank Mr Speaker, who, over the years, has been very good in granting a number of debates on the future of Coventry City football club. The people of Coventry and the fans very much appreciate that he has been able to do that.

I welcome the Minister to her place. I have known her for quite a long time, too, but this is the first time that we have participated in a debate together. I hope that at the end of the debate she will have some constructive comments to make. Some weeks ago, I wrote to her about the problems at Coventry City football club, and in her response she gave us a little bit of hope, as she said she hoped to have something positive to tell us at the end of this debate.

Coventry City football club faces an uncertain future, and the ongoing saga has spanned many years. I have met Ministers in the past, along with my Coventry colleague from past Parliaments, Bob Ainsworth, and my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North West (Mr Robinson). I have asked questions in the House and tabled early-day motions. I recognise that there are differing views about what has happened to Coventry City football club, but at the end of the day the club is ultimately responsible for its own future.

Hon. Members will remember the recent damaging rent dispute between the football club's owners, Sisu, and Arena Coventry Ltd, which operates the Ricoh arena. That dispute led to the football club playing its home games in Northampton, more than 30 miles away, which was, to say the least, expensive and inconvenient for the fans. Since then, the Ricoh arena has been sold to Wasps rugby club, and amidst all that, Sisu continues to take legal action. I do not propose to discuss that legal action today, as it is sub judice and a different matter, but it has helped neither the situation nor the relationship between the fans and the club—so much so that dialogue now seems impossible.

Big questions remain. The deal that sees Coventry City play at the Ricoh arena expires at the end of the 2017-18 season, and talks to reach a new agreement have broken down. A long-term solution for home matches remains far away, and the threat of the club once again moving out of the city remains. The football club's academy is under threat. The club has approved a proposal for the training centre to be redeveloped for housing. We have to ask ourselves what Sisu's future intentions for Coventry City football club are. What possible plan could Sisu have for the club's future?

At the heart of the issue lies the question of how a football club should be run, and for whom. This season has seen disappointment on the field—just a single win in the first 11 league games—and the manager has recently quit. Off the field, there is further unrest. The man in charge of resolving the future use of the Ricoh

[Mr Jim Cunningham]

arena by the club, the managing director, has stepped down. A petition started by the *Coventry Telegraph* calling for Sisu to sell up has amassed nearly 20,000 signatories. That petition has my support and that of my hon. Friends the Members for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) and for Coventry North West. Just imagine if the club was succeeding and that number of fans attended home games.

I believe that every football club should work for the community that it represents, the community whose name it bears—in this case, Coventry City. That is the name on the shirt. The community is so tied to the club that the council recently renamed a road after the famous Jimmy Hill. A football club should not be viewed as a way to make a quick buck by faceless and unaccountable owners. The club, the community asset, has been mismanaged by a select few for their own benefit. Decisions have been made in the interests of the parent company, and the football club has been sidelined and relegated to second place behind the business interests of a hedge fund. The Football Association and the Football League must explain how such a company can pass the fit and proper person test and then proceed to run a club into the ground. It has no stadium, no manager and its academy is under threat. By every conceivable measure, the club is heading backwards. The existing regulations have clearly failed.

**Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising this issue, on which we strongly agree. He makes a really powerful point. One of the tragedies of Coventry City is that it demonstrates the weakness of the owners and directors test—the fit and proper person test—and the weakness of the FA or the league in making any sort of proper intervention in such a club. Does he agree that that shows the need for proper transparency of ownership and a greater number of independent directors on the boards of clubs, who could represent the city and the fans?

**Mr Cunningham:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments and pay tribute to him, because over the years he and I have done quite a bit of work in this area. I particularly thank him for the support he has given to the Coventry football supporters. The FA and the Football League have been highly critical of FIFA, but they should start by putting their own house in order—I fully agree with him about that. As I have the opportunity, I will mention that I hope he might also consider that the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, on which he sits, might want to have a look at this issue.

**Damian Collins:** To give a plug, the Committee will be interviewing the chairman and the director of governance of the FA on Monday next week.

**Mr Cunningham:** I thank the hon. Gentleman. I am sure he will raise the issue of Coventry.

There are potential solutions that would make the club work for the community again. Other clubs have shown us that giving fans an increased say can work. AFC Wimbledon is owned by the fans and the team was promoted last season, and Portsmouth is owned by its

fans and is now turning a profit. I am not saying that is the only model to follow, but workable community solutions that put the fans first exist and should be considered. However, any solution is closed off unless Sisu decides to engage in a dialogue in good faith.

This morning I met representatives of the fans, who gave me a document that could form a basis for bringing both sides together to try and resolve the dispute—the Minister might want to look at it. They note in the document that the supporters expect a number of things from the owners of the club, which include a commitment to the football club, decent investment on and off the pitch, honest communication and engagement with the fans, fans being given a stake in the club, respect for the club's traditions, a good relationship with the wider community and an offer of a quality matchday experience for all the fans. Those are reasonable requests and are in line with some of the points I have made this morning, but such solutions are closed off unless Sisu decides either to engage in a dialogue in good faith or to sell up, move on and leave its toxic legacy behind.

The future of the football club hangs in the balance. Having watched the club together on the terraces for decades, we now stand to see it fall away—to see it all lost—because of the poor choices of a hedge fund. It was all completely avoidable. At the end of the day, it is the fans and the community that lose out and suffer. Look at other clubs across the UK: when a club succeeds, the city and the area surrounding it succeed too. Football can provide a sense of identity, community and pride.

Will the Minister update me on any discussions that have taken place between her, Sisu and the FA? Will she intervene where appropriate? If she feels it is unacceptable for her to intervene herself, will she appoint somebody of repute to bring both sides together to try to resolve the dispute? Pressure must be put on Sisu to engage with other parties and the wider community, including the fans, with the Minister arbitrating if necessary. She should also consider appointing somebody of good repute—it could be a judge—to arbitrate.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. He knows of my personal involvement in this issue over the past few years. He will obviously agree that Sisu's record and the position that the club finds itself in are absolutely lamentable. Does he agree that clubs need to be seen to be representatives of communities, not franchises that can be bought and moved about by owners? That is why it is key that we intervene strongly when a club finds itself in a lamentable position like that of Coventry City.

**Mr Cunningham:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman, who for years before coming to the House played a role in trying to bring both sides together. I think the Minister can play a significant part if the will is there. I do not want to criticise the current Minister, because she is fairly new in her job, but previous Ministers have done the “Grand Old Duke of York” routine: we had meetings with them and got to the top of the hill, but we all ended up back down it again—in fact, we rolled back down.

I ask that the Football League reviews the appropriateness of its fit and proper test. As a minimum, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee should look at the regulations

that are in place—I have already said that to its Chairman—so this can never happen again. Lastly, I ask that Sisu ends its involvement with Coventry City football club so the damage it has caused can begin to be undone, unless it is prepared to talk reasonably with the fans and use the charter as a basis for an agreement to resolve the dispute.

11.12 am

**Colleen Fletcher** (Coventry North East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) on securing this debate. He has been involved in this issue for many years, as was my constituency predecessor.

In the short time available to me, I want to make two points and echo all that my hon. Friend said. First, the Football League allowed Sisu—the owners of the Sky Blues—to move the club away from Coventry in 2013 temporarily, having been assured by Sisu that it would build a new stadium in the city. Since then, there have been numerous stories about its plans for a long-term stadium solution in or around the city of Coventry, the latest of which—apparently its preferred option—is a new stadium and ground-share agreement at the Butts stadium.

However, nobody who knows the local area and understands the issues involved has ever believed that any of Sisu's plans are feasible or anything other than a smokescreen. There has never been any evidence of serious intent to build a new stadium. In reality, the only viable option to secure the club's long-term future in Coventry is an extension of the agreement to play home games at the Ricoh arena, which is due to expire in 2018. The club's owners know that, whether they admit it or not. They must now do everything within their power to ensure that the agreement is extended. If they are incapable of achieving that, they should sell up and go, as the *Coventry Telegraph* has called on them to do.

Secondly, the Football League claims to be a genuine regulatory body, not just a representative organisation acting in the interest of club owners and its own narrow self-interest. If the Football League is indeed the effective and responsible regulatory body it claims to be, it will surely have sought and received clear evidence from Sisu to show that it has a plan to secure a long-term stadium solution in Coventry. Similarly, it will have monitored the situation to ensure that real progress is made to achieve that ambition, and it will wish to take appropriate and robust action, including the removal of the golden share from Sisu, should the situation remain unresolved. I urge the Minister to ask the Football League for sight of that evidence. I intend to do the same during a meeting I have with it later this week, but I fear that it does not hold such evidence because it simply does not exist. If I am right, that demonstrates the inadequacy of its role in the Coventry City saga and its inability—or, worse, its unwillingness—to properly regulate the game of football. For the sake of the thousands of loyal Coventry City fans, we need to find a resolution to this situation, which has gone on for far too long.

11.15 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch):** As always, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I

am extremely grateful to the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) for securing this debate. We have been friends across the Chamber for many years, and he is extremely passionate about this issue. There has not been a moment in our friendship when Coventry City has not come up as a topic of conversation. With his knowledge and passion, he made some incredibly insightful contributions, as did other hon. Members.

As the hon. Gentleman said, football clubs up and down the country remain a matter of great importance. They are valuable parts of our local communities, and every care should be taken by their owners and stakeholders to protect their long-term future. The preservation of Coventry City football club in particular is not a new issue. As the hon. Gentleman said, my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant), debated the subject in the House in September 2014 and October 2013. I am sure I was not alone in welcoming the club's return to the Ricoh arena in late 2014, so it is with regret that two years on we are once again talking about our concerns about the club's ownership and the uncertainty surrounding where the team will be playing its football in the foreseeable future.

There is a great deal of focus on the amount of money at the top end of professional football, but we must remember that the majority of clubs compete in the lower divisions and operate on a considerably different scale. Such clubs cannot rely on huge sums of money from broadcasters or sponsors. They need the continuous support of local businesses, local councils and, of course, the club's supporters. That applies to Coventry City. I am aware of its illustrious past—as the hon. Gentleman knows, the first time I ever cried at a football match was when Coventry beat Tottenham at Wembley in 1987. Despite that, I have great sympathy with the fans of Coventry City, as I have with the supporters of any club that is suffering as a consequence of either poor performance on the pitch or financial struggles off the pitch.

The financial state of clubs in this country is better now than at any time over the past 20 years. The football authorities have made progress over recent years to introduce new ownership and financial rules, including a means and abilities test, which requires proof of funds from prospective new owners, transfer embargoes to help to curb club spending and the financial fair play principles across the 92 professional clubs. Financial fair play, in particular, has led to more responsible spending by clubs and, as a result, fewer incidents of club insolvencies. I think I am right in saying that Coventry City's owners have in recent years reduced the debt the club once carried, and the return to the Ricoh arena has improved the club's financial position. However, I hear what both the hon. Member for Coventry South and my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) said, and I can reassure them that the test will always remain under review.

Ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of clubs must be the primary responsibility of the football authorities and of all owners. That said, I also believe that supporters have every right to protest against the way they see their club being run if they believe that the plans or methods the owners are deploying are not working, so long as those protests are carried out in a non-threatening manner. It is clear from the ongoing protests at Coventry City that genuine concerns remain

[Tracey Crouch]

about the owners' ability to take the club forward and to resolve the matter of where the first team and its academy will train and play. Those would be real concerns for any club. Although I am not privy to the owners' thought process or the discussions that have taken place among the relevant parties about residency, it is clear that there remains a distinct lack of clarity on all those fronts. I call on all those interested parties to come forward and to provide the clarity that is needed, for the good of the club and its loyal supporters.

**Damian Collins:** The Minister said that the owners and directors test is kept under review. Does she share my concern that, as it is defined at the moment, it is a fairly narrow test of whether someone has unspent convictions that make them incapable of being a director? It gives little discretionary power to the league or the FA to come to an opinion, based on a range of factors that are part of the experience of that director, about whether that director is fit to hold that role.

**Tracey Crouch:** We always keep all such things under review, and I am looking forward to seeing the outcome of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's meeting next week with the FA. It is important that we have healthy football clubs and owners who care for and respect those football clubs and the communities in which they sit. There is a gamut of reasons for that, including more than just financial conduct and criminal activity. It is important that we keep such things under review, but I am looking forward to seeing the outcome of the Select Committee's meeting next week with the FA.

I return to the need to ensure that all interested parties come forward and provide clarity. It is important that the club's owners and Coventry City Council sit down and try to resolve the ongoing row between them, which began with rent disputes and resulted in the football team temporarily relocating to Northampton, and continues to cast a shadow over the new and progressive measures that are needed to take the club forward. I am aware of the ongoing legal dispute and I do not want to prejudice it or take sides. It is for the two parties and Wasps Rugby to decide how best to resolve that dispute and set about finding ways to work together, for the sake of the local community.

The club's owners or senior executives should make arrangements to meet a representative group of Coventry supporters as soon as possible. There needs to be much greater open dialogue on the matters of strategic importance to the club, including what plans there are for its future home.

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** I come back to something that I said in my speech: we need someone eminent to get both sides together. We can call for people to do that, but we have to get someone of eminence who can actually bring both sides together. That is key if the Minister herself cannot do that.

**Tracey Crouch:** I am flattered that the hon. Gentleman thinks that I am that eminent person.

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** I didn't say you were.

**Tracey Crouch:** I am grateful for that clarification. Now I am hurt that he does not think that I am that eminent person. One of the most frustrating things about the Sports Minister brief is that a lot of things happen in football that should have nothing to do with the Government. I am regularly contacted by supporters of various football clubs—Coventry City is one—who wish the Government to intervene and the Minister personally to get involved. That is incredibly difficult to do, because at the end of the day it is not for the Government to intervene in such things. However, I completely hear what he says about trying to ensure that someone mediates between the parties. If the situation has got to the point where the relationship is so broken that the parties cannot come together and come to an agreement, I will take that point away and consider it in detail. My hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe may wish to think about whether there is a role for him as a passionate supporter and believer in such things or whether there is someone outside the political arena who could perform that role, but I hear what the hon. Member for Coventry South says. Ultimately, this is an issue for the football authorities, and they need to come together to try to sort it out. I will return shortly to the point that the hon. Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) made about the Football League.

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** I thought Pontius Pilate died 2,000 years ago, but it is obvious that he has not died. I understand that Ministers cannot or do not want to get involved, but they have the authority to appoint someone of some standing to bring both sides together. I think that the fans, who, as I indicated, have been constructive, would welcome that. I accept that Ministers get lots of demands from lots of football fans and all that goes with that, but this situation is far too serious; it has gone on for five or six years and something really has to be done about it.

**Tracey Crouch:** The hon. Gentleman is picking up on a theme that I was getting to: the importance of supporters and of clubs listening to supporters. He will be aware that structured dialogue between club owners and their supporter groups was a key recommendation in the report of the expert working group on football supporter ownership and engagement. That report is the culmination of the work that the Government have done over several years, in partnership with the football authorities and supporter representative groups, to find ways to improve supporter engagement beyond the customer relationship and to recognise supporters as integral to clubs' success. The leagues have codified that structured dialogue requirement in their rulebooks, and those structured meetings will begin this season. The football authorities are currently working on guidance to clubs on how those meetings should be structured. If that is not happening at Coventry, please let me know, because it is important that those recommendations are implemented at all levels of football. I believe that those meetings will lead the way in ensuring that fans are better informed about and consulted on clubs' activities, including their financial standing, the identity of their owners and other matters of real importance.

**Damian Collins:** Going back to a point that the Minister made earlier, does she accept that one of the reasons that such cases—be it Coventry, Leeds, Portsmouth

or whatever—come back to the Minister’s door time after time is that the football authorities are powerless to do anything when they see a club being run badly? As long as owners are keeping within the narrow confines of the rules, they can run a football club into the ground and the FA will not lift a finger.

**Tracey Crouch:** My hon. Friend makes an important point, which I will discuss with officials later today. There is perhaps a gap there, and that is perhaps something that we need to look at. I am sure that that issue will be raised by him or other members of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee at its meeting next week with the FA.

I will turn briefly to the comments made by the hon. Member for Coventry North East on the Football League. Following all the discussions and the temporary relocation, the league confirmed:

“Any application to move...to a stadium outside the city would need to be considered by”

the league’s board.

“In doing so, the Board would require the club to demonstrate that it had a clear plan for returning to Coventry within a prescribed timeframe.”

I sincerely hope that history does not repeat itself and that the club does not find itself playing outside its city again. However, it is important that supporters know exactly what the rules are, so after this debate I will ask the league to confirm its position. Furthermore, there should be a proposal forthcoming for the league or the FA to ensure that fans are properly consulted.

To conclude, it is right that the Government do not involve themselves in the regulation of football or the business and commercial affairs of any club. Football clubs must be run as businesses, but they also need social consciences; they must consider the impacts of their actions on supporters and the local community. It is important that those who have a direct say or influence over the future of Coventry City stand up and provide the clarity that is needed. It is of paramount importance that the city of Coventry has a football club.

For my part, I will meet the football authorities in the coming months to discuss several relevant matters in the game and will ask them specifically for an update on the progress with Coventry City. In the meantime, I wish the Sky Blues the best of luck against Charlton on Saturday and hope that we can resolve this situation collectively for the hon. Member for Coventry South and the people of Coventry.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.29 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Royal Yacht Britannia: International Trade

[MR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the reintroduction of the Royal Yacht Britannia for the purpose of international trade.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope, for what I think is the first time, in this important debate. We have to ask ourselves what sort of Britain we want to live in and what we in this Parliament can do to try to make Britain great again. On 23 June, the British public said that they wanted to take back control, be independent of the European Union, stand tall in the world again and project our power and influence around the globe as an independent nation.

The Government’s interpretation of that has been put forward as “Brexit means Brexit.” I believe that if Brexit is to mean successful Brexit, it should also mean the return of our royal yacht. Today, I want to set out the case for the renewal of the royal yacht, which is both economic and patriotic and, crucially, would be at low cost, if not no cost, to the taxpayer.

Since I launched the campaign, I have been supported by Ministers past and present, 100 colleagues on the Government Benches, *The Sun*, the *Daily Mail*, *The Times*, the *Sunday Express* and, most vociferously of all, Christopher Hope of *The Daily Telegraph*. That support is welcome and has been crucial in making today’s debate a success. However, the most moving and compelling arguments have been made not by newspapers or colleagues but by the hundreds of members of the public who have written or emailed me comments and suggestions of support. Some have gone as far as sending me cheques, and some have even offered to give up their winter fuel allowance this year to pay for a new royal yacht. Those hundreds of selfless acts and offers of help from the public are a demonstration of a proud nation, eager to support our royal family; a nation with hope and pride for our future. The British public have realised—perhaps before politicians—that a royal yacht is not some sepia-tinted look back to the 1950s, but about the Britain that their children, and indeed their grandchildren, will inhabit.

It will not surprise colleagues to hear that not all of the correspondence has been positive or supportive. I want to deal here and now, at the start of the debate, with those who seek to rubbish the idea of a new royal yacht and the contribution that our royal family can make to Great Britain and her future.

Our head of state is an inspirational leader who can represent our United Kingdom in a way that no other global leader can match. Over 60 years, she has met 4 million people in person, equivalent to the population of New Zealand. She is Queen of 16 countries and has travelled more widely than any other head of state in history. One of her greatest achievements has been to build our Commonwealth from eight members in 1952 to the 54 of today.

The Commonwealth represents a unique family of nations spanning every continent and global religion and covering nearly a third of the world’s population. Our Commonwealth is rightly the envy of the world,

[*Jake Berry*]

and in the years ahead this international body will be of growing importance and influence to the UK and its economy as we grow and succeed outside the European Union. A royal yacht is crucial to the leader of our Commonwealth. When launching Britannia on the Clyde in 1953, she said:

“My father felt most strongly, as I do, that a yacht was a necessity, and not a luxury for the head of the British Commonwealth, between whose countries the sea is no barrier, but the natural highway.”

Britain has the fifth largest economy in the world and remains the third largest maritime power. We as a nation have a unique history in connection with the sea. As an island race, our relationship with the sea is written into our DNA. The relationship has been represented on behalf of our nation, both symbolically and in actuality, by a history of royal yachts stretching back to the restoration of the monarchy with Charles II. We are foolish to have turned our back on the sea and all that it represents for our nation through our failure to renew the royal yacht Britannia in 1997.

I believe that Britain as a nation is partly blind to the perception around the globe of all that she represents. Our country, and in particular our royal family, have an unmatched global reach. President Barack Obama, speaking at the funeral of President Shimon Peres recently, described our Queen as one of the

“giants of the 20th century that I have had the honour to meet”.

In a post-Brexit Britain, we need our head of state now more than ever. She can uniquely portray a positive role for our nation around the globe, and a new royal yacht is vital in her doing that.

A royal yacht, unlike our recently acquired state plane, is a small piece of Britain that can move from international port to international port, showing the soft power and prestige of our nation. It is a floating royal palace that can be used to host meetings as a platform for our humanitarian mission around the globe, and a showcase for the best of British industry. No other country, if presented with such an opportunity, would have squandered it away in the court of public opinion and envy, as happened in 1997 with the decommissioning of the royal yacht Britannia.

It is true that the role of the royal yacht changed since its introduction with Charles II. I would like to concentrate on the contribution that Britannia made to trade at the end of her service. Britannia was decommissioned in 1997 after more than 40 years in service. She conducted 968 official visits and clocked up more than a million miles at sea. In her later years—between 1991 and 1995—she is estimated to have brought £3 billion of commercial trade deals to our country. In 1993, on one trip to India alone, £1.3 billion of trade deals were signed. It is acknowledged that those deals would have been signed in any event, but the presence of Britannia sped up the negotiations from years to days. To put that into the context of the renewal and running of a royal yacht, the deal signed on that one trip would have paid for a royal yacht in its entirety and its annual running costs for 100 years.

During those commercially profitable years, Britannia hosted business figures from across the globe on what were called sea days, on which opportunities were discussed and trade agreements struck. Sea days took place around the coast of Britain and abroad, and were always organised

to coincide with an official visit by Britannia. The prestige associated with Britannia attracted prominent figures from commerce and industry to attend the sea days. Invitations were sent in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, with key decision makers in global companies targeted. On occasion, a member of the royal family would also attend. A royal invitation to conduct business on the most exclusive yacht in the world was impossible for even the most successful businesspeople to resist. It is my view that a renewed royal yacht could be used in just that way today.

Hon. Members do not have to take my word for that—they can take the word of Henry Catto, who was the US ambassador to the Court of St James’s between 1989 and 1991. He found himself in the lucky position of being chief of protocol in 1976 when Her Majesty the Queen visited America. He wrote in his book:

“I was literally besieged with people wanting invitations to the various functions on board. Corporate moguls would devise the most outlandish reasons as to why they should be invited; society matrons would throw themselves at me”—

Members are listening now.

“In short, that ship was a superb tool for British industry and the British nation and to let her go and not replace her would be a great pity”.

Compare that with Barack Obama’s comments that the UK would be at the back of the queue in any trade deal with the United States. That shows the huge contribution a new royal yacht could make: we could go from the back of the queue to the front, just by using the power, prestige and global influence of our royal family.

Until now, the European Commission has been responsible for negotiating international trade deals on behalf of EU member states, meaning that the United Kingdom has not had a dedicated team of trade negotiators since 1973. The Minister, who is new in his Department, will acknowledge that negotiating British trade abroad is a huge task, but it would be made significantly easier, in my view, by the royal yacht and by the presence of our royal family.

I hope that I have made the case for the return of the royal yacht for the purposes of trade and explained the role it can play for Britain, but I also want to talk about what I believe a future royal yacht should look like and, crucially, how it should be funded. There are some basic rules we must follow. It must belong to the state, it must fly the white ensign and it must have a strong connection with our royal family. It has to belong to the state so it has the benefit of diplomatic immunity when it visits international harbours around the globe; it has to fly the white ensign, because it is crucial that it is crewed by our Royal Navy; and it has to have a strong connection with our royal family, as that is the unique quality that will make its service to our nation succeed.

**Oliver Colville** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Is it correct that the old royal yacht Britannia was actually a hospital ship that was used during the course of conflict, and that it was able to make a major contribution in helping our sick and injured servicemen and women?

**Jake Berry:** That is absolutely correct. I propose that any new royal yacht would again offer a multitude of services, whether as a trade envoy, a hospital ship or a research and development vessel for our science and industry.

There are several proposals for what type of ship we should build, as well as proposals to recommission the existing royal yacht Britannia, which stands proudly in Leith docks. They should all be explored, but I will talk about my personal preference, which is to build a new royal yacht along the lines of the proposals put to the Government in the 1990s. The future royal yacht project envisaged a new ship that would be slightly smaller than Britannia but similar in design. Crucially, it would have an increased range and a much-reduced crewing requirement and would be much cheaper to run. It has been estimated that the ship would cost about £100 million to construct and could be funded either through private donations—for example, by giving industry naming rights for certain decks and rooms—through a private finance initiative model or through public fundraising.

The final idea of the future royal yacht commission was that the Bibby shipping line would construct a new royal yacht, with the Government putting no money whatever toward its construction. The Government would then use it on a bareboat charter basis for 12 years at an estimated cost of £7 million a year. After the initial 12 years' use had expired, the yacht would become the property of our nation. While those charter figures are historical and may be out of date, I believe that the different ideas out there about how the yacht could be funded show that there are many ways in which we could commission a royal yacht with no up-front cost to the taxpayer.

The reason why I believe a new royal yacht is preferable to recommissioning the existing royal yacht Britannia is that such a vessel is about our country's future, not its past. It should be a shop window for what is best about British shipbuilding. I imagine the engines might be provided by Rolls-Royce or Perkins, while the hull would be constructed using British steel in a British shipyard. The IT and communications system would be the best that Silicon roundabout in London could offer. It would be a thoroughly modern ship, reflecting a modern nation and a modern monarchy that is willing and able to serve Britain across the globe.

Today's debate is an opportunity to show that a new royal yacht commands significant public support. British industry is already calling for the opportunity to showcase its world-beating ingenuity and engineering talent across the globe. Financial backers have come forward with ideas about how the royal yacht could be paid for, and more than 100 Members have signed a letter, published in *The Daily Telegraph*, calling on the Government to set up a commission to look at what service a royal yacht could provide our nation.

The people backing the campaign are not self-interested or driven by preferment. They want to make the dream of a new royal yacht a reality, and they offer their service to our nation without hesitation. That is why I hope the Minister will agree to set up a Government commission to carry out a full cost-benefit analysis of the contribution that a new royal yacht could make to our nation. That commission would act as a rallying point for all those who are interested in the project. It would be a place for people to offer their help and expertise and a place for those who are willing to make a significant financial contribution to try to make this happen.

In the long history of the Government's involvement with the renewal of the royal yacht, offers of help have all too often gone unanswered. Expertise has been lost

and opportunity upon opportunity has been missed. Brexit is a new chapter in our nation's story, and I hope that the Government will be able to match the hope and optimism demonstrated by its people.

**Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend on his campaign, which I and more than 100 of my colleagues wholeheartedly support. He has mentioned the Government's relationship with the royal yacht. In view of the clear advantages that a new royal yacht could provide in fostering trade and international relations, does he agree that it might be appropriate if a number of Government Departments were to share the running costs—not least the Department for International Development, which has a rising budget?

**Jake Berry**: I agree wholeheartedly with my right hon. Friend. It is interesting that some of the countries to which we have recently given, and continue to give, international aid have their own state yacht. India has a state yacht, and it was a recipient of international aid from this country until recently. The Philippines has a state yacht. Turkey has a state yacht. Here in Britain—the fifth largest economy in the world, as I said earlier—we feel it is something we cannot afford. Personally, I think that is a national disgrace.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I very much support my hon. Friend's campaign and am one of the 100 signatories. Whichever model we choose, can we ensure that it is tasteful and not a gin palace or a Philip Green-type vessel?

My serious and substantive point is that in choosing the Government Departments that may chip in, we must ensure that the Royal Navy does not pick up all of the tab, since the Royal Navy does other things. While it is right that the yacht is badged with the white ensign, will my hon. Friend give some thought to how we can ensure that the Navy in particular does not pick up the tab in the way that it used to? That was the main bone of contention when I was serving, and it really rankled. We must ensure that the cost is spread more logically, preferably from the private sector, but certainly not by damaging defence. He will know that the yacht will present one whopping great target and will require frigates and destroyers to protect it, and that clearly comes with a cost.

**Jake Berry**: I agree wholeheartedly that the cost should be spread over many Departments. The benefit of setting up a commission is that we could also look at spreading the cost across the Commonwealth. There is no reason why the Canadian navy, the New Zealand navy and navies from other Commonwealth countries could not be involved in crewing or contributing to the royal yacht. In fact, in the most recent proposals for a royal yacht, which were in 2012—it was called the jubilee yacht and was discussed widely in the newspapers at the time—a significant donation of some £10 million was offered by a Canadian financier. He is not British and does not live in the United Kingdom, but he acknowledged the huge opportunity that a royal yacht could bring to the Commonwealth, not just to the United Kingdom. The cost should be shared among Departments, but the commission could also look at the opportunity of sharing the cost among other members of our Commonwealth.

[Jake Berry]

Today's debate has shown there is real appetite to explore this issue. The Government should match the optimism of their own people. I want to be part of a Government who are brave enough to say that a new royal yacht should play its part in making Britain the leading free trade economy in the world. Her Majesty the Queen does not bend to the will of newspapers; she is constant. Our Government should not bend to the will of newspapers. They should do what is in our national interest, and I believe that commissioning a new royal yacht is in this nation's interest.

2.52 pm

**Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): May I congratulate the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) on introducing such an excellent motion so well? I am very pleased to have the chance to speak today, especially as I missed the chance to sign the letter—I wish I had been able to be part of it.

A few years ago, before the royal yacht was decommissioned, it came to the north coast of Northern Ireland. There was immense pride. It was in all our newspapers, and it lifted everybody. During the royal visit, the yacht invited on board and celebrated the charities and the businessmen we have in Northern Ireland, and did everything that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. When we think about how fantastic a new royal yacht and its work in the Commonwealth could be, another factor is how well the royal family has gone down in Ireland, and all the work Ireland and Northern Ireland have to do together. Whether Prince Charles's visit last year or the Queen's momentous visit to Dublin, they illustrate what a new royal yacht could do for us, not only in Europe but in the whole world.

I was interested to hear the suggestions for how we would finance the royal yacht. One of my greatest concerns when I looked at this was how we could finance it—could PFIs work? Could donors help? Could the Commonwealth get involved? Today we have had presented to us an excellent idea of how that could be achievable. I want to see the best of industry involved. We want the new royal yacht to be an example of what is best—not a gaudy gin palace, as has been said, but the mark of everything that is best about the United Kingdom. We must set that target in place and all work together. This is a fantastic idea, and I am glad to be here to support it.

2.54 pm

**Sir Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot) (Con): I too am delighted to serve under your leadership, Mr Chope, and wish to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) on this initiative and on an excellent speech. I was involved in this campaign when I was at the Ministry of Defence about five years ago. I believe profoundly in this cause, so I am delighted that my hon. Friend has taken it up. One of the darker moments of my political life was the picture of Her Majesty the Queen standing on the dockside with something of a tear in her eye as the royal yacht Britannia was finally decommissioned. It was a great disservice to Her Majesty. Let us hope therefore that we can now put that error right.

As my hon. Friend said, Brexit makes the building of a new royal yacht not a luxury but a must-have. As we embrace the new world, reigniting the unrivalled historic relationships Britain has enjoyed around the world and forging new trade links, a new royal yacht would be a brilliant addition to our national trade promotion toolkit. Sadly, however sleek and dignified the lines of Britannia remain, I am advised by experienced naval personnel that refurbishing the existing royal yacht is simply not a starter. In any case, this presents us with a magnificent opportunity to celebrate the latest skills to be found in our national dockyards across the country, from Appledore to the Clyde and, of course, Northern Ireland.

We have the opportunity to construct a brand new, potent symbol of our newly reasserted national sovereignty through a ship whose presence in every port across the globe will make a statement of our national intent. Whether hosting an export drive, carrying the Prime Minister to important international events or, of course, bearing the sovereign on a state visit, the new royal yacht would be a symbol of our country in which the entire nation could once again take pride. As my hon. Friend so rightly said, it would enable us to stand tall in the world. I pay tribute not only to my hon. Friend, who has picked up this ball and run with it, but to *The Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Mail*, *The Times* and *The Sun*. We had better name-check Quentin Letts, because we cannot let Christopher Hope get away with the only mention here—a favourable reference please, Mr Letts.

I would like to make an important point. Too often, our media have dismissed such ventures as luxuries the nation cannot afford, translating the cost into x number of hospital beds or y number of teachers. The coalition Government finally overcame the criticisms of what was dubbed “Blair Force One” in respect of the very modest £10 million VIP module for the Royal Air Force's new A300 Voyager transport aircraft. At last, the Queen and the Prime Minister can fly around the world in a modern RAF jet instead of the ignominy of watching on our televisions as our Prime Minister turns up to be greeted at some foreign venue—I remember in particular when it happened with President Obama—in a third-world chartered commercial airliner. I felt very embarrassed, and I think many other people shared that sense of embarrassment.

There is a serious value in projects such as this, because they tell the world something about how we see ourselves. We are neither a third-world nor a second-rate power; we are a world leader and we should not be ashamed of proclaiming the same. I know the difference it made when I was a Defence Minister. If I pitched up at some international gathering in a Royal Air Force aeroplane, with Royal Air Force roundels on it, I would be treated with greater respect than had I turned up in the alternative desired by some media—an easyJet flight. There would not have been a string of cars with blue lights waiting to greet a British Minister; it would have been some minor official. This is very important to the dignity of our country. It is not a luxury, as I had the privilege of experiencing, and we need to ensure that people understand that.

**Dr Murrison** *rose*—

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** I give way to my surgeon commander friend.

**Dr Murrison:** I succeeded my hon. Friend in ministerial office. He will remember, as I do, the effectiveness of running trade missions from the back of destroyers and frigates, not only for defence and security but a range of British export possibilities. How much more effective does he think this yacht will be, going around the world projecting what is best in British export, than those very effective trade missions in which he and I were involved?

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. I recall signing a treaty with the Brazilians aboard HMS Ocean. It was very instructive because of what the Brazilian Defence Minister said to me at our first meeting. Apropos of nothing, he stretched out his hand and said, "There is only one Navy in the world, Minister." He paused and said, "It is true the United States has a Navy, but there is only one Navy: the Royal Navy." Why should a Brazilian say that? Because of Admiral Sir Thomas Cochrane. There is not a child in Brazil or Chile who has not heard of him. Sadly, thanks to our education system, there is not a child in the United Kingdom who has heard of him. He was once the Member of Parliament for Westminster and the amazing liberator of Brazil and Chile from foreign rule. We are respected around the world and a new royal yacht would add to that. My hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen has made the case for trade, so I will not repeat it.

I also agree that the new ship must fly under the white ensign in the name of the Royal Navy. That will of course add to the cost, and we all know about the enormous pressure on naval personnel and on the MOD budget more generally, so, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) suggested, the cost of acquisition should be split between four Government Departments: the MOD, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Foreign Office and, of course, the rich as Croesus Department for International Development. We have to find something good to come out of its money.

Finally, I do not think anything exemplified the enormous respect and affection that the British people have for Her Majesty the Queen as much as the diamond jubilee. What struck people was the extraordinary selfless service that she has given to our nation. We as a nation ought to reflect the profound thanks that our people have for her leadership of our country over 60 years by procuring a new royal yacht, in her name and on her behalf, to serve the purposes set out in this debate, as that would be an enduring way of marking the most astonishing period of leadership by our sovereign, Her Majesty the Queen. So I say, "Rule, Britannia".

3.2 pm

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I declare an interest of sorts: Britannia is moored in my constituency. It is not going anywhere, partly because one of its propellers has been melted down and is now in the form of a statue of a yottie, or royal yachtsman, and partly because it is owned privately by a trust; it is not in public hands.

**Mr James Gray** (North Wiltshire) (Con): The hon. Lady might show true respect to the royal yacht Britannia if she described it not as "it" but as "she".

**Deidre Brock:** That semantic point is appreciated.

The yacht is promoted as the museum piece that she is, harking back to a time that cannot be recaptured: a piece from the days of steamships, polished and gleaming from bow to stern, beautifully cared for as a floating curiosity, but not a working ship, so recommissioning is out of the question. I assume Members have had a look at the YouGov poll and seen that the building of a new royal yacht is not supported. In fact, only among Conservative voters, by 41% to 39%, are there more people in favour of building it than not, and when we ask about whether the money to build and run a new ship could be justified, even Conservative voters turn against it.

It is notable, too, that Scotland has a more solid opposition to the idea than anywhere else: 60% against recommissioning, 66% against buying a new one and 68% think the costs cannot be justified. The costs, which are important at a time when working families have joined benefit claimants in the queues at food banks, are simply unjustifiable. We have heard there are lots of ways in which the yacht could be funded, but we have heard no firm proposals. As usual, the burden would fall on the long-suffering taxpayer. Like PFI and PPP and every other cunning plan that Governments come up with, it would cost the public purse, not private finance.

As has been mentioned, the old yacht had a crew of 250 and 21 officers drawn from the Navy. On royal duty it had a platoon of marines on board and warships accompanying it. I am guessing the Navy's top brass do not have a new royal yacht as their dearest ambition, given the current state of their resources. Then we get to the capital costs. Are they to come from a defence budget already groaning under the pressure of carrying Trident, or are they to come from another part of the public purse? Given what we hear repeatedly about the shortages of equipment that armed forces personnel face, can anyone justify adding another capital spend to that burden?

**Jake Berry:** I thank the hon. Lady for her contribution to the debate. I think she is arguing that the public should not pay for the royal yacht, but would she support a royal yacht if it was funded privately?

**Deidre Brock:** The public say they are not supportive of the recommissioning of the yacht. That does not take into the account the running costs, which it has been suggested will come from several Departments, including the Department for International Trade. If the intent is to take the capital spend and running costs from elsewhere in the public purse, where will that blow fall? Given the austerity fetish that the former Chancellor inflicted on all of us and the reported comments of the current Chancellor that he intends to deliver on all of the already planned cuts, where exactly is the spare cash to come from? And how exactly does anyone square the fact that benefit sanctions mean that the poorest, weakest and most disadvantaged people are left to go cold and hungry, but we will all be paying for what must seem to them a new pleasure cruiser for the royal family? This is just a wistful throwback to the days of the Raj, a pleading with history to run backwards and ignore the dodgy bits on the way. This is a rosy-tinted fiction of a

[Deidre Brock]

time that never was, a fond imagining that empire was a good thing and that fine gentlemen rise to the occasion upon demand.

It is reminiscent of John Major's thoughts when he said,

"Fifty years from now Britain will still be the country of long shadows on county grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pools fillers and—as George Orwell said—'old maids bicycling to Holy Communion through the morning mist' and if we get our way—Shakespeare still read even in school. Britain will survive unamendable in all essentials."

He was actually talking about why the UK should remain in the European Union. The current fantasy is a fairy story from the imagination of Brexiteers who imagine the UK has only to denounce the EU to rise again to great heights.

The sad and sorry Britannia plan sounds like the regrets of someone who has missed their chance drawing the tattered remnants of their dreams around them for whatever warmth they can offer while the world rushes by uncaringly. Flash-boat democracy has no place in the modern world, which has changed utterly from the day in 1997 that Britannia was decommissioned. We have emails, electronic trading, smartphones with more computing power than the moon landing craft, and entire businesses that exist only online. This is a different world from the world in which the yacht was decommissioned, never mind the world in which it was commissioned in the first place.

**Mr Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk) (Con): The hon. Lady is obviously having a lot of fun with her caricature. She may have noticed that both Mr Letts and Mr Hope are scribbling down furiously everything she says. None the less, did she not hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) said about the possibilities of the new royal yacht for creating more business opportunities, more revenue, ultimately more tax revenue and therefore more money for the Government for nurses and teachers?

**Deidre Brock**: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I also heard that Blair Force One is still current. I cannot see why that is not being used, as apparently it should be, for trade throughout the world.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Deidre Brock**: I am almost finished. I do not see why we need to commission another yacht at a cost of £60 million in 1997, allegedly £100 million now, and then running costs unknown. The running costs were £66 million between 1990 and 1997. What are those costs today? We have no idea.

As I said, this is a different world. If Members want economic revival they should ask for austerity to be eased, and spending resumed. If they really want international trade to improve, they will petition for UK embassies to be retooled as permanent trade missions. If they want to get on their feet and build an economy they should dump the daft ideas and get on with the serious hard work that is needed. It is what their constituents deserve. They can hang a new bauble on the jacket of the UK as it shuffles down the road, but that does

nothing to feed a hungry child, support a struggling industry or boost a flagging economy. Dump the bauble. Get wise about what we have to do now.

3.10 pm

**David Tredinnick** (Bosworth) (Con): I had thought that there was a parliamentary convention that we did not refer to the royal family, but I imagine it has been waived for this debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) on obtaining the debate and notifying me about it. I look forward to hearing from the Minister, who will I understand be making his maiden ministerial speech, if there is such a thing. My hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen drew our attention to the fact that many national newspapers support the campaign; that is a very good start. There can surely not be a better year in which to consider the issue than when Her Majesty the Queen is 90 years old. My hon. Friend has already referred to the outstanding service that she has given the country.

I visited Britannia when she was in service. I remember that really there were two ships—the front run by the Navy and the rear an amazing platform for entertaining and persuading people to our interests. I think, from memory, that the dining room table would seat 50. It was a splendid boat. Interestingly, Her Majesty's quarters were unbelievably spartan, so there was nothing for the Green camp to look at there. It was very rough and ready accommodation.

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that what is different about having a new royal yacht now is that we are sailing into a brave new world, and that we will do, and need to do, many more trade deals across the world? There is a great opportunity not only to support the royal family, but to support the nation in getting those trade deals.

**David Tredinnick**: I agree, and I like my hon. Friend's metaphor about sailing out into a brave new world. We are certainly in a brave new world.

I was, like you, Mr Chope, in the House in 1997 during both the Major Government and the Labour Government, when they took over. I remember the debate on the royal yacht as a complete shambles. The proposition that there should be a new royal yacht was introduced at the end of the Parliament. The failure to secure Labour support was lamentable, and the then Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, Sir Edward Heath, described it as an extraordinary mistake. It was perhaps no surprise that when Labour took power Gordon Brown knocked the project on the head. I still think that, if there had been all-party negotiations at the time, earlier in the Parliament, we would not be having this debate, because the decision would have been carried, but it was too close to a general election and it was too difficult for Labour after the general election.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen has admitted that trade deals that happened on the royal yacht might have happened anyway, but I note the £3 billion of deals that he said were made, and the extraordinary amount of business done on one visit to India. The yacht was always going to provide a tipping point for major deals. I think that that is one of the

crucial aspects of the recommissioning of the yacht—the lady, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) would probably like her to be considered.

A new royal yacht that does not earn its keep will not, I think, have public support. I thought that we had already disposed of the point about its being a charge on the public purse. The idea is that it should not be. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) was saying that the cost would be split between four Departments and that we are not talking about a new vessel paid for by some kind of non-governmental subscription, which would be paid back by virtue of the fact that the vessel was the royal yacht and that possibly it would have another role when not being used by Her Majesty.

Incidentally, the royal yacht would of course have to fly the white ensign for security and docking purposes, but it would also fly a totally different set of flags for Her Majesty, one of which would be the flag of a Lord High Admiral, which, from memory, is a deep red colour with an anchor on it. So there would be no dispute about who was on board at any time.

The point made by other hon. Members about Brexit is also relevant. This is a fantastic time for us to build this new flagship of the nation.

**Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that, as he has just mentioned, this is a perfect time to recommission a royal yacht? I have no doubt that we will make trade deals with it, and that in due course it will fund itself and help with diplomacy; but it will send out a massive signal to the world, once we unshackle ourselves from the dead hand of Brussels, that the British are back—confident, proud and outward-looking.

**David Tredinnick:** I thank my hon. Friend; there could not possibly be a better time. We need statements of confidence at a time when our currency is fluctuating and there is a degree of uncertainty. It is about our nations coming up to the plate and saying, “Yes, we believe in ourselves.”

My hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), who is a former Defence Minister, touched on the fact that the royal yacht is always accompanied by a warship, usually a frigate. It is also worth making the point that it would be a very secure vessel for Her Majesty and whoever else was present for trade reasons. At a time of cyber-attacks and all kinds of other attacks it is probably better to be in a secure space, as was the case for Her Majesty on her royal visits.

One of the ideas that was mooted was a royal commission. The metaphor for royal commissions is grass so dark and long that one can never see through it. Their history shows that they take for ever. Why on earth do we need a royal commission when surely the simple approach would be to get good people with good money around a table, and come to some agreement with the palace and, no doubt, with my hon. Friend the Minister?

**Jake Berry:** The commission would not necessarily be a royal commission, but a commission with Government support. Having met several leading naval architects who would like to volunteer their services for free, and major engine manufacturers who would like to put

engines in the new royal yacht for free, I would say that the difference between warm words of support and their actually coming forward and saying, “Yes, let’s make this happen,” is some form of Government support. They want to support a royal yacht that will serve our nations for decades to come. The best way to ensure that that happens is for the Government to have, even if they do not pay for it, some form of ownership. Until we get that Government hat-tip, as it were, to the idea, I do not think that anyone will come forward with substantive support rather than words.

**David Tredinnick:** I hear what my hon. Friend says. I do not think that in my midlands constituency there is support for a new royal yacht that is not paid for by some form of subscription. I do not think that people want it to be a charge on the taxpayer. The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock), who made a flamboyant and exciting speech, would certainly be in that camp.

We would not be having this debate in the first place if the matter had been dealt with properly in 1997. The case for a new royal yacht is overwhelming, provided that the money to fund it comes from the private and not the public sector.

**Mr Christopher Chope (in the Chair):** I invite Ian Paisley to follow the example of his colleague from the other part of Antrim, so that we have the opportunity also to hear the hon. Members from Plymouth and Portsmouth who wish to participate, before the winding-up speeches start at half-past 3.

3.19 pm

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): Thank you, Mr Chope, for calling me in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) on bringing this important matter to the House. I will be brief, as you have requested, Mr Chope. In fact, I feel like bursting into song and singing, “Rule, Britannia! Britannia rules the waves! Many, many jobs she intends to save!” I hope that we can get to that point. I hope that the Minister will get on with it, commission the report, commission the work and ensure that we soon have on the high seas this floating advertisement for all that is wonderful about the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The question has been posed as to who will build the ship. Well, if the Scots Nats do not want to build it, we have a shipyard in Ulster. The Ulstermen will happily rise to the opportunity to rivet those steel joints together and make that boat for Ulster and for the United Kingdom.

The question is not only who should build the ship, but what will be on board. I hope that it is an advertisement for all that is great—the great foods that we produce and the great products that we have. Perhaps there will even be room enough for a great bus, built in County Antrim, that we can advertise around the world. We will be able to show the many trading opportunities that we have to other parts of the world. We may even have whisky on board—I hope that we will have the whiskey with an e, which is made in Bushmills. Mr Chope, do you know why it has an e? Because it is excellent; that is why it is there.

[*Ian Paisley*]

Where will this ship go? I hope that it goes everywhere on the high seas. From no port should it be turned away. Nowhere shall it be said that the British will not have the opportunity to sell their wares in, yes, this new opportunity to promote trade deals and to promote the United Kingdom post-Brexit.

However, the most important question, which has been posed by the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen, is of course who should pay for the ship. That does deserve rigorous and serious challenge, because at this point we do not require the taxpayer to fork out for everything. There will be perfect harmony in the opportunity for the public, private and charitable sectors to work together to bring about this idea and to ensure that we finally deliver on it and get the ship on to our seas. Therefore, I commend it. I wave the opportunity Godspeed and I hope that the Minister will not torpedo it but support it.

3.22 pm

**Mrs Flick Drummond** (Portsmouth South) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) on securing this interesting debate.

Her Majesty's Yacht Britannia was based in Portsmouth dockyard and for decades was a familiar sight to my constituents and visitors. She was based at South Railway jetty, the traditional dock for royalty and distinguished visitors travelling by sea. From there she could be seen by every ship coming and going from Portsmouth when she was alongside. There was therefore considerable sadness when Britannia was removed from service without the prospect of a replacement. Portsmouth expects, should Britannia be replaced, that we will be her home again.

**Craig Mackinlay** (South Thanet) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that actually the only true home for the new royal yacht Britannia should be the country's only royal harbour—Ramsgate, in my constituency?

**Mrs Drummond:** That might be one of the cinque ports, but I still think that Portsmouth will be the best place.

There is an excellent case for renewing the role of Britannia as a floating base for UK diplomacy. The royal family are a formidable and hard-working element of the UK's soft power mission, and a ship equipped with conferencing and hospitality facilities offers them a great base. However, Britannia was not just a floating hotel, but a symbol in her own right of the prestige and reputation of the UK. Many of the deals done by UK exporters aboard Britannia were won without the presence of the royal family, but with the aura of "Great Britain" very much present. It is worth noting that our competitors recognise the usefulness of ships employed in that way, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen said. Many nations operate training ships that actually serve to promote their national interests. The Chinese Government, for instance, have just commissioned a new one.

The motion refers to reintroducing the Britannia but, like other hon. Members, I hope that we will be looking to build a modern replacement for her. Whether this is done by reactivation or replacement, there are some

basic principles that the Government should adhere to. First, her home, like Britannia's, should be Portsmouth. Secondly, as a vessel operated and supported by the Royal Navy, she must not be an excessive burden in terms of either manpower or budget. A good argument for replacing Britannia is that her systems are somewhat outdated and labour-intensive compared with those of modern vessels. She is a steam-age ship in a digital world, with a relatively short range compared with equivalent modern vessels. She could showcase outstanding products from the UK marine sector in her design and build. If the ship exists partly to promote British trade, it follows that not all the burden of paying for her should fall on the MOD budget or, indeed, the taxpayer. Thirdly, her operational use must be as wide as possible. By all means title her a "royal yacht", but she should be capable of adapting as need requires.

Britannia was designed to operate as a hospital ship in times of crisis, but that happened only once, during a humanitarian crisis in Aden. Alternatively, this ship could be used more intensively than Britannia was, as a mobile educational facility around the UK. We are a country dependent on the sea for our past security and future prosperity, yet we are increasingly "sea-blind". Air travel is the long-distance mode of transport that dominates our everyday thoughts, but it is not actually the most important: 80% of all world trade is seaborne and more than 90% of Britain's trade, by volume and value, travels by sea; we still rely on sea trade for much of our food.

In Portsmouth, the museums and ships in our historic dockyard are a permanent reminder of the importance of the Royal Navy and the seas to our national story. Britannia could be a mobile showcase for the importance of the maritime industry to people around the UK. The overwhelming majority of space in our dockyard is engaged in maintaining a Royal Navy that is at the leading edge of technology and is supported by a defence sector that drives a great deal of innovation in the civil as well as the naval and military fields.

The sea-blindness that I referred to is hard to understand, given the importance of the sea and the maritime sector to our lives. We know from the maritime growth study, published a year ago, that the maritime industries sector contributes more than £11 billion a year to our economy. It is bigger than aerospace and on a par with our world-leading pharmaceutical sector. It may represent only 5% of our employment base, but it is a vital part of our manufacturing and service sectors.

A revived Britannia could tell that story and promote the skills and technology of the sea at home as well as abroad. I hope that the Government will look carefully at the options for renewing the capability that Britannia provided, by whatever means, and will recognise that it could give us a competitive edge in world trade and diplomacy.

3.27 pm

**Oliver Colville** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): It is a delight and a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. You and I have known each other for more than 30 years and, if I may say so, it is always a pleasure and a delight to serve under you.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) on securing the debate. Post-Brexit, it is clear that we have to put our

best foot forward by going out and getting as much trade as we possibly can. That will be absolutely vital. Needless to say, I would like the new ship to be built in Plymouth, either by Princess Yachts, which is one of our great luxury yacht producers, or by Babcock, which is responsible for managing and running the oldest naval dockyard in the country.

In 2020, Plymouth will commemorate the Mayflower leaving Plymouth to go and found the American colonies. That gives us a unique opportunity to have a fantastic trade exhibition down in the south-west. The country needs to grab that opportunity with both hands, in no uncertain terms. By building Britannia down in Plymouth, the Government could stimulate and create a tourist attraction. If we are successful, we could also have a fleet review, or even a review of the NATO fleet. That would encourage tourists to come to our wonderful part of the south-west. Britain needs to encourage American tourists to come here.

It is absolutely brilliant that the Minister who will be responding to the debate is the former commodore of the House of Commons yacht club. My final point to him is that the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip, is the High Steward of Plymouth, and we should send him a clear message that we support having the ship rebuilt and relocated to Plymouth.

3.30 pm

**Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Choqe. I thank and congratulate the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) for securing this entertaining and interesting debate. The enthusiasm of Conservative Members and the sparsity of Labour Members in the Chamber will be spotted by those elsewhere.

I like the fact that the UK is looking up and wants to catch up with the great powers of the world: Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Saudi Arabia—places with royal yachts. It is great to see the UK having such ambition to catch those countries, and good luck to it in doing that. Perhaps the royal yacht will be the answer, but I do not think it will.

I am very familiar with the former royal yacht Britannia. As a child, I used to see it often behind the island of Watersay, from Castlebay. Its three masts were seen every August as the Queen went on a cruise around Scotland to the castle of Mey. I am delighted that it is now tied up at harbour in Leith, and that there are no designs today on that ship that now belongs to Leith. The designs today are based on pomp and circumstance, and I can see no circumstance at all for this pomp. In fact, we nearly had civil war between Ramsgate and Portsmouth at one stage—

**Mrs Drummond:** And Plymouth.

**Mr MacNeil:** And Plymouth, sorry.

It was pointed out that Her Majesty is Queen of 16 realms, and that perhaps Commonwealth countries could contribute to the yacht, which might mean that they would want it themselves for rambling trade expeditions across the world. Who knows? I think they would be reluctant to call it Britannia in that case; they might want to call it The Commonwealth. Otherwise it

might fuel awful sentiments, such as republicanism in Australia, if people were paying their taxes to contribute to a yacht for a far-off country.

That brings me to the name: Britannia. I thought some hon. Members might have looked at the opportunity of having the yacht for the 100th anniversary of the UK, which will fall in December 2022 when the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland becomes 100 years old. That opportunity was missed—perhaps there is some nervousness that Britannia as currently constituted might find itself being two states before that date, with the boat perhaps needing to be called Scotia.

The answer to the calamity facing the UK is not a yacht, which I think a number of hon. Members, in the backs of their minds, really do feel. The answer is not the superstitious notion that all future trade success depends on having a royal yacht. The idea that getting to the front of the queue is based on having a royal yacht belongs on the back of a fag packet. It is not the back of a yacht that gets nations to the front of the queue; it is the professionalism of being a good trading nation and having negotiators—the UK currently has twelve, but it needs about 200. There is a real danger that the UK could be mugged at international negotiations because it does not have the experience of small places like the Faroe Islands or Iceland, which have 50,000 and 300,000 people respectively. Those are the issues that should be bothering the UK.

Top trading nations do not have a royal yacht. China does not have a royal yacht, the USA does not have a royal yacht, Germany does not have a royal yacht. Nor do South Korea, France, Hong Kong or Italy, and all those nations are ahead of the UK.

**Oliver Colvile:** The countries the hon. Gentleman has just talked about do not have a royal family; we do.

**Mr MacNeil:** I am not sure what point the hon. Gentleman is making, because they are ahead of us in trading. As a monarchist myself, I do not particularly like the republican sentiments he is leaning towards by indicating that we might be better off in trading if we were a republic. I do not find that at all appealing.

If the UK were able to build a ship, could it not be doing so now? The idea that the Conservatives have suddenly become Keynesians and are looking for a fiscal stimulus to ignite industry across the country rings hollow, particularly when we have seen the fetish of austerity, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) said.

The hostility to the gin market today has surprised me—I would have thought that people could have supported the gin industry, but no. Hon. Members have shown some hostility towards it this afternoon, although happily the whisky industry, in which Scotland excels, was not included in that.

The hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) made a serious point about a royal yacht being a very big target. A lot of royal naval assets would be tied up in ensuring its safety. In the world we are in at the moment, it would be a sitting duck, and it would cost an awful lot of money to make sure it was safe. In fact, although the costs were put at £7 million a year to finance the boat back on charter from her owners, the crew of about 250, which the royal yacht had, would

[Mr MacNeil]

cost about £7.5 million to £12 million in wages, and the officers would cost a further £1.2 million. That is not including the cost of defending the yacht, which was the important point that the hon. Gentleman made.

Reality came crashing into the debate in the fantastic speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith, which some of the hon. Gentlemen present greeted with, indeed, great honour and gentlemanliness. She made a great point about food banks and cuts to social services. To add to that, with the pound crashing, the current projections of costs for the royal yacht may go further north. She correctly made a point about the shortage of armed forces equipment. It is a rose-tinted fiction that we will have a royal yacht, and then all will be well with the situation the UK has found itself in.

This debate has shown that the UK has found itself in some sort of trouble, but I say to colleagues that the answer is not the comfort blanket of a royal yacht. In fact, to the outside world the idea will look bizarre. I cannot wait to see “The Daily Show” with Trevor Noah; the previous presenter Jon Stewart had great fun a few years ago with the UK’s fetish for shipping on the Thames, but this will be seen as high comedy across the world. The idea is that a royal yacht will make Britain great again—I cannot remember which hon. Member said Britain was not great. He did not exactly say that, but he implied that Britain was not great by saying that the yacht would make Britain great again. Another hon. Member said that Britain would stand tall in the world, indicating that Britain does not stand tall in the world at the moment. Indeed, it does not, because of Brexit. It is a laughing stock from Reykjavik to Buenos Aires—that is the reality, and building a royal yacht would only add to that. I am sorry to say that to hon. Members, and I wish them well in what they are trying to do, but the idea of having the comfort blanket of a royal yacht is barking up the wrong tree.

3.37 pm

**Barry Gardiner** (Brent North) (Lab): Captain Chope, I pay tribute to your skill in charting this debate away from the rocks and along its voyage. I note the gentlemen of the press waiting, acid pens poised to keelhaul anyone bold enough to disagree with the proposition we are debating today. I defy them; all I can say is, let us hope I am not walking the plank into troubled waters.

I stand second to none in my admiration for the dedicated service of Her Majesty the Queen, and there is little I would begrudge her personally—even what the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) described as a floating palace. So it is with some trepidation that I find myself debating the idea that has been floated by the hon. Gentleman and some 99 of his Back-Bench colleagues. Given how often Conservative Members have attempted to relaunch this idea of a new or refitted royal yacht, it should really come as no surprise that it has surfaced once again. It is not a new idea; indeed, in my time in the House, this is no less than the third time the matter has been dredged up, Mary Celeste-like, to the surface.

The hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) referred to Sir Thomas Cochrane. Of course, Sir Thomas was an admirable seaman in a great many ways, but I

trust the hon. Gentleman recalls that during his service on the *Barfleur* in 1798 the *Sea Wolf*, as he was known, was court-martialled for showing disrespect. He was actually dismissed from the Royal Navy in 1814 after being convicted for fraud on the stock exchange.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for referring to Admiral Sir Thomas Cochrane. It is indeed true that there was a trumped up charge against him, which forced him to leave the country, and the beneficiaries were Brazil and Chile. Of course, he upset the Admiralty because he believed that there was a better way to protect ships—by using tar—and he was against the widespread corruption in the Admiralty in those days.

**Barry Gardiner:** If nothing else, the hon. Gentleman and I are agreed on our admiration for Sir Thomas Cochrane. Of course, he was not readmitted to the Royal Navy until 1832 and, in 1806—he later admitted—he bribed the electors of Honiton by paying each 10 guineas so that he could enter this place, so perhaps he was not always a model that we should aspire to follow.

Here we are once again debating the recommissioning of a yacht that was launched some 63 years ago, as if it were the missing part of the Government’s international trade plan. Unfortunately, it is not. What is most troubling is that it seems to be, if not the only part, certainly one of the more credible parts. When it comes to international trade negotiations, the Government are not very able seamen, who have found themselves drifting rudderless into uncharted waters. A decommissioned boat, however, is not the ideal vessel to pilot their way out.

The recent EU referendum has presented significant challenges about what our future trading relations will look like and how we can go about ensuring that Britain and the British people can benefit. British businesses have relied on access to the single market since it came into force in 1993. Before that, they relied on the reduced tariffs of the customs union that preceded it. Few British businesses, and even fewer British business leaders, will recall just what difficulties were encountered when attempting international trade before that.

Furthermore, our participation in the European project and our membership of the customs union and the subsequent single market made the UK an extremely attractive destination for foreign investment. I do not doubt that that was enhanced by our strong international network, our respect for the rule of law and the dominance of English as an international language, but it is equally foolish to identify our success as having stemmed exclusively from our attributes and not from the access that we enjoy to the world’s largest consumer market. Our trading capacity is a manifestation of our attributes combined with our access to and capacity to influence the regulations of that wider market. Chance and good fortune also played their part, because our capacity to engage in and lead international trade is greatly magnified by virtue of our geography, location and time zone.

A combination of those elements has enabled us to play a leading role in international affairs and trade throughout history, and is why we have been able to continue to attract business investment and promote British exports overseas. It takes time to develop markets, and requires thorough analysis. It takes confidence on the part of investors and trust on the part of trading partners.

Today, I am wearing the tie of Polska Zegluga Morska, the Polish steamship company. I put it on quite deliberately this morning, not because the royal yacht was built as a steamship, but because in 1989, before the Berlin wall came down, I began my first trade mission to Poland. Over the next five years, I took delegations from Maritime London, and put on conferences and trade missions in Poland, Ukraine and Russia to open up the market for our marine services industry—our lawyers, insurance brokers, protection and indemnity clubs, engineers and marine surveyors. I know what it is to export into new markets, and I inform the House that it is not about a flash yacht. It comes through diligent market research, understanding the regulatory structures and identifying the gaps that a team or product can fill. That is not doom-mongering or “Project Fear”; it is a reasoned assessment of the factors that feed into successful exports.

The Brexit vote threatens our trading capacity because it makes the questions about regulatory structures and market gaps impossible to answer. Businesses have no idea at the moment which markets they will be able to do business in, nor at what cost. They have no idea about the regulatory framework they will face or which non-tariff barriers they will encounter. They do not know whether they will be able to retain foreign staff or fill recruitment gaps from overseas if they need to.

Investors now see the decision to invoke article 50 as soon as possible as prejudicing the very possibility of a stable transition whereby the answers to those questions can be methodically worked through. We cannot know the extent of the investment decisions that are being suspended or cancelled.

**Karl McCartney** (Lincoln) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Barry Gardiner:** Because of the time, I will not.

Certain things are literally incalculable, but that does not make them less certain. Such investment decisions are being made, and they will have a long-tail liability—a liability that might only crystallise over years to come.

The idea that we could relaunch an ancient yacht as a beacon of British innovation and enterprise is entirely symptomatic of the nostalgic nonsense that has infected the Government’s approach to the new trading relationship that we must develop in a post-referendum world once the UK leaves the EU. We face the biggest constitutional and commercial challenge of our lifetimes, and we are here today to discuss relaunching a long-retired yacht. The Germans and the French must be quaking—not in their boots, but with laughter. The Chinese and the Americans, who are looking on in astonishment, must be wondering why we are incapable of seeing the gravity of our own situation.

It greatly concerns me that this debate sends a signal to the rest of the world that we still see the best of Britain as being behind us. We are a world leader in financial and legal services, the automotive and engineering sectors, pharmaceuticals, biosciences, business, energy, construction, fashion, art and music. But at this precise moment—when the fashion and textiles industry is asking where it will get linkers from in a post-Brexit world, when Nissan and Jaguar Land Rover are suspending future investment decisions until they have clarity on market access, and when the pharmaceutical sector is at its wits’ end over losing the European Medicines Agency

from the UK—the best that this Government can come up with, as they studiously avoid giving us a running commentary, is to bring us here today to debate the recommissioning of Her Majesty’s yacht Britannia.

Government is not about playing with toy boats as virility symbols. The Government should be engaging with British business and setting out strategic proposals on an industry-by-industry basis, to promote Britain and our exports overseas. They need to tell the financial services industry—our biggest export sector—how they propose to protect the passporting regime that has allowed British financial institutions to transact business across the EU. That facility has been material to our capacity to attract foreign banks to establish their European operations throughout the UK. Those banks are now openly discussing and actively investigating relocations to Dublin, Paris, Frankfurt or Luxembourg.

Given how many trade missions the royal yacht Britannia undertook on behalf of the British Invisible Exports Council, perhaps the Back Benchers who signed the letter supporting the motion might better spend their time exploring the threats to the financial services industry in the UK. How much would it cost to refit a yacht of that size and bring it up to modern technological standards? How much would it cost to crew and maintain the vessel? How many Royal Navy staff would be taken away from active service elsewhere to crew the yacht? What security and counter-terrorism measures would need to be undertaken to ensure that the yacht would not be a sitting duck terrorist target?

**Mr Christopher Chope (in the Chair):** Order. The convention is that Front Benchers have 10 minutes to wind up. The hon. Gentleman has already been speaking for 11 minutes. It would be helpful if the Minister had time to respond and the proposer of the motion was able to have the last word.

**Barry Gardiner:** Captain Chope, I apologise. I had not realised that the time had gone so fast. I will conclude my remarks there.

3.48 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Mark Garnier):** It is a great pleasure to follow the shadow Secretary of State for International Trade with his surfeit of maritime metaphors and his admiration for Admiral Sir Thomas Cochrane.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) on securing the debate. The topic is clearly a subject of great passion for many people across the House. I, for one, have always been a great fan of the royal yacht, which has been involved in many totemic events in our history, not least on 1 July 1997, when it slipped its moorings at HMS Tamar, rounded Hong Kong island and set off into the South China sea as the Union flag was lowered for the final time on the crown colony of Hong Kong.

I will pick up on a couple of points raised in the debate. The first is the recommissioning of the royal yacht in support of trade promotion. It is pretty clear that this Chamber is not in favour of that at all, which is right. In 1997 it was calculated that buying an extra five years for the former royal yacht would have cost £17 million and an extra 20 years would have cost £20 million. The former royal yacht is clearly well past its active life.

[*Mark Garnier*]

The second proposal is the potential commissioning of a new royal yacht in support of trade promotion, and I will take this opportunity to provide some context for the role and purpose of the Department for International Trade. The new Department has overall responsibility for promoting British trade across the world under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox). We will bang the drum for Britain across the world and pull out all the stops in boosting our trade, working with our overseas diplomatic missions to promote the UK as a place to do business and to trade with, driving inward investment and, in time, negotiating trade agreements. The Department will be the key player in selling the UK through exports and trade promotion, negotiating trade deals and attracting foreign direct investment into the UK. The Department will use any and all resources and assets at its disposal to secure those agreements and to boost our trade.

The royal yacht Britannia was, and is, an iconic symbol of Great Britain. As the second royal yacht to bear the name Britannia, and the 83rd such royal vessel, she was for more than 40 years an instantly recognisable feature on the seas as a representation of the United Kingdom, our royal family and our diplomatic service, and as a platform to showcase the best of the United Kingdom. Britannia's primary role, at which she excelled, was to provide a base for the royal family's national and international engagements, for which she sailed more than 1 million miles, undertaking just under 8,000 engagements—272 of those engagements were within British waters.

Britannia was the first ocean-going royal yacht, and her primary role was to provide a base for the royal family when going overseas. Before the royal yacht was built, the royal family used to—"hijack" is the wrong word—take control of an ocean liner or a royal naval warship and use it as their base, but the yacht's secondary role was to provide a base from which the UK could engage with other Governments through diplomacy to secure trade and investment opportunities. Thirdly, of course, HMY Britannia had a reserve role as a potential medical facility in the event of conflict, a role for which she was fortunately never required but, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond), she was used for the evacuation of Aden in 1986, when she evacuated 1,000 people of 44 different nationalities.

The royal yacht's multifunctional role made it unique and special, projecting the United Kingdom's diplomatic influence and reflecting the United Kingdom's proud heritage as a seafaring trading nation. We are determined to make a success of our global role in the world, but recommissioning the royal yacht Britannia is not something the Government are considering at all. We will listen to the cases being proposed, but there are clear issues on feasibility and cost. The existing ship is a popular tourist attraction in Edinburgh.

Although there is no doubt that Britannia presents an impressive backdrop to the signing of trade and investment deals, there was and is much more to negotiations, which involve discussion, engagement and hard graft behind the scenes away from the pomp and splendour of the signing table—my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen said that although

£3 billion-worth of trade deals were done, there is no conclusive evidence that the deals would not have been signed were it not for the royal yacht. Such hard work is central to the Department for International Trade's responsibility to successfully negotiate trade agreements when we leave the EU in order to secure the UK's economic future.

Today's debate proposes the reintroduction of the royal yacht, which is currently moored in Scotland as a popular visitor attraction. Twenty years ago, the then Government proposed a replacement for Britannia, which was then more than 40 years old and in need of overhaul or replacement. Of course, as we know, the decision was taken to retire her without replacement. More recently, the royal yacht has been moored at the port of Leith and receives hundreds of thousands of visitors every year. The cost of reintroduction, including major overhaul to the engines, has not been explored but, as I mentioned earlier, even in 1997 it would have been very expensive. I also have no doubt that making moves to commandeer Britannia from her current home in Scotland would be strongly resisted—that point has been made vociferously.

As we have heard, there are also proposals to commission a new royal yacht, which many Members and organisations would support. As my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) said, I was once commodore of the House of Commons yacht club—I am not entirely certain that I do not still hold that position—and as such I am a natural ally of all things offshore, but hard facts stand in the way of a new yacht, not least the need for significant levels of funding to commission, build, fit out and maintain the vessel. We have heard that a vessel could be funded from outside sources, but a new yacht would require the latest design and technology, which the United Kingdom is best placed to provide. That would come at a cost, and we have yet to find out exactly how the yacht would be funded.

Media coverage over the past fortnight has included an alleged proposal for a replacement yacht from almost 20 years ago. Although it was not an official proposal, the figure of £60 million to build the new yacht would now likely be double that. There is also the additional cost to the taxpayer of operation and maintenance, which would need to be factored in.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** I welcome the Minister to his role but, for goodness' sake, let us place this in context. We spend £12 billion a year on overseas aid and, although it may not be possible to itemise exactly how much the royal yacht Britannia delivered in trade deals, the sentiment in this Chamber today is explicit that a new royal yacht at a modest £120 million would deliver for the British people a statement of our intent post-Brexit and would deliver a return on investment to the British economy.

**Mark Garnier:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention, and I know he is passionate about this subject and Sir Thomas Cochrane, but we have not seen a business proposal or a cost-benefit analysis, so this debate is slightly hypothetical. The international development budget is separate from this discussion. We are talking about trade, not international development, which is slightly different. I think we would all be keen to see my hon. Friend make a business proposal, and no one is trying to stop him.

The former royal yacht was crewed by the Royal Navy and, as we have heard, there are three particular factors that need to be taken into account. A new royal yacht would fly the white ensign, would be state owned and would function as a floating royal palace, which means that the royal yacht would have to be manned by the Royal Navy. That would put pressure on the senior service. Even once those financial challenges were potentially overcome through private sponsors and donations, it would not negate the ongoing liability for 10, 20 or 40 years.

I also wonder whether a new yacht would provide the best return on investment. From 1989 to 1996, Britannia undertook 37 visits in support of UK exports and investment, which is not a huge number when we consider that in some years it cost as much as £12 million to run—it was expensive. Of those visits, more than a quarter were around the United Kingdom. We have new routes in emerging markets, and we have stronger ties and partnerships than ever before that have helped to secure our position as an open, outward-facing trading nation. It is also worth bearing in mind that we have 270 posts and missions across the world where we are flying the flag for Britain and going out to promote our country, which is important.

The Department was set up with the purpose of ensuring that we seize every opportunity that leaving the EU presents to forge a new way in the world and to make Britain a global leader in free trade. I am acutely aware that people in this room are firmly behind the proposal, but I make it clear that the Government have no plans, and have had no plans, to commission a new royal yacht. As such, it is very unlikely indeed that we would use taxpayers' money to fund either a royal commission or an investigation into whether we could commission a new royal yacht.

3.58 pm

**Jake Berry:** I thank all colleagues who have attended and supported today's debate. I also thank you, Mr Chope, for being such an excellent Chairman. I was a remainer in the EU referendum, and I have tried not to become a "remoaner," which is what we heard from the Labour and Scottish National party spokespeople. Our proposal is simple: no public funds should be committed to the building of a new royal yacht. The will of the House is clear today that people do not have an appetite to recommission the existing royal yacht Britannia, but if we can find a way to privately fund a new royal yacht, it is something that the Government should seriously consider. I am encouraged that the Minister said that the Government would consider a cost-benefit analysis and that their minds are not closed.

The old royal yacht, which is in Leith docks, is something in which our nation can still take huge pride. It is the most popular tourist attraction in Scotland, and we have heard today that it should remain as a beacon for Edinburgh and Leith around the globe. This debate has received international attention, and I have been overwhelmed by requests for interviews from the German media. We need to understand that in Britain we do not appreciate the contribution that a royal yacht can make in a way that other countries would appreciate—they seem keen to see a new royal yacht rule the waves.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## EU Referendum: Immigration and Disability Employment

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

4 pm

**Mr Mark Harper** (Forest of Dean) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered immigration policy and the disability employment gap after the EU referendum.

Members who have looked at the title of this debate may not immediately understand what I am driving at. I raise the subject of immigration and disability employment not just because I have been both Immigration Minister and Minister for Disabled People, but because I think we have a very good opportunity, post-Brexit, to look at getting more disabled people into work. I am pleased to see the Minister for Immigration in his place; I am also pleased to see the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work here today, because that demonstrates that the Government are joined up on these matters and that Ministers in different Departments work closely together.

A number of issues came out of the referendum. First, the British people want us to have control of immigration, both from within and from without the European Union. I think that will mean ending the free movement of people and applying the same rules to those coming from inside the EU and to those coming from outside the EU, in one consistent immigration system. It flows from that—and from the fact that the Conservative party has twice committed, in our 2010 and 2015 manifestos, to reducing net migration—that we should use that extra control to reduce net migration to the United Kingdom. If we are to have a dynamic, fast-growing economy that continues to generate lots of jobs, as we have done consistently over the last six years—indeed, businesses have created more jobs in Britain, using the conditions created by the coalition Government and by this Conservative Government, than the whole of the rest of the European Union put together—we need to increase the ability for businesses to use the talents of those British citizens who are not yet in the labour market.

The referendum has also given the Government the opportunity to deliver another manifesto commitment, which is to halve the disability employment gap—the gap between the proportion of people who are disabled who are in work and the proportion of the working-age population as a whole. We can use Brexit as an opportunity to challenge businesses to use some imagination and effort to look harder at employing people with a disability, whether that is a mental health problem, a learning disability or a physical disability. Those are the messages that arise and that I will elaborate on a little further in my speech, before my hon. Friend the Minister responds—positively, I hope—on behalf of the Government.

Having caught the end of the previous debate, I want to lay my cards on the table. I come at this issue as someone who supported the remain campaign but, as I mentioned, I have also been Immigration Minister, so I understand the complexities and challenges facing the Minister as he grapples with the subject. The Prime Minister, who as a former Home Secretary knows how challenging this area is, has said that there is no single policy that can be introduced to control immigration;

[Mr Mark Harper]

getting a handle on it requires detailed, relentless work over time. As soon as the Government close one loophole, people get around it. The world changes and the needs of the economy change. If we are to have an immigration system that delivers for the economy and the British people, that relentless, detailed work needs to continue.

When I was Immigration Minister, I found it very frustrating not to be able to control EU migration. We could control it a little—we could crack down on overt abuse—but it was largely outside the control of Ministers and of Parliament. That was very frustrating, and Brexit is an opportunity to get it right. It seemed to me in the referendum campaign that one of the important issues, although not the only one, that led to the vote to leave the European Union was that the British people were frustrated that free movement within the EU did not give their elected Government and their elected representatives the ability to control immigration and to choose who came to our country in the way they thought we should. I do not think that was the only issue, but it was clear from the general election campaign and from the referendum campaign that it is important and we need to address it.

As I said, the Conservative party made a clear commitment in both our last two manifestos to reduce net migration to sustainable levels, which is defined as reducing it from hundreds of thousands to tens of thousands. That ambition has been reconfirmed, post-referendum, by the Prime Minister. She has been realistic that it will take time to deliver—we are not likely to leave the European Union for another two years after article 50 has been triggered, and it will take time for the implementation of policies to take effect after that—but we can get on a path to delivering that target. That would be welcome, and I know the Minister would be keen to achieve it.

It is worth saying that this is not just about our manifesto commitment. The reason for reducing net migration is that, certainly at the lower end of the labour market, there is evidence that high levels of migration can have an impact on wage levels. That was one of the issues reflected in the British people's decision to leave the European Union. Particularly in areas that have large numbers of new migrants, there can be significant pressures on public services, which we also heard about from the public: pressures on accessing doctors, other healthcare services, schools and housing. All those pressures would be alleviated if we controlled migration more effectively.

If no British citizens at all were out of work, clearly it would make sense to import workers from overseas to fill the skill gaps and the gaps in the labour market. However, although unemployment is very low—less than 5%, which is a success both of Government policy and of the work done over the years of the coalition Government, particularly by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), to make the benefits system more flexible and to encourage people to get into work, with changes such as universal credit—a significant number of British people who are capable of working and would like to work have some sort of barrier or difficulty that makes it harder to get a job.

I do not particularly want to fire statistics at the Minister, but it is worth looking at the number of people who claim employment and support allowance and are in the work-related activity group, which means they have a condition that will allow them to work at some point in the future. There are nearly half a million people in that category, half of whom are people with mental health conditions, for example, who would be able to work if they were given the opportunity to do so and their employer made reasonable adjustments. There are more than 1.5 million people in the support group; again, with reasonable adjustments, some of those people would be able to enter the workplace. I remind the Minister that many of those people would like to work. They want the opportunity to work, but they do not currently get it.

There are also significant numbers of people with a learning disability who would be capable of working and would love the opportunity to work but do not currently get it. It is worth mentioning some information that Mencap has provided for this debate. It points out that there are 1.4 million people in the United Kingdom with a learning disability. Mencap exists to support those people and their families. It estimates that around eight in every 10 of those 1.4 million people with a learning disability could do work, with the right support, but also that only two in every 10 of them are currently in employment. That means that, according to Mencap staff, who are experts on such matters, six in every 10 people with a learning disability—840,000 people—could do some sort of work but are not currently given the opportunity.

Mencap says that the majority of people with a learning disability can work and want to work. The figures are stark: the national employment percentage is in the high 70s, but the overall disability employment rate is just below 50%. Mencap makes the point that there is a large pool of people who are capable of working and would like the opportunity to work, but who are not currently given the opportunity to do so.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I was very much in the out camp and was pleased that the referendum went the way it did. My constituents asked me whether they would continue to be protected by disabilities legislation, as they are while we are in the EU. Is it the right hon. Gentleman's intention that that legislative protection would still be given outside the EU? I understand the Government committed to that, so I am keen to hear whether that is the case. If it is, the existing protection in legislation will continue.

**Mr Harper:** I welcome that intervention because, although I am sure that the Minister will respond to that point, it gives me the opportunity to remind the House that it was a Conservative Government who in 1995 brought in the first Disability Discrimination Act, which was taken through the Commons by Lord Hague of Richmond, who was then simply William Hague and a Minister in the Department that became the Department for Work and Pensions. That was trailblazing legislation in this country, informed by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which Lord Hague had studied carefully. He had the full support of the then Prime Minister, John Major, in taking it through the House.

That legislation is largely domestic and was introduced by a Conservative Government. When the last Labour Government introduced the Equality Act 2010, which consolidated a lot of legislation in one place, we supported that. I was the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman at the time, and I would not anticipate any change—certainly no diminution—in the legislative protection for disabled people when we leave the European Union. I am sure that the Minister will confirm that.

Some people might be thinking, “Well, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) made that point at a timely moment. All this legislative protection is in place, so what difference will leaving the European Union make?” I received a briefing note from the Papworth Trust, which is another excellent organisation that helps disabled people to get into work. I suggest businesses need to put more effort and imagination into hiring people. The Papworth Trust says:

“A major barrier for our customers”

—the disabled people whom it helps—

“is that employers often seek ‘ready-made’ employees who are proficient in their role with minimum training, support or cost to the employer.”

The trust also highlights the fact that there are many good employers that go that extra mile.

My argument is that, post-Brexit, we can say to employers, “You’re not going to have the ability to hire people who are ready to drop straight into your company off the shelf. You are going to have to look harder at people who might require extra training or assistance. The Government should stand ready to help you, perhaps by dealing with the extra costs of hiring some of those disabled people, but you should look at them and give them the opportunity. They will repay you by being productive, valued and valuable employees.” The Government can challenge employers on their attitudes. As I said, there are already some very good employers. The Government’s Disability Confident scheme helps to share best practice and gives employers the confidence to hire more disabled people. It is a very good example.

I have several asks to make of the Minister. First, he should continue the work that the Government are already doing in the Department for Work and Pensions, which is working closely with the Home Office on this matter. As I highlighted at the start of the debate, the fact that Ministers from both Departments are present and listening to the debate is excellent. I have had conversations with both the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Home Secretary on this matter. They are both keen to make progress in this area.

Secondly, we need to identify the sectors of the economy in which we are currently very dependent on migration from the European Union. For both entry-level and skilled jobs, we should find out where people with a disability could provide a contribution to employers.

Thirdly, the Government need to work in partnership with employers, but also to utilise the third and charitable sectors. I have already mentioned several organisations, but Mind is a prominent mental health charity that encourages employers to employ people with a mental health problem. Scope and Mencap are both excellent organisations that continue to work in partnership with the Government and employers.

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. I cannot agree with everything he has said about immigration but, on the disability employment gap, I have to concur with a lot of what he said. Will he encourage his colleagues in the Government to bring forward the Green Paper on the health and work programme so that some of the issues we are discussing can be teased out further?

**Mr Harper:** Part of the reason why I started to have some of the conversations I have been having and secured this debate was to inform the wider debate. I think the Government are planning to publish the Green Paper in the autumn. Part of the point of discussing these subjects is to feed into the strands of thinking that will go into the Green Paper, which is of course a consultation document. As the Government listen to responses from employers, Members of Parliament and the charitable sector, they can include this debate as one thing they think about as they formulate the specific plans that will be published in a White Paper and perhaps, if required, in legislation.

The final thing I want to say to the Minister is that he should look at some of the help that the Government could provide to employers and at some of the help that is already in place, to see whether, if we were successful in getting a significant number of disabled people into work, it would be sufficiently flexible and scalable. I would like my hon. Friend to look specifically at the Access to Work programme, which is an excellent scheme, but not as well known as we would hope. One of my concerns is that, were we as successful as I hope we can be, we would run into a problem, because Access to Work is currently funded by the departmental expenditure of the Department for Work and Pensions. Were a lot more people to want to use Access to Work to help to fund the reasonable adjustments that employers might need to make, we would run up against a funding barrier. Scope has proposed that Access to Work should be funded from annually managed expenditure so that it can be scaled as necessary in response to demand.

In summary, the Minister should work closely with other Departments across Government, which is already happening but must continue; he should look at the Green Paper that the Government are going to publish and the feedback from it, and build in the ideas I have outlined; and he should look at the help that the Government already provide to employers to check that it is going to deliver in the new environment. If we do that and get that imagination and effort from employers, with support from Government, one thing that will flow from Brexit will be further opportunities for disabled people to get into work. To use the phrase of the moment, we can then truly build a country that works for everyone.

4.18 pm

**The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) on securing the debate, on his eloquent contribution and on his article on this very subject in today’s *Times* newspaper. As both a former Minister for Disabled People and a former

[Mr Robert Goodwill]

distinguished holder of the post that I now occupy, he brings unique knowledge and experience to the debate. Indeed, there was very little in what he said with which I could disagree. I welcome the fact that the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work was present for my right hon. Friend's contribution, which shows that we work across Government on such matters.

One issue that my right hon. Friend raised was the help and support that can be given to employers on the hiring of people with disabilities. I would also like to talk about people with abilities; we have talked a lot about disability, but the abilities that people have are a tremendous resource, although in many ways it goes untapped. Our small employer offer now gives advice and financial support to small and medium-sized enterprises, and further ideas will be explored in the forthcoming work and health Green Paper, which he referred to.

I will discuss my current area of responsibility shortly, but first I will mention the real advances that this Government have made in employment and disability employment. In the past six years, we have overseen huge increases in the number of 16 to 64-year-olds in employment. Since May 2010, employment has risen by 2.3 million, with 74.5% of people of working age now in employment. That is a testament to our record of helping nearly a million new businesses to set up and grow, and of creating nearly 3 million new apprenticeships. We have also taken the lowest-paid workers out of income tax and introduced a new national living wage to help sustain the labour market. In addition, during the past three years the number of disabled people in work has increased by almost half a million. A total of 3.4 million disabled people are now in the workforce.

However, there is much more to do. The labour force survey from 2015 tells us that 11% of disabled people of working age have never worked, compared with 8% of non-disabled people. There are also important differences in the highest educational qualifications of working-age disabled and non-disabled people, which may affect the employment opportunities and income of each group. Also, while the rate of employment for those of working age is at 74.5% overall, it is at 47.9% for disabled people.

We recognise that the gap between the employment rates of disabled people and non-disabled people remains too large, which is why we are committed to halving it. This Government are ambitious for disabled people and people with health conditions, and we want to remove the barriers that prevent them from working. We want every individual to have the opportunity to share in the economic and health benefits that work brings.

The Government's ambition to halve the disability employment gap has been widely recognised as being bold and challenging. The gap has persisted over time, under successive Governments, and is the result of a complex blend of factors. We plan to publish the Green Paper that I have referred to shortly. It will explore a range of ways to improve the prospects and transform the lives of disabled people and people with long-term health conditions. We want to remove the barriers that prevent them from working, and help to ensure that they are able to obtain work and remain in it.

**Neil Gray:** We look forward to the publication of the Green Paper, but will the Government commit to putting forward any extra resources? A number of the areas that the Green Paper would seek to address, including helping people with learning disabilities or mental health conditions, would require a bespoke intervention and a bespoke service, which is obviously expensive. Is it possible for the Government to commit more funding to what will be proposed in the Green Paper?

**Mr Goodwill:** Of course, a review of resourcing will be part of the review, but let us not forget that getting people into work means that they will be less reliant on benefits and more able to contribute, not only to their own lives but to the economy through the tax they will pay.

By the end of this Parliament, we want to have shown that there are interventions that can meaningfully address the pay gap, and to be on the way to securing success. Addressing the gap is partly about ensuring that employers do all they can to fill jobs with people in the resident labour market, including disabled people.

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I apologise for arriving late for the debate, Mr Owen. Does the Minister agree that we should actually be quite optimistic, given that employers report above average levels of commitment and loyalty from their existing disabled workers? That is a good story to get over to employers.

**Mr Goodwill:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. This process is about sharing the experiences of employers who have managed to deliver on this issue, to show that it is not something that employers should be frightened of. Rather, it is a real opportunity for their business that they should grasp with both hands.

Although nine out of 10 people employed here are UK nationals, we want to reduce the reliance on international workers, as part of our manifesto commitment to reduce net migration to sustainable levels, which means in the tens of thousands and not the hundreds of thousands. Working with colleagues across Government, I am determined to deliver on that commitment.

We have legislated twice to stop illegal migrants from operating under the radar, but there is no doubt that there is still far more that we can do. In March, we announced a package of measures to reform the routes for skilled workers, to ensure that only those who can make a real economic contribution can come to the UK. We are setting higher salary thresholds and introducing an immigration skills charge of £1,000 per worker per year, to boost funding for the training of UK workers. My right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean referred to the pressure on wage rates from immigration, and that change will help to address that problem. Nevertheless, there is more we can do to ensure that we continue to attract the brightest and best, while also ensuring that we clamp down on abuse and create opportunities for resident workers and disabled people.

As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced last week, we will shortly consult on potential reform to our work and study migration systems. We will look very carefully at the work routes, including examining whether we should tighten up the test that companies have to take before recruiting from abroad.

We will do all we can to encourage employers to offer jobs to resident labour, including, of course, disabled people. We will consult on plans to ask any company seeking to sponsor a visa to bring in a non-EU worker to provide details of the proportion of work visa holders in their workforce, alongside other information used to support the visa application process. That already happens in the United States and is one of several proposals that we will consult on as part of our work to ensure that companies take reasonable steps to recruit at home before looking to bring in workers from abroad.

As with other information used in the visa process, that work would not involve, and was never intended to involve, the publication of the ratio of resident workers to foreign workers, nor the creation of lists or names of workers. We are considering adding other conditions that must be met before a company can recruit from abroad—for example, considering what steps they have taken to train up a local workforce. We are committed to reducing non-EU migration across all visa routes, to bring net migration down to sustainable levels as soon as possible.

British businesses have driven the economic recovery in this country, with employment now at record levels. However, we still need to do more, so that all British people, including disabled people, get the right opportunities they need to get on in life. What is happening now is not fair on the companies doing the right thing, so I will consider again whether our immigration system provides the right incentives for businesses to invest in resident workers.

I turn to the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union, about which my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean spoke in some detail. Like him, I was on the remain side of the argument, but I accept the wishes of the British people as expressed at the ballot box. As the Prime Minister has made clear, Brexit means Brexit, and we will make a success of it. The Prime Minister has announced that we will trigger article 50 by next March. Beyond that, however, she has rightly been clear that we should not provide a running commentary on events, and it would not be right for me

to set out the terms of our negotiations here, even if I was aware of all of them. What I will say is that, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean suggested, leaving the European Union presents us with an opportunity to look afresh at all the issues around free movement.

Currently, nationals from countries in the European economic area have the right in EU law to enter the UK for any purpose for up to three months, and to stay indefinitely to work. They can access services and employment on the basis of their EU passport or identity card. Free movement rights are exercised at the discretion of the EEA national, rather than with the permission of the destination member state. Since 2004, free movement from the A8—the eight accession countries—and from the A2 countries, Bulgaria and Romania, has provided employers with a readily available pool of cheap labour. That has had a significant impact on employment practices, so any restrictions would clearly have an impact.

EU nationals, excluding Irish nationals, account for almost 6% of total UK employment, but they are over-represented in sectors such as hospitality, manufacturing, agriculture, transport and storage. It is in that context that we can look again at prioritising employment for the resident labour market, including disabled people. We should look at where disabled people are able to provide a contribution, while ensuring that the right safeguards are put in place, particularly if they do not have an advocate to work in their best interests. That will require close working across Government, but I assure my right hon. Friend that in order to address these issues I will work closely with my counterparts in his other former Department, the Department for Work and Pensions; with the voluntary sector, where appropriate; and, of course, with employers.

I assure my right hon. Friend that the position of the disabled is, and will remain, a priority for this Government in the months and years ahead. We will seize every opportunity to ensure that, wherever possible, those with disabilities are helped into the workforce.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## HS2: North-west of England

**Albert Owen (in the Chair):** We now move to the next debate. From the outset, I want to make it clear that it is an hour-long debate and that I will call the three Front-Bench spokespersons, including the Minister, within half an hour. A number of Members are down to speak and I ask them to be concise. I am sure that the Member moving the motion will take interventions, if necessary, during his opening remarks.

4.30 pm

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered HS2 in the North West of England.

I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the question of High Speed 2 in the north-west of England, and it is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Owen.

Infrastructure investment should be a good thing for the economy, and in principle I am all in favour of HS2, and HS3, HS4, and HS5. But as things stand, and until assurances are given by the Government, I remain ambivalent that HS2 will truly bring the promised benefits to all of the UK. Indeed, if rumours, press stories and anonymous briefings are to be believed, it will simply be a fast link between the major centres of London, Birmingham and Manchester that will help to expand those three big cities while further squeezing out growth in the areas outside those metropolises. Therefore, the consideration must be about not just the physical layout of the line and its track works, but the services on it, and the line design must flow from the service level required, rather than the other way around.

I sound that element of caution because, as we have seen with HS2 phase one, once the project gets passed over to the Treasury, finance often becomes the only—and a short-term—consideration. For example, the HS2 spur to Heathrow Airport is lost, with warnings of further cuts. Indeed, we are still waiting for formal confirmation that HS2 will go ahead at all, which is one reason I always called for the whole project to be built from the north to the south, to ensure that it did not simply become yet another major infrastructure programme focused solely on London and the south-east. Worse than that would be the opportunity missed if the wrong strategy for HS2 in the north-west was adopted. The Government's own vision for HS2 in its consultation envisaged that only two trains per hour would stop at Crewe, with the majority of trains going into a tunnel just south of Crewe and bypassing the station, and therefore the region—my sub-region—completely.

In making my case, I am pleased to call in support two principal backers: Sir David Higgins, with his report "HS2 Plus", and the board of the Cheshire and Warrington local enterprise partnership. Our LEP's economic strategy is based very clearly on the vision of Sir David Higgins of a hub at Crewe, interlinked with local lines and distributing the growth benefits across our sub-region. Sir David's report demonstrates that Crewe sits at the very centre of the north-west rail system, and states very clearly that Crewe should therefore become a regional transport hub, with HS2 fully integrated into plans for revitalising the northern economy as a whole. Rail lines from Crewe radiate towards Manchester and Liverpool,

Stoke and Derby, and Warrington, and on to Lancashire and Scotland, Shrewsbury and mid-Wales, and many of the smaller towns in Cheshire, as well as Chester and north Wales and the Wirral. A proper regional rail hub at Crewe would allow all of those places to enjoy the benefits of the huge investment that the nation is making in the new line.

From the work undertaken by my LEP, the main conclusion is clear: a proper regional hub at Crewe could extend the benefits of HS2 to 1.5 million people across the north-west and north Wales, reducing travel time to London by an hour. Those figures come from modelling work done by Mott MacDonald, commissioned by the LEP. The firm was asked to assume that five trains per hour from London stop at Crewe, with up to four trains an hour then running from Crewe on all the lines that radiate out from there. In some cases, perhaps because there are single track sections on the line, that would not be possible, so the LEP asked Mott MacDonald to limit the number of additional trains to what the current infrastructure can accommodate.

My own local authority, Cheshire West and Chester, working with neighbouring authorities in the Mersey Dee Alliance area, which includes councils across the border in north Wales, has also identified the importance of rail infrastructure as central to the economic growth of our region. "Growth Track 360", a report published by that alliance of businesses and political and public sector leaders, led by Samantha Dixon, the leader of Cheshire West and Chester council, has set out a programme of rail improvements that will transform the economies of Cheshire and north Wales by providing better links between places in Cheshire and the Wirral and into north Wales. By linking such improvements into the services radiating out from a proper rail hub at Crewe, we can offer even more people in Cheshire, north Wales and Merseyside the benefits of the journey time improvements that HS2 provides.

"Growth Track 360" also calls for developments at Crewe to be future-proofed, to ensure that in the long term HS2 trains have the ability to "turn left at Crewe", as we say, towards Chester and on to north Wales. If that does not happen, 1.5 million people will be on a branch line and the full benefits of HS2 will be lost. Surely those areas also have a right to benefit from public investment in HS2? But, just as importantly, they have the right not to suffer from—to coin a phrase used on the railways—the wrong type of HS2.

I am clear that if we do not get the Higgins vision of a rail hub, investment and growth will be sucked out of and away from Cheshire and other parts of the north-west in favour of the already big cities. I do not want Cheshire's growth to depend on crumbs from the table of Manchester. Employers in my area already tell me that they lose skilled workers to Manchester because the local rail links to Manchester and the local and regional motorway network—yes, I am talking about the M56—are insufficient. If the strategic rail network also fails to serve the entire region, the negative effects could be catastrophic and long term.

My LEP has drawn some interesting and valuable comparisons with the effect of high-speed rail connectivity in similar circumstances elsewhere. Lyon was the first city to be connected to the TGV network in France. It now handles more than 100,000 passengers a day more than when it was opened, and it has led to the creation

of 40,000 new jobs in the area around the station. Lille is a city about the same size as Warrington. In the eight years after its TGV station was opened, employment in the city and the surrounding region grew by nearly 120,000. Key to that success was the creation of a strong local network of trains, trams and buses linking to the TGV network at Lille station, much like the regional rail hub Sir David Higgins proposed for Crewe. Kakegawa is a similar-sized city to Chester. It was originally bypassed by the Japanese high-speed rail network. It finally got a new station in 1988, leading directly to an almost 40% increase in industrial output in the town in just four years.

So, in the debate and more generally, we now await the Government's proposals for HS2 phase two. I am grateful for the Transport Minister's attendance today and even more grateful that it is he and not one of his colleagues from the Treasury who will respond. Clearly, one of the big concerns of HS2 is cost, and we cannot write blank cheques, but if we can consider HS2 as an investment that will benefit the whole country, hopefully we can arrive at a solution that spreads its wealth across the whole country too. Central to that is the Higgins hub at Crewe with its five or six trains an hour, and through services connecting HS2 to all the major towns and cities in the north-west and on to Birmingham and London.

In conclusion, we have a choice: we can take Harry Beck's plan of the London underground, draw a short line above Chesham and Amersham showing Birmingham and Manchester, and consider HS2 to be just another part of London's transport network, or we can recognise that a truly national project should have truly national benefits. I suggest to the Minister that now would be a great time for the Government to confirm that their intention is the latter.

**Albert Owen (in the Chair):** I have just sought clarification about the wind-ups. The Labour and Scottish National parties have five minutes each, not 10, to wind up, and the Minister has 10 minutes to respond to the debate.

4.38 pm

**Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con):** It is a pleasure to take part in the debate. I agree with much of what the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) said. HS2 has the potential to bring huge benefits to my constituency if the appropriate system of hub and spoke is in place. Winsford in particular could benefit from that development, as it is on the line that runs to Chester. However, I urge caution to the Minister on routing through my constituency.

Eddisbury is geologically unique. It has a salt mine that provides 60% of the salt that keeps our roads clear and the neighbouring constituency has underground gas storage for the UK's gas reserves. The whole area is riddled with wild and mined brine extraction with large areas of wet rockhead, where water causes the salt to dissolve, which results in subsidence problems and continuously shifting ground.

If the money is to be spent, it needs to be spent properly and needs to ensure those five or six trains to Crewe and a link to Manchester airport in order to deliver for the region. The Minister will shortly receive further information in the form of an expert report, which will highlight some of the engineering issues that will be faced on the route currently proposed through

Eddisbury. At present, HS2 has no baseline figures in terms of subsidence. It is not undertaking ground movement assessments in the area using the most up-to-date InSAR satellite imaging technology. If the Government are not to incur vastly increased costs, it is vital that a baseline is established and that ongoing ground movement monitoring is carried out in order to understand the seismicity of the area and its vulnerabilities.

In terms of supporting the line itself, 100-metre-deep pilings might be needed, running through salt. That would be a unique engineering project for Eddisbury's particular geology. I would urge the Minister to cost that section of the route carefully and examine, with the very strict Treasury criteria, whether value could be achieved by aligning the route elsewhere, which might deliver a better outcome for Cheshire as a whole as well as deliver the kind of economic benefits that the local enterprise partnership has talked about.

I know time is short and I want to move on to compensation for my residents. At the moment, the announcement on phase 2b of HS2 has been considerably delayed. That has substantially disadvantaged residents, who are currently able only to access compensation through the exceptional hardship scheme, rather than the need-to-sell scheme. The need-to-sell scheme only requires applicants to show unreasonable burden. It is not fair for residents on phase 2b to have a less fair scheme when it is no fault of their own that the route announcement has been delayed. Is the Minister prepared to say today that the need-to-sell scheme could be extended to those residents of Eddisbury affected by the route issues?

HS2 could bring huge benefits, but it has to bring those benefits in a way that includes a proper cost-benefit analysis. Where the evidence shows that the routing may not be appropriate and accurate, the arguments made by the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) for appropriate stops locally at Crewe, and the establishment of the hub-and-spoke system and proper investment for the station, can only be done if consideration is given to where savings can be made on the route on the Treasury costings. In the meantime, some of my residents are affected by blight. Bearing in mind that those residents are relatively small in number at present, I would ask that the Government consider extending the need-to-sell scheme to them immediately. There is much more I could say, but I shall write to the Minister to outline my further arguments.

4.43 pm

**Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op):** I have always been a supporter of greater investment in our railway network and, as someone who was on the HS2 Bill Committee, examining the Bill line-by-line, I remain convinced that bringing high-speed rail to the UK is essential. Therefore, it is a pleasure to be in this debate under your chairmanship today, Mr Owen.

We have got to secure greater capacity on our railway network—it really is as simple as that. Demand on our railways has exploded over recent years. Total passenger journeys have more than doubled—from 735 million in 1995 to 1.5 billion journeys in 2013. By 2026, peak demand is projected to hit 250% of capacity at Euston, 200% of capacity at Birmingham New Street and 175% of capacity at Manchester Piccadilly. The west coast main

[Jonathan Reynolds]

line will be full by 2024. During morning peak-time services, around 3,000 passengers arrive standing into London Euston or Birmingham each day, unable to get a seat despite paying the full fare. These are journeys not of 10 or 20 minutes but of up to two hours or more from Manchester. My wife once had to sit on the floor outside the toilet from London to Manchester when she was eight months pregnant, with a small toddler in tow—

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): With Jeremy?

**Jonathan Reynolds:** I believe many people have experienced similar problems on the network. This is not what should be offered by a 21st century rail service in the fifth richest country in the world.

The increase in capacity offered by HS2 is warmly welcomed. I recognise that we should be open to conversations about how we might change the design, and different parts of the country will need to put their case for how they see or want to see the benefits manifest themselves in their areas. I myself wanted HS2 to begin construction in the north, from Manchester heading down. Many colleagues have made that case. A compelling case was made by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) on how it could be altered to improve the service for his area. It is important to say that the phase 1 plans in the hybrid Bill will be quite transformative, because separating out long-distance passenger traffic from freight and local services will allow more services across the board. When we talk about HS2, that should always be borne in mind—the benefits are not just from the new capacity of the HS2 line, but also from the additional benefits that come from freeing up the existing capacity and infrastructure.

I find the two most common complaints I hear about HS2 to be without foundation. The first is that HS2 will simply be a rich man's railway. That is incoherent. The laws of supply and demand tell us that, if we do not build more capacity, prices will have to rise as an ever greater number of people chase a limited number of seats on the trains. I see HS2 being built as a way to keep fares down.

The second criticism that we often hear is that the new line should be built not with high-speed technology but with standard technology. Again, that does not add up. A new rail line built to traditional speeds would still incur about 90% of the costs of HS2 but offer only a fraction of the capacity that HS2 would provide. I believe this is the right project.

If we really want to make real the Government's former rhetoric—I do not know whether it is still the policy—about the northern powerhouse and devolution, infrastructure and investment outside of London has got to come with it. We cannot attract the global companies and the long-term investment into the north-west and Yorkshire that we all want to see unless we can give people some certainty that we will address the chronic underinvestment in infrastructure in the regions outside London. I see HS2 as integral to that. It is about jobs, growth and connectivity, about better wages, better career paths and better homes. It is about bringing London and Manchester closer together and giving hard-pressed Londoners a chance to spend more time

in the UK's greatest city. The HS2 stations at Manchester airport and Manchester city centre are about making Greater Manchester a nexus for domestic, European and global travel, and I like the look of that a great deal.

**Jason McCartney:** I rise as a Yorkshire Member. This is relevant. I thank the hon. Gentleman for talking about capacity. It is not about speed. Does he agree that, at a time when the Government are making big infrastructure decisions on Hinkley, Crossrail and airport expansion, it is really important that we win the hearts and minds in the north of England, by showing that this will not only benefit Leeds and Manchester? It will also benefit our towns—Chester, Stalybridge, Huddersfield, Halifax and Burnley—and it will create quality jobs and apprenticeships in the north of our nation.

**Jonathan Reynolds:** I endorse that wholeheartedly, and not just because we share a train line between our constituencies, allowing easy access between the two. This is about how the economy works outside of London and where the investment goes. It is about job opportunities, career paths and the lives that can radiate from that kind of investment.

We have never got this right as a country before. We never thought as we needed to about what to do when we saw the de-industrialisation of the '80s and the changes in the way that people live and work in the areas those of us here represent. It needs this kind of ambition. People talk about the costs of these projects, but they always will be expensive in a country with our land values and distribution of population. It will be difficult, in cost terms, to deliver, but it is the right thing to do.

**Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the north of England has suffered because 90% of capital expenditure on transport has gone to the south-east? To put his point very bluntly, should we not ensure that HS2 all the way to Leeds and Manchester is not behind Crossrail 2 in the queue for capital investment?

**Jonathan Reynolds:** Unsurprisingly, I entirely endorse that message. This has to be the priority for the country, because it is a national project. Other very useful transport infrastructure projects do not have the same benefits for the whole of the country. When talking about projects of this kind, we, and the Front Benchers in particular, have got to scrutinise the costs. We have got to ensure that the powers and resources to deliver the projects are proportionate and that the people who are affected by the building of the line are taken into consideration. Above all, we have to be unequivocal that this country needs to make this kind of investment if we are to make our economy work better and improve our constituents' lives and career paths. I welcome every opportunity to debate this project, but we must always talk about improving it and about the rightness of making this kind of infrastructure investment, because that is what our constituencies need and our constituents want.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Albert Owen (in the Chair):** Order. Three Members have indicated that they want to speak. If they take five minutes each, that would be great.

4.51 pm

**Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) for securing this excellent and timely debate. I believe that this project has cross-party support from those of us from the north-west and the north generally. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) made an excellent speech, and I agree with every word of it. The hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) made the point that 90% of infrastructure investment in the UK goes to London and the south-east. Collectively, we have to ensure that the north, and the north-west in particular, gets its fair share. He is a man from the north-east. If I were from the north-east, I would be jumping up and down, because it gets a tiny percentage of investment in all infrastructure, not just rail infrastructure.

Since I was elected as a Member of Parliament in 2010, most of us have agreed with High Speed 2, but we still have to fight for it. We have only to look at the media in the south-east. I always find it interesting that the London news—the 6 o'clock news and the 10 o'clock news—calls high-speed rail a white elephant for some reason, but Crossrail 2, which costs £17 billion, does not seem to be an issue. Various infrastructure projects are going on in the south-east, but there seems to be an issue with infrastructure investment elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

If high-speed rail is a white elephant—if it does not provide value for money and if the costs are escalating—it should not go ahead, as I do not agree with wasting taxpayers' money, but I do not believe it is. I believe it is exactly the right thing to do for the country, for the north-west, for greater Cheshire and for the constituents of Weaver Vale, which is, as hon. Members know, the gateway to the northern powerhouse. It is a vital infrastructure project.

The volume of traffic in all areas has increased beyond recognition in the past few decades. Some 317 billion miles were travelled on the roads in 2015-16, and 62 billion miles were travelled by rail passengers. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde talked about his wife sitting on the floor on a Pendolino. Those of us who travel from this place of an evening—even on a Wednesday evening, but particularly on Thursdays and Fridays—are very familiar with standing room only on the west coast main line trains from London Euston to Manchester Piccadilly.

In terms of people served, the west coast main line is the most important rail network in Britain. Some 40% of all freight trains use it at some point in their journey. Demand on the line from both freight and passenger traffic is expected to grow substantially. High Speed 2 would release that capacity and enable freight to get off the roads. It is no surprise that the Victorian rail infrastructure that serves much of the north-west is incompatible with the growing demand. The antiquated trains on the railway infrastructure of the mid-Cheshire line from Chester into Stockport and Manchester are trundling along at the same speed that they did when the Victorians built the line more than 150 years ago.

The hon. Member for City of Chester said that it is very hard for business in Chester to recruit quality staff from elsewhere in the region because the commute takes too long. That is a barrier to growth in Chester.

**Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): Will my hon. Friend endorse the North Wales and Mersey Dee Rail Task Force growth track 360 campaign, which seeks to ensure journey times of under one hour within the north Wales, Cheshire and Wirral region, as well as faster links to London, to counteract the economic underperformance of the region by connecting people to jobs and business to customers, and reducing our overdependence on a congested road network?

**Graham Evans:** I absolutely agree. My hon. Friend raises an important point. High Speed 2 is not just about Cheshire and the north-west region. It is about another country and the north Wales economy. He is exactly right. The Mersey Dee Alliance is a good alliance, and I am very pleased, as he is, to be part of it. It is about looking at this together, because enterprise zones do not recognise borders, and those of us representing Cheshire will benefit from the cross-border activity. It is very important that the rail infrastructure travels along north Wales and Anglesey to the markets of Ireland.

It would be a mistake to look at High Speed 2 as a stand-alone project. Over the next five years, three times the amount that is spent on High Speed 2 will be spent on roads, railways and other forms of transport. It is really important to ensure that High Speed 2 and the expenditure on other transport in the north-west complement each other so the connectivity that High Speed 2 brings is enhanced throughout the north-west, spreading the benefits. Trying to get from Northwich to Widnes and Runcorn is a nightmare. It is virtually impossible. Passengers trundle into Stockport, and then trundle along over to Widnes and into Liverpool. Increasing capacity on rail networks will potentially remove an estimated 10 million vehicles from UK roads, significantly relieving the pressure on busy sections of roads, such as the M56 in my constituency, which the hon. Member for City of Chester could not resist mentioning. We are all as one on the M56's issues.

We have only to look at another French town, Lille, whose economy has flourished as a result of the connectivity of high-speed rail and the connection to the HS1 line, to see the potential that High Speed 2 can bring to north-west hubs such as Crewe. Those areas of France have been transformed. Around the station in Lille, investment has increased significantly, and new offices, hotels, a retail centre and a conference centre are all being developed. The Euralille complex, situated between the two Lille stations, has emerged as the third largest business centre in France. That highlights the real opportunity for Cheshire and its towns. Lille highlights how forward vision and connectivity together can be a radical catalyst for growth in any modern city.

Connectivity between our cities is vital for the development of the northern powerhouse and the rebalancing of our economy. North-west businesses will have better access to specialised services, a larger workforce and greater opportunities to offer their services to the capital. Likewise, shorter journey times are vital for business-related journeys, and connections with London alone could bring £4 billion of benefits to the north-west. Over the next few decades, High Speed 2 will play a fundamental role in reshaping our economy. Some 70% of jobs created by High Speed 2 are forecast to be outside London. I am sure all hon. Members will agree that we want those jobs in the north of England and Scotland.

[Graham Evans]

We must look at High Speed 2 not in isolation but as part of an overall strategy for improving connectivity throughout the north-west. We must take steps to ensure that spending on other areas of transport infrastructure is, as much as possible, complementary to the High Speed 2 network so we can replicate Lille's success at hubs such as Crewe in the north-west of England.

**Albert Owen (in the Chair):** I hope that the trains are more on time than the hon. Gentleman's five-minute speech.

4.59 pm

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I praise my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) for securing this timely debate. I have the most visited constituency in the north-west of England—in fact, 25 million people have visited it in the past 12 months. Hon. Members have probably guessed that Manchester airport is on my southern boundary, but that makes the issue very relevant to us.

Daniel Adamson, a Mancunian entrepreneur and engineer, coined the term “northern powerhouse” in 1860 when he built the Manchester ship canal. He wanted to create a continuous economic region from the estuary of the Mersey to the banks of the Humber estuary. We are focusing on HS2 and its impact—an impact like the ship canal had more than a century ago.

HS2 will drive growth in the north, as other Members have said, and help free up capacity, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) said. The west coast main line will be full by 2024. We need the extra capacity, but we also need a station at Manchester airport. That will be critical to ensuring that the benefits of the project are felt beyond Manchester as a whole, in the wider catchment areas. Any measures that help to reduce journey times and free up capacity on the existing network, enabling more places across the north to be connected to Manchester airport, will be most welcome.

One of the most important features of HS2 and a station at Manchester airport is the potential for wider rail network improvements. A connected network would potentially deliver truly transformational benefits for the north. Connectivity to and from Manchester airport is a key factor for airlines when they think about introducing new long-haul routes. With the current rail access, 3.5 million people are within a two-hour catchment area of Manchester airport using public transport, compared with 11 million and 12 million for Gatwick and Heathrow respectively. Currently, the only city that can be reached by rail from Manchester airport in 30 minutes is Manchester. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) alluded to, that situation exists following decades of Governments of both parties spending 90% of infrastructure investment on the south and the south-east.

I mentioned the transformational nature of a connected network. The current journey time from Manchester airport to Euston is two hours and 24 minutes. That will be revolutionised; it will come down to 59 minutes. If we do this right, it will open up whole new markets, from Hull to Liverpool, Chester and north Wales.

Let us look at the growth of comparator European airports and cities. Amsterdam's Schiphol airport has a smaller immediate population than Greater Manchester, yet successfully draws a higher proportion of its passengers from further afield. That is supported by rail journeys around 30% quicker than those between Manchester and the likes of Liverpool, Leeds and Sheffield. From Manchester airport, it currently takes 65 minutes to get to Liverpool and 73 minutes to get to Sheffield. If we introduced HS2 and HS3, those journeys would be reduced to 30 minutes. To get from Manchester airport to Leeds, it would take 10 minutes to get to Manchester city centre and another 30 minutes to get to Leeds—40 minutes in total. We would be linking three major airport hubs at Speke, Manchester and Leeds-Bradford, all for the cost of one Crossrail project—it would be the same length—and creating unheard-of runway capacity across the north.

We estimate that with the right rail improvements that opened up the catchment area and gave airlines access to more passenger demand, 20 to 30 new long-haul routes from Manchester airport would be made viable. I would like the Minister to respond to those points, and possibly pledge to follow through and ensure that the design and delivery of the HS2 works goes hand in hand with the delivery of a true east-west link as part of wider rail network improvements, and that both schemes are delivered at the earliest possible opportunity so that we can derive maximum benefit and close the north-south productivity gap as soon as possible. We are focused on Heathrow—we will be for weeks, months and years ahead—but we will get more bang for our buck in GDP as a country and an economy by investing in our northern infrastructure than we ever will by investing in runway 3 at Heathrow.

**Albert Owen (in the Chair):** Order. I call Mary Robinson to conclude the Back-Bench contributions. I will call the Scottish National party spokesman at 10 past 5 at the latest.

5.4 pm

**Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, and to see Members from both sides of the Chamber present for this important debate about HS2. I congratulate the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) on securing it.

I am conscious of time, but I rise to speak about how this ambitious project will bring prosperity and jobs to my region, Greater Manchester. High Speed 2 will sweep into the north, with phase 2a to Crewe scheduled to open in 2027 and the delivery of phase 2b marked for completion in 2033. HS2 is the UK's largest infrastructure project. It is critical to genuinely transforming connectivity across the region and rebalancing the UK economy. Now more than ever, I believe that it is vital that we modernise our railways.

I was pleased that the Minister was able to attend the debate that I secured in the previous Session on transport infrastructure in south Manchester. Although I was unable to dedicate as much time in that debate to high-speed rail as it was due, I welcomed the fact that he noted the importance of a regional hub at Manchester airport. The HS2 station at Manchester airport will reach close to my constituency of Cheadle and offer substantial further scope for jobs and productivity growth.

It will maximise the airport's potential and recognise its capacity to grow and handle up to 55 million passengers per annum. Manchester airport employs 20,000 people, many of whom live in my constituency, and contributes £1.8 billion annually to the economy. The £1 billion transformation plan to develop the airport through the airport city enterprise zone promises more jobs and wealth creation. That hub is vital to supporting development and key to regional prosperity and delivering the northern powerhouse.

One of the most important features of HS2, with a station at Manchester airport, is the potential for it to form part of a wider northern powerhouse rail network, as the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) mentioned. Such a connected network has the potential to deliver truly transformational benefits for the north. With the current rail access to Manchester airport, the population within a two-hour catchment area using public transport stands at only around 3.5 million, compared with 11 million and 12 million at Gatwick and Heathrow respectively. Manchester is the only city that can be reached by rail in 30 minutes. It is critical that we get the Manchester airport hub and that the design and delivery of HS2 works hand in hand with the design and delivery of a true east-west link across the north as part of the wider NPR network. Both schemes should be delivered at the earliest opportunity, so that we can derive the maximum benefit and close the north-south productivity gap.

I look forward to the legislation for phase 1 being brought forward later this year. Although I appreciate that delivery timetables have been extended to allow time for the petitions process, I urge the Government to take steps to prevent further delays to the opening of the first step of HS2. We need to talk not about whether HS2 will bring economic benefits, but about how great those benefits will be and how that investment can be spread across the north-west so that the benefits of a transformed rail network can be shared by everyone.

5.8 pm

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I congratulate the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) on securing the debate. My job of summing up for the SNP may have been slightly easier if the motion did not say "north-west of England" but stopped at just "north-west". I noted that the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans) said that he agreed with every word that the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) had said. That may be a first, and it says a lot about the quality of the debate.

I agree that HS2 should be not just about connecting London, Birmingham and Manchester. It must be much more strategic than that. We have heard about east-west connectivity, and the hon. Member for City of Chester mentioned connectivity onwards north to Scotland, which must happen. There has been a bit of a theme among all the contributions: the economic benefits that arise from the expenditure on this big project, not just the cost burden, must be spread across the whole of the UK.

The call for a hub at Crewe makes absolute sense. That seems critical to connectivity between the regions and nations of the UK. I also agree that the project

must be future-proof. I am concerned that under the current HS2 arrangements the classic compatible trains that will be purchased to run on the network will actually run slower on the west coast main line north of Crewe than trains do at present. People will get to Crewe having had a quicker journey time, but then the service north of there will be diminished. That is not acceptable, so I ask the Minister to think about that in the long run.

To pick up on some of the other contributions, the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) almost seemed to make the case against the project, which I found quite surprising, talking about the costs and engineering difficulties. I think there was a wee bit of "not in my back yard" and "we'll take the benefits, but please build the railway somewhere else."

Like the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde, I was on the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill Committee, and I agree with him that HS2 is about capacity. The hon. Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) said in an intervention that it is about not speed but capacity, but in my opinion it is about both. If we do not have the right speed, the attraction for passengers will not be there, especially when we look at extending the network north to Scotland. We have aspirations of a three-hour journey time from London, which would really compete with the budget airlines.

I have already said that the hon. Member for Weaver Vale agreed with every word said by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde, which was good. The hon. Members for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) and for Cheadle (Mary Robinson) made clear the need for Manchester to be properly connected, with the benefits that it will bring, and the need for the east-west spur.

I apologise for repeating myself, but HS2 must be strategic and connect the entire country. Plans must be taken forward to bring the high-speed network north to Scotland. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde said he hoped that the project would start in the north, and he used Manchester as his example of the north. Actually, "north" is further north than Manchester. However, I agree with the sentiment: it would be great to start construction in the north—north of Manchester, perhaps in Glasgow, and bring it right down from there, with the economic benefits being shared by all.

5.11 pm

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) for securing the debate. He passionately put forward his case on how HS2 can serve the interests of his constituents and the wider north-west. I echo his sentiment that HS2 has Labour's backing. We welcome infrastructure investment, but part of the case for HS2 that convinced so many was that it was not simply another project designed for the benefit of the south-east but that it would benefit regions across the country.

Crewe is already a gateway station for the north-west, with regional and long-distance connections to the wider north-west, the east midlands and Wales, but there are significant capacity constraints that have an impact on reliability, which has been below industry targets, and there are bottlenecks at Colwich junction and around Stafford. This is also a problem for national freight

[*Andy McDonald*]

operators, with much freight traffic on the west coast main line routed through Basford Hall yard, south of Crewe, and 43% of rail freight journeys using the west coast main line at some point.

The phase 2a link will help provide much needed additional capacity for freight and will improve reliability for commuter services, so it should be welcomed that the Government have brought forward the opening of the phase 2a link to 2027 as that will provide benefits to the north-west and beyond. However, it would be disappointing if a Crewe hub were not developed, as the fact that it is already a regional hub provides a springboard for further developing and improving connectivity with conventional rail. The benefits of stopping more trains at Crewe are clear, as expressed in David Higgins's "HS2 Plus" report.

We welcomed the Government's decision to accelerate the section of route from the west midlands to Crewe so that it opens six years earlier than planned in 2027, bringing benefits to the north sooner than initially thought, but the primary concerns are the rumours that phases 2a and 2b might be downgraded or delayed as the project increasingly comes under budgetary strain.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones)** *indicated dissent.*

**Andy McDonald:** I see the Minister shaking his head—he can give me that assurance, then. In the words of the Public Accounts Committee report, "the cost estimates for phase 2 are still volatile".

There was a cost estimate from the Department for Transport that was £7 billion over the agreed £28.5 billion funding, and then £9 billion of potential savings were subsequently identified. We know that much of the savings are a result of more detailed and accurate estimates being applied, but the worry is that without a confirmed route and a firm cost estimate, and with budgetary pressures, the planned savings on phase 2 will be delivered by adversely affecting the expected benefits of the programme to the north, including the north-west.

I know the Minister will wish to reassure the House that he intends to preserve the integrity of HS2 to the north, because that will tackle the lack of capacity south of Birmingham and the poor connectivity not just between the region and London but within the north. It is crucial that we ensure that HS2 remains an infrastructure project that delivers for the whole country.

We have seen the uncertainty surrounding the proposed route changes in south Yorkshire. We do not want to see the same uncertainty on the western leg. It has been rumoured that if costs for the existing scheme cannot be brought down, one option under consideration is to delay or abandon altogether the section to Manchester and build the line only as far as Crewe, or to delay the line—an HS2 spokesperson said that the Treasury is taking the position that that nothing is ruled out.

I echo the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester and stress the importance of delivering a hub station at Crewe, which will benefit the sub-region, the north-west and the country as a whole, and of phase 2b, which ought to transform connectivity in the north

and through the country. It would be disastrous for the north-west and make a mockery of the so-called northern powerhouse if phase 2 were to be downgraded.

We eagerly await the Government's proposals for HS2 phase 2, but whatever the forthcoming route proposals, they must ensure that HS2 is an infrastructure project that delivers for the whole country. I hope the Minister can provide reassurances to that effect.

5.16 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport**

**(Andrew Jones):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I congratulate the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) on securing this debate on HS2 connectivity in the north-west. He represents a beautiful city—one of the many places in the north-west that really stands to benefit from HS2. It has been great to hear the appetite for the scheme from across the Chamber.

HS2 will become the backbone of our national rail network. It will be a key part of building a transport system and economy that works for all. It will increase rail capacity and improve connectivity, and people will not need to travel on HS2 to benefit from it. By providing new fast lines for inter-city services, HS2 will free up space on our existing railway network for new commuter, regional and freight services. We are already starting to see the benefits of the scheme in the form of jobs and skills, which are being created now.

HS2 is working with businesses across the UK, including many small and medium-sized firms, to ensure that they are well prepared to bid for contracts and reap its benefits. Construction alone will generate about 25,000 jobs and 2,000 apprenticeships. A supplier roadshow has travelled the UK, highlighting the range of commercial opportunities that the construction schemes will present, encouraging companies from all over the UK to consider tendering for some of the work. I attended the last one, which was up in Aberdeen, which highlighted to the engineering businesses in the area who have perhaps developed great skills through the oil sector that HS2 presents opportunities for them.

HS2 is not just about serving a few destinations—that phrase was heard across the House. It is not just that; HS2 services will also run on to the existing network, serving destinations in the north-west and indeed those going as far as Scotland. Interchange with conventional rail will also be key in allowing places far beyond the network to benefit. Last year we decided to take the HS2 route via Crewe and to open the route to Crewe in 2027. The journey time between Crewe and London will be just 55 minutes—that is 35 minutes faster than today. Passengers interchanging at Crewe, for example from Chester or north Wales, will also be able to take advantage.

Sir David Higgins recognised the opportunity that Crewe presents for the region. He recommended a north-west hub at Crewe to integrate regional and high-speed rail. It is a sensible idea; Crewe already is a hub. It has rail services to London, Birmingham, Shrewsbury, south Wales, Stoke, Derby, Manchester, Liverpool, Scotland and, of course, north Wales and Chester. It is also well connected to major A roads and the M6.

The Government are developing options for Crewe and we expect to provide an update on the scheme later this year as part of our planned announcement on

phase 2b. I will talk a little bit more about the timing later. The hon. Member for City of Chester has clearly put across the local ambition for high-frequency HS2 services at Crewe and for the increased frequency of conventional services between Crewe and Chester. I understand that local ambition. I have made the case for my own constituency as well, as indeed have many hon. Members. We are already investing in connectivity in the region, and we only have to look at the working taking place at the Halton curve to see that. We are looking at what HS2 connectivity could be provided at Crewe to benefit the whole region.

I have to say that it is too early to lock down the service proposition at this stage. We need to understand what is possible and what benefits could be delivered, but options need to be left open so that services meet the demands and priorities of the 2020s and beyond. I also have to say that we have to think about affordability. We have incredibly ambitious rail investment programmes and there are priorities for investment across the network.

**Christian Matheson:** Does the Minister accept that the opportunities for the 2020s and beyond will actually be created by getting the service level for HS2 right?

**Andrew Jones:** I have absolutely no doubt that when we consider those services we are all thinking ahead. I entirely buy the argument that transport investment is a driver of economic growth and, indeed, social progress—whichever mode of transport we are talking about. The Government are not buying trains because we like trains; we are buying them because they facilitate economic growth. That is the same with buses and social progress.

Taking HS2 to Crewe will play an important part in turning the town around. It is already a hub and it is also a town that is in need of investment, but HS2 is not a silver bullet in itself. We need to ensure that HS2 drives regeneration, not only in the places that it serves directly but far more widely. For the economic growth benefits of HS2 to be realised and to spread, local partners have an important role to play.

It is fantastic to see the north-west making such excellent progress in its plans for the region. The northern gateway partnership is already developing its growth strategy. That work, which is aiming to deliver around 100,000 homes and 120,000 jobs, will ensure the regeneration benefits of HS2 are felt right across the region. I have met with the combined authority, Transport for Greater Manchester, on a number of occasions, and I have done the same with the west midlands. It has been fantastic to see the ambition that those areas have for regeneration, recognising that, when HS2 arrives, it will present them with significant opportunities.

**Andy McDonald:** The Minister said it is too early to “lock down” the level of service, but he will undoubtedly appreciate that, if we cannot establish a bare minimum level of service, this becomes a rather pointless and redundant exercise. If he is not able to do that now, will he give some indication of when he will be able to give a little bit more detail about the basic minimum level of service we have been discussing this afternoon?

**Andrew Jones:** I will come on to timing a little later on. I turn to the matter of the north Wales main line and the work that is being carried out by the North Wales and Mersey Dee rail task force. I welcome its

establishment and it is doing a good job of making the case for rail modernisation in north Wales and of developing wider growth plans for the region. This is an opportunity for north Wales to make the best case for investment in rail infrastructure and services. It is vital that a shared local vision is brought together with a defined set of prioritised outcomes based on economic growth, journey times, connectivity and modal shift. We will continue to work closely with that taskforce and with the Welsh Government to provide advice and assistance and to consider what can be jointly accomplished. We want the taskforce to advise us effectively on options for enhancements, including electrification, to address the regional economic needs and, of course, on the value of those options.

Many hon. Members have commented today. I will first respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach), who has raised concerns with me previously regarding the route north of Crewe, given the ground instability problems associated with the route crossing the Cheshire saltfield. I have been down that salt mine as part of looking at the winter preparations for the road network last year. I have to say it was a very interesting place to visit. I am aware of the scale of this enormous undertaking and I reassure my hon. Friend and other hon. Members that we are not ignoring that risk. HS2 Ltd has carried out surveys to better understand the geological issues in Cheshire and has commissioned further studies from third-party organisations. We are looking at a range of options in that area.

At this stage, I cannot provide any further information about where that part of the route will run. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will make an announcement on that during the autumn. My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury also made a further point about blight for residents affected by the potential routes. I will look at those cases with every sympathy, and I know she will write to me so I will look out for her letter.

I thoroughly agree with the points made by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) on transport being a driver of economic growth, on how capacity is necessary and on how, looking not too far ahead, we will have a rail network that is full, which is something we have discussed previously. He will not be surprised that we are in further agreement. To my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans), I say this is not a white elephant: it is a scheme that is a fundamental and critical part of our national infrastructure and it will happen.

To my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson), I say yes, the debate really has moved on; it is not if but when this happens. The debate we should be having is on how we maximise the benefits that will flow from HS2 when it arrives. To the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), I say that I completely recognise that Manchester airport is thoroughly important, not just for Manchester but for the whole of the north of England with its power to connect it. I can also confirm that we are developing plans for HS3 alongside HS2; they are not separate schemes being developed in isolation. We are looking at integration of the two.

I can confirm that we have had absolutely no loss of ambition. I will run through some timing: on phase 1, we hope the Bill will complete its passage through the

[*Andrew Jones*]

Lords very soon and we hope to start the build in the spring. The necessary work to prepare the Bill for phase 2a is underway and we intend for it to start its parliamentary journey next year. On phase 2b, the Government will announce our proposed route from Crewe to Manchester and from Birmingham to Leeds, south Yorkshire and the east midlands later this year. That will be an important moment and will begin to make the project far more tangible.

This is a project that is from the UK and for the UK. It is all about national benefits, including extra capacity on the network and developing skills, and companies from right across the UK will be able to benefit from the significant amount of work required. We view this as a critical part of our national infrastructure and of building a transport network and an economy that works for all. We have had a positive debate today. Though it has been focused on the north-west—and it is clearly right that this presents a huge opportunity for the north-west, for the city of Chester and for the whole region—it is a national project and we have to view it in that way.

**Jason McCartney:** Will the Minister give way? This will be very short.

**Andrew Jones:** It will have to be.

**Jason McCartney:** Will the Minister confirm that in November the Secretary of State for Transport will confirm the phase 2b route, from Birmingham to Crewe, up to Manchester and also the Yorkshire leg?

**Andrew Jones:** I can confirm that we will announce the Yorkshire leg. I do not know when the Secretary of State will announce it, but I can confirm that we will be announcing the full “Y” route—that is the Yorkshire leg and the Manchester leg.

**Jason McCartney:** This autumn?

**Andrew Jones:** This autumn; that is exactly right. This is a major undertaking for our country but it is an essential one. I emphasise one further point with my last comment: this project is one that central and local Government, and both the public and private sectors, have to come together to deliver. If we all come together to deliver this project we will maximise the benefits, both in transport and regeneration, and our whole country will benefit from that.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered HS2 in the North West of England.

5.29 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*





# Written Statements

Tuesday 11 October 2016

## TREASURY

### ECOFIN: 9-10 September 2016

#### **The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond):**

An informal meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council was held in Bratislava on 9-10 September 2016. The Government are committed to leaving the European Union; in the interim, they continue to participate fully in ECOFIN meetings. EU Finance Ministers discussed the following items:

#### *Future economic policies in the EU*

Ministers discussed the EU's current economic policy framework and whether further systemic reforms are needed. Presentations were provided by former Italian Prime Minister and Finance Minister Mario Monti and former Swedish Finance Minister Anders Borg.

#### *Deepening Economic Monetary Union (EMU)—fiscal pillar*

An orientation discussion was held on proposals for a euro area fiscal capacity, assisted by Guntram Wolff of Bruegel, Vitor Gasper of the IMF, and Danial Gros of the Centre for European Policy Studies.

#### *Taxation—current issues: improving tax certainty and fighting BEPS, tax crime and terrorism*

Ministers exchanged views on measures to address tax avoidance, tax evasion and tax crime and counter-terrorist financing. Presentations were given by OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría and State Secretary of the Slovak Finance Ministry Dana Meager.

#### *Investment plan for Europe*

The Council discussed the progress of the first two pillars of the investment plan for Europe; the European fund for strategic investment (EFSI) and European investment and advisory Hub. EIB President Werner Hoyer and EFSI managing director Wilhelm Molterer reported on the first year's functioning of EFSI and the Hub.

[HCWS176]

### ECOFIN: 11 October 2016

#### **The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke):**

A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) will be held in Luxembourg on 11 October 2016. The Government are committed to leaving the European Union; in the interim, they continue to participate fully in ECOFIN meetings. EU Finance Ministers are due to discuss the following items:

#### *Opening session*

Ministers will be briefed on outcomes of the 10 October meeting of the Eurogroup and the Commission will present an update on the current economic situation. Ministers will also discuss issues relating to the improvement and implementation of the stability and growth pact (SGP), hold an exchange of views on proposals for a European fund for sustainable development (EFSI), and hear a presentation from the European systemic risk board (ESRB) on the residential real estate sector.

#### *Current financial services legislative proposals*

The Council presidency will provide an update on current legislative proposals in the field of financial services.

#### *Fight against fraud*

The Council presidency and Commission will provide information on VAT-related aspects of the draft directive on the fight against fraud affecting the Union's financial interests by means of criminal law—PIF directive.

#### *Banking union*

Ministers are to discuss the current state of play on the implementation of banking union within the eurozone.

#### *G20 and IMF meetings*

Council will follow up on the G20 and IMF meetings which took place in Washington on 6-9 October 2016. The presidency and Commission will provide information on the outcomes.

#### *Climate finance*

Ministers will discuss preparations for the 22nd conference of parties to the United Nations framework convention on climate change—UNFCCC—in Marrakesh, 7-18 November 2016, including adoption of draft European Council conclusions.

#### *European semester 2016—lessons learnt*

Ministers will exchange views on key challenges and lessons learnt and the way forward for the European semester.

#### *Joint report on health systems and fiscal sustainability*

A presentation will be given by the Commission on the joint Commission-EPC report of the health systems and fiscal sustainability. This will be followed by an exchange of views.

#### *Other business—the Basel Committee's banking reform agenda*

The Commission will provide an update on the state of play in ongoing Basel negotiations.

[HCWS177]

## DEFENCE

### Long Service and Good Conduct Medal

#### **The Secretary of State for Defence (Sir Michael Fallon):**

I am today announcing that with effect from 29 July 2014, the long service and good conduct medal will be made available to officers who have served 15 years clear of any disciplinary entry on their service record. This meets the intention set out in a written statement which was tabled in the House of Lords at the conclusion of Sir John Holmes' review of military medals by The Lord Privy Seal (Official Record:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldhansard/text/140729-wms0001.htm#14072935000018>).

The extension of the long service and good conduct medal to officers means that all currently serving members of the regular armed forces, who have 15 years' service clear of any disciplinary entries on their service record will have that service recognised.

I am also announcing that the clasp to the medal will be awarded for every further period of 10 years served, again where their service records is clear of any disciplinary entries.

Finally, I am announcing that there will no longer be a permanent bar to anyone receiving the medal. This will ensure that everyone who commits themselves to our armed forces for a significant period will have that commitment recognised.

Tracing its history back to 1830, the long service and good conduct medal is the oldest medal still being awarded to our service personnel. It is therefore right to make these changes and to be able more fully to recognise those who commit themselves to a career serving our country in the armed forces.

[HCWS175]

# Petition

*Tuesday 11 October 2016*

## PRESENTED PETITIONS

*Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor*

### **Implementation of the 1995 and 2011 Pension Acts**

*The petition of residents of Brighton, Pavilion,*

Declares that as a result of the way in which the 1995 Pension Act and the 2011 Pension Act were implemented, women born in the 1950s (on or after 6 April 1951) have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age; further that hundreds of thousands of women have had significant changes imposed on them with little or no personal notice; further that implementation took place faster than promised; further that this gave no time to make alternative pension plans; and further that retirement plans have been shattered with devastating consequences.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to make fair transitional arrangements for all women born in the 1950s (on or after 6 April 1951) who have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—*[Presented by Caroline Lucas.]*

[P001919]

Petitions in same terms were also presented by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady) [P001921]; the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) [P001922]; the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) [P001924]; the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Sir Simon Burns) [P001920]; the hon. Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) [P001931]; the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) [P001928]; the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott) [P001926]; and the hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen) [P001938].

Petitions P001929, P001930, and P001933 to P001936 in the same terms were also presented.



# Ministerial Corrections

Tuesday 11 October 2016

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### BBC

*The following is an extract from the response to the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) during the statement on the BBC by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on 15 September 2016.*

**Karen Bradley:** For the first time, we have made it an 11-year charter in order that it does not coincide with the electoral cycle and there cannot be seen to be political influence on the charter renewal. In addition, we want to make sure that this is the longest charter ever. [*Official Report, 15 September 2016, Vol. 614, c. 1058.*] *Letter of correction from Karen Bradley:*

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) during my statement on the BBC.

The correct response should have been:

**Karen Bradley:** For the first time, we have made it an 11-year charter in order that it does not coincide with the electoral cycle and there cannot be seen to be political influence on the charter renewal. In addition, we want to make sure that **this is one of the longest charters ever.**

*The following is an extract from the response given to the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) during the statement on the BBC by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on 15 September 2016.*

**Karen Bradley:** As I pointed out to the hon. Lady's colleague the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson), BBC Alba is a wholly owned subsidiary of the BBC, whereas S4C is not.

[*Official Report, 15 September 2016, Vol. 614, c. 1064.*] *Letter of correction from Karen Bradley:*

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) during my statement on the BBC.

The correct response should have been:

**Karen Bradley:** As I pointed out to the hon. Lady's colleague the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson), **BBC Alba is a BBC service; S4C is not.**

## DEFENCE

### Defence Procurement: Steel Industry

*The following is an extract from Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence on 12 September 2016.*

**Christina Rees:** Now that Government Departments are mandated to provide information about the proportion of UK steel used in the Crown Commercial Service, will the Minister please tell the House what percentage of UK steel is used in current defence projects and what percentage will be used in future?

**Harriett Baldwin:** The hon. Lady rightly speaks up for steel production in her constituency. She will be very pleased to know that, for the largest project that the UK Government have ever procured that uses steel—she will be aware that that is the carrier programme currently under construction on the Clyde—the vast majority comes from Tata Steel. I believe it is 94%.

[*Official Report, 12 September 2016, Vol. 614, c. 586.*]

*Letter of correction from Harriett Baldwin:*

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees) during Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence.

The correct response should have been:

**Harriett Baldwin:** The hon. Lady rightly speaks up for steel production in her constituency. She will be very pleased to know that, for the largest project that the UK Government have ever procured that uses steel—she will be aware that that is the carrier programme currently under construction **in Rosyth**—the vast majority comes from Tata Steel. I believe it is **95,000 tonnes.**



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