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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 7 December 2016**

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# House of Commons

*Wednesday 7 December 2016*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### NORTHERN IRELAND

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Security

2. **Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the security situation in Northern Ireland. [907640]

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (James Brokenshire):** Yesterday, I laid before the House the 10th biannual statement to Parliament on the security situation in Northern Ireland. The terrorist threat level in Northern Ireland remains unchanged at severe, meaning that an attack is highly likely. The need for vigilance remains, and I pay tribute to the brave men and women who work tirelessly to keep communities safe.

**Mrs Murray:** I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Kris Hopkins), for meeting me recently, when I was able to tell him about my constituent. I understand that the Secretary of State is unable to discuss that individual case, but does he agree that any security review must take account of such legacy cases?

**James Brokenshire:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I know that she has met my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to discuss the issue. The approach to individual cases is clearly the operational responsibility of the police, but I agree that we must find a better way to investigate legacy cases. The requirement for the Police Service of Northern Ireland to investigate the past puts pressure on its ability to police the present. That is why I remain committed to moving ahead with the Stormont House legacy bodies, which I believe will provide a much more proportionate response to the need to get to those issues.

**Mr Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): The Secretary of State will be aware of recent footage that has emerged of dissident republicans, heavily armed and carrying rocket launchers, in Ardoyne, part of north Belfast, near where Michael McGibbon was murdered recently. It was a scandalous and appalling display. Does the Secretary of State agree that the police, who have been very quick to arrest and charge people for very minor breaches of parading legislation, really need to get a grip on those kinds of displays and arrest and pursue

people, because the people in these communities absolutely do not want those kinds of displays of paramilitary activity?

**James Brokenshire:** I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman's sentiments. The video is utterly repugnant. In my statement yesterday, I pointed out that support for such dissident groups

"remains limited, despite their attempts to seek legitimacy in a wider society which continues to reject their use of violence."—[*Official Report*, 6 December 2016; Vol. 618, c. 12WS.]

That contemptible video was intended to be a show of strength, but I see it as a sign of weakness, and it is important that the PSNI continues its investigations.

**Mr Dodds:** I agree with the Secretary of State and commend the widow of Michael McGibbon, who has spoken so bravely against these people, and who has, unfortunately, been forced out of her home. Her words are a ringing endorsement of the peace process and the political process in Northern Ireland. On tackling dissidents, the cross-border joint agency taskforce, set up under the "Fresh Start" agreement, is doing great work. I would be grateful if the Secretary of State updated us on the work that it is doing to tackle dissident republicans and other criminal gangs.

**James Brokenshire:** The right hon. Gentleman is right to mention the very brave testimony of Joanne McGibbon. Our thoughts are with all those who have lost loved ones to terrorism. This House should continue to send out that strong and important message. The joint agency taskforce, which brings together different agencies to confront organised criminality and those linked to terrorism, is doing very good work, and we need to do more of it.

**Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): Given that the threat level in Northern Ireland is still severe, is the Secretary of State satisfied with the level of intelligence sharing in the Province?

**James Brokenshire:** Some very good work is taking place among our agencies in Northern Ireland, as well as those in the Republic of Ireland. That is in a stronger position. Of course, there is still room for further improvement, but significant seizures of arms and weaponry have been made as a consequence of that work. It is important to underline that.

**Lady Hermon** (North Down) (Ind): My constituent, Austin Hunter, was an outstanding journalist who covered the security situation in Northern Ireland for many years. He was not only a brilliant journalist and a great family man, but a remarkably fine man in his own right. Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to join me—and colleagues from across the House who will have known Austin Hunter as a distinguished journalist in Northern Ireland—in sending condolences to his family, who are absolutely devastated by his death in a tragic traffic accident in Bahrain over the weekend?

**James Brokenshire:** I thank the hon. Lady for that. Although I did not have the privilege of meeting Austin Hunter, I know, from all the powerful testimony that I have heard, not only that he was an incredible journalist, but how warm and human he was. It was a tragic accident, and I join the hon. Lady in sending my condolences to his friends and family, and everyone who knew him. He clearly made a remarkable contribution, and he will be missed by so many.

**Mrs Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): People who give information to the police about terrorist activities have saved many lives in the past, and continue to do so today. Is it not entirely wrong to claim, as some groups do in Northern Ireland, that any case that involves an agent somehow also involves police misconduct?

**James Brokenshire:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct that we save lives as a consequence of the support of people in communities, often at great personal cost. That should be recognised, in terms of some of the really powerful intelligence that is provided and the impact that it has.

**Tom Elliott** (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): I congratulate the Police Service of Northern Ireland and other security agencies on stopping a number of terrorist attacks. Would the Secretary of State give us some information on whether dissident terrorists are still recruiting and increasing in numbers in Northern Ireland?

**James Brokenshire:** As the hon. Gentleman will have seen in my written statement yesterday, there is an enduring threat from terrorism, which is why I underlined the need for vigilance. Support for those terrorists remains limited, but we must continue to be aware and confront it in every way, which is why I pay tribute to the work of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the successes that have been achieved. Equally, however, we must remain absolutely focused on security issues, which underlines the points that I made in yesterday's statement.

12. [907650] **Mr Ranil Jayawardena** (North East Hampshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important that service personnel, who put their lives on the line for our security on a daily basis, including former paratrooper Lance Corporal J, who was arrested and questioned in November last year, or other former members of the Parachute Regiment who had to go to the High Court to battle against detention and extradition, should not face legal reprisals, which may be taken for political reasons?

**James Brokenshire:** I hope that my hon. Friend understands that I cannot comment on individual cases. I will be unswerving and unstinting in underlining the huge contribution of our armed forces in helping to bring about the peace that we enjoy today. Part of that is the rule of law. Where there is evidence of criminality, it is important that the rule of law is upheld, but I know very clearly the incredible contribution that many members of our armed forces have made.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State agree that the prospect of a hard border would provide opportunities for organised crime and would cause additional problems for the security services, including police services? Does he therefore agree that it is essential that Brexit does not result in a hard border?

**James Brokenshire:** The hon. Lady has heard me say on a number of occasions that I do not want a return to the borders of the past. Part of that, yes, is about the politics, but it is also about how we ensure that that

continued good relationship between us and the Irish Government is maintained, and security is a key factor in that.

### Security Service Personnel

3. **Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the protection of data relating to security service personnel who are based in Northern Ireland. [907641]

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (James Brokenshire):** The safety and security of all those serving in the PSNI, prisons and security forces in Northern Ireland is of the utmost importance to this Government. We keep under careful review arrangements and advice to support their protection.

**Ian Paisley:** I thank the Secretary of State for his answer. He will know from his previous role that any breach of the security data of a member of the security services poses an obvious threat and risk to them and their families. Will he undertake a desktop review of all data handling and the security of postal communications between the Northern Ireland Office and security personnel, both former and serving? Will he also undertake to press this matter with the Department of Justice, as it must join up with the NIO to tackle this?

**James Brokenshire:** The hon. Gentleman has raised an individual case with me, and I shall write to him with my response. I do take the security of information relating to people who serve by guarding and protecting us very, very seriously. I meet the military, the PSNI and the Justice Minister; I undertake to raise the importance of ensuring the appropriate protection of the personal data of security force members at the next meeting and to consider the issue further.

### Stormont House Agreement

4. **Craig Whittaker** (Calder Valley) (Con): What steps he is taking to build consensus across Northern Ireland on establishing the legacy bodies included in the Stormont House agreement. [907642]

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (James Brokenshire):** I continue to meet victims groups, the Executive and others to establish the legacy bodies set out in the Stormont House agreement. When I am confident that there is sufficient political consensus, I intend to move to a public phase, to allow wider community consideration and to build confidence and momentum behind the creation of the new legacy bodies.

**Craig Whittaker:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is vital that the legacy bodies in the Stormont House agreement operate in ways that are fair, balanced, impartial and proportionate if we are to counter the one-sided focus on cases involving the state, whereas over 90% of deaths in the troubles were caused by terrorists?

**James Brokenshire:** My hon. Friend makes a powerful and important point. I agree that the legacy bodies must be balanced and proportionate. That was at the

heart of the phraseology in the Stormont House agreement and will be important in delivering that more balanced approach.

**Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): Part of addressing the legacy of the past is breaking down divisions that exist today. Will the Secretary of State therefore join me in expressing sympathy to the family of Danny Murphy, the secretary of the Ulster Gaelic Athletic Association, who died this morning and who worked tirelessly to build peace and reconciliation and to bring people together through sport? He is a loss to us all and to that vital work.

**James Brokenshire:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for drawing to the attention of the House the sad death of Danny Murphy. I am sure that we all extend our condolences to his friends and family. It is worth reflecting at this time on the powerful way in which sport can unite people and bring them together.

**Gavin Robinson** (Belfast East) (DUP): Does the Secretary of State recognise the sheer hypocrisy of republicans who seek 100% transparency on 10% of the deaths in the troubles, but offer none in return? Until they do, and until they offer the assurance that they will give information about the killings, deaths and murders that they were responsible for, it will be incredibly difficult to build the consensus that we need.

**James Brokenshire:** It is important for everyone to work together to move the process on. That is why I continue to commit significant efforts and work to doing just that. The hon. Gentleman is right: at present, the system is heavily focused on the 10% rather than the 90%, and the balanced, proportionate measures that I put forward will assist in changing that.

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): First, I associate myself with the tributes paid both to the fine journalist Austin Hunter and to the fíor Gael Danny Murphy, who was such a good servant of community relations and reconciliation. Would the Minister not do better in building consensus if he did not revisit pejorative remarks that give offence to victims of state violence? In relation to having a balanced approach, surely having a stronger provision in respect of thematics would be much better—one that was not restricted to killings, as other measures are, but would examine the patterns and practices of paramilitaries.

**James Brokenshire:** The hon. Gentleman will be well aware that the legacy bodies contemplated cover a range of issues. Yes, of course, part of this is about investigation, and part is about more information and consideration of the issues to come forward in a number of different ways. That is why it is a priority that we move forward with the Stormont House bodies, and why that remains a key focus for me.

**Mr David Anderson** (Blaydon) (Lab): One of the most serious omissions over the past years has been the failure to address the desperate plight of people who have been seriously injured as a result of the troubles and who have been unable to work and therefore unable to build up second pension provision. Notwithstanding what the Secretary of State said about the need for

political consensus, will he meet me and representatives of the WAVE trauma centre to see how we can work together to try to resolve this tremendous anomaly as quickly as possible?

**James Brokenshire:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue. I have met with the WAVE trauma centre previously, and look forward to continuing engagement with it. I am conscious of the issue of pension rights. Discussion is continuing with the Northern Ireland Executive, and I will continue to seek to gain the necessary consensus to make progress on this important issue.

#### Northern Ireland Office: Leaving the EU

5. **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): How many civil servants in his Department have been assigned to work on issues relating to the UK leaving the EU; and how many additional civil servants his Department estimates it will need over the period leading up to the UK leaving the EU. [907643]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Kris Hopkins):** Officials across the whole Department are working to ensure that the interests of Northern Ireland are protected and advanced as the UK prepares to leave the EU. We will continue to monitor what further support is required.

**Liz McInnes:** The Northern Ireland Office did little preparation for Brexit, and it appears from the response to a written question that I tabled that several private consultancy firms are profiting from this lack of preparation. How many contracts have been awarded to consultancy firms and external organisations?

**Kris Hopkins:** I know of no external contracts being issued.

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): Will my hon. Friend update the House on what action his Department is taking to promote business and community engagement ahead of Brexit?

**Kris Hopkins:** There is constant dialogue between business, local government and the voluntary sector, and the NIO has been used as a conduit to make sure that Cabinet members and colleagues fully understand the implications for Northern Ireland and that we get the best possible deal for Northern Ireland.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The agricultural and fishing sector in Northern Ireland creates some 70,000 jobs. It also produces 3.25% of Northern Ireland's gross value added, which equates to £1.1 billion at basic prices. Can the Minister confirm that civil service personnel will be in place in sufficient numbers to ensure a smooth transition for the UK out of the EU?

**Kris Hopkins:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. We do recognise the importance of that sector in Northern Ireland. There is a good dialogue between the sector and the Department. Cabinet members have met leading food manufacturers and members of the agricultural sector, and that dialogue will continue.

**Mr David Anderson** (Blaydon) (Lab): Recent reports in the United States show that advice given by our civil servants to the US State Department prior to the referendum was that it need not do any preparatory work, because “Brexit can’t possibly happen, so don’t worry about it.” Was the same crass advice being given by the NIO to our partners, and especially to the Irish Government?

**Kris Hopkins:** I do not recognise the comments that have just been made. We have an extremely good relationship with the Irish Government. We will continue that dialogue and work with them.

### Businesses

6. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What steps he is taking to consult businesses in Northern Ireland on strengthening the Northern Ireland economy. [907644]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Kris Hopkins):** The Secretary of State has established a business advisory group to help understand the economic priorities of the Northern Ireland business community. A series of sectoral meetings have already been held with key industrial sectors, including the agricultural food sector, manufacturing and the creative industries.

**Bob Blackman:** I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. What impact will the Government’s industrial strategy have in revamping the private sector in Northern Ireland, and what discussions is he having with the Executive on this topic?

**Kris Hopkins:** It is important to recognise the huge contribution—some £23 billion—that is incorporated in the industrial strategy, and also to recognise the movement and growth in private sector business, with some 14,410 jobs created in the last year alone.

**David Simpson** (Upper Bann) (DUP): I am sure the Minister will agree that the lowering of corporation tax in Northern Ireland will certainly help the economy and companies. However, will he also agree that one area we all need to concentrate on is productivity and the recruitment of new apprentices?

**Kris Hopkins:** I do recognise the points the hon. Gentleman makes. We are working closely with the Executive to raise productivity. They have a really important budget coming up, and we have made a commitment of around £250 million of capital investment to assist in that process.

10. [907648] **David Rutley** (Macclesfield) (Con): Does my hon. Friend welcome the additional £250 million of capital expenditure that is being provided to the Northern Ireland Executive in the autumn statement? Does he agree that it will create a real opportunity for the Executive to invest in important infrastructure?

**Kris Hopkins:** I completely agree with that statement. There has been huge growth in jobs in Northern Ireland—nearly 60,000 new jobs since 2010. We need to keep

building on the great steps that have been made, and the Government working with the Executive is a key part of that.

**Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): May I, too, associate myself with the condolences offered in respect of Danny Murphy, who was my constituent for many years? He was a powerful force for reconciliation and mutual understanding, not only on the island of Ireland but between Ireland and Britain. May I also ask the Minister to consider the recent report on apprenticeships from the all-party group on the visitor economy, with particular reference to fiscal flexibilities?

**Kris Hopkins:** May I offer my condolences to Danny Murphy’s family as well?

I recognise the impact that tourism has on the hon. Lady’s constituency. The Mourne mountains are a great attraction, and the Newcastle air show in the first week of August is really important for the local economy. I hope that I can also make a contribution to that in the near future.

**Mr Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire) (Con): The campaign to give powers to the Assembly to reduce corporation tax united all political parties in Northern Ireland and pretty well the whole of business in Northern Ireland. A business in Craigavon told me that it would double its turnover and its workforce if the rates were down to those of the Republic. Will the Minister guarantee that he and the Secretary of State will use every opportunity to push the Assembly and the Executive to get this through?

**Kris Hopkins:** I recognise the contribution that my right hon. Friend has made in trying to achieve this. It is right that we challenge the Executive, and fiscal responsibility is an important part of that process. There is an important budget coming up at the moment, and there is ongoing dialogue between the NIO and the Executive.

### Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements

7. **Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): What progress has been made on the implementation of the Stormont House and “Fresh Start” agreements. [907645]

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (James Brokenshire):** Good progress has been made on implementing the agreements. This includes legislation on welfare reform, a joint agency taskforce to tackle crime, an Executive strategy to disband paramilitary groups and an independent reporting commission to report on progress towards ending paramilitary activity.

**Edward Argar:** Both agreements contain important provisions to place the finances of the Northern Ireland Executive on a sustainable footing, which is vital to the continued economic success of Northern Ireland. Will the Secretary of State enlarge on progress in these specific areas?

**James Brokenshire:** I think that we have made significant progress. Considering the position this time last year, there have been important steps forward, but there are still additional steps to be taken, including the establishment

of an independent fiscal council to publish an annual report on the Executive's finances and to give further assurance on progress.

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson** (Lagan Valley) (DUP): May I associate myself and my colleagues with the tributes paid to Austin Hunter and to Danny Murphy?

Will the Secretary of State give an assurance that he will not allow the Stormont House and "Fresh Start" agreements to be unpicked? Crucially, in relation to legacy issues, will he hold fast on national security and not allow those who want to rewrite the history of the past to do so?

**James Brokenshire:** I am very clear on the need to continue to make progress in relation to Stormont House and "Fresh Start". There have been significant steps forward. Equally, though, I will not be party to a rewriting of the issues of the past, and that is why a proportionate approach is required.

**Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): Part of the Stormont House agreement involves the legacy issues. Almost weekly, news items prejudice up-and-coming cases by giving just one side of the story. Will the Secretary of State take action so that we do not have future cases prejudiced by stories in the newspapers, or will he pause the legacy issues?

**James Brokenshire:** It is important that the rule of law is clearly upheld and that appropriate investigations are undertaken. However, I make the point that I made earlier about the imbalance within the existing system: 90% of those who lost their lives lost them as a consequence of terrorism. That is why the new bodies are important to deliver a balanced, proportionate approach.

#### UK Decision to Leave the EU: Ireland

8. **Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): What discussions he has had with the Irish Government on the implications of the UK's decision to leave the EU. [907646]

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (James Brokenshire):** I have met and will continue to meet counterparts in the Irish Government as we prepare for the UK's exit from the EU. The UK-Irish relationship has never been stronger. In the coming months, we will deepen co-operation and secure a deal that works in the interests of Northern Ireland and the best interests of the island of Ireland.

**Mary Robinson:** In recognising the closeness and importance of the relationship between the United Kingdom and Ireland, will my right hon. Friend assure the House that while there can be no question of Ireland negotiating with the EU on behalf of Northern Ireland, ultimately any process should serve to strengthen and enhance existing relationships with the Republic?

**James Brokenshire:** I am very happy to give that assurance. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, and the UK Government will continue to speak on its behalf in their negotiations with the EU.

**Dr Alasdair McDonnell** (Belfast South) (SDLP): May I associate myself with the condolences to the families of Danny Murphy and Austin Hunter?

Does the Secretary of State recognise the real need for bespoke and in-depth protection for all aspects of the Good Friday agreement, or the Belfast agreement, and the need—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman is asking about protections for Northern Ireland in respect of the Good Friday agreement. I say to the hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena) that this is a very important matter that the hon. Member for Belfast South (Dr McDonnell) should be able to articulate for his constituents with a respectful audience.

**Dr Alasdair McDonnell:** Does the Secretary of State agree that there is a real need for bespoke and in-depth protection for all aspects of the Good Friday or Belfast agreement, and for the constitutional principles in annex A of the agreement to be given full recognition in any future UK-EU treaty? Northern Ireland's unique interests will in no way be satisfied by a mere consultation with the First and Deputy First Ministers.

**James Brokenshire:** The Government stand by their commitments under the Belfast agreement and subsequent agreements. There are fundamental issues such as consent. I can say to the hon. Gentleman in terms that we will not do anything as part of the negotiations that unpicks or seeks to undermine those essential values contained in the agreements.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): The democratic reverberations that have echoed around Europe since the end of June no doubt affect the Irish Republic as well. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the particular circumstances that exist in Northern Ireland regarding the border with the Irish Republic are at the forefront of his mind in negotiations as we go into 2018?

**James Brokenshire:** I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance about the significance and importance of the border issue. A critical aspect of our approach is that we do not see a return to the borders of the past.

**Mr David Anderson** (Blaydon) (Lab): Last week, in response to a written question on the status and rights of UK state pensioners living in the Republic of Ireland post-Brexit, I was told by Department for Work and Pensions Ministers that that was a matter for negotiation. They simply do not know what the future of those people is. What will the Secretary of State do to get this issue resolved as a matter of urgency? Is this not yet another example of why he should be a permanent member of the Brexit team, not just an add-on?

**James Brokenshire:** I can say to the hon. Gentleman in terms that we are playing a key role in ensuring that there is a UK-wide negotiation and that the interests of Northern Ireland are heard loud and clear in those preparations. One of the aspects of that is the Ireland Act 1949—the rights of Irish citizens in the United Kingdom—and that is part of the work that we are doing.

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

Q1. [907699] **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 7 December.

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington):** I have been asked to reply. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is visiting the Gulf Co-operation Council summit in Bahrain.

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

**Dr Whitford:** Yesterday's signing of a memorandum of understanding with Houston spaceport and the Rice Space Institute brings the reality of a Prestwick spaceport closer, with the huge boost that that could give to the UK aerospace industry. Will the UK Government join the Scottish Government in supporting an Ayrshire growth deal to literally get this off the ground?

**Mr Lidington:** I can certainly assure the hon. Lady that the Government are looking keenly at the opportunities for Scotland, and indeed the whole United Kingdom, arising from the possible future development of commercial space operations. The Ayrshire project that she has described will, I am sure, be examined closely by my ministerial colleagues who are particularly concerned about this area of policy. We definitely want to see the UK as a pioneer in seizing these new commercial opportunities.

Q2. [907701] **Sir Peter Bottomley** (Worthing West) (Con): Perhaps thinking of rail passengers trying to get to their jobs, the general secretary of the TUC has spoken about "shafted and abandoned" workers, while Unite's Len McCluskey is doing a UKIP dance move by resigning before trying to return. Will my right hon. Friend encourage union and other political leaders to tell the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers that 250 people with guaranteed employment should not be putting the lives, jobs and safety of 600,000 Southern rail passengers at risk?

**Mr Lidington:** I am sure that my hon. Friend speaks on behalf of thousands of rail passengers in his constituency and many others in the south of England. It is deeply disappointing that some unions are threatening to strike over the Christmas period. The Government are now investing record amounts in improving our railways—up to £40 billion over the next five years—and we need everyone in industry, both management and unions, to work together to secure the best deal for passengers.

I have to say that the RMT's action shows co-ordinated contempt for the travelling public, and it seems designed to do nothing except to bring about the maximum damage to people's lives—[*Interruption.*] There is some heckling from Opposition Members. The Conservative party is on the side of rail passengers, and I hope that the Labour party will join me in saying to the rail union

leaders, "Sort it out. Put the travelling public first. Stop the squabbling, and tell your members to get back to work."

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I am sure that the whole House will want to join me in commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Pearl Harbour attack, in which thousands of American service personnel and civilians died. The next day, Winston Churchill summoned Parliament to debate the British response and said:

"It is indispensable to our system of government that Parliament should play its full part in all the important acts of State".—[*Official Report*, 8 December 1941; Vol. 376, c. 1358.]

These words are a vital reminder that even at a time of crisis—in fact, especially at a time of national crisis—the role of Parliament is central.

In the same spirit, we welcome the Government's decision to accept our motion today; they will show Parliament their plan for Brexit before article 50 is triggered. May I ask the Leader of the House one central question about this plan: do the Government want the UK to remain part of the customs union?

**Mr Lidington:** I join the hon. Lady in marking the anniversary of Pearl Harbour and remembering all those who lost their lives at that time, and also in marking—with a sense of some celebration, even—the fact that Prime Minister Abe is joining President Obama in going to Pearl Harbour. He is the first Japanese Prime Minister so to do, and that sign of reconciliation and putting ancient conflicts behind them is welcome.

To turn to the hon. Lady's point about Europe, the Government have always made it clear that we would seek to give additional clarity about our position at the earliest opportunity, but it has been the case, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said many times, that one of our core objectives will be to secure the maximum freedom for British companies both to have access to and to operate within the single European market.

**Emily Thornberry:** I thank the Leader of the House for that answer, but I respectfully say to him that surely on this issue the answer should be straightforward. We all know that it would be a disaster for British business if we did not remain part of the customs union. The Leader of the House said himself in February:

"Everything we take for granted...—trade...without customs checks or paperwork at national frontiers...—would all be up in the air... It is massive what is at risk."

On this side of the House, we would agree with him—we could not agree with him more—so can he put it beyond doubt and tell us right now: do the Government want the UK to stay in the customs union?

**Mr Lidington:** The hon. Lady and I—she is right—both argued passionately for the remain cause during the referendum. What separates us now is that I am part of a Conservative Government who are working together to respect the democratic verdict of the British people and to secure the best possible outcome for the prosperity and security of the entire United Kingdom from the negotiations, whereas the hon. Lady, even just two months ago, was telling us that she wanted

"to go back to the British people in some way".

She needs to decide whether she accepts the democratic verdict or not.

**Emily Thornberry:** Of course we accept the democratic decision of the British public—[HON. MEMBERS: “Ah!”] Of course we do. The difference between our side of the House and the Government side is that we want to leave the European Union on behalf of 100%—on behalf of the whole of this nation.

We really need a straightforward answer to a straightforward question. Leaving the customs union would mean having to check every container coming in at Dover. It would mean UK firms having proof of origin tests whenever they export to Europe. It would mean chaos and it would mean gridlock for cross-border supply chains. As the Leader of the House said in May, I believe about lamb and beef exports,

“They go tariff free, they go without any extra...checks...you cannot guarantee any of that if we are outside.”

Again, Labour Members agree with what he said six months ago. The question is: does he still agree with himself?

**Mr Lidington:** I thought it had not escaped even the hon. Lady’s attention that there has been a rather significant referendum since February. That changes the context in which we are now having to operate. We face a deep, challenging and wide-ranging negotiation, and it would be harmful to the national interest for me or other Ministers to engage in the sort of detailed exposition of our negotiating position that she is now pressing upon me. None of the other 27 Governments are doing that; nor should we.

**Emily Thornberry:** Dear oh dear. We are not asking for details; we are asking about a central plank of the negotiations. If the right hon. Gentleman cannot give us an answer on the customs union—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Both the questions and the answers will be heard. If the juvenile behaviour could stop, that would be really helpful to the scrutiny process.

**Emily Thornberry:** We have not had an answer on the customs union as a whole, so may I ask the right hon. Gentleman a question about one specific point? Since 1993, there have been no customs checks on the land border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. In May, when visiting Northern Ireland, he said that if the UK

“were not part of the customs union...there would have to be customs checks at the border.”

He also said that for anyone to pretend otherwise “flies in the face of reality.”

Will he confirm that that remains the position? If that is right, he really must make it clear today that the Government are determined to avoid that situation.

**Mr Lidington:** The Prime Minister and the Northern Ireland Secretary have repeatedly made it clear that we want the very long-standing common travel and free trade arrangements across the Irish border to continue, as indeed do the Irish Government. We are actively engaged in talking both to the Northern Ireland Executive and to the Government of the Republic of Ireland about those matters. There is goodwill on all sides towards trying to reach a solution that works for people north and south of the border.

**Emily Thornberry:** The Leader of the House has made the familiar arguments—he cannot give answers; it is all to be resolved through negotiations; Brexit means Brexit; Brexit means breakfast—but that was not what the Secretary of State for Brexit said when he was asked about the customs union in September. He said that he had looked at the matter carefully and that

“that is exactly the sort of decision that we will resolve before we trigger article 50.”—[*Official Report*, 5 September 2016; Vol. 614, c. 54.]

If the Government are going to decide their position on this issue before 31 March, will the Leader of the House confirm that the British people and the British Parliament will be told some answers to my questions before the Government tell the rest of Europe?

**Mr Lidington:** If the answers sound familiar, it might be because we need constant repetition before the hon. Lady understands and appreciates the principal argument. The Government are at the moment engaged in a consultation with more than 50 sectors of United Kingdom business to ascertain precisely which aspects of European Union membership work well for them, which they see as harmful and where the opportunities beyond EU membership lie. We will come to a decision and we will go into negotiations on behalf of the full 100% of the United Kingdom population and all four nations of the UK.

**Emily Thornberry:** The fact is—the Leader of the House knows it, as do we all—that he can consult as much as he likes, but the answer will come back that we should be part of the customs union. It is hugely disappointing that on a day when the Government are committing to greater transparency on their intentions for Brexit, we are getting the usual stonewalling. We have a Government who are promising to tell us the plan, while refusing to give us answers to the most basic of questions, and who are promising to give Parliament a say, while spending we do not know how much taxpayers’ money across the road in the Supreme Court trying to stop Parliament from having a say on this. In short, we have a Government who cannot tell us the plan because they do not have a plan. In February, the Leader of the House said that what he was hearing from the leave campaign was “confusing, contradictory, nonsense”. My final question is this: are we hearing anything different from the Government today?

**Mr Lidington:** We will publish, before article 50 is triggered, a statement about our negotiating strategy and objectives, as the Prime Minister said yesterday. The hon. Lady seems to be in a state of utter denial about the consequences that flow from the referendum decision. No other EU Government are seeking to reverse or question the legitimacy of that vote in the way that she and a number of her colleagues are still trying to do. I am afraid that that just indicates how distant the Labour party now is from any aspirations to be back in government again. We watch them in action, quarrelling like “Mutiny on the Bounty” as re-shot by the “Carry On” team. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There is far too much noise. I want to hear the words flowing. There is no reason why the Chair should be denied the hearing of these matters. It is very important.

**Mr Lidington:** They are rudderless. They are drifting on Europe, as on so many other aspects of policy. It is little wonder that so many decent working people, who for generations looked to Labour to be their champion, have given up in despair and are turning to the Conservative party as the authentic voice of working families.

Q3. [907702] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): In 1943, a 16-year-old girl was forcibly taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where she witnessed the horrors of the death camps. On liberation, she came to this country with her mother. She raised a family and became a nurse. She dedicated her life to making sure the people of this country and beyond know the horrors of the holocaust. Last week, that lady turned 90. Kitty Hart-Moxon is with us today at Prime Minister's Question Time. [Applause.] Will my right hon. Friend join me, and I think the whole House, in wishing Kitty a very happy belated birthday, and thank her for her lifetime of dedication to raising this important issue? Will he also pay tribute to the Holocaust Educational Trust, which does everything possible to ensure we all remember and bear witness to the horrors of the worst part of the 20th century?

**Mr Lidington:** First, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this important issue. I would like to join him in marking the achievements of Kitty Hart-Moxon and the Holocaust Educational Trust. I can never forget the impact of discovering, as a schoolboy, that two of the boys in my class had fathers who survived Auschwitz. It is only a couple of generations ago that Europe was plunged into this unspeakable horror. It is important that not just the Holocaust Educational Trust but we all play our part in ensuring that the memory of the holocaust lives on, and that the wider lessons of that dark period in our history are learned. I would be grateful for the support of all Members, right across the House from all political parties, in working together to ensure that that vital work continues.

**Angus Robertson** (Moray) (SNP): Some of the most deprived communities in the country are in Glasgow, yet today we learn that apparently the Government plan to close jobcentres in those very communities, in Parkhead, Bridgeton, Easterhouse, Castlemilk, Langside, Anniesland, Cambuslang and Maryhill. Is it true that the Government are planning to close these important offices and bring misery to the lives of the many tens of thousands of people in Glasgow who currently use these centres?

**Mr Lidington:** Clearly, the Department for Work and Pensions, like every Department, looks from time to time at its estate and the number of offices it has, but the right hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly reasonable point on behalf of people in Glasgow. I will ask my right hon. Friend the Work and Pensions Secretary to contact him with the details he is seeking.

**Angus Robertson:** I am sorry but that is not good enough. [Interruption.] I am being heckled while standing up for deprived communities. That will ill behave Tory Members in Scotland.

The Leader of the House is correct that the Department has plans to cut the estate by 20%, but it is planning to cut it by 50% in Glasgow. Why are the Government planning disproportionately to cut vital jobcentres in some of the most deprived communities in our country?

**Mr Lidington:** The key element in any such decision that a Department has to make is not the raw number of offices there should be but how accessible the offices and the services they provide continue to be for the people who need to use them. I am absolutely confident that that criterion is at the heart of my right hon. Friend's thinking in planning for the future of offices in Scotland and everywhere else in the United Kingdom.

Q4. [907703] **Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): Passengers on the Chase line face chaos and utter misery every autumn, and this year it has been worse than ever. Delayed, cancelled and overcrowded trains are leaving passengers stranded at stations and making them late for work and school. Will my right hon. Friend outline what measures the Government are taking to penalise poor-performing train operators?

**Mr Lidington:** I sympathise with my hon. Friend and her constituent, and all passengers who come across these problems on the Chase line. It is clearly unacceptable, and it is important that the operator works hard to secure a rapid and sustained improvement. The Government have introduced new rules to ensure that rail passengers will soon be able to claim compensation if their train is more than 15 minutes late, but as the Transport Secretary said yesterday, more needs to be done, and we want to see much closer working right across the railway industry, so that this kind of problem can be resolved much more swiftly.

Q6. [907705] **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Does the Leader of the House agree with the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) that Brexit offers an opportunity to remove pesky emissions standards? In the red, white and blue of Brexit, will his Government still commit to continued tough targets to protect our environment, or will tackling global warming become just a load of hot air?

**Mr Lidington:** The Government remain utterly committed to both national and global ambitions and targets on climate change. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, in her previous job, played a key role in brokering the Paris agreement last year—the first ever global agreement on climate change. I hope that the hon. Lady would welcome the fact that we are going to be ahead of our targets and ambitions in delivering on the proportion of electricity provided by renewables in this country and that we continue to work to get our carbon emissions down.

Q5. [907704] **Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): There has been much talk recently about paying for access to a tariff-free single market. I think that that is a very good idea. Given that the UK is the fifth-biggest economy in the world and we have a £70 billion trade deficit with the EU, would the excellent acting Prime Minister tell the House how much the EU should pay for tariff-free access to the UK's single market?

**Mr Lidington:** I thank my hon. Friend for the upgrade, but I hope that that does not turn out to be a career-limiting compliment. He makes a good point in that a settlement at the end of our negotiations that maintains maximum access to and freedom to operate within the European

market—for UK companies elsewhere in Europe and European companies here—is in our mutual interest. I hope that will inspire negotiators on both sides.

**Q7.** [907706] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): How does closing Maryhill jobcentre in my constituency, one of the most deprived parts of the country, help my constituents who want to find a job? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that travelling further to other centres will mean increased costs for people already on the lowest incomes and an increased risk of sanctions? Why do the Government continue to target the poorest and most vulnerable in our society?

**Mr Lidington:** If the Government have been targeting the poorest and most vulnerable, it has been to get them back to work in record numbers and to provide a boost to the pay of people on low incomes through the introduction of and the increase in the national living wage. I wish the hon. Gentleman was prepared to welcome and celebrate those achievements.

**Q8.** [907707] **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): As we are about to commence the most important negotiation for decades, does my right hon. Friend agree that forcing the Government to disclose their negotiating strategy at this stage is rather like showing one's hand of cards to an opponent before a game of poker. I urge him to take no advice from the Labour party; it has only one card to play—and it is always the joker.

**Mr Lidington:** We have always said that we would come up with some more details about our strategic aims going into the negotiation, but it would harm our national interest if we were to go into the sort of detailed explanation of our negotiating position that the Opposition urge upon us. That is not how any of the other 27 Governments are either acting or thinking, and we should learn from that example.

**Mr Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): Does the Leader of the House agree that tonight's vote on the Prime Minister's amendment, which we fully support, is a vote of the highest significance and greatest importance, because for the first time right hon. and hon. Members will have the opportunity to vote on whether they respect the will of the people of the United Kingdom and whether they will get on and implement it? People will be able to read in tomorrow's *Hansard* who stands by respecting the will of the people of the United Kingdom. Does he also agree—I am sure he will—that the more red, white and blue he makes it, the better for us on the Unionist Benches?

**Mr Lidington:** As so often, the right hon. Gentleman makes a powerful and important point. The vote tonight will be the first opportunity for Members to decide whether or not they support the Government's timetable for triggering article 50 by the end of March 2017. Any right hon. or hon. Member who votes against that motion will, in my view, be seeking to thwart the outcome of the referendum in the most profoundly undemocratic fashion.

**Q9.** [907708] **Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): This country's nuclear deterrent is our ultimate defence, and it must be maintained at all costs, yet hundreds of my constituents who work at the Atomic

Weapons Establishment are currently on strike or work to rule in a dispute over pensions. These are people who, more often than not, have devoted their entire working lives tending our nuclear defence and to whom promises were made during privatisation. Will the Leader of the House commit to sit down with the Prime Minister to review the situation to ensure that those promises are being kept?

**Mr Lidington:** I will certainly ensure that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is informed about this matter. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise these concerns on behalf of his constituents. My understanding is that the proposed changes to the Atomic Weapons Establishment pension scheme are a matter for the company as the employer, but I can assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary has been in close contact with AWE throughout the process and has also met the trade unions. He is now carefully considering recent developments to see what else might be done.

**Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I know that the whole House will join me in sending heartfelt sympathies and condolences to the family of David Brown, from Eston, who, aged just 18, took his own life. The inquest into his death has heard that he did so on the day he was due to sign on at the jobcentre, after saying that he felt "belittled" by staff despite actively looking for work and seeking an apprenticeship. Shortly before taking his own life, he told his mum:

"The way the Jobcentre treat people, it is no surprise people commit suicide."

Will the Leader of the House undertake to review that individual case? Will he also undertake to take stock of six years of brutal welfare reform, and look into the way the Department for Work and Pensions treats its most vulnerable constituents, particularly young people?

**Mr Lidington:** Let me first express my own unreserved sympathy for the family of David Brown. No parent, no family, should have to go through that kind of shocking experience.

Clearly, human beings in any organisation sometimes make decisions that get things wrong, and I will ask the Department for Work and Pensions to have a look at the particular case that the hon. Lady has described. However, I have to say to her that I think the principle remains right that, while staff should always behave with courtesy towards people seeking to claim benefits, it is also right for us to expect people who are receiving benefits to be subject to the kind of disciplines that apply to people in work even if they are on low pay. There is a principle of fairness here, which is what lies behind the approach that the DWP takes.

**Q10.** [907709] **Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I applaud the Prime Minister's vision of a Government for all, but, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for communities engagement, I can tell the House that fewer than 4% of those on the boards of the companies in the FTSE 150 are from ethnic minorities. Will the Government support a vision of helping to increase that proportion to 10% by 2021?

**Mr Lidington:** It is clear that boardrooms should do more to reflect the reality of modern Britain. The Government certainly support the principle of increasing the diversity of boards, which is why we are supporting the business-led ethnic diversity initiative chaired by Sir John Parker. We strongly encourage businesses to act on Sir John's recommendations.

**Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab):** The response to a recent freedom of information request shows that Pinderfields hospital has diverted ambulances destined for its accident and emergency department to Dewsbury hospital, in my constituency, 61 times in the past 12 months. Dewsbury is scheduled for a downgrade next year. In the light of evidence showing that Pinderfields cannot currently cope, will the Leader of the House pledge urgent Government support to keep Dewsbury A&E open?

**Mr Lidington:** The NHS is certainly busier than it has ever been in its history, which is why it should be a matter of thanks and tribute to hard-working NHS staff that 90% of people going to A&E are still being seen within the four-hour target. The point about the configuration of local services in any part of the country is that they need to be driven by local clinicians through trusts working together with the clinical commissioning groups, who manage and understand what is needed in each locality. Local authorities, through their health committees, have the right to call in proposed changes in services and refer them to the Secretary of State if they are uncomfortable with them.

Q11. [907710] **Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con):** I know that my right hon. Friend will agree with me about the importance of the creative sector to our economy. That, in conjunction with the Welsh language, makes S4C, or Sianel Pedwar Cymru—which is currently based in my constituency—hugely important to the Welsh and British culture and economy. Will my right hon. Friend reaffirm the Government's commitment to protecting the S4C budget while we review the future of the Welsh language broadcaster?

**Mr Lidington:** We are fully committed to the future of Welsh language broadcasting, and to S4C. I am pleased to say that the licence fee settlement that we have agreed has provided financial certainty, protecting S4C's funding at more than £74 million a year for the next five years. We are absolutely committed to ensuring that the channel continues to make first-class shows and serve Welsh-speaking audiences in my hon. Friend's constituency, and, for that matter, throughout the United Kingdom.

**Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab):** Is the Leader of the House aware of reports of Rohingya children being massacred and thrown into fires, of Rohingya women being raped and of houses being razed to the ground? What representations have the Government made to the Burmese authorities or the military in that regard?

**Mr Lidington:** Those reports from Rohingya are extremely concerning. As the hon. Lady knows, there is a long history of discrimination against the Rohingya people in Burma. British Ministers and the British embassy and officials in London make our concern very clear at regular intervals to the Burmese authorities.

Q12. [907711] **Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con):** Following the revelations in the BBC "Panorama" programme, Clinton House in my constituency is now closed. Three further care homes run by the Morleigh Group have now been rated as inadequate by the Care Quality Commission and two others are under inspection. Concerns have been raised about these care homes for many years, and it cannot be acceptable that it took the BBC to provoke the action that was desperately needed. Does the Leader of the House agree that it is now time to urgently review the role of the CQC to ensure that in future concerns raised by residents, families and staff are properly and promptly addressed?

**Mr Lidington:** Older and vulnerable people deserve the highest quality care possible. There is no excuse for services that fall short of expectations in the way my hon. Friend has described. The CQC has extensive powers in law to ensure that nobody in the chain of responsibility is immune to legal accountability, and I would expect the CQC to exercise those powers in full in this case. But my hon. Friend has made some criticisms of the CQC and the Government have been looking into ways to improve its processes and increase its efficiency. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (David Mowat), is the Minister responsible for community health and care, and he discussed this very issue with the CQC earlier today.

**Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op):** US satellite data show that 6% of methane from fracking is leaked through fugitive emissions. Given that methane is 86 times worse than CO<sub>2</sub> for global warming over a 20-year timeframe, will the right hon. Gentleman support the Council of Europe's call for the banning of fracking, or at least for a maximum of 0.1% fugitive emissions at the wellhead?

**Mr Lidington:** No, Mr Speaker. The Government took their decision to give a go-ahead to fracking after extensive consideration of both the economic and the environmental risks and opportunities involved. We are confident that fracking can be carried out in a way that is safe and does not harm the environment, but which also provides job opportunities for this country and makes us less dependent on the import of energy.

Q13. [907712] **Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con):** I expect my right hon. Friend will be astonished, if not aghast, to learn that a succession of journalists from the BBC have contacted me seeking to create—to manufacture—stories of Back-Bench rebellion on the issue of the EU. [Interruption.] Will he—[Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I want to hear about these activities.

**Mr Baker:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that on these controversial issues the BBC should stick to its charter obligations on accuracy and impartiality, instead of seeking to create problems for the Government?

**Mr Lidington:** I am sure that my hon. Friend is shocked at the thought that anybody should look to him as a source of information about rebellions against the Government. I hope he will be able to find some

comfort in the fact that the new royal charter and agreement require the BBC to deliver impartial news—the very first time impartiality has been enshrined in the BBC’s mission.

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): Having now received a response from the Prime Minister to my request for a children’s funeral fund, I was disturbed to be told that the social fund could provide a “simple and respectful funeral.” This answer is both insensitive and totally lacks any understanding of my original request. Has the Leader of the House the authority to facilitate a meeting with me and other bereaved mothers, so that we can explain to the Prime Minister exactly what we are asking for? This request is important to us as parents, many in this House and, judging from my postbag, many people and organisations across the country.

**Mr Lidington:** Burying a child must be an incredibly painful experience for any family, and I think we all pay respect to, and have enormous sympathy with, the hon. Lady. She says she speaks on behalf of thousands of parents who have had to go through that anguish. As the Prime Minister has said, there are mechanisms in place for making financial support available from central Government, and local authorities are of course free to waive funeral fees for child burials, and many of them do so. I will talk to my ministerial colleagues about the hon. Lady’s request for a meeting, and I am sure that she will receive a response to that.

**Q14.** [907713] **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): Good train links are vital in enabling our constituents to get to work. It is therefore incredibly frustrating for my constituents that, of the 63 services a day that CrossCountry operates between Birmingham and Bristol, only three stop at the city of Gloucester on the way. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that when Ministers extend the train operator’s franchise, they do not allow CrossCountry to go on treating Gloucester like a leper to be avoided at all costs, and that they instead oblige the company to deliver the kind of service that every city deserves?

**Mr Lidington:** My hon. Friend is as always speaking up strongly on behalf of his constituents. Any of us who have been to Gloucester will know that it is a place we want to be able to visit frequently and easily. The Government are investing record amounts in improving our railways and, in his particular case, Transport Ministers are working with CrossCountry and Great Western to see how the Gloucester service can be improved.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We come now to the 10-minute rule motion, and I want to point out very gently—and, I hope, with proper courtesy—to the hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena) that 10 minutes is the maximum speaking time. There is another matter for debate today that is somewhat preoccupying the House, and there is no obligation on the hon. Gentleman to speak for the full 10 minutes if he does not feel inclined to do so. The House would be very sympathetic and understanding if he refrained. We will see.

## Electoral Reform (Local Elections and Miscellaneous Provisions)

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

12.42 pm

**Mr Ranil Jayawardena** (North East Hampshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill applying to England to provide for the introduction of first past the post elections of mayors, the London Assembly and Police and Crime Commissioners; to require elections for mayors, the London Assembly, Police and Crime Commissioners and local authorities to take place on the same day; to abolish the election of councillors by halves or thirds to local authorities; to allow a person to be a Member of the House of Commons and to hold any elected local government office, including that of Police and Crime Commissioner, at the same time; and for connected purposes.

The word “Parliament” has a range of meanings. It can be a collective noun: a parliament of owls is the term used to describe those very wise birds. It can also describe the very wise Members of this House, an institution of our constitutional monarchy—a court or council summoned by the monarch. We sit in the mother of all Parliaments, a place where the democratically elected people of this country come together to govern for the country. This is a place where the people’s voice must be heard.

The principle that all Members of this House are elected by their constituents is a fundamental principle in our United Kingdom. The link that binds a Member of Parliament to his or her constituency is one of the most important in politics. Every citizen of this country knows that they have one single consistent point of contact in this House to champion the issues that matter to them, to their families and to our country. But, unlike many things in our constitutional settlement, this link is not an accident. It is a product of our voting system to this House. It is the first-past-the-post system that gives our constituents the certainty of knowing who their representative in this House will be. That is widely understood by the people of this country.

In the 2011 referendum, first past the post was strongly supported by the British people by a margin of more than 2:1. Its greatest strength is that every person has one vote and the candidate who gets the most votes wins. It is quick and simple to count and does not unnecessarily burden the taxpayer with equipment and administration costs. The results are declared quickly, providing certainty during turbulent times. Most importantly, voters know that the candidate for whom they voted must be sure to deliver their objectives and stand by their manifesto and will face the test of the ballot box in five years’ time.

While many in this House appreciate the benefits of first past the post, that appreciation is sadly not replicated across our country. Some say that the effect of PR can be mitigated through, for example, the additional member system, but it does no such thing. While people may know their constituency Member, they are less likely, through no fault of their own, to contact their regional Members, so the latter have all the powers of their counterparts who were elected by first past the post but, having been appointed from a party list, have less accountability and connection to the people they represent. With systems such as alternative vote, one could even

find that the person who wins actually ends up losing, which happens across the world from Irish presidential elections to elections to the Australian House of Representatives. Preferential voting means that people who should be elected are not.

As chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on Sri Lanka, I was surprised to find that a version of an electoral system invented by the Labour party is used for that country’s presidential elections. The supplementary vote system is also used for the election of police and crime commissioners and mayors across England. Once again, the candidate with less support in the first round can still end up winning. Take Lord Prescott, a candidate in the 2012 police and crime commissioner elections, he won the first round but was beaten in the second round. While I may be delighted that the Conservative candidate won, it was a day on which democracy was thwarted. The only purpose of that system is to give someone a second chance to steal votes from those who did not vote for them. In all, eight police and crime commissioners who should have been elected were not, including in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Across England, we expect the very best. We want the best candidates, elected through the best system, to give us the best representation, but alternative systems of voting mean that some local areas have been stripped of their right to choose who is best. What is worse, the wishes of local people are being ignored, allowing candidates who lose to win. That will become ever more prevalent as more powers are devolved to local authorities and as more elected mayors are created through devolution. The public shall grow ever more dissatisfied with our political system. First past the post gives voters simplicity. It gives decisiveness. It gives voters constituency representation. Burke said:

“Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement”.

Each and every citizen has a right to know what judgment will represent them. If that is true for this place, why should we expect the public to accept second best in public offices across our land?

Similarly, we elect every Member of this House on one day, so why is it not the same for our local authorities? In this House, the Government are able to plan for the long term, acting in the best interests of the people for the long term. Local authorities that elect by thirds are often in a constant state of electioneering. Every May, new councillors come on board and have to settle into a new committee structure by July, before breaking up for August, working over the autumn months, only to be back in election mode in the new year. The best interests of the people are not served by that short-termism. If all local elections were held on a “super Thursday”, voters would know that their vote would make a difference, leading to greater engagement and public interest. Such a change would also save money. The estimated saving in one of my local authorities is some £57,000 in three years out of four. If we scale that up to the 120 authorities that do not have all-out elections, that is over £20 million over a four-year term. That would be not only a boon for local taxpayers, but a commitment to strong, stable local government, which would then be free to plan for the long term.

Democracy means that the people should decide who represents them. The former Member for Manchester Central was forced to stand down in 2012, even though

he had secured a strong mandate in 2010, to stand as a police and crime commissioner. Let us just think of the cost! By-elections can cost up to a quarter of a million pounds, so surely it should just be left up to the people to decide who is best placed to represent them at any level of government, at any given time. Surely we want the best mayors, the best PCCs, the best Assembly Members and the best councillors. The people should be able to have their say and their voice must be heard.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Mr Ranil Jayawardena, Chris Evans, Jim Fitzpatrick, Robert Flello, David Mackintosh, Christian Matheson, Mr David Nuttall, Chris Philp, Robert Neill, John Penrose, Andrew Rosindell and John Stevenson present the Bill.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 13 January 2017, and to be printed (Bill 110).*

## Opposition Day

[15<sup>TH</sup> ALLOTTED DAY]

### The Government's Plan for Brexit

**Mr Speaker:** I inform the House that I have selected amendment (a) in the name of the Prime Minister.

12.51 pm

**Keir Starmer** (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House recognises that leaving the EU is the defining issue facing the UK; notes the resolution on parliamentary scrutiny of the UK leaving the EU agreed by the House on 12 October 2016; recognises that it is Parliament's responsibility to properly scrutinise the Government while respecting the decision of the British people to leave the European Union; confirms that there should be no disclosure of material that could be reasonably judged to damage the UK in any negotiations to depart from the European Union after Article 50 has been triggered; and calls on the Prime Minister to commit to publishing the Government's plan for leaving the EU before Article 50 is invoked.

For months, Labour has been pressing the Prime Minister and the Government to set out their plan for Brexit. For months, the Prime Minister and a succession of Ministers have refused to do so, either in writing or from the Dispatch Box. Facing defeat on today's motion, the Government have now caved in—last-minute amendments tell their own story and everybody knows it. This is a victory for common sense. I thank those from various Opposition parties who backed putting pressure on the Government to disclose their plan, and I thank the Conservative Members who, rightly, want to see far more detail about the approach their Front Benchers are intending to take.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Does the hon. and learned Gentleman acknowledge that, by accepting the Government's amendment to his otherwise very good motion, he is falling into a Tory trap of binding his party to supporting the invoking of article 50 by March, which is an unrealistic and increasingly arbitrary date?

**Mr Speaker:** Before the hon. and learned Gentleman responds, may I politely say that the intervention is absolutely legitimate but this is a helpful guide: if Members who are hoping to speak intervene more than once, in accordance with very long-standing practice they will be relegated on the list? That is only fair if I am to try to secure equal opportunities for all Members.

**Keir Starmer:** I am grateful for that intervention, and I assure the hon. Lady that I shall come to that important point in due course.

I have seen the overnight briefings, which will no doubt be repeated today from the Dispatch Box, that the Government always intended to publish their plan, but an eleventh-hour concession is an eleventh-hour concession. I have faced the Secretary of State on many occasions and asked for a plan, and he has refused on every occasion, so nobody is going to fall for that.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Keir Starmer:** I am going to make some progress, if I may. The focus is now where it ought to be: on the substance, not the process. The terms upon which we leave the EU will define us and our country for many years, and this House and the public are entitled to know the approach the Government are intending to take.

**Sir Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot) (Con) *rose*—

**Keir Starmer:** I will make a bit of progress and get to dealing with the amendment.

Today's victory is important, and so is the timing. As we debate this motion, the Government's appeal is being heard in the Supreme Court. We need to remind ourselves that the Government are arguing that this House should have no say on the question of invoking article 50—that is the argument they are presenting in the Supreme Court; through that argument, they want to remove the prospect of a vote granted by the High Court a few weeks ago. That is the core of their argument and the purpose of their appeal: to remove that vote from us. That is what they are seeking to achieve, but that would be to avoid scrutiny and avoid accountability. If the Government succeed in that appeal, this motion will be very important, because it puts grip into a process that would otherwise have none. We will only have a plan to discuss because we will not be getting a vote.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): However, if the Government fail at the Supreme Court, there will have to be a legislative process. This is not a legislative process today, is it?

**Keir Starmer:** I am grateful for that intervention and I am coming precisely to that point, so I will press on.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Keir Starmer:** I am going to get to the amendment, so that I can make my position clear on that, and then I will take interventions.

A plan will now have to be prepared, debated and subjected to scrutiny, whether or not we have a vote. That is a good thing for anybody who believes in parliamentary scrutiny. If, however, the Government lose their appeal, there will need to be article 50 legislation in the new year; a motion of this House will not suffice.

I pause here to deal with the Government amendment, on which I want to make this clear to all Members: today we are not voting to trigger article 50 or to give authority to the Prime Minister to do so. It is most certainly not a vote for article 50. Unless the Supreme Court overrules the High Court, only legislation can do that.

Nor does today's motion preclude Labour or any other party tabling amendments to the article 50 legislation and having them voted on. The motion, as amended, would be an indication that the purpose of calling for a plan is not to frustrate the process or delay the Prime Minister's timetable. That is what is made clear by the motion and the amendment taken together. Labour has repeatedly said it will not frustrate the process, and I stick by that. That is why the Government should

prepare their plan and publish it in time for this House to consider it when it debates and votes on the article 50 legislation. The timetable in the amendment is in fact there to put pressure on the Government, because a late plan would clearly frustrate the purposes and intentions of this motion. I put the Government on notice that I will not be slow to call them out if they do not produce a timely plan.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): I do not want the shadow Secretary of State to inadvertently mislead the House. We already have legislation before this House—the Withdrawal from the European Union (Article 50) Bill—which has had its First Reading and will get its Second Reading on 16 December, unless someone objects.

**Keir Starmer:** I am grateful for that intervention and understand the point, but let us see what happens on 16 December. The Secretary of State has made it clear on a number of occasions, understandably, that in addition to the main point of the appeal so far as the Government are concerned, which is to take away any right to vote on invoking article 50, there is a secondary intention, which is to get greater clarity on the type of legislation that may be needed in the new year. I anticipate that it is that Minister legislation that we will address before too long, but I do, of course, acknowledge the private Member's Bill.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): I am glad that my hon. and learned Friend has made it clear that it is not our intention to frustrate the article 50 process, because the Government and their supporters have been putting it around that we are somehow trying to sabotage any decision on it.

**Keir Starmer:** I am grateful for that intervention, because what we have seen is the characterising of anyone who questions the Government's approach as frustration. That is the wrong characterisation and it is to be avoided. Having accepted today's amendment, I hope that I will not be intervened on the whole time by Members saying that this is an attempt to frustrate. The plan needs to be produced in good time and with sufficient detail for us to debate it, but the purpose is not to frustrate the overall process or to delay the timetable that the Prime Minister set out some time ago.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): If the hon. and learned Gentleman accepts the Government's amendment, is he not effectively giving unilateral support to whatever plan they decide to present, which means that Opposition Members will not be able to perform their parliamentary role of scrutinising the Executive?

**Keir Starmer:** I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, but that is not the case, and I will make that point in a moment.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Does the shadow Secretary of State agree that, if the Opposition support, or at least do not oppose, the Government's amendment, it would be completely unacceptable and

totally inconsistent for them to do anything in the new year to delay the triggering of article 50 beyond 31 March?

**Keir Starmer:** I have made it absolutely clear that nothing in today's motion precludes any party, including my own, from tabling an amendment to proposed legislation, if there is proposed legislation, and voting on it. I am astonished that some Members are willing to pass up the opportunity to have a vote in the first place and to restrict our ability to debate amendments.

**The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis):** I do not want to break the hon. and learned Gentleman's flow, but I want to make a factual point. Will he please answer the question that has just been put to him? Given that he supports the amendment, does he think it reasonable that some want to frustrate and slow down the article 50 process?

**Keir Starmer:** I have made it absolutely clear—and I will make it absolutely clear again—that the purpose of the motion calling for a plan is not to frustrate or delay the process. That is not why we are calling for a plan. This presents a challenge for the Government, because they now need to produce a plan in good time to allow the proper formalities and processes to be gone through. The timetable is more of a challenge for the Government than it is for the Opposition.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Keir Starmer:** I am going to make some progress. I have taken a lot of interventions.

The Government must now prepare their plan and publish it. I put the Government on notice that, if they fail to produce a plan by the time we debate proposed legislation on article 50—assuming that we do debate it and that the Government do not win their appeal—amendments will be tabled by the Opposition and, possibly, Government Members, setting out the minimum requirements of a plan. In other words, we are not going to have a situation where the Government seek a vote in a vacuum or produce a late, vague plan.

**Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con):** I congratulate the hon. and learned Gentleman, because he is playing on a very difficult wicket. The motion states

“that there should be no disclosure of material that could be reasonably judged to damage the UK”.

Does he therefore believe that this plan should be a series of hints, an explanation of principle or specific priorities? It would be helpful to know what he means by a plan.

**Keir Starmer:** I think it is pretty straightforward and I have said this on a number of occasions. I fully accept that the Government will enter into confidential negotiations for a number of months and that producing a plan should not undermine that process. This is not the first time that I have said that; I have said it repeatedly. Some argue that we should not produce a plan because saying anything might undermine the negotiations, but I do not accept that. I do, however, accept that there is a level of detail and of confidential issues and tactics that should not be disclosed, and I have never said otherwise.

I want to put the contrary proposition, to see how comfortable Members really are with it. Absent of a plan and of our knowing the objectives and starting position, the Government would then negotiate for two years without telling us any of that detail. Are any Members of this House content not to know any of that between now and March 2019? Hands up who does not want to know that and is happy to say, “I don't need to know. Whatever you are negotiating is fine by me.”

**Mr David Davis:** The hon. and learned Gentleman is an experienced lawyer, so I am sure that putting up Aunt Sallies is old hat to him. Given that he thinks that the alternative is telling the House nothing, I ask him what he thinks of these comments, which I have made eight times to this House:

“As I have said several times in debates that the hon. Gentleman has attended”—

this was in response to the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown)—

“I will make as much information public as possible without prejudicing our negotiating position.”—[*Official Report*, 20 October 2016; Vol. 615, c. 952.]

**Keir Starmer:** I heard that point being made and I understand and respect the Secretary of State's position on this issue and his history on issues of scrutiny and accountability. I also understand why he feels uncomfortable not disclosing the information that can be disclosed, but the motion moves the issue on and makes it clear that there will be a plan, while, of course, preserving that which needs to remain confidential.

I acknowledge that the Secretary of State made those comments and that he has said on more than one occasion that, when the Government have reached a judgment on the customs union—I assume that he also means when they have reached a judgment on the single market—they will make that position public. I therefore anticipate that the Secretary of State has no difficulty with a plan that sets out the position on the single market, the customs union, transitional measures and the like, because that is the direction of travel that I have understood him to be going in. The plan commits him to it and puts it in the framework of scrutiny and accountability that will come with proposed legislation on article 50, but I do acknowledge what he has said.

**Mr David Davis:** I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for that acknowledgment, but let me pick up on the issues that he has raised. There may be circumstances in which the criteria and aims are clear, but the individual policy is not. There may be several options and it might be in our negotiating interests to keep more than one of them open. Surely that does not necessarily require that we specify in detail any individual line of pursuit.

**Keir Starmer:** I understand the Secretary of State's point. To some extent, we will probably return to this debate as and when the plan materialises, but it is important there is no mischaracterisation. Asking for a plan setting out the objectives is not to seek to undermine the UK's negotiating hand, nor is it to seek a running commentary. It is, in fact, to seek to have clarity, scrutiny and accountability.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Keir Starmer:** I am going to make progress.

The minimum requirements of a plan are fivefold. The first—I have begun to touch on this—is the need for enough detail and clarity to end the circus of uncertainty that has been going on in recent weeks on issues such as the single market, paying for access to the single market, the customs union and transitional arrangements. The pattern and rhythm of those exchanges over the past few days and weeks is clear for all to see. One member of the Cabinet says one thing one day; another member of the Cabinet says something else on a different day; then a spokesperson says that no decision has been made. We have seen that pattern over and over in the past few weeks. That uncertainty causes anxiety across the UK, in businesses, among working people, and in our nations and regions. It has to end, as it causes more damage to the process than anything else at the moment. The House, the public, businesses, working people, the media and our communities are entitled to know the basis on which the Government intend to negotiate their future.

**Lucy Frazer** (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): The hon. and learned Gentleman said that the alternative to having a plan was no information until 2019. Does he accept that in the debate on 12 October he asked the Secretary of State whether we would have the same information as the European Parliament, where there is a mandatory obligation to inform the European Parliament of the negotiations? My right hon. Friend said very clearly that the answer was yes.

**Keir Starmer:** Yes; good. We are working with our European colleagues on that issue, but that is after article 50 has been triggered. We are discussing what comes before. Of course, there are stages in the process. The plan is important because it is the start of the process: it sets the scene and the direction of travel. Once article 50 has been triggered, MEPs will be involved in the process, because they have a vote at the end of the exercise. I acknowledge that the Secretary of State has said on a number of occasions that whatever information they have, we will have. I should jolly well hope so. The idea that MEPs would be provided with more information about the negotiations than us would be wrong in the eyes of everyone in the House. The Secretary of State made that commitment early on, and it was the right commitment to make. He will not be surprised to learn that I intend to hold him to that every step of the way. I am sure that we will meet at the Dispatch Box to discuss precisely that.

**Mr David Davis** *rose*—

**Keir Starmer:** I have not finished dealing with the intervention from the hon. and learned Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer). This is about what happens before the negotiations in the run-up to article 50. There will then be a two-year tunnel of negotiations. Then there is what happens at the end. MEPs will have a vote, and if they vote down the deal there will be no deal. I have no doubt that the Secretary of State will concede that we will have a vote in the House, because the idea of MEPs voting, but not the House, on the final deal is wrong in principle. He might be able to indicate now that there will be a vote at the

end of the process on the deal, in the same way that MEPs will have a vote, as that would be helpful for this side of the House.

**Mr David Davis:** I apologise for intervening again, but we have said that procedures under the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 will apply. That is straightforward. I have said that at least three times to the House.

The hon. and learned Gentleman has asserted that there is no vote between whatever happens as a result of the court case and the ratification process. The great repeal Bill will be presented to the House during that two-year period, and after that there will be a series of consequential legislative measures, some primary, some secondary, and on every measure the House will have a vote and say.

**Keir Starmer:** I acknowledge that, but my response is exactly the same as my previous response. The timetable for the great repeal Bill applies after article 50 has been invoked, so that does not help us with the plan and the starting position. That is why this part of the process has to be gripped now, because what happens between now and 31 March really matters to the starting position. I accept that after that the great repeal Bill will be introduced and debated, and no doubt there will be votes on its provisions, but essentially it is a Bill that indicates what will happen at the end of the process, rather than a Bill that deals with the plan—the starting position—or the process.

**Mr Dominic Raab** (Esher and Walton) (Con): I understand why the shadow Minister is pressing the Government for their plans and I understand why he is setting out his red lines. I do not understand why he wants to enshrine that in legislation. The only reason for doing that is so that the Labour party can set up the Government to be sued later. Is that not the truth—will he come clean? It is wrecking tactics by any other name.

**Keir Starmer:** The answer to the question is no.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Keir Starmer:** I am going to make progress—I have taken a lot of interventions.

The second requirement of a plan is that it must have enough detail to allow the relevant parliamentary bodies and Committees, including the Exiting the European Union Committee, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), to scrutinise the plan effectively. The Committee's terms of reference include examining the Government's objectives, so the plan must have sufficient detail to allow parliamentary bodies to conduct scrutiny effectively.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Keir Starmer:** I am going to press on. Thirdly, the plan must provide enough detail to enable the Office for Budget Responsibility to do its job properly. As Members across the House know, the Budget Responsibility and National Audit Act 2011 sets out the role of the OBR: it is the duty of the OBR to examine and report on the sustainability of the public finances. Its charter states:

"The OBR's published forecasts shall be based on all government decisions and all other circumstances that may have a material impact on the fiscal outlook."

The Government are responsible for all policy decisions and policy costings, but it is for the OBR to provide independent scrutiny and certification of the Government's policy costings. It states whether it agrees or disagrees with the Government's costings, or whether it has been given insufficient time or information to reach a judgment. It is an important check and balance in the system on the spending of public money and on costings.

In its response to the autumn statement this year, the OBR made the following comment on assumptions about the cost of Brexit. In the foreword to the response, it said that it asked the Government for

"a formal statement of Government policy as regards its desired trade regime and system of migration control, as a basis for our projections"

on Brexit.

"The Government directed us to two public statements by the Prime Minister that it stated were relevant".

The OBR was trying to do its job and obtain sufficient information to carry out its statutory functions, and has asked the Government for the relevant information. It has been directed to two public statements by the Prime Minister. In its report this year, the OBR said:

"Perhaps understandably, the Government's response leaves us little the wiser as regards the choices and trade-offs that the Government might make during the negotiations".

It is perhaps understandable in the early stages why that may be the case—I concede that, and this is not intended to be a cheap shot based on the OBR report—but it is important that the OBR should be able to do its job properly over the next two years or more. Unless it has sufficiently clear objectives, it cannot do so. It is wrong in principle for the OBR to be disabled from discharging its functions properly. There should be enough detail for that scrutiny to be carried out.

Fourthly, the plan must have enough detail to enable the relevant authorities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to be assured that their particular and specific concerns are addressed. Other Members will speak about those concerns far more authoritatively than I can, but they include concerns about the single market and, in Northern Ireland, concerns about the border and related issues. The detail must be sufficient for those authorities to be assured that their concerns are understood and are being addressed. Over the past few weeks, I have visited Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland to speak to the devolved Governments as well as to businesses, trade unions and the public in meetings. I can assure the House that "Brexit means Brexit" does not come close to answering the concerns I heard or to addressing the huge, complex challenges that Brexit will pose across the UK.

Fifthly, the plan must have enough detail to build genuine consensus. That is an important point, because the future of this country is bound up with the negotiations, and it is wrong in principle for the Government to act solely for the 52%—to base its approach on the 52% or a group within the 52%. The vote on 23 June was not a vote to write those that voted to remain out of their own history. They have a right and an interest in these negotiations and they have a right to have a Government

who give weight to their interests as well as the interests of the 52%. I have said this before and I will say it again: the Government must act not for the 52% or the 48% but for the 100%, acting in the national interest. That can be achieved only if we have a national consensus.

**Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con):** I am fascinated by the focus on the plan and the amount of work that the hon. and learned Gentleman will invite the OBR to do. He does understand, surely, that no plan survives engagement with the enemy. *[Interruption.]* That is a military metaphor from assaults. Our negotiating hand is clear, and it is clear that it is not compatible with the position taken by our 27 partners. This will all change in the course of the negotiations, and we will have to leave it to the Government to make those decisions.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I recognise that the hon. Gentleman is an illustrious Member of the House as Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, but even so the intervention was too long.

**Keir Starmer:** On reflection, the hon. Gentleman may think that he did not use the right word in describing our partners as "the enemy".

That brings me to a footnote, but an important footnote. Some of the language and tone that has been adopted by the Government and their Front Bench is not helping the prospects for a good outcome. *[Interruption.]* I hear the comment that that is disingenuous. I have been to Brussels. I have spoken on a number of occasions to those who will be involved in the exit, and they are not particularly amused by jokes about Prosecco; they are not particularly interested or amused by references to "cake and eat it". They want a professional, constructive set of negotiations, and some of the comments that are being made about them and their real purposes are not helping the prospect. We have a shared interest across this House in getting these very difficult negotiations off to the best possible start, and comments along the way that are unhelpful or disparaging of our EU partners are simply not helping.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Keir Starmer:** I will press on.

Until now, the Prime Minister's two mantras that "Brexit means Brexit" and that there will be "no running commentary" on negotiations tell us nothing about the type of Brexit that the Government propose. I am not sure that the recently coined "red, white and blue" Brexit takes us any further forward. The question that everybody wants answered is, will it be the hard Brexit suggested in the Prime Minister's party conference speech, or the vaguer form suggested by Cabinet Ministers when they speak of possible payments into the EU budget and provide welcome guarantees to Nissan about the prospect of arrangements that are free of tariffs or bureaucratic impediments? These are two different versions of our future that will be negotiated over the next few years, and we need to know which version we are running with, and we need a consensus.

**Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op):** My hon. and learned Friend is right to insist on a plan. It is important that we do not stand in the way of the will of

[Chris Leslie]

the British people in the referendum, but does he accept that there are many people in all parts of the House who have some doubts and misgivings about the timing of the invoking of article 50? Many people think that 31 March is simply too soon—that we are rushing into it—and that as we will not start negotiations until after the German elections, we may get only a year of negotiations. Does my hon. and learned Friend accept that there is risk in that timetable?

**Keir Starmer:** I am grateful for that intervention. I do understand the concerns about the timetable and I think they are shared across the House. It is a tight timetable. I accept that the purpose of the plan, or the motion, is not to frustrate or delay the process. I know that the Secretary of State equally wants to keep to that timetable, but it is an exacting timetable and it is incumbent on the Government to make sure that the deadline is met by ensuring that the plan is available as soon as possible in January 2017.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Keir Starmer:** I shall press on, if I may.

The question on everybody's lips is, is it the hard Brexit sketched out at the party conference, which was read by those in Brussels as meaning outside the single market, outside the customs union and an arm's length relationship with our EU partners, or is it a more co-operative, collaborative approach with our partners? I understand, and I can hear from the statements, that there is disagreement on the other party Benches about this, but we cannot go into the negotiations with that disagreement still raging. We need to go in with consensus.

I will say this loud and clear: there is no mandate for hard Brexit; there is no consensus for hard Brexit.

**Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con):** Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

**Keir Starmer:** No. I have given way a number of times.

In the past few months I have travelled across the UK to hold meetings with a wide range of interested parties, such as businesses large and small, different nations and regions, trade unions, working people and local communities on the question of the terms on which the UK should exit the EU. I know that the Secretary of State and his team have been engaged in the same exercise. We have been to some of the same places and regions and spoken to some of the same people. The overwhelming evidence is that they do not want hard Brexit. There is not a consensus out there for hard Brexit. If we are to reach a consensus, it must be genuine consensus that works for everybody.

The ball is now in the Government's court to produce a timely plan that meets these requirements. That will be the start of scrutiny and accountability, not the end. If the Government fail to produce a timely and sufficiently detailed plan, they should expect further challenge from the Opposition, and I put the Secretary of State on notice that that is what we will do. Only legislation, not today's motion, can allow the Prime Minister to trigger article 50. That will have to be debated and subject to

the full and proper procedures in this House, as the Secretary of State accepts. The motion makes it clear that although Labour will not frustrate the article 50 process, it does intend to shape the debate and head off hard Brexit.

1.27 pm

**The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr David Davis):** I beg to move an amendment, at end add:

“, consistently with the principles agreed without division by this House on 12 October; recognises that this House should respect the wishes of the United Kingdom as expressed in the referendum on 23 June; and further calls on the Government to invoke Article 50 by 31 March 2017.”

Before I speak to the amendment, let me make a few factual remarks to the Labour spokesman, the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). He ended by saying that there is no mandate for hard Brexit. To be honest, I do not know what hard Brexit means. The mandate was to leave the European Union. We should keep that in mind. He quite properly raised the issue of Northern Ireland. It is simply because I am standing at the Dispatch Box today that I am not chairing a joint ministerial committee of the devolved Administrations on exactly these issues. There has been considerable progress on that; I can brief him on that, if he does not know about it. Some of it, almost by definition, is confidential. He should take it as read that the process has been going on for some time and is quite well advanced.

The hon. and learned Gentleman raised the issue of the Budget Responsibility and National Audit Act 2011. He may remember that I was a Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, and I am reasonably familiar with National Audit Office and OBR operations. The condition that applies to any information that we put in the public domain—that it will not bias or undermine the negotiation—applies equally here; if we were to give information to the OBR, there would be the same telegraphing of what we are doing. It would be very inappropriate for another reason as well. This is a negotiation, not a policy statement, so where we are aiming for—I think we may be on the same page on this—may not be the exact place we end up, and I think he would understand that.

**Keir Starmer:** To be clear, I was not making the argument that the OBR required confidential information, the disclosure of which would undermine negotiations; my point was simply that the plan must be sufficiently detailed to let the OBR do its job in a way that lets it provide the scrutiny it is supposed to.

**Mr Davis:** I take that point. As I make progress through what I have to say, I will explain why, in some respects, that is not practical.

This debate is very similar to the last Opposition day debate Labour chose to have on Brexit, and it really is the last clause of the motion that extends beyond that. The Government and I certainly can accept the motion with the amendment that whatever plan we set out is consistent

“with the principles agreed without division by this House on 12 October”, and that the House

“recognises that this House should respect the wishes of the United Kingdom as expressed in the referendum on 23 June; and further calls on the Government to invoke Article 50 by 31 March 2017.”

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr Davis:** No, I am going to make a bit of progress. I will give way later. I normally like the badinage with the Opposition, but I have to make some progress on quite an important argument.

Dance on a pin as the shadow spokesman may, that is what the Opposition are signing up to: the Government invoking article 50 by 31 March 2017. Let us be clear about that. It has always been our intention, as I said in my intervention on him, to lay out the strategy in more detail when possible, provided it does not undermine the UK's negotiating position.

**Mr Dominic Grieve** (Beaconsfield) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Davis:** If my right hon. and learned Friend will wait a little while, I will, of course, give way to him.

In fact, I have said that categorically in front of this House and the other House on a number of occasions, including just last week, and I am happy to confirm it again today. Our amendment also lays out an important challenge to those on the Benches opposite who say that they respect the result of the referendum, but whose actions suggest that they are looking for every opportunity to thwart and delay this. We will see today if they are willing to back the Government in getting on with implementing the decision made by the people of the United Kingdom. However, before I address the motion in terms, I will give way to my right hon. and learned Friend.

**Mr Grieve:** May I emphasise to my right hon. Friend that the motion must require Parliament to support the triggering of article 50 by means known to the law? He will doubtless agree that, as the law stands, that requires primary legislation. While it is possible for private Members' Bills to be introduced, in reality it will be the Government's duty to introduce legislation if they wish to proceed, and to do that in a timely fashion that enables proper debate on it.

**Mr Davis:** My right hon. and learned Friend, the ex-Attorney General, should know better than to tempt me to comment on a court case that is taking place as we stand here, so I will not do that, but as he well knows, we will obey the rule of law; we will obey what the Court finds. We will ensure that we do the right thing. As the spokesman for the Opposition said, one of the reasons we are waiting on the outcome is to get precisely right what it is this House has to do.

**Geraint Davies:** On the timing set out in the amendment, does the Secretary of State not accept that, given that the French election is in May and the German election is in October, nothing will be achieved in that timeframe? If we trigger in March, there will be negotiating time lost in the two-year window. Article 50 should therefore

be triggered in the autumn, in November, with time for a referendum on the exit package, so that people can decide on the final deal.

**Mr Davis:** No, I do not accept that. Between now and the possible end of the negotiating process, if it goes the full distance, there are 15 elections, and of course we have already had two events this weekend: a referendum and another election. There is no point in the period when there is no election under way, so it is simply not possible to meet the hon. Gentleman's requirement.

**Mr Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): Is the crucial issue here not that, whatever the caveats entered by the shadow Minister, anyone voting for this amendment tonight will find it impossible to justify to the public any reneging, any going back or any procrastination—anything after 31 March that seeks to delay the triggering of article 50? That is the reality of the situation.

**Mr Davis:** The right hon. Gentleman is exactly right. I agree with him entirely.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe) (Con) *rose*—

**Mr Davis:** To balance up affairs, I will give way to the Father of the House.

**Mr Clarke:** Quite apart from the legalities of the situation, we have to address the political question of the Government's accountability to this House for their important policies. This word “plan” is being used in an extremely vague way, and could cover some of the vague assertions that Ministers have been making for the last few weeks. Will the Secretary of State accept that the House requires a description—published in a White Paper, preferably—of the strategic objectives that the Government will pursue and that the Government should submit that strategy to a vote of the House? Once it has the House's approval, they can move to invoke article 50.

**Mr Davis:** My right hon. and learned Friend is at least straightforward in what he says; he does not really agree with the outcome of the referendum. My view on this—I agree with him to some extent—is very clear. He has said that the word “plan” is vague; I think that what I have said already to this House, in terms of giving all possible information, subject to it not undermining negotiations, is actually more comprehensive. But it is not that we are not going to allow the House votes. First, we cannot do that as a Government, even if we wanted to. Secondly, as I have said, there will be a considerable amount of legislation during the negotiation, which will, in some respects, confine us.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Davis:** I will make some more progress, if I may. [*Interruption.*] I will not give in to my normal temptations today. [HON. MEMBERS: “Go on!”] No, no.

**Chris Bryant** *rose*—

**Mr Davis:** Mr Speaker, I am going to make about five minutes' progress. I hope the hon. Gentleman does not mind. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Secretary of State is clearly not giving way at present—a point that is so blindingly obvious that only an extraordinarily clever person could fail to grasp it.

**Mr Davis:** You make my point, Mr Speaker.

It is widely accepted that the negotiation of our departure from the European Union is the most important and most complex negotiation in modern times, and it is overwhelmingly important that we get it right; I think that is common ground. It is normal even for basic trade negotiations to be carried out with a degree of secrecy. Indeed, the European Commission recognises this in its own approach to transparency in such negotiations, in which it says:

“A certain level of confidentiality is necessary to protect EU interests and to keep chances for a satisfactory outcome high. When entering into a game, no-one starts by revealing his entire strategy to his counterpart from the outset: this is also the case for the EU.”

The reason for this is to retain room for manoeuvre, including the ability to give and take, to trade off different interests, to maximise the value of concessions, and to do so without always giving the other side advance notice. We must retain the ability to negotiate with a high degree of agility and speed; the more complex the negotiation, the more parties to it, and the more time-pressured it is, the more important that is.

Any trade negotiation—and this is more than a trade negotiation—is difficult and complex. This negotiation will be another step up beyond that, for a number of reasons. First, it is about more than just trade. While that is an incredibly important part of it, our new relationship with the EU will also encompass our continued co-operation in areas such as security, justice and home affairs. Secondly, it is not merely a bilateral negotiation, but one involving about 30 different parties with a number of different interests. Thirdly, while considering our exit, Europe must also consider its own future. We have been clear that we want a stable and secure European Union—a vital partner for the UK at a time of very serious global challenges. Finally, the political scene in Europe is not set, but is changing—the point I was making. During the period of our negotiations, there are at least 15 elections and other political events that could change the backdrop to our exit process. The combination of these factors and their interplay will mean a changing climate for what are already complicated talks.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** Will my right hon. Friend allow me to intervene?

**Mr Davis:** In a moment.

We will need to find a way through a vast number of competing interests to manage our exit from the Union, so that our people benefit from it—that is the aim of this exercise: for our people to benefit from it.

To do that, the Government must have the flexibility to adjust during negotiations. It is like threading the eye of a needle: if you have a good eye and a steady hand, it is easy enough, but if somebody jogs your elbow, it is harder. If 650 people jog your elbow, it is very much harder.

**Mr Pat McFadden** (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The Secretary of State has just read out a list of reasons not to disclose the Government's plan and negotiating objectives, but the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) called—rightly in my view—for a White Paper on the Government's intentions. If the Secretary of State does not agree with him, will he at least agree with himself, because he called for the same thing before he was appointed to the job? Why was a White Paper the right thing to do in July, but not now?

**Mr Davis:** I really ought to make the people who raise this point, which has been made about five times in this House, read out what I actually said, which was that this is one negotiating option among several. The right hon. Gentleman says that I have just been giving reasons for not outlining negotiating objectives, but that is not true—I will come back to why in a minute. There is a reason not to lay out in detail some of the trade-offs and some of the options that we do have to keep to ourselves until we are in the negotiating chamber. I make this point more generally to the House. During the course of the Amsterdam treaty, we had difficult negotiations to carry out, and I kept the House up to date with every bit of that, but that was done at the right time—the appropriate time—and not when it undermined the national interest, which is the problem here.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** Does my right hon. Friend accept that one can be an honest Brexiteer who wants to get this through, while still wanting to proclaim parliamentary sovereignty? That is a perfectly logical point of view. I happen to agree that we want to get article 50 through without any wrecking amendments that unduly tie the Government's hands, but can he give a commitment that in addition to votes on the great repeal Bill, when we have a final deal, the matter will come to this House for ratification?

**Mr Davis:** In fact there is a law that applies to this—the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010—so we are, in effect, bound by that.

**Keir Starmer:** This is important, so can the Secretary of State say in terms that there will be a vote on the final deal in this House? I understand what he says about the underpinning statutes, but can he say simply, for the record, that there will be a vote on the final deal in this House?

**Mr Davis:** All I can say is what I have said before: that is what I expect. It is as simple as that.

I want to pick up on the point about parliamentary scrutiny in a little more depth, if I may—

**Chris Bryant:** The 2010 Act says that a Government cannot ratify a treaty until such time as they have laid the treaty before the House and 21 sitting days have passed. It does not guarantee a vote. In fact, since 2010 the Government have on several occasions refused to allow a vote on treaties even when they have been asked for by the Opposition. Is the Secretary of State now specifically saying that the Government will guarantee a vote at such a point?

**Mr Davis:** As I was about to say—I was in the middle of a sentence—it is inconceivable to me that if the European Parliament has a vote, this House does not. It is as simple as that.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend clarify the point that any vote in this House at the end of the process would merely be on the deal and could not reverse the fact that we had left the European Union.

**Mr Davis:** That is entirely correct.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Davis:** If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I will make a bit more progress for a few moments and keep him in mind.

All this does not mean that parliamentary scrutiny is not very important—of course it is. I, of all people, would be last to argue that. That is why I have already given three oral statements to this House and answered more than 350 parliamentary questions. It is why Ministers from my Department and I have already appeared before Select Committees on 10 occasions—I will be appearing in front of the Brexit Committee in a week. It is why the Government announced a series of themed debates, with workers' rights and transport already discussed, and another debate coming up before Christmas. There have also been more than 15 debates about this in the other House.

However, there is no doubt that the way in which we handle and disclose information is important to the negotiating process. Needless to say, I have given a great deal of thought to how we achieve accountability at the same time as preserving the national interest. That was why at the first parliamentary Committee hearing I appeared before—I think it was the House of Lords Select Committee—I volunteered an undertaking that British parliamentarians would be at least as well served, in terms of information, as the European Parliament. As I said to the Opposition spokesman, I have said on several other occasions that we will provide as much information as possible—subject, again, to that not undermining the national interest. This is a substantive undertaking, but it must be done in a way that will not compromise the negotiation.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The Secretary of State repeats that what he is doing is—he thinks—in the national interest, but he must have heard from industrialists, as Labour Members have, that the uncertainty and lack of clarity from Ministers means that people are putting back projects and not investing. That is why the growth rate is down and the public finances are in such a mess.

**Mr Davis:** We heard during the campaign about how the economy was going to collapse, but I seem to have noticed in the past few months that really it is doing very well indeed, thank you very much. This nay-saying—this talking down the country—is, frankly, the least desirable part of the Opposition's behaviour.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Davis:** Yes, as I promised to do so.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** May I say how strongly I support my right hon. Friend? My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who is of course a very great national treasure, called for us to set out our strategic vision, but surely this Government have set out that strategic vision with great clarity: we want to recover control of our borders, make our own laws, keep our own money, engage in free trade, and leave the European Union. What could be more strategic than that?

**Mr Davis:** My hon. Friend is, of course, exactly right, and that brings me rather neatly to the next thing I want to say.

Opposition Members have tried to pretend that we have told them nothing, but that simply demonstrates the old adage that none are so deaf as those who will not hear. We have also been clear that we will set out more as we approach the negotiations.

**Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP) *rose*—

**Mr Davis:** I will give way in a moment.

As the Prime Minister said in October, although we will not be giving a running commentary—Opposition Members love that phrase—we will give clarity whenever possible and as quickly as possible. As she told the House earlier this month,

“Our plan is to deliver control of the movement of people from the European Union into the United Kingdom.”—[*Official Report*, 16 November 2016; Vol. 617, c. 230.]

That was the first point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth). I have also been clear about what this involves. Free movement of people cannot continue as it is now, but this will not mean pulling up the drawbridge. We will operate the immigration system in our national interest, with a view to winning the global battle for talent. Labour Members do not like this, partly because they cannot agree on their own policy. In the past few weeks, we have heard at least three different positions on the future of free movement from shadow Front Benchers—[*Interruption.*] The Opposition spokesman probably thinks there are more, as he is challenging me. It is therefore no surprise that they do not want to talk about it, but this is an important, substantive decision that reflects the will of the British people.

Similarly, the Prime Minister has said that we intend to remove the UK from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. That is part of the promise to recover control of our own laws. Some Labour Members do not like this because they suggest that the ECJ is the principal guarantor of basic British rights and freedoms. I have to say that that shows an astonishing lack of knowledge of our own history, in which British people fought to create and preserve those freedoms. I suppose it is unsurprising that the party that attempted to impose on Britain the most draconian piece of law in modern times—90 days' detention without charge—has little understanding of the proper origins of freedom and the rule of law.

**Mr MacNeil:** As part of our determination to find out some knowledge from Ministers, it was asked several times at today's Prime Minister's questions whether the

[Mr MacNeil]

UK would want to be in the customs union or not. Can the Secretary of State for Brexit let us know what his policy is? Can he give us something substantive? Is it a case of in the customs union or not in the customs union, because this was not on the ballot paper? The people did not vote to leave the customs union.

**Mr Davis:** What was on the ballot paper, and what I think a million Scots voted for, was leaving the European Union—[*Interruption.*] I will come back, do not worry. I am not going to sidestep the question; I never do.

The simple truth is that, as the Prime Minister said—I am a Minister of the Government, remember—this is not a binary option. There are about four different possibilities, and we are still assessing them. I have given an undertaking to the Opposition spokesman that I will notify the House in detail when we come to that decision.

**Emma Reynolds** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mr Davis:** I will make some progress and then I will give way again in a moment. There are some among the Labour party who think that leaving the jurisdiction of the ECJ will undermine employment law. Again, that shows a sorry ignorance—employment protection in the UK does not derive principally from the ECJ.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Davis:** No.

Nevertheless, to prevent any misrepresentation or misunderstanding, the Government have announced that they will not erode employment protections, so there can be no doubt about the situation. Labour talks about employment rights, but the Government have made clear guarantees and are bringing forward the great repeal Bill to ensure that the rights that are currently enjoyed are maintained.

**Anna Soubry:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Hon. Members:** Give way!

**Mr Davis:** Clearly somebody has the support of the Labour party for what she wants to say. I will get around to my right hon. Friend in a minute.

We have been clear that the great repeal Bill will transpose all EU law into UK law, wherever practical.

**Anna Soubry** *rose*—

**Mr Davis:** I will not give way for a second, because this point is incredibly important. No law will be changed without the explicit approval of Parliament. That is the key point to understand in this debate.

**Anna Soubry:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. On the customs union matter, did I hear him correctly? Is he saying that the Government will decide whether we will seek to remain in it or out of it,

and that then the House, or rather the Opposition, will be told what the Government's decision is, but we in this place will have no say in it?

**Mr Davis:** My right hon. Friend was not listening; she probably made up her question before she heard the last paragraph. I said that there would be no law changed in this country without the approval of the House of Commons.

Let me come back to the issue of customs union, since it is important. There are several options on customs union. One is shown by Norway, which is in the single market but not in the customs union. One is shown by Switzerland, which is neither in the customs union nor in the single market, but has a customs agreement. A whole series of options exists, and we will come back to the House about that when we are ready.

On my right hon. Friend's other point, she intimated that because I gave the undertaking to the Opposition spokesman, it was somehow to the Opposition, not the House of Commons. Any undertaking made from this Dispatch Box is to the whole House of Commons, and she should understand that.

A further area in which our aims have been made very clear is justice and home affairs. As I said in the House last week, our aim is to preserve the current relationship as best we can, consistent with our broader aims. That clearly extends to areas such as security and law enforcement. Even after we leave the EU, the UK and the EU will face common threats, from terrorism to organised crime. As such, I believe that there is a clear mutual interest in continued co-operation in these areas. The security of Europe will remain of paramount importance to us, meaning that we will continue to co-operate as we do now with our European partners to help to maintain it.

As for the area that has dominated the debate so far—trade and the European market—the Government have been as clear as is sensible at this stage. We have said that we seek the freest possible trading arrangements, in respect of both tariffs and non-tariff barriers. The Government's view is that the best deal is most likely to be achieved by a negotiated outcome.

**Emma Reynolds** *rose*—

**Mr Davis:** One moment. There is a range of means of arriving at a deal and there is a range of outcomes, and it does not make sense to box ourselves in. I am a believer in free trade, and I want to see the freest trade possible with the European Union and also with the rest of the world. We will be a global and outward-looking nation and a leading advocate for free trade. We want to be able to embrace the opportunities of Brexit—I know that the shadow Chancellor agrees with that, although it apparently makes my opposite number “furious”—but we want to maintain the best relationship possible with the European Union.

**Callum McCaig** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr Davis:** Not at the moment. We have made our aims clear on immigration, on the ECJ, on workers' rights and, in fact, on European Union legislation more broadly. We have clear aims on justice and home affairs,

on security and, finally, on trade. It is important that the House understands what we are aiming for, but it is also important that we do not close off options before we absolutely have to. Just this weekend the leader of the Opposition suggested that he would seek to tie the hands of the Government regarding certain outcomes, such as a particular status in terms of the European market. To do so would seriously undermine the national interest, because it would undermine our ability to negotiate freely.

As I said at my first appearance at the Dispatch Box in this role, Parliament will be regularly updated and engaged. Keeping in mind those strategic aims and the fact that to reveal our position in detail or prejudice the negotiations cannot be in the national interest, we will set out our strategic plans ahead of the triggering of article 50. It is well documented that when we have decided to trigger article 50, the Government will notify the European Council. As I have said on several occasions, the House was always going to be informed in advance of the process. We are happy to support the spirit of today's motion, with the vital caveat that nothing we say should jeopardise our negotiating position.

The Government amendment underlines the timetable for our departure, affirming the Prime Minister's intention to notify by 31 March. Many Opposition Members pay lip service to respecting the result of the referendum, while at the same time trying to find new ways to thwart and delay. The shadow Cabinet cannot even decide whether it respects the will of the people. We are well aware of the desire of my opposite number to keep his "options open" with regard to a second referendum—the most destructive thing we could do for our negotiating position at the moment.

**Keir Starmer:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr Davis:** No.

Today we will see whether the Opposition are prepared to back Britain and support our plan to follow the instruction of the British people and leave the European Union. The Government are absolutely determined to honour the decision made by the British people on 23 June.

1.56 pm

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): I thank the shadow Secretary of State for his speech and for giving us the opportunity to debate this subject today. As we have said, we are keen to continue to work with him and his colleagues, and indeed with Members from across the House, where that is possible. We appreciate the remarks that he made about devolved Administrations, but, given where we are and given the Government's comments, that is not enough for us, and neither is what has been set out.

It is 167 days—almost six months—since the referendum. We have 113 days to go until the 31 March deadline that the Government have set themselves, so we are almost two thirds of the way there. To talk about a glacial pace of progress might be something of an overstatement. So far, the Government have told us nothing. We have been told about soft Brexit, hard Brexit, grey Brexit, and, earlier today, a red, white and blue Brexit. Perhaps we will be getting a continental Brexit, to keep our

European partners on side, or even a deep-fried Brexit. We are not entirely sure. Given the timetable, it will not be a Christmassy Brexit for whoever is trying to plug the gaps in the Government's plans.

There has been an impact, and a significant number of questions remain unanswered. They are not just questions that float out there; they go to the very heart of the Government's negotiating position. What exactly are the Government telling their negotiating partners, if anything? Are the Government telling them that the single market is important and that we need to maintain membership of it? Have the Government listened to their Scottish leader, who said of the single market that "the over-riding priority is to retain access to it"?

Do the Government agree with her on that? What about the rights of EU nationals? European nationals call this country their home. They call Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland their home, and I hope that they will continue to do so. What a huge contribution they have made and continue to make. They deserve better than this continued uncertainty.

We all benefit from freedom of movement, and I hope that we will all continue to benefit from it. A large number of our industries also benefit from it, not least the food and drink industry. Scotland has suffered over the years from emigration; we have benefited more than most from freedom of movement, as I know the Secretary of State is well aware. We want to keep it. It benefits us and it will continue to benefit us. It benefits us not only financially but culturally, by enriching our communities and bringing in the people who enrich our society.

**Mr David Davis:** The hon. Gentleman and I do not differ on many of these points, but allowing people access to any part of the United Kingdom, and access to work in particular, is not achieved only by an absolute rule on freedom of movement. Control of our borders by our Government would presumably be operated in the UK national interest. Why does he expect that to punish Scotland? It would not do so.

**Stephen Gethins:** The Secretary of State makes the point. Why not give Scotland—it needs the powers—some of the responsibility for immigration?

On that very point, the Vote Leave campaign, of which the Secretary of State was a member—a full and active member—did not promise much. It is good to see that the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) is in his place, for was it not he who said that Scotland could have control over immigration if we voted to leave the European Union? I would be delighted to hear about their plans when the Under-Secretary winds up.

**Michael Gove** (Surrey Heath) (Con) *indicated assent.*

**Stephen Gethins:** I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman is nodding still, and I look forward to his joining us in the Lobby at some point. He can come home to his roots, and we will welcome him on this issue.

Let us not forget the impact this is having elsewhere in the United Kingdom. On jobs and the economy, Nissan has been given reassurances, but what about other industries? What about the food and drink industry? What about our fishermen and farmers, a lot of whose rules and regulations come from the European Union?

[Stephen Gethins]

What will happen to the common agricultural policy, or to the coastal communities fund, which is so important to our fishing communities? [Interruption.] What happens, as the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) points out from a sedentary position, about Horizon 2020? What will happen to universities, which particularly benefit from freedom of movement? What will happen to workers' rights, which will come back to this House, which has not always been the best place to guarantee those rights in the past? What will happen to the environment, which has also benefited from Europe?

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): The hon. Gentleman mentions workers' rights. First, the Government have already confirmed that we will maintain what exists; and secondly, in many areas UK law exceeds the EU minimum.

**Stephen Gethins:** In many other areas, such as parental and other rights, we relied on European Union rulings. I tell the hon. Gentleman right now that I would trust the European Union a lot more than I trust this Government when it comes to workers' rights and other rights.

We need more details. Mario Draghi, the president of the European Central Bank, has said:

"it is important to have clarity over the negotiation process as soon as possible in order to reduce uncertainty".

The Secretary of State's speech has not reduced that uncertainty in the slightest.

The Secretary of State made the point that no law will be changed without the say of Parliament, so let me ask him a question. He is in the Chamber, but not in his place, although his colleague the Under-Secretary is on the Front Bench. Will no law that is a responsibility of the Scottish Parliament be changed without the say-so and consent of that Parliament? That is critical, because the motion fails to take on board the impact of devolved Administrations, and a huge array of the questions lie unanswered about matters that are the direct responsibility of not just Edinburgh, but of Belfast and Cardiff.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech, which is well worthy of the award he won last night as an MP to watch. The Government talk about respect, but the people of Scotland voted to remain within the single market. Why do the UK Government not respect the wishes of the Scottish people and support our bid to make sure that we retain the benefits of European membership?

**Stephen Gethins:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point.

I have another point—I hope the Under-Secretary has his notepad ready so that he can respond to it. We were told by the Secretary of State for Scotland just on 27 November that Scotland would be gaining "significant powers". Will the Under-Secretary outline what those significant powers are and, to come back to the point I made earlier, whether they will include powers over immigration among others?

Scotland is a European Nation, and we are proud to be a European nation. We benefit, as we see every day in our interactions with the food and drink industry, universities, businesses and the financial sector among many other sectors. The EU benefits us in many different ways—financially, socially and even politically, because there are so many areas, such as energy and climate change, on which we agree so much more with the European consensus than we do with the Westminster consensus.

The relationship with the European Union is important and will be important in the future, but for the record it is important for us to bear it in mind that Scotland has always been a European nation. In the town of St Andrews in my constituency, there stands a statue of General Sikorski, who led the free Polish troops. We remember the sacrifice that they made, and the contribution that the Polish community has made to Scotland and to other parts of the United Kingdom. I remember the interaction between universities in Scotland and those across Europe for hundreds of years, such as the interaction between Scottish universities and those in the Netherlands and elsewhere. I also remember the Lübeck letter: just after the battle of Stirling Bridge—we are going back a bit—the first thing that William Wallace did was to tell the Hanseatic League that Scotland was open for business again. This relationship goes back a long time, and the lack of preparations for Brexit is irresponsible.

There is the Court case across the road today. I do not want to go into it too much, but the Scottish Lord Advocate will be making the arguments for the Scottish Government, and he will do so much better than I possibly could. However, I do not understand why the Government are scared of parliamentary scrutiny. What concerns them about trying to undertake what is, as the Secretary of State himself conceded, an enormous undertaking? Is it not the case that the Government governs, or so the theory goes, and that the legislature scrutinises its work—never has that been more important—while, despite what some people have said, the judiciary does not decide the laws, but carries out the task of assessing whether the rules are being adhered to? All of us in the Chamber must respect that. Similarly, it is for the devolved Administrations to have a say over areas under their responsibility.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): In the case currently going through the Supreme Court, the Lord Advocate for Scotland described the Sewell convention yesterday as

"a political restriction upon Parliament's ability to act, no more and no less than that".

However, has not that convention been put on a statutory footing as part of the Scotland Act 2016? Is my hon. Friend as concerned as I am about the lack of clarity from Brexit Ministers on that point?

**Stephen Gethins:** The Minister makes—[Interruption.] My hon. Friend—he is not yet a Minister, but let's give it time—makes an excellent point. There is chaos, pure and simple. The chaos is the fault not of the judges but of the Government who have carried on the irresponsibility of the Vote Leave campaign by continuing to give us no details.

We are well aware that the Secretary of State does not like the use of the prerogative, but this could all have been avoided. Let us give credit where it is due: I give

credit to David Cameron—hon. Members will not hear this often from SNP Members, and, frankly, they will not hear it often from Conservative Members either—who sat down with the then First Minister of Scotland, my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), and hammered out the Edinburgh agreement to give the Scottish independence referendum a legal footing to remove any uncertainty. I will read a little of agreement, which was agreed by the Westminster Government and the Scottish Government—and full credit goes to everybody, particularly the officials who worked so hard on it. It states:

“The governments are agreed that the referendum should...have a clear legal base”—

just imagine if the Government had done that—

“be legislated for by the Scottish Parliament;...be conducted so as to command the confidence of parliaments, governments and people; and...deliver a fair test and a decisive expression of the views of people...and a result that everyone will respect.”

It went on:

“The two governments are committed to continue to work together constructively in the light of the outcome, whatever it is, in the best interests of the people of Scotland and of the rest of the United Kingdom.”

The question is: why was there so little preparation? Was it negligence, breath-taking complacency, or did they think that everyone would be okay regardless and they did not need to bother?

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): If my hon. Friend has been following the Supreme Court case as closely as I have, he will be aware that it was pointed out by senior counsel for the respondents yesterday that the Government had the opportunity to give legal force to this referendum, as a result of the amendment proposed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), but they specifically said that they did not want to do so. The now Leader of the House, who was then the Minister for Europe, said:

“The legislation is about holding a vote; it makes no provision for what follows. The referendum is advisory”.—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2015; Vol. 597, c. 231.]

It was said quite clearly by the Government that it was their intention to make no provision for what would follow.

**Stephen Gethins:** My hon. and learned Friend makes a very fine point, as always.

Let me make another comparison. We are here to scrutinise the work of the Government. They put forward manifestos before elections, and we scrutinise those. No one questions the idea that the Government should try to prepare a manifesto. Before elections, officials pore over the manifestos of the parties standing, including even the no-hopers—some poor soul in the civil service has to go through the Labour party manifesto!

Whatever happened, the Government got it wrong and need to change course. That is the responsibility of the Members who campaigned for out. It is not just us asking these questions: Manfred Weber, president of the European People's party group in the European Parliament, has said:

“I haven't really heard how the British government want to tackle Brexit or what Brexit really means.”

The Foreign Secretary has some responsibility, and has a job on his hands. I hope everyone on the Government Benches is taking him terribly seriously nowadays, as

they have been told to do so. He is determined to make a “titanic success” of this process, but he has been telling everyone a different story. I wonder if that goes beyond the Brexit process. What about when he decides what Christmas card he should give his Foreign Secretary counterparts? Will it be a Christmas tree, or is that perhaps a bit too German? Will it be the flight into Egypt, or is that a bit too soft on refugees? Will he go for Santa on his way from Lapland with his elves, or does that give him freedom of movement problems? Perhaps everyone will just get two and be done with it.

Look at the chaos at the heart of this Government and compare and contrast it with the Scottish Government. Ireland is a hugely important partner and key nation—a partner nation and our sister nation. Charlie Flanagan told his Government's Brexit Committee that he had no idea how the UK would approach Brexit. The Irish Minister for Jobs described the International Trade Secretary as like a husband

“who wants a divorce, but “

to

“keep all the assets and the family home.”

Compare that with the reception that the First Minister got in Dublin just last week. Compare it with the partnership that we are building. [*Interruption.*] Members call getting a positive response grandstanding! The Government wish they could get a positive response from a European partner. Even James Reilly, the deputy leader of Fine Gael, said:

“We are very much heartened by the fact that Scotland voted to stay in the EU. We would be very supportive of ensuring that Scotland's voice is heard during the UK negotiations, as well as the voices of our fellow Celts north of the Border, who also voted to stay within the EU.”

The Government are in chaos, pure and simple. That chaos is affecting our day-to-day lives and will continue to do so. This is too important to let the Government off the hook about it. It is too important not to have full scrutiny, and it is too important to the powers of the devolved Administrations for it to be left purely to this place. That is why we cannot back the Secretary of State's amendment today.

**Several hon. Members** rose—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. On account of the number of would-be participants in the debate, it is necessary to impose a time limit. We will start with a time limit of eight minutes on Back-Bench speeches, but I give due notice that that is not likely to endure for very long. Members can help each other, however.

2.13 pm

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I will, I hope, be brief. I support the Government's amendment, and wish to make it clear that I believe that making great pace in getting ourselves through the process and into the negotiations is the key for whatever the Government do now.

Most people, including the Opposition, fail to define what leaving the European Union actually means. They keep saying that they will not and do not want to frustrate the will of the British people and that that means they do not want to delay the triggering of article 50. But in the same breath—with respect to the

[*Mr Iain Duncan Smith*]

hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer)—they go on to qualify what leaving actually means. When listening to him, the definition I heard was that he wants to be a member of everything that we are in as members of the EU now, with one or two small changes—so he does not actually want to leave. In that sense, the purpose behind what the Opposition are doing speaks more of their own problems than of the negotiations that the Government will embark on once we activate article 50. I will say more on that in a moment.

I make no bones about the fact that I voted and campaigned for the UK to leave the European Union. I believe that it is necessary for us to understand what we mean by that—to define it, and then to act on that, as some of my colleagues have already said. Leaving the European Union at its most basic will mean that we will no longer be subject to European law. From that flow the other elements that were debated during the campaign. The public most clearly want to take back control of their borders with the European Union and to take back control of the money raised from them in taxation. Those things cannot happen if we are subject to European law. This, then, is the key element: leaving the European Union means that we are no longer subject to the jurisprudence of European law. That is really quite important. The failure of the Opposition to accept that means that they are not really in favour of leaving, and have not even accepted that we are leaving; they are debating how we stay in with modifications.

On that principle, I remind the House that the Centre for Social Justice published a report about why people voted to leave, called “48:52”. That report made it very clear—even many remainers have said the same—that the public wanted control of migration and they wanted sovereignty returned. I was quite surprised by their using and agreeing with the word “sovereignty”. We are always being told in this House that no one out there cares about sovereignty and that it is an esoteric issue debated only here by obsessed politicians who cannot get away from the fact that no one talks about it out in the country. In fact, sovereignty was the key element that the people spoken to for the report all agreed that they wanted—to take back control, the phrase that we use endlessly when debating this matter.

We are therefore clear about what people wanted. When people say we do not know what the public wanted, that is simply not true. They do a disservice to the general public if they cannot understand what they meant when they voted to leave the European Union. The public were very clear on that. I have heard the Liberals go on about how people voted to leave but did not vote for a destination. Leaving is a destination. It means we are in control of ourselves. This country is not moving. It is staying where it is, but we will no longer be subject to European law. Playing silly games does not help anyone to believe that, fundamentally, politicians understand what they are going through.

Given all that, there is no point during any of the negotiations in our trying to ask the European Union for something that it simply cannot and will not give us. This is the main point. There is no point going to the EU and saying, as a point of special pleading, “We want to be out of the European Union and are going to

be free to make our own laws, but will you let us stay in the single market, and can we stay in the customs union?” I fully understand the position of those of my colleagues who want to stay in those elements. That is a wholly reasonable position, but if we are leaving the European Union, staying in those two things does not stand. More importantly, I would not want to, because that would again bring us under the control of the *acquis communautaire*, and not being so is one of the main reasons for leaving. The Opposition asked for enough detail. The strategic aim is on those points—that is enough detail.

On the customs union, I come back to this simple point. Why would the United Kingdom want to stay in the customs union when one of the key elements behind making the important decision to leave the European Union was getting back the opportunity to make our own trade arrangements with other countries? I would rather we stayed in than stay in the customs union. It seems completely pointless to embroil ourselves in the customs union—to go through all the rigmarole, arguments, debates and rows, only to find that at the end of the day we do not have the jewel in the crown of our making free trade arrangements.

On that point, I have something interesting to say to the House. I discovered the other day that there are now no fewer than five elements of legislation—three Bills, I think, and two amendments to Bills—going through both the House of Representatives and the Senate that pave the way for a free trade agreement between the US and the United Kingdom. So much for the current President’s view that we will be at the back of the queue. It appears that the legislators in Congress see us wholly at the front of it. They know the reason why: we are the great free trading nation of the world. We believe in free trade, and that is the direction in which we want to take ourselves, and, I hope, many others. For us, the rest of the debate, once we get through that and understand its relevance, is about process.

I listened very carefully to the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras as he spoke for the Opposition, and I understand deeply the problem the Opposition have right now. The Conservatives were in opposition for a number of years and we were often divided. I was a Leader of the Opposition and I remember it very well. Leading the Opposition is like herding cats and there are a lot of cats sitting on the Benches behind him. They are divided about what they want. They are exposed in a simple position of not really wanting to leave, but recognising that 70% of them now sit in constituencies that voted overwhelmingly to leave. They are focusing on the fact that they run the risk, politically, of being in danger when the next election is called.

I understand fully Labour Members’ need to somehow try to confuse the issue with this particular agreement in relation to the amendment. However, the Government amendment is very clear. It sets a date by which article 50 has to be invoked. By not voting against the amendment, the Labour party will be giving the Government a blank cheque to go forward and invoke article 50 without any real caveats. I am wholly in favour of that, I have to say, because I support the Government, but I did not think Labour Members were supporting the Government. I welcome them to that position, although some of my hon. Friends absolutely deplore them for doing so. I see

from the shaking of heads that many on their own Benches deplore the weakness they seem to have shown, but I congratulate them—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I was momentarily distracted by another hon. Member speaking to me. The right hon. Gentleman was a beneficiary for a few seconds, but I am afraid his time has now elapsed.

2.21 pm

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): I want to begin by expressing my concern about the continuing tone of some of the debate on the UK's exit from the European Union. I also want to express the hope, which may be vain, that today will mark the end of the phony war.

The decision has been made. We all campaigned on one side or the other and we accept the result. Parliament will vote in favour of triggering article 50. The deal—this is the importance of the motion tabled by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer)—is that in return the Government will come forward with, and get on with producing, a plan. It is entirely reasonable that the House and the British public should expect the Government to publish a plan well in advance of that vote. I welcome the fact that belatedly—nearly six months on—the Government have finally done so today.

So please, can we have an end to talk about “democracy deniers” and “remoaners”? One headline yesterday read:

“Forty pro-EU Conservative MPs defy the will of the people to ‘side with Labour’”,

and the Prime Minister's official spokesperson said:

“While others have seemingly made clear they want to frustrate the will of the British people, the Government is pressing on with it.”

May we have an end to that? It does a profound disservice to the scale of the task our country faces, to the seriousness of that task and the importance of the outcome to every single person who lives in the United Kingdom. I say to the Secretary of State that the Government and the Prime Minister should be trying to unite our country as they go about their task—we all agree that we should try to achieve the best possible deal—and to recognise their responsibilities to the 48% as well as the 52%. Maybe today will mark the day when they begin to do that.

Of course there are different views about the future of our relationship with the EU. Leaving the EU is not in doubt, but the nature of that new relationship—here I disagree with the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith)—is up for debate.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** We accept that Labour is going to vote for article 50 and we all want the plan, but does the right hon. Gentleman believe that Labour should not put forward an amendment on the article 50 vote that lays down a specific future, for instance, staying in the single market?

**Hilary Benn:** No, I do not. First, we have no idea what the legislation will look like. I would just make the point that, when I last checked, Norway is not a member of the European Union. Unless any hon. Members wish to contradict me, it is not a member. It is outside

the EU and it is a member of the single market. What that demonstrates is that there are choices to be made about our future relationship with the EU.

All any unreasonable delay in bringing forward the plan will do is create further uncertainty. The hon. Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller) is no longer in his place, but he said that it might consist of hints. I merely remind the House that when Moses came down from the mountain bearing the tablets, they did not contain the 10 hints. He was pretty clear about what he was telling people to do. I remind the House that the Secretary of State has got up eight times to enlighten us not a great deal about the Government's objectives, and I have never heard Parliament described as “elbow joggers” before, although I did like the analogy. We are not elbow joggers, but participants in the process and we intend to scrutinise the Government as they undertake it. Apart from anything else, it would have been quite unacceptable for the Government to have told the 27 member states what their objectives were before they told Parliament and the British people. It is therefore really important that we get the plan and that the Government publish one with substance.

To be fair to the Government, in some areas, we know what the plan is. That has been set out very clearly for the car industry. We know what the Government want: no tariffs and no bureaucratic impediments. Those were the words of the Business Secretary. They do not want anything to happen that would make it more difficult to trade. I am sure the rest of the manufacturing sector says, in all the meetings the Secretary of State is having, “Okay, that's great for cars, but what about us?” Is it unreasonable for the Government then to say what their objectives are for the rest of manufacturing industry? I think that is perfectly reasonable.

There is then the curious case of the customs union, which got even curiously during the Secretary of State's speech. The Prime Minister has now told us twice that it is not a binary choice. Now we understand it is a four-way choice. The Secretary of State said there are four different models. The right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), who unfortunately is no longer in her place, asked a perfectly reasonable question: whether he could at least tell us what the four different options are, so that we can all join in the conversation on which of the four the Government might eventually decide to choose.

Presumably, we are going to seek maximum access to the single market. For financial services, and the jobs and the tax revenue that depend on it, it is really important that we are able to keep access to the single market. I am sure that causes the Chancellor to lie awake at night, worrying about it. How will those controls on free movement, which the Secretary of State reminded us of, work in practice? How will they affect lecturers at universities, doctors and nurses, people picking and processing vegetables, chefs, care workers, highly skilled engineers, technicians and IT specialists? Will companies—this is a question we have heard a lot in the Select Committee—continue to be able to move their staff within their companies to another base elsewhere in Europe to repair a product, solve a problem or create a new business opportunity? When will we be able to offer clarity to EU citizens about their position here? We now know from the Home Secretary that they will all have to be documented. It is a fair question: how many civil servants will that take, how much will it cost and when will it be completed?

[Hilary Benn]

What about our universities? Young people from the rest of Europe will be asking themselves whether they are still going to apply to come to Britain, and when will they stop being treated as a home student and become an overseas student? They need to know and the universities need to be able to plan. Will we continue to participate in the Erasmus programme that allows young people in Britain from low-income backgrounds to study elsewhere in Europe? Will we continue to be a part of Horizon 2020?

What about the whole range of agencies? I will pick one: the European Medicines Agency. Now, one could say that wanting to remain a member of the EMA is cherry-picking. However, working with our European neighbours to agree on how quickly and safely we can bring new medicines to market is good for patients in Britain as well as patients in Europe. I plead with the Government to be just a bit more enthusiastic—I do not say this so much about the Secretary of State—and clear that they are determined to find a way of continuing to co-operate on foreign policy, defence, security and the fight against terrorism, because that is so important to us all.

Finally, on transitional arrangements, the cliff edge and the negotiating plan, previous Governments, in respect of a whole host of treaties, including the Lisbon treaty, the constitutional treaty, the Nice treaty, and the Amsterdam treaty, and even when we sought to join the common market in 1967, all set out what they were trying to achieve. George Brown talked about the need for considerable adaptations and an adequate period. If it was sensible to admit the need for transitional arrangements when joining the common market, which was a much simpler organisation, is it not sensible for the Government to admit now that, if they cannot negotiate everything within 18 months—listen to what Michel Barnier said yesterday—they will be prepared, if necessary—

**Emma Reynolds:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Hilary Benn:** Will I get more injury time, Mr Speaker?

**Mr Speaker:** Indeed.

**Hilary Benn:** Then of course I give way.

**Emma Reynolds:** My right hon. Friend is very generous. Does he agree that businesses have expressed concern about the uncertainty created by the cliff edge in March 2019, about how we might fall back on WTO rules and tariffs and about how bad that would be not only for businesses but for jobs, our constituents and the broader economy?

**Hilary Benn:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have heard a lot of evidence before the Select Committee, of which she is a valued member, saying precisely that. As she said, we have heard much about bureaucracy, rules of origin, delays and so on. Whole businesses have been created on the basis of goods moving back and forth four, five, six times before finally being added to the product being sold. People need to understand that the way business works in the Europe of which we have

been a part creates and sustains jobs. To say, “We will walk away. It doesn’t matter. We can cope,” really misses the point about why business is worried about the implications.

The last point I want to make to the Secretary of State concerns the question of a vote on the final deal. I heard him say today, “I expect there will be a vote”. Well, I expect that the District line will turn up within five minutes, but today there were longer delays. He said, as I understood it, that it was inconceivable that there would not be a vote. Well, some people would have said it was inconceivable that Donald Trump would be elected President of the United States. It does not fill me with a great deal of confidence. I gently say to him that the simple response to the question, “Will there be a vote when the deal comes before us after the negotiation?”, is to stand up, look the House direct in the eye, and say, “Yes, there will be a vote.”

2.32 pm

**Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con):** It gives me pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn). It shows the odd situation we are in that I can say I agreed with every word he uttered. It might be a long time before either of us finds ourselves in that situation on any other subject, but then this is unlike any decision that has come to the House for many years.

We all know that when we leave the EU and begin the several-years process of deciding our future political and economic relationships with Europe and the rest of the world, we will be embarking on some of the most complicated and epoch-making decisions that the House will have faced for a century. Although those debates will come later—and I will not argue today my well-known views on the merits of EU membership—I think that the decisions we are taking today on the parliamentary procedure that should apply to a Government engaged in policy making and acting on behalf of the UK, including future citizens, not just present citizens, are equally important. If we carelessly agree to things today, we might create precedents that will be quoted in future to the detriment of both Houses of Parliament and of the system of checks, balances and accountability that is crucial to our constitution. Of course, today, I speak politically not legally—we all await the outcome of the serious issues before the Supreme Court.

I do not understand why the Government indicated that today’s Opposition day motion posed some sort of threat. With great respect to the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), who leads for the Opposition—he is working very subtly, and I have high regard for how he conducts himself—it is a harmless motion, a plain and simple motion, setting out what one would expect to happen in any similar circumstances and what one would certainly expect to have happened at any time in the past 100 to 150 years—certainly in every Parliament I have sat in.

**Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con):** Surely you haven’t been here 150 years!

**Mr Clarke:** No—only the last few decades can I recall directly. In any previous Parliament—certainly the ones I sat in—the process to be followed would have been

regarded as self-evident: the Government would produce a policy statement, a White Paper, setting out their strategic objectives, their vision, for the role they were seeking for the United Kingdom; the House of Commons would be invited to vote on that strategy and to approve or deny it; then, with the approval of the House, the Government would go forward, again with the consent of the House, and invoke article 50; then they would start the negotiations. It is a quite unnecessary performance to try to modify that, but I am extremely worried that people are trying to do so.

I would echo the comments of the SNP spokesman, the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins). I do not think that scrutiny and debate are a threat to a Government or to the quality of decision making. It is my opinion that we should return to proper Cabinet government in this country. If a Minister comes forward with controversial proposals, it is useful to have them tested by colleagues and improved in discussion, before they are sent to the House. Every Minister has taken part in debates in the House of Commons, and of course they maintain their course, but every now and then they will have a sinking feeling that their opponent is actually making rather a strong point. In such cases, one goes away and makes improvements. In strengthening their negotiating position, the Government could benefit from such a fit and proper process, particularly given that at the moment it is sadly clear from the constant remarks to the newspapers and the occasional leaks that Ministers have no idea what the strategy is and do not agree with each other anyway.

The Government have two or three arguments against this. The point about the royal prerogative is a matter for the Supreme Court. The excellent Treasury Devil, James Eadie, for whom I have the highest respect, has apparently argued that the royal prerogative still applies to making war as well as to making treaties. I will wait for the legal judgment but, politically, had Tony Blair decided when invading Iraq to tell the House of Commons that it was not a matter for the House of Commons and that he was invoking the royal prerogative rather than seeking a vote, he would have had even more trouble than he had in any case as a result of the strange way he went about the vote.

We are told that the referendum somehow overrides the centuries-old tradition of parliamentary accountability. I will not comment on the pathetically low level of debate, as reported in the national media, on both sides during the referendum campaign. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Brexit no more adopted some of the dafter and dishonest arguments on his side than I think I did on mine, but serious arguments were not reported. More to the point, the public voted by a majority to leave the EU. They did not vote for anything on the subject of replacements for the EU; it was not even raised in debate. These choices that Ministers are now struggling with, and for which they should be accountable to us, would have been a mystery to 99% of the people who listened to the debate and voted in the referendum. The issue of whether we should be in the customs union, and the consequences one way or the other, was not decided by the referendum. Brexiters in the Government do not even agree with each other on the path they should now follow. We should go back to parliamentary democracy and accountability to this House.

**Mr Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I am glad that my right hon. and learned Friend now agrees that this Parliament should be supreme. In fact, Mr Blair did take the country to war on the royal prerogative, because the vote in this House was not law, but purely advisory. Is it not rather odd that we now have a Supreme Court that sees itself as a constitutional court able to direct that this House shall have to do something, which has always previously been our right? We are a supreme Parliament; we can stop Brexit if we want to.

**Mr Clarke:** It is not going to direct us at all. The Supreme Court is the authority—I am not, and my hon. Friend is not—for saying what, strictly speaking, the legal constitutional position is. This House then has its own political role in deciding how, within that framework, it is going to operate. The political practice for decades has been that these kinds of decisions are not taken on the basis of telling Parliament that it has nothing to do with it and that Members will not have a vote. On the basis of that argument, the Cameron Government would have proceeded with their intervention in Syria, which we decided that we did not want; they would not even have offered the Commons a vote before they proceeded. In this particular instance, no Government that I can recall would have had the nerve to come along to Parliament and say, “Oh, we are exercising the royal prerogative; we are not going to ask you.”

Finally, let me deal with the nature of accountability. I am not sure that the Government have yet wholly picked up the point, apart from the fact that they have to get out of being defeated on a motion in a Labour Supply day. We are told, “Oh, the Government will make statements.” Well, the Government have been making statements, in which the rather vague language of “a plan” is used. We will probably be told that the plan is to have a red, white and blue Brexit and that we are believers in free trade, whilst we are giving up all the conditions that govern free trade in the single market. Apparently, not only are we going to give up the European Court of Justice, which we have always used very successfully to resolve disputes, but we are going to have trade agreements with everybody else and not abide by the rules of those either, if we feel like it. We need a White Paper, a strategy, votes in this House and clarity on policy.

2.42 pm

**Edward Miliband** (Doncaster North) (Lab): It is a privilege to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke).

This debate might appear just to be about this House, and the rights of this House and whether we get a plan. It is not. And it is not about whether we were for leave or for remain. It is about a deeply divided country. The truth is that we are divided between people who voted leave and fear being betrayed, and people who voted remain and fear a deep sense of loss.

In case we have forgotten, after all this is over—I suspect it will take more than two years—leavers and remainers will have to live in the same country. That is why I believe that the way we conduct this debate, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) said, is absolutely crucial and all of us, however we voted in the referendum, should be seeking to unite the country and not divide it. What does that demand?

[Edward Miliband]

First, I believe we need to honour the result of the referendum. It was a referendum that, as the House knows, I did not seek, and it was close, but it was clear and it needs to be respected, in my view. We are leaving the European Union; I could not put it any plainer than that. That is my starting point. But unifying the country takes a lot more than simply saying “Brexit means Brexit” or even “red, white and blue Brexit”.

There are hugely significant and material choices to be made by the Government and our EU partners, which will have implications for our country for decades to come. That is why it is good that the Government have said that they are going to publish a plan. I looked up the “Chambers Dictionary” definition of a plan, and it is this:

“a thought-out arrangement or method for doing something”.

That seems to me to be more than a series of hints, to use the words of the hon. Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller). What the Government have committed to—there should be no doubt about this—is the thought-out arrangement that they favour for Brexit, and they have committed to produce that to the House before the negotiations begin.

We know the key questions that need to be answered. Do we remain in the single market or not? Do we remain in the customs union—that has been debated today—or not? If Brexit is outside the customs union, as seems to be the Government’s position—maybe, although there are four different options and we do not know what they are—what is the best estimate of the economic impact of that on our country and every one of our constituencies and constituents? The reason this matters is that these are not nit-picking or procedural questions; they are questions that will affect millions of people and businesses up and down the country. There are not simply matters of procedure.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that this is not nit-picking. A key issue in my constituency is the funding for the South Wales Metro, which was due to come from European funding. The First Minister is going to Europe to see what he can get for the next two years, but this is a huge area of uncertainty, and it will affect hundreds of thousands of people in south Wales.

**Edward Miliband:** My hon. Friend puts it very well.

What about the plan on immigration, including for citizens of this country who want to go and work or live abroad in the future? What is the vision? I think the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, who is no longer in his place, was nodding and saying that they would produce a plan on our approach to crime and terrorism, foreign policy, climate and energy policy, in respect of which Governments of both parties have taken a leadership role in Europe. What is the future for that? We do not know at the moment, so it must be in the plan.

Our motion is not a request for every dot and comma of the negotiations, to use the Prime Minister’s words, to be included. We are talking about basic and fundamental questions about the Government’s vision of our economy and place in the world, post-Brexit.

As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) said, the plan must be produced in January—soon enough for Parliament and, crucially, the British people to debate it properly. I had some time on my hands, so I looked up the consultations on which the Government have embarked since the 2015 general election. There were 1,200 in all, and they include everything from consultation on the code for small sea-going passenger ships to one on the regulation of traffic signs. The Government consult a lot. Are we seriously saying that the issue on which they are not going to consult the British people is the post-Brexit arrangements for our country? I would point out that this is less of a niche issue than the regulation of traffic signs—important though that issue is.

Here is the thing. The Government said that they want to bring the country with them. That is really important, and those words were echoed by the leader of the Scottish Conservative party, who said that we have got to listen to the voices of the 48%. But a Government cannot take the country with them if they do not tell the country where they are seeking to go before the negotiations begin.

I have no greater authority to cite on this than the current Prime Minister. In 2007, she wrote a very interesting pamphlet with somebody called Nicholas Timothy, who I believe is her chief of staff. It is called “Restoring Parliamentary Authority: EU Laws and British Scrutiny.” I am told that it has been taken off the relevant website, but fortunately the House of Commons Library has a copy. It says:

“Our feeble system of scrutiny undermines Parliament’s ability to check or restrain the Government’s action in Europe... We therefore need a system that gives Parliament real powers over ministers, enough time to scrutinise, and the transparency to restore public trust in the process.”

I could not have put it better myself.

**Sir Oliver Letwin** (West Dorset) (Con) *rose*—

**Edward Miliband:** I give way to the right hon. Gentleman, who might well have had a hand in the pamphlet or written many like it.

**Sir Oliver Letwin:** I am grateful. To clarify, for the benefit of the House, is the right hon. Gentleman arguing whether, after the scrutiny, Parliament or Government get to decide on how to proceed with the negotiations?

**Edward Miliband:** I believe, as the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe said, that of course there should be a parliamentary vote—a mandate for the Government. That takes me precisely to further crucial points. The Government think that they will be weaker if they bring a plan to the House and get our support. I think the Government will be stronger in the negotiations, because they will be able to go to our partners in Europe and say that the plan is not just the Government’s, but one endorsed by the British Parliament.

The Government’s excuse relates to secrecy, and I think this needs to be dealt with. I do not think this argument stands up even to the most basic scrutiny. Let us think about how things will unfold. Once the formal negotiations begin, the EU negotiator will obviously have to confer with the 27 other Governments. Our Government’s intention and detailed proposals will remain secret for a few days if they are really lucky, but probably

not even for a few days. The Government's position will inevitably leak. The question before us is not whether the Government's intentions are kept secret—which is apparently what the Prime Minister wants—but whether those in this Parliament and this country are the last people to know what the Government's intentions actually are. It seems to me that there is absolutely no chance of the Government's uniting the country, and taking the country with them, if they adopt that approach.

There is also the question whether the referendum decides the form that Brexit will take. I do not believe that it does, as many other Members have said, but it is not just me who takes that view. Daniel Hannan, one of the leading Leave campaigners, has said:

“Some Leavers claim the result as a mandate for whatever arrangement they happened to want.”

That is the truth about this, and there is no getting away from it. There are many different forms of Brexit, as we see in the numerous other countries that are outside the European Union.

I want to end where I began, with a point about the spirit of the debate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central quoted some comments that had been made by Downing Street spokespersons on Monday, but they said something else which I find incredibly troubling. They said that those of us who are asking for transparency were not “backing the UK team”. In other words, we are not being patriotic. By my reckoning, that puts Sir John Major, Ruth Davidson and a number of Conservative Members of Parliament in the unpatriotic category. I am used to being called unpatriotic, and my dad has been called unpatriotic as well, but it really is something when Conservative Members are called unpatriotic. We know that things have become desperate for the Government when that starts happening.

We are not seeking proper scrutiny of the plans for Brexit because of our lack of patriotism; we are doing it out of patriotism, because we believe in the unity of the country. We believe that the country must be brought together. We believe that the cohesion of the country must be protected. This is the most complex and treacherous situation that our country has faced for a generation. Candour and transparency are not qualities that the Government should fear, but qualities that they should embrace, because they are the only route to uniting our nation, and we all have a responsibility to seek to unify the country.

I urge the Government not to choose a path of division, excluding the 48%, refusing to share their intentions and vilifying their opponents, including those on their own side. That is not behaviour equal to the moment: it is not behaviour that our country and the world need. We all have a responsibility to rise to the moment, and that is what we must do in the months and years ahead.

2.52 pm

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): Listening to the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband)—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I think the hon. Gentleman has been notified of this, but I should notify the House that, although the clock can be stopped at this point, the time limit for Back-Bench speeches is being reduced to five minutes, with immediate effect.

**Sir William Cash:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I was about to refer to the final remarks made by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North. I think it was Samuel Johnson who said that calling on patriotism was the refuge of the scoundrel. I listened with great care to what the right hon. Gentleman said, as I always do, but I have to say that he dodged a number of issues, not least when he described the dictionary definition of a plan as something that was thought out or a method of doing something. He said that that was not the case for the Government, but in fact, of course, it is.

It is very simple—as simple as this: there was a vote, which was authorised by a sovereign Act of this Parliament. That Act transferred the right to make a decision to the British people, and they made it. The right hon. Gentleman acknowledges that, and he says that he wants to respect it, but the reality is that the decision was about whether to stay in the European Union or to leave it, and the bottom line is that the people of this country decided, by a substantial majority, to leave. The right hon. Gentleman, he tells us, accepts that, but then he sets up a fog, as does the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), and as does my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). We are given a whole lot of amorphous details that are intended to make the situation far more complicated than it is.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, not for the first time during these debates. He and I took part in a referendum in the 1970s, when he was no doubt saddened to find himself on the losing side. I seem to remember that he strongly took the constitutional view that the result was purely advisory, and it did not change either his views or his political campaigning one iota afterwards—just as Nigel Farage and many of his supporters made it perfectly clear when they were expecting to lose this referendum that they were waiting for the next chance, and they were going to go on. We must have respect for each other's opinions, rather than telling each other that we have been ordered by an opinion poll to start abandoning them.

**Sir William Cash:** I hate—this pains me—to disappoint my right hon. and learned Friend, but I voted yes in the 1975 referendum—[*Interruption.*] I accept my right hon. and learned Friend's apology. It was only when I came to the House and the Whips made what I think was probably a terrible mistake of making me a member of the then Select Committee on European Legislation that I began to see the truth. I discovered that, actually, we were not able to run our own affairs as this whole process continued towards political union. That was what the Maastricht rebellion was all about. There is a very interesting article by Philip Johnston about it in today's *Daily Telegraph*.

It is because of the political union with which we are still lumbered—because we have not, as yet, left the European Union—that this is so essential. Back in May I wrote a paper about the question of repeal, entitled “Achieving leaving by repealing”. The laws that we incorporated by virtue of the European Communities Act 1972, as they accumulated, created circumstances in which we were becoming increasingly suborned to an undemocratic system of majority voting, which was combined with the ever-increasing assertiveness of one

[Sir William Cash]

country in particular, and others in general, congregating around one another. That put us at an incredible disadvantage.

The European Scrutiny Committee, of which I am Chairman, conducted an inquiry into the manner in which the Council of Ministers operated and reached the conclusion that it was not transparent. We took evidence from Simon Hix. The decisions that are made on behalf of the British people and imposed on us by virtue of section 2 of the European Communities Act are neither democratic nor accountable, and they are not transparent. That is why it is so essential that we repeal that legislation. While the Supreme Court is weaving in and out of political issues and trying to avoid article 9 of the Bill of Rights—I do not need to go into that now—the bottom line is that what we are facing is a political imperative towards a greater degree of political union.

I discovered that last week when I went to a conference in Brussels, where Mario Monti said, “Europe needs political integration or there will be war. It is as simple as that.” That is the manner in which this argument is being constructed across the water. Similarly, Chancellor Kohl said that there would be war in Europe if we did not agree to the Maastricht treaty and the whole European integration process. That was why my hon. Friends and I—there are not many of us left in the House now—opposed the treaty. We saw that it was European government. That was the key—for us, it was a question of democracy above all else.

I wanted to intervene on the speech made by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central, but unfortunately he would not give way. I rather suspect that I know why, but there we are. I wanted to ask a question that I will ask those on the Opposition Front Bench as well. Will they oppose the Second Reading of the great repeal Bill when it comes before the House? That will be a crucial test. Let us leave aside all that is going on in relation to article 50, which is about one simple question: are we using the prerogative or not? In my opinion, that is largely a very big storm in a very big teacup. The bottom line is that we will agree to article 50. The real question is: are we going to leave the European Union?

Let me say this very simply. We should not be supplicants in these negotiations. We should say no to the single market, no to the customs union and no to the European Court, because we cannot be subject to that European Court in any circumstances. We should say yes to borders, yes to free trade and yes to regaining the democracy for which this House has stood for hundreds of years.

2.59 pm

**Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I come to this debate from two positions. First, I am a Scottish National party Member from Scotland, which voted to stay in the EU. We were told that this is a family of nations, and as such we would expect a member of that family to be respected—as, indeed, the EU respects its members. Secondly, I am the Chairman of the newly formed International Trade Committee, and it is to that that I shall direct most of my remarks.

The Prime Minister talks about Brexit meaning Brexit, but I have spoken to a number of economists about that. Indeed, I am indebted to a number of economists

of various shades and political persuasions: Angus Armstrong of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research; Patrick Minford; Professor Ian Mitchell; Professor Ian Wooten of Strathclyde; Dr James Scott of King's; and Dr Jim Rollo of Sussex University, as well as legal experts from Cambridge, University College London and the London School of Economics. Brexit actually means about seven options. It means: do we stay in the European economic area? We can still see the video of Nigel Farage and Daniel Hannan saying before the referendum that leaving the EU meant we would be like Norway. The question was: should the UK remain a member of the EU or leave the EU? The seven options include the EEA, EFTA and the currency union. We could not get an answer today at PMQs or from the Secretary of State either.

Another option is to trade at WTO levels. That would mean that we need to have our schedules accepted at the WTO. I see that the Secretary of State for International Trade was in Geneva last week, probably discussing that. If we do not get the schedules agreed, we will be at WTO-minus. That is a possibility because of the difficulties over agriculture. Some 98% of the schedules might well be agreed, but those in the agricultural sector should be very scared. Of course, some people will have voted for Brexit on the basis that they do not want to trade so much as a stone axe ever again with Europe, but they are probably the editors of the *Mail*, *The Sun* and the *Express*.

We find ourselves in great uncertainty. Investors are uncertain. If we go to WTO rules, what will that mean for them? What will it mean for employers, too? We have absolutely no idea where the Government are going. There is great uncertainty for the Irish, too. This morning I met the Irish Foreign Minister, Charles Flanagan. He did not know what the ask from the UK Government is. This is our next-door neighbour, but they do not know where we want to go.

**George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government could show good faith by agreeing to reveal their goals and negotiating strategy with the devolved Administrations under Privy Council rules, which would put aside the whole question that the Government cannot reveal their negotiating hand?

**Mr MacNeil:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent suggestion; perhaps the Government should explore that further.

We should think of our other neighbours, not just the Irish. What does this mean for the Isle of Man, for Jersey or for Guernsey—for people we have close links to? What, indeed, does it mean for Gibraltar and the Gibraltarians—people I respect greatly and have very close links to myself?

We find ourselves in a very difficult situation here in Parliament. The Government have created a problem of their own making because of the Prime Minister's naivety in not taking this process forward by putting a simple measure before Parliament. That would have stopped us from needing to go to the courts in the first place. Now the devolved Administrations have woken up to the fact that they can be involved, and maybe—probably—the Supreme Court will rule that the process requires the consent of the Scottish Parliament, in which case Brexit is finished, Brexit is over and Brexit will be blocked.

We see also that Europe is dictating the pace. The Barnier declaration yesterday that the UK will have 18 months to negotiate after triggering article 50 shows that it is dictating the pace. Given the experience of their negotiators, Europe will probably be negotiating the terms, too. That is because I fear there are more experienced negotiators in the tiny Faroe Islands than in the United Kingdom, and the UK negotiators will probably be scalped very quickly.

We need to know where the UK plans to go. The question in June was: should the UK remain a member of the EU or leave the EU? Nobody voted to leave the European economic area. Nobody voted to leave EFTA. Nobody voted to leave the customs union. Arguments afterwards that that question gives a mandate for those subsequent steps are nonsense. There is no mandate to take these next steps. Leaving the European Union can mean being like Norway or like Iceland, as Daniel Hannan, Nigel Farage and a number of Conservative Members said before the referendum, before changing their tune quite markedly afterwards.

We need answers. We need to know what the destination is, because a lack of a strategy is not what people in the UK need for their jobs, investments, industries, employment, families and communities. No answers is not a black Brexit or a white Brexit—or a red, white and blue Brexit. No answers is a yellow Brexit—it is a cowardly Brexit. It is a Brexit that shows that this Government have absolutely no idea where they are going, and it is a Brexit to keep together our ragbag of Brexiteers who each want a different one of the seven options. When the Brexiteers see which of the options the Government choose, they are going to fight like cats in a sack.

That is the difficulty that the UK Government face. They cannot consult the devolved Administrations and they cannot consult their European friends because they cannot consult properly and meaningfully around the Cabinet table as each member of the Government supports something different. There is going to be mighty trouble in the UK Government when they do decide in March.

3.5 pm

**Michael Gove** (Surrey Heath) (Con): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) and a superb argument against secession from a Scottish nationalist. I thank the right hon. Members for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) because the challenge they put to the House is one to which we should all attempt to rise: how can we ensure not just that we respect the result that 52% of people voted for, but that we involve the 48% who voted remain for a variety of reasons? While I am grateful to them for their speeches, which I thought were for the most part very constructive, I was disappointed in the Front-Bench speech from the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). He spoke for nearly 40 minutes, longer than some Pinter plays and many Haydn symphonies, and he spoke on what he referred to as the “defining issue” facing the UK, but he did not reveal at any point what Labour’s position is on our future relationship with the EU. He did not reveal on behalf of the 48% for whom he professes to speak whether he wants to stay in the single market or the customs union. What we had was 40 minutes of pious vapouring—a hole in the air masquerading as an argument.

One of the reasons why it is so important that we hear from the 48% is that we know what the 52% voted for. Some in the course of this debate have tried to complicate and obfuscate, but it was made perfectly clear not just by the Vote Leave campaign, in which I was privileged to play a role, but by the then Prime Minister and Member for Witney; by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne), the then Chancellor of the Exchequer; and by Lord Mandelson. It was made clear by every single one of the leading representatives of the remain campaign that voting to leave the EU meant leaving the single market. There should be no ambiguity about that point. The public were fully informed and they took their decision in full knowledge.

That is one of the reasons why I am glad our Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer—both, it must be said, among the 48% who voted remain—are very clear that the result must be respected, and that means ensuring that the votes of 17.4 million people and their determination to leave the single market alongside leaving the EU should be acknowledged.

**George Kerevan:** Is the right hon. Gentleman telling us that leaving the single market is the Government’s position?

**Michael Gove:** I am telling the hon. Gentleman that that was the position taken by the British public, including more than 1 million people in Scotland and including many more people in his constituency than voted for the Scottish National party.

Not only do we need to respect the result and what the 52% wanted, but we need to acknowledge some of the concerns put forward by those who articulated the case for remain. There were two powerful concerns that weighed with me. The first was the prospect of an immediate economic shock, should we leave. That was a view put forward by the Governor of the Bank of England and a number of other distinguished economists, but we can now see that, while their concerns were expressed sincerely, they did not come to fruition. The point was made at the time—[*Interruption.*] I am grateful for the sedentary intervention from the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Chris Leslie), but the point was made at the time that there would be an immediate shock not just to Britain but to the world economy. That shock did not materialise. In fact, since we voted—

**Anna Soubry:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Michael Gove:** Not quite yet.

Since we voted to leave, we have seen increased investment from Nissan, Jaguar Land Rover, Amazon and Facebook—from a variety of both traditional manufacturing and new technology investors. Far from there being an economic shock, we are the fastest growing economy in the G7.

It was also a legitimate concern of some who voted remain that voting to leave the EU would damage the United Kingdom. The truth is that since we voted to leave the EU, support for a second independence referendum has fallen, support for Scottish independence has fallen, support for the SNP and its secessionist sermonising has fallen, and the single most popular politician in Scotland is Ruth Davidson, the only leader of any party who wants to embrace the result.

**Anna Soubry:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Michael Gove:** No, I am not giving way.

So on two of the legitimate concerns expressed beforehand—that our economy would be damaged and the Union would be damaged—the evidence is that our economy is stronger and the Union is more popular.

Of course other concerns were expressed by people who voted to remain. Some of them relate to the fate of EU citizens in this country, some relate to future academic and scientific co-operation, and some, naturally, relate to defence and security co-operation. My point is that it is incumbent on everyone—not just the Government but the 48%—to put forward their propositions in this area.

I have made it clear, and I share this view with my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), that I believe that EU citizens in this country should stay and that their role should not be a bargaining chip. I am sure that many of those who voted remain will join me in that call, but where are those who voted to remain, now that power is flowing back to this place for the first time in my life, offering to explain how we can refine regulation and change our laws and rules as we become a self-governing country once more and become freer, more liberal, more prosperous and more creative? I am afraid that, despite some honourable exceptions, most of those people are still looking back in anger, remorse and regret instead of looking forward optimistically. This is a great country. We can achieve great things.

**Anna Soubry:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Michael Gove:** No thank you.

This Parliament has an opportunity to shape an economic policy, an immigration policy and a knowledge policy that can once again make us a world beater, but if we do not take that opportunity and instead concentrate on seeking to dilute the result of the referendum, I am afraid that we will fail the people of this country at this historic moment.

3.11 pm

**Dame Rosie Winterton** (Doncaster Central) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove). I was pleased that he called for unity, although I am not sure that he actually achieved it in the House during his speech.

This debate has shown why it is so important that Parliament should be able properly to consider the plan for leaving the European Union. There is no doubt in my mind that we will leave; my constituents voted decisively to do so. I absolutely agree with what my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) said about article 50. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) said, however, this is a time to bring the country together, and it is essential that we work together to get the best deal for our constituents when we leave. This is such an important step to take, and it is inconceivable that as Members of Parliament we should just sit back and let the Government get on with it without telling us, even in broad terms, what discussions they are having. I am

therefore pleased that the Government have accepted that they will share with Parliament the broad terms of the negotiations.

Companies in my constituency are suffering because of the uncertainty, and they want to know what analysis is being done of the effect that Brexit will have on them. I have said before that such an analysis should be carried out not only by sector but by region. Ministers have said that they will consult Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland about the Brexit negotiations, but what about Yorkshire and the Humber? What about the other regions of the UK? Will the Minister tell us what the process will be for consulting the regions and how companies and others in my constituency will be able to contribute to that process?

Companies will also want to know what the approach to the single market is going to be. They will want to be assured that if the Government intend to give up our current level of access to the biggest marketplace in the world, they have a clear plan to ensure that businesses and jobs will not be adversely affected. Equally, if the Government intend to seek a transitional deal to make the transition smoother, they should be open and up front about it, so that companies and workers can plan accordingly. The Secretary of State said earlier that workers' rights would be protected. I welcome that, but I hope the Minister will be able to assure me that he is fully consulting the trade unions on how employment rights will be protected in relation to the European Union.

When we talk about employee rights, part of our discussions about the UK workforce will involve discussing how freedom of movement will operate in a post-Brexit world. We know that this was an issue in the referendum; it certainly was in my constituency. We also know that we have to strike a balance between addressing people's concerns about how freedom of movement has been operating and ensuring that we do not leave our health service, our food and agriculture sectors and many other industries unable to function because of labour shortages.

We also have to address how freedom of movement has led to the exploitation of workers from other parts of the European Union and the undercutting of UK workers' wages and conditions. I know from my constituency that agencies have too often operated in an unacceptable way, recruiting from outside the UK while not even advertising in this country, with workers from other European countries coming here on short-term contracts and never knowing from week to week what work is going to be available. I know from discussions with colleagues from socialist and social democratic parties across Europe that other countries are aware of such developing problems, and we need to have an honest debate about this. Surely we should be talking about EU citizens moving to the UK to take up secure employment and about employers being made to take responsibility for how workers are treated, so that UK employees are not left at a disadvantage, with all the resentment that follows on from that. These are just a few of the issues that Parliament should be discussing. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us some reassurances on the negotiations and that he will address the points that are being made today.

3.16 pm

**Mr Peter Lilley** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): I want to make two main points. The first is that the Government's position is much clearer than many Opposition Members are willing to believe and that it narrows the range of outcomes very considerably. The second is that what matters as much as, if not more than, the Government's position is the position of our partners in Europe, yet no one on the Opposition Benches has mentioned that—there seems to be a sort of arrogance in suggesting that we can say, “We want this and we'll get it.” Or perhaps it is subservience in saying, “We want this and we'll, give any concession in order to obtain it.”

The Government's position has ruled out three options. First, we will not be part of the internal market of the European Union. I use the term “internal market” because that is what it is called in European law. There is no such thing in European law as the single market. To be a member of the internal market, we would have to be a member state subject to all the laws of the European Union, and the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State today have said that we will not be subject to the European Court of Justice.

Secondly, we will not be members of the European economic area, because all members of the European economic area have to accept free movement, and the Government have ruled that out. On top of that, we cannot negotiate service deals because we do not have control over the laws governing all our service industries. This was described during the referendum campaign by the current Chancellor of the Exchequer as the worst of all possible worlds, and many others on that side of the argument supported him. Now, however, they suddenly want to be part of that worst of all possible worlds.

Thirdly, we cannot be subject to the common external tariff of the EU because we are champions of free trade, according to the Prime Minister. We set up a Department for International Trade that has to be able to negotiate tariffs. We also want to cut the tariffs on products that we do not produce—including food and clothing products on which the EU imposes very high tariffs—because those tariffs are damaging to the just-about-managing people in this country. So those three options are ruled out, which leaves two realistic options.

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith:** May I give my right hon. Friend one good example of this? It relates to the import of oranges. Very recently, the customs union has slapped on a tariff increase from 3% to 16%, solely to protect some producers in Spain. That raises the cost of buying the products here in the United Kingdom, so food is now more expensive as a direct result of interventions in the customs union that Opposition Members want to be part of.

**Mr Lilley:** My right hon. Friend makes a good point, and I would add that we do not easily manufacture oranges at scale in this country.

There are two realistic options. The first is that we continue with roughly the status quo: tariff-free trade and no new barriers to service trade. The EU already has free trade agreements that do not require free movement with 50 countries. The second is that we trade with them on WTO terms and they might try to make trade in our service and financial services industries

a bit more difficult. The important thing is that both options are actually very simple to negotiate. Going from zero tariffs to zero tariffs is much easier than negotiating a trade agreement between Canada and the European Union, where each side has 5,000 or 10,000 different tariff lines and must trade them off against each other. We also have exactly the same rules on products and so on as our partners in Europe. The status quo would therefore be simple to negotiate. The WTO option does not even require negotiation; it is what happens if the negotiations have no successful outcome. Both are simple and could be done quickly.

I also believe that both options are acceptable to the UK. In the view of most people, retaining the status quo would obviously be the superior option if we could get it immediately, but if we go to trading on WTO terms, the average tariff would be about 4%—much less than that on average on manufactured products, but the 4% includes agricultural products. We have just experienced a 15% devaluation against the euro, so our exporters will, on balance, be much better off even with those tariffs, whereas exporters to us will have to face a 15% hurdle plus that 4% average tariff, so they will be much worse off.

It is important that we emphasise to our negotiating partners that although we might prefer to continue with the status quo, if they do not want it, we are willing to walk away and trade on WTO terms. Quite a few Opposition Members have been trade unionists and are used to negotiating, but not many people in this House are. We cannot successfully negotiate unless we are prepared to walk away with no deal. Ultimately, however, it will be our partners in Europe—the EU 27—that will choose between whether we continue with roughly the status quo or whether we move to WTO terms and some obstacles.

**George Kerevan:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Lilley:** I am sorry, but I will not.

Our EU partners will choose. If their primary concern is the economic wellbeing of their people, they will choose to continue with free trade. If their overriding primary concern is political and if they want to punish us and be seen to punish us, they will go with WTO terms. In practice, they will punish themselves far more, and we should make that clear. We cannot negotiate our way into making them choose one option over the other. We can perhaps try to persuade them, their industries and their electorates that they will be much better off if they continue to trade with us on roughly the current basis than if they move to WTO terms, under which they will be the principal losers. We are their single biggest market. A fifth of all German cars come here, much French wine comes here, and so on. Let us go to them and say, “It is a simple choice, make that choice”—

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

3.23 pm

**Mr Pat McFadden** (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The motion before us, moved by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir

[Mr Pat McFadden]

Starmer), the shadow Secretary of State, calls for a plan before article 50 is invoked. Since 23 June, the resistance to such calls, for reasons of “no running commentary” or not giving away negotiating positions to what the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), unwisely referred to as our enemy—

**Crispin Blunt:** The faux outrage that has followed the use of a metaphor is not worthy of the right hon. Gentleman, so I invite him to desist.

**Mr McFadden:** We are all responsible for what we say, and I do not believe that our European partners are our enemies.

Behind all that resistance lies one emotion. It is not the confidence of those who won the referendum campaign, but fear about the contradictory statements made during the campaign, about the exposure of divisions within Government and about the enormity of some of the decisions that must be taken. On one level, I sympathise with Ministers, because the dawning realisation of what they are facing and what must be decided is in some ways something to which I can understand a response of fear. However, that does not serve well either democratic debate or our negotiating position.

To pick up on a point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), an assumption has been made that, if we say what we want, that weakens us, but that is not necessarily the case. If we say what we want, that can strengthen our hand, which is precisely why the Secretary of State called for a White Paper in the article he wrote back in July. It is important for Ministers to understand that 23 June was not just a decision by the people on whether we stay in the European Union—although it was obviously that—but the passing of political responsibility for the consequences of that decision to those who led the leave campaign, many of whom now occupy senior Government positions. Despite the fear, there is no place to hide. There is a duty to both leave and remain voters to set out the principal negotiating objectives. There is also a responsibility to accept the consequences of post-referendum decisions.

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): Like the right hon. Gentleman, I campaigned to remain, and we do all have a responsibility now to try to get the best deal, but the most basic business lesson shows us not only the point about not playing our hand, but that we should not narrow our options. We want to keep our options as wide as possible, not narrow them, which is the thrust of what the Labour Front-Bench spokesman was getting at, which takes us down a narrow lane when we want to keep things as wide as possible to get the best deal.

**Mr McFadden:** I am afraid that I do not agree with the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's intervention. Responsibility cannot be evaded. The Government have a duty to do more than define success as whatever it is they manage to agree at the end of the day. The public need more than that.

What is it reasonable for such a plan to cover? I do not have an exhaustive list. Other Members have referred to some of the key points, but I want to outline some

things that it is completely reasonable for such a plan to include. Will we stay in the single market? Some hon. Members have said that that question has been decided. I do not believe that it has. If the Government's position is to withdraw from the single market, is it their aim to ensure equivalent access not only for goods, but for services? What is the position on the customs union? The Government have said that they will not accept free movement as it currently stands. Many of us want the way free movement has worked to be reformed, but what reforms do they want? They have rejected the points-based system, so what can we expect in future? Is it, for example, the same visa system that applies to non-EU immigration? It is perhaps worth reminding ourselves that that has resulted in higher levels of immigration from outside the EU in recent years than from within the EU.

If agreement is not reached within the two-year period after triggering article 50, are we happy to fall back on WTO rules, with all that that means, or is it Government policy to seek a transitional agreement to avoid that happening? That is a perfectly reasonable question for us to ask and for the public to ask. Will we be able to avoid customs and people controls on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland? That is another reasonable question. What are the proposals, beyond the single market, for cross-border co-operation on issues such as terrorism, crime and environmental protection? If we do pay in for future access to trade, as the Secretary of State said he was open to doing last week, how will the Government guarantee the spending promises made to universities and to farmers, the promises on regional spending and of course the £350 million a week extra promised during the campaign to the NHS? Will workers' rights, many of them underpinned by European directives, be guaranteed in the future—and in what way?

As I have said, that is not an exhaustive list and there will be other questions, but I ask them to illustrate that a plan has to be more than a statement and more than a press release; it has to be comprehensive and to have substance. Fear cannot be an excuse for steamrolling through anything the Government choose to define as “success”. Fear is no excuse for accusing anyone who asks questions of trying to deny the referendum result or, even worse, of not being behind team UK or of being unpatriotic in some way. The truth is that asking questions like this is in the interests of the country and of voters, both those who voted leave and those who voted remain. It is our political duty, as representatives of our constituents, to ask these questions and to insist on a proper plan for the country's future.

3.30 pm

**Sir Oliver Letwin** (West Dorset) (Con): The right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) has made out that the essence of today's debate is about whether the Government publish a plan and how it is scrutinised, and the shadow Secretary of State echoed that thought. I do not believe that is the debate we are having today; as was made clear in the response to me from the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), the former Leader of the Opposition, the debate we are actually having is congruent with the discussion going on in the Supreme Court, over the road. It is about a great constitutional issue: the old Leninist question of “who, whom?” The question

is: should the Government of the UK, following a referendum, be able to conduct negotiations in the style and manner and with the intent that they decide, on behalf of the people of the UK, or should Parliament seek to constrain the negotiation, ultimately by passing a law constraining the activities of the Government in that negotiation? That is the issue we are facing.

I wish briefly to argue, in the time allotted, that if we think about it carefully, it is clear that it is impossible to conduct that negotiation successfully on the basis of a legal mandate given by Parliament. Why? It is because once a law is passed that determines negotiation, the negotiation as a whole, and in every particular and at every moment, is justiciable. We will end up with the Supreme Court and lower courts being called upon to decide, from moment to moment, in judicial review after judicial review, whether the Government have sufficiently transparently made clear every detail of the negotiation to satisfy the Court that the mandate of Parliament in the law is being observed; and whether they have fulfilled the terms of the mandate, once everything is transparent. Any Member of this House who believes this country will have an advantage in the outcome from such a process is severely misguided.

I voted to remain, and I still believe that would have been the right decision for this country. I believe we would be better off inside the customs union than out and better off inside the single market than out; I wanted to be free of the rest of the EU's jurisprudence, but not of those things. I think we might have achieved that, but that world has passed; the referendum has occurred—we are leaving. If we are leaving, we have to negotiate an exit. The horror and the tragedy of the discussion we are having now is that, if it does lead to Parliament imposing those kinds of constraints on the Government, it will not be possible for the Government to do a trade deal with the remainder of the EU when we have left—by that, I mean left the single market and left the customs union, as we are bound to do by the logic of the situation—and it will not be possible for the Government to negotiate a trade deal to the advantage of our country because it will not necessarily be within the mandate, and that could leave us in the worst of all possible positions. So I urge Opposition Members to remove the cloak, cease to pretend that this is about transparency and plans, as we know perfectly well where the Government are going, admit that this is a constitutional argument and give up the attempt to control the negotiations line by line from Parliament.

**Helen Goodman:** When the right hon. Gentleman looks at the way the other European countries conduct their negotiations within the EU at the moment, he will surely acknowledge that, for example, the Chancellor of Germany goes to her Parliament and receives a negotiating mandate, and then goes to Brussels. It is that kind of process that we on the Labour Benches are looking for.

**Sir Oliver Letwin:** The hon. Lady is an old friend of mine, but she is totally misguided if she thinks that this is an analogous situation. This is the first time in history that a country has sought to remove itself from the EU. We are engaged in the most complicated game of multidimensional chess that any country has ever engaged in. To imagine that that can receive a legally binding negotiating mandate from Parliament, justiciable by the courts, is pure fantasy.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Why is it, then, that the European Parliament can be involved in this process, but this sovereign Parliament, because of the problems that the Government have created for themselves, cannot have any say? That is a democratic outrage.

**Sir Oliver Letwin:** The reason is that the European Parliament is one of the counterparties to the negotiation. The counterparty in our case is the Government of the United Kingdom. We have had a referendum. The Government have to be able to carry through the effect of that referendum, and the plain choice we face is whether or not to constrain the Government. My argument is that, if we constrain the Government, we will end up with a worse result from the point of view of people such as me who were part of the 48%.

**Edward Miliband:** In November 1991, John Major came to the House to seek approval for his negotiating mandate—his plan, we might call it—for the Maastricht negotiations. I do not understand how the right hon. Gentleman can say that this is a terrible breach of our practices when John Major did precisely the same thing.

**Sir Oliver Letwin:** He did. The outcome was catastrophic. I wrote 100 articles inveighing against the Maastricht treaty. Had we never signed up to the Maastricht treaty, we would not now be in this position. The right hon. Gentleman is not citing a precedent that augurs well for the negotiations that are to come.

**David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): During those negotiations, did not John Major say, “don't bind my hands when I am negotiating” with the European Union?

**Sir Oliver Letwin:** He did. He did not succeed in having his hands not bound, and I repeat that the result was a catastrophe.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** The Maastricht treaty and internal negotiations on being in the EU are wholly different from leaving the EU. The strategy for those was about remaining in the EU—all the rest was detail for debate. Here we are debating something strategically quite different: we are departing from the European Union, including the European Court of Justice and various other elements. Too much detail on that will delay the whole process and make it impossible to reach the agreement that my right hon. Friend is talking about.

**Sir Oliver Letwin:** I happen to agree with my right hon. Friend, but my point goes beyond that. It was never suggested, even during the Maastricht debates, that there should be a justiciable mandate. It has never been the case in the course of our island's history that the prerogative power of making treaties was constrained by a justiciable mandate, still less in the case of a negotiation of this complexity, as my right hon. Friend has said.

**Anna Soubry:** I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend, as ever, for his careful and thoughtful remarks. He says that we are out of the customs union and that we will not be part of it, but people such as me and my constituents are asking whether that is right. Is not it right that we in this place should have a debate to determine whether that is the case?

**Sir Oliver Letwin:** My answer is no. It is not right that we in this place should decide those things, because ultimately they can be decided only as part of the negotiation. As a matter of fact, I think that the Government will be compelled by the logic of the situation to take us out of the customs union, but whether or not they do that has to be left in the hands of Ministers to negotiate as part of the complex of negotiations.

3.38 pm

**Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Let me be absolutely clear. We cannot say this often enough: this debate is not about whether we Brexit but how we Brexit. That is of prime importance. Decisions taken during the withdrawal process could have a huge impact on our economy and the prosperity of the people of this country. I do not accept the comments by the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin). The future of this country and its prosperity is of prime significance to the Members of this Chamber, and we have a right to discuss, debate and take a vote on it.

The people may have voted for Brexit—we cannot say this often enough, either—but they did not vote to be poorer. I echo the comments made by my right hon. Friends the Members for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband). The time for digs against and negative comments about those of us who want the best possible deal for the UK is over. It is time to move on and to be responsible and mature in terms of what we are looking for.

It is the responsibility of Parliament to explore what Brexit means, both for our constituents and, importantly, for businesses located in our constituencies. I shall take for an example a key sector of our economy—food and farming, the biggest manufacturing sector in the UK economy, with a value of more than £108 billion, providing 3.9 million jobs. Seventy-five per cent. of our agricultural exports are to the European Union.

**Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): My hon. Friend and I are both members of the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Yesterday, I had a meeting with a Minister from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and I fear that there is a problem in the Department with the conflation of two issues—free trade and access to the single market. Will my hon. Friend comment on that issue?

**Angela Smith:** I shall come on to the option that we should follow in the negotiations. As many Members have illustrated, we all have views on where we should be going. The National Farmers Union has modelled three scenarios for the outcome of the negotiations: a free trade agreement with the European Union; World Trade Organisation rules; and trade liberalisation.

The potential cost to farming of non-tariff barriers to access the EU and worldwide trade range from 5% as a result of regulatory divergence to 8%. If direct farm payments are reduced or taken away completely from farmers in those scenarios, there will be a hugely negative impact on farm incomes, ranging from a reduction of £24,000 per annum under the best deal—the free trade deal—to an impact of over £30,000 per annum on

individual farm income under the trade liberalisation scenario. The EU spends £3.2 billion a year on support to farmers, which is just under 25% of what we pay the EU to be a member of the Union. A key question for the Commons is whether we continue direct farm payments to farmers at the existing 100% level. Do we reduce it, and do we look at the impact on farm trade and individual farmers? We need answers to those questions before we can sign off any Government position on what we do in Brussels in summer 2017.

The farming industry employs more than 80,000 seasonal workers a year. The NFU has called for a seasonal agricultural workers permit scheme. The Government refuse to commit to such a scheme, but without that input there is little hope for the horticultural sector. Furthermore, the food and drink manufacturing sector has a skills gap. By 2024, it will stand at 130,000. On top of that, one in 12 employers in the sector report an intention on the part of their employees to go back home.

The road haulage industry, which is a critical service for the food and farming sector, has a skills shortage of 45,000. Sixty thousand drivers in the UK are foreign, mostly from the EU. The veterinary sector is another vital service for the food and farming sector, and reports that over 50% of vets registered every year in the UK come from abroad, mostly the EU.

**Helen Goodman:** My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech about the importance of the farming sector. She will know that we have had representations from the National Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which have millions of members, all of whom are concerned about biodiversity, which is what farmers support in this country. Farmers cannot provide the environmental goods if their income makes farming uneconomic.

**Angela Smith:** Mr Speaker, I did not get the extra minute for the second intervention.

**Mr Speaker:** It is right that all of us should be held to account, including the Chair.

**Angela Smith:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I accept what my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) said.

The labour shortages that will or could result from Brexit should be taken seriously by the Government. We need to know what resources and plans are required to take account of immigration policy and restrictions on freedom of movement and on the development of the domestic workforce. It is reasonable that this Chamber has an understanding of where the Government are going on this key issue before it accepts the Government's negotiating position on Brexit. These concerns should be addressed when the Government publish their plan.

My own position is that we should retain membership of the single market, but I also believe that we need a proper timetable and sufficient time for Parliament to scrutinise the proposals and to amend them if necessary.

I will vote against the amendment, therefore, because there are no guarantees before us today. Nothing that I have heard today gives me confidence that the Government will not try to wriggle out of the commitment to put a

plan before this House. The vote today is not against Brexit, but against a motion that will potentially curtail the right of Parliament to act in the national interest, as it should do, and in so doing, act in the interests of our constituents.

3.46 pm

**Nicky Morgan** (Loughborough) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to speak in this debate.

Let me make it clear at the start, for the benefit of Members and of the Whip on the Bench, that I intend to support both the motion and amendment (a). I am very pleased that the Government have accepted the motion. This is the first time that they have accepted that Parliament should have a say on the triggering of article 50 and a role in scrutiny of the Government's plans for Brexit.

We live in a representative democracy. It is right that Members in all parts of the House, many of whom have spoken today, act for both the 52% and the 48%, as has been said today. I want the ability to speak up for the students in my constituency, the university academics, the farmers, the businesses, the NHS workers and everybody else who lives there. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) that the Government should give urgent clarity and confirmation to EU citizens living here that they may stay. We will have the moral upper hand at the start of negotiations if we have given that clarity.

Today's debate has shown that we should have started the debate a number of months ago. Although I might disagree with what my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) said, it is important that he has said it and we are able to debate those issues. I want a proper commitment to the plan, as we have seen, and a vote on the timetable. It is not good enough that these things are dragged out of the Government by Opposition day motions. I am pleased that it has happened, but I wish the Government were taking more of the initiative.

The Government plan can set out the high-level overall objectives. I might disagree with what my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley) said, but he said it more clearly than I have heard it said by anybody with his beliefs. Does the Minister agree with what my right hon. Friend said? The Secretary of State was right when he said in his opening speech that "it is also important that we do not close off options before we absolutely have to."

As the Labour motion says,

"there should be no disclosure of material that could be reasonably judged to damage the UK in any negotiations to depart from the European Union after Article 50 has been triggered".

The trouble with having "no running commentary" from the Government is that it has been replaced by running commentary based on notes seen in Downing Street, ambassadors' private conversations with the Foreign Secretary and Nissan executives' conversations with those in Downing Street.

It is also important that we have a timetable. I have been very clear previously that I want the Government to get on with triggering article 50. I see that as the start of healing the rift between Parliament and people that we have seen result from 23 June. I do not have a problem with voting for the amendment, but I understand

and respect those Members who do. I do not think it is the same as having an Act of Parliament, as the High Court ruled, and I hope the Minister will be very clear that approving the amendment is not the same as having legislation.

We are going to have a wholly new relationship with the EU on or before March 2019. We are going to have a wholly new place in the world, and I want this country to be outward-looking and forward-facing. Brexit is going to affect our economy, our foreign trade, our foreign policies, our trade policies and our immigration policy. How the Government conduct the next two years will say much about our constitution and our values as a country.

Parliament has to rise to the occasion, and I have to say that neither Front-Bench speech today quite got there. Contributions from other Members of the House have got closer to showing an appreciation of the magnitude of what we are doing. If we are going to argue solely about the process, I think we will be letting our constituents down. It is the substance of the final deal we agree with the EU, and the final trade agreements we have with the rest of the world, that will shape Britain's place in the world.

We need Ministers—from the Prime Minister downwards—to inspire as well as engage on these issues and to be clear about what 2019 and beyond will look like for this country. I look forward to further such debates.

3.51 pm

**Mr Douglas Carswell** (Clacton) (UKIP): The Opposition motion is absolutely right about one thing: leaving the EU is indeed the defining issue for this country. As such, I urge the Government to get on with it.

As for parliamentary scrutiny, of course Parliament ought to have the ability to hold the Executive to account, but believe me, as someone who enjoys endlessly banging on about Europe, there are endless opportunities to scrutinise the Government. I suspect that the sudden surge of interest in parliamentary scrutiny is in fact about seeking to frustrate the referendum result.

Those on the Labour Front Bench have been happy for the past 20 years to use Crown prerogative to hand powers to Brussels. All of a sudden, we see the issue of parliamentary oversight being used, in effect, as a brake—a brake against taking back control, and a brake against bringing our democracy home. Once again, those on the Labour Front Bench side with the supranational élites; they are out to try to frustrate and overturn the way people voted in June. Parliamentary sovereignty is shorthand for the sovereignty of the people. The verdict of the people on 23 June was absolutely clear. It would be perverse to invoke parliamentary oversight and sovereignty as a pretext for dither and delay.

I am absolutely delighted that the Government have tabled amendment (a) and it is an honour to add my name to it. The amendment calls the bluff of those who wanted to use sophistry to frustrate Brexit. Let us stop playing these parliamentary parlour games. Today's vote is non-binding, and I hope Ministers will shortly bring binding votes before the Commons.

Finally, some politicians' approach to Brexit these past few months has been to regard it almost as though the people somehow made a mistake on 23 June. They

[Mr Douglas Carswell]

seem to hold out the hope that we might have a second referendum and—who knows?—presumably assemble a new people. Perhaps, if these efforts to subvert the outcome of the referendum persist, we would find it easier to assemble a new Parliament.

3.53 pm

**Mr Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire) (Con): The conundrum we are facing is that this is the first time in our history that the establishment and the Government of the day, having decided to have a referendum, have got a result that they disagree with. The Labour party's 1975 referendum, and the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish referendums, all delivered a result that was satisfactory to the establishment and the majority in this House. Today, we face the opposite.

Two weeks ago, I was at the annual general meeting of my local National Farmers Union office, and a lady said to me, "What is it about London—what don't they get? We voted to leave. Leave means leave." As a founder member of Vote Leave, I think that we were pretty clear right throughout the campaign about what we wanted—we wanted to take back control. The Government have been pretty clear that they are going to deliver on that.

We wanted to take back control of our money. On my first day at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my Secretary of State's briefing said that we were handing back £642 million of real money because the Commission, under the ECJ, disliked the manner in which the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) had implemented the then CAP reform. So there was I, democratically elected and responsible to this democratic House, with nothing I could do about it. This House began from the principle of deciding what taxes were and who was responsible for them, controlling the monarch of the time, and it still has that fundamental role. The people will get back their role of kicking out politicians who raise taxes and spend them badly, because we do not have that at the moment.

We voted to take back control of our laws. I know about that in spades from my time at DEFRA. About 90% of DEFRA's work is the implementation of European law. I tried manfully in negotiations to work with good allies, but we were outvoted on many occasions, and our farmers are struggling with the latest CAP reform. With many areas of activity competing strongly to be the worst, I would say that the EU's governance of fishing wins, because it has been a catastrophe. Getting back our powers to control our fishing will restore our marine environments and fish stocks, and bring prosperity and wealth back to our most remote marine communities.

**Angela Smith:** I am listening to what the right hon. Gentleman says about the CAP, but does he believe that post-Brexit—in 2019 and 2020—the UK Government should continue to give support to farmers at the levels they are currently receiving? Does he believe that that money should still go to farmers or not?

**Mr Paterson:** Emphatically yes. If the hon. Lady had listened to my speeches during the referendum campaign, she would know that I said, "And, if appropriate, more." What we will now be able to do is to embrace technology.

The EU is becoming the museum of world farming because it is so extraordinarily hostile to technology—and that also applies to fishing.

The hon. Lady has also mentioned immigration—quite rightly. The most angry people I met when I was at DEFRA were the fruit farmers in Essex, Kent and Hereford who had been deprived by the then Home Secretary, now our Prime Minister, who had stopped the seasonal agricultural workers scheme, which brought in 21,250 highly skilled Romanians and Bulgarians before their countries became full members. I worked hard with my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) and the then Home Secretary to see how we could work our way around this. The hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) is absolutely right—we need a supply of skilled labour to work in our horticultural, fruit-picking and vegetable industry, and also in food processing.

At the other end of the scale, I know an eye surgeon whose family—they are Sufi Muslims—came from the United Provinces of India. She gave me, unprovoked—I have clean hands; she started it—the most extraordinary lecture attacking current immigration policy whereby she has to take less qualified, less skilled, less safe and less experienced eye surgeons because they have European passports, and she cannot choose more skilled and safer ones from Bangalore, Hong Kong or San Diego. I would like us to have the choice of the world's workers—whether fruit packers or eye surgeons—on a permit scheme. I wholly endorse the comments of my right hon. Friends the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) and for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) because it would send out a tremendous signal if we stated here and now that there are very large numbers of EU citizens working in our economy who make an enormous contribution. We should give them, up to a certain date, the right of abode, and from then on move to a permit system.

We said that we would take back control of our ability to trade around the world. SNP Members make a huge fuss about the single market and the customs union. We have to leave the single market if we want to come out from under the cosh of the European Court of Justice. The single market does not exist anyway. My noble Friend Lord Bamford recently gave a very good speech in another place saying that there are 10 standards for brake lights on tractors within the current so-called single market. It is a non-problem. People just punch in the information when they go on the production line.

**Joanna Cherry:** I am interested in what the right hon. Gentleman has just said. Can he tell me why the Conservative manifesto, on which his party fought the last election, stated:

"We say: yes to the Single Market"?

**Mr Paterson:** I am speaking for the Vote Leave campaign, which made it very clear that we would not be under the jurisdiction of the ECJ and that we would be able to make trade treaties around the world. Also—this was massively popular during the campaign—if we leave the customs union and get outside fortress Europe, the prices of everyday goods, food and clothing will come down. That will be of massive benefit to our consumers, and it is another example of why this is the establishment against the people.

The same thing is happening in Europe. We saw the results of the referendum in Italy this week, and there will soon be elections in Holland, France and Germany. Opposition Members should wake up to the phenomenon that we have allies in those countries who want what they would call an open Brexit. They want to trade with us, so we should be offering them zero for zero on tariffs.

Ilse Aigner is a senior member of the Christian Social Union in Bavaria with whom I worked extremely closely when she was the federal Agriculture Minister. Only last week, in her role as Economic Affairs Minister for Bavaria, she said to her federal counterpart, "Don't mess up Brexit. We don't want recession in Bavaria; we want to continue selling our products." As well as the 17.4 million people here who voted for Brexit, we have significant interests in Europe on our side.

Quotes have been bandied about—including one that was, I think, a perversion of something that Helmuth von Moltke said—and I close with two. Napoleon, who knew a thing or two about winning battles, said:

"I never had a plan of operations".

Carl von Clausewitz said:

"Pursue one great decisive aim with force and determination."

Good luck to the Government; I will vote for the amendment tonight.

4.1 pm

**Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Lab):** We have to face up to the fact that a growing proportion of our population have lost faith in this place and in our collective ability to address their concerns and offer them hope for a better future. Brexit was a shock-and-awe wake-up call from too many who feel that mainstream politics is broken and does not work for them. Of course, some voted against the notion of pooled sovereignty and the fear of a federal superstate, but many others registered their protest at the state of their everyday lives: stagnant wages; the loss of traditional jobs and the consequential destruction of communities caused by globalisation; the impact of migration; and horrendous continuing inequality, which is something that UKIP has no answers to.

Although many of us believed that we had too much to lose by leaving the European Union, many of our fellow citizens felt they had nothing to lose. I am not the first Member of this House to make these points, but it is astonishing that in the aftermath of the Brexit vote and at a time of alarming levels of support for far-right parties across Europe and elsewhere, mainstream parties in this House appear to have learned nothing. Until the motion was tabled, the Government thought it acceptable to keep their Brexit plans secret from not only Members of the House but the people of this country. The Lib Dems suggest that the referendum result should be overturned via a second referendum. Some senior Labour Front Benchers demonstrate contempt for those who have legitimate concerns about the pace and impact of immigration.

If we are to begin a reconnection with those who have been left behind, it is vital that we demonstrate that we get it. We must have an honest dialogue with people about the unavoidable change that will continue to take place and the difficult choices that we face.

**Mr Carswell:** Will the hon. Gentleman agree with UKIP's long-standing policy by voting in favour of supporting the triggering of article 50 and leaving the European Union?

**Mr Lewis:** I do not think I agree with a single policy that UKIP advocates. The party is about dividing our communities and causing mayhem in terms of community cohesion. It has nothing to say about the inequality in our society.

We must have an honest dialogue with the people. The language of hard and soft—and now, apparently, red, white and blue—Brexit is meaningless to many of our constituents. The Government's shambolic and secretive approach to our negotiating position is cutting our constituents out of some of the most crucial decisions facing the future of our country.

Only this weekend, we saw the farce of the Prime Minister's crackdown on Brexit leaks itself being leaked—an episode worthy of "The Thick of It" and "Yes Minister" combined. My concern that we are alienating large sections of the electorate and playing into the hands of the far right is not simply about the Conservative party. I despair when I hear Labour spokespeople responding to questions about immigration with meaningless platitudes such as, "We need to talk about immigration," or when I listen to Front Benchers who dismiss or deny voters' legitimate concerns. We need a credible policy agenda that does not compromise our internationalist and anti-racist values, but recognises that if people do not believe in open borders, they must show how they will control and manage immigration.

It is entirely consistent to have zero tolerance for the demonisation of immigrants, while believing in the control and management of migration. It is also consistent to assert that integration is an expectation of citizenship and to be crystal clear that it is this country's duty and in our finest traditions to be a safe haven for refugees fleeing violence and repression. None of these things is incompatible with our values, and they are not contradictory.

Finally, we must tackle the grotesque inequality that scars our society. I commend the Governor of the Bank of England for his thoughtful and challenging speech recently about the need for real change. The fact is that the combined impact of globalisation and technology will continue to threaten jobs in our country, and income inequality and stalled social mobility are forming a lethal cocktail. Frankly, this Government are making those issues worse, not better. I remain convinced that it is in our national interest for the UK to be at the heart of the European Union, but the people have spoken and we have to respect their decision. Brexit is a wake-up call that has magnified the growing division in our society. We must not only tackle grotesque levels of inequality, but do politics differently in relation to how we engage with people about the big changes that will continue to affect their lives. The "we know best" era of Government has passed, and the stakes have never been higher for the future of our country and our politics.

4.6 pm

**Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con):** It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis). He made an important point about

[Mr Peter Bone]

reconnecting with the electorate. I entirely agree with him that for too many years Governments have thought that they knew best and have ignored the people. For instance, they have not been willing to engage on the issue of immigration. He is also absolutely right to say that we can want controlled immigration without demonising immigrants.

It is nice to see you back in the Chair again, Mr Speaker. The fact that you are giving so much attention to this debate clearly shows that it is an important one.

I will turn to an aspect of this debate that we have not touched on completely, because it has suddenly started to be about parliamentary sovereignty. As somebody who has always defended the right of Parliament and has been concerned about the power of the Executive, hon. Members would expect me to bang on about that and say that we should have a vote in this House on article 50. In fact, I have always thought we should do so. However, the reason why the Government are right to say that they can use the royal prerogative to trigger article 50 is the unique circumstances of the referendum. This House, in an Act of Parliament, gave the British people the right to decide that question. That is why I absolutely defend the right of the Government to proceed in the way they have thought fit to proceed.

Having said that, the role of Parliament is to deal with all the issues that will come up after we have triggered the process, reflecting the fact that we want to leave the European Union. To the Government's great credit, they are putting on a series of debate on the European Union and Brexit in which hon. Members can make their views known. When the Government go to negotiate, they will therefore know the views of Parliament. It would be totally absurd, however, for the Government to lay down their negotiating hand in advance. It would just be daft. When I was in business, I did not tell the opposition what I wanted in advance of a negotiation. In the same way, the chief spokesman for the European Union has said this week that he will not lay down in advance what the European Union wants.

The most important part of this debate is that we will tonight, I hope, agree a motion telling the Government to trigger article 50 by 31 March. The Supreme Court is saying that that is not enough and there has to be an Act of Parliament.

**Mr MacNeil:** The High Court.

**Mr Bone:** Quite right—that is what the High Court has said. It is possible, of course, that the Supreme Court will agree with the High Court and we will have to have an Act of Parliament, although if the Supreme Court disagrees with the High Court the Government can continue the way they want to, through the royal prerogative.

That is why I have introduced my Withdrawal from the European Union (Article 50) Bill. It is two clauses long. All it does is tell the Government that by 31 March they have to trigger article 50. If that Bill goes through, we will be satisfying the High Court. That Bill will get its Second Reading on 16 December unless anyone objects to it. It will then go into Committee to be discussed and come back to the House on Report. By the time it comes back to the House for Third Reading, the Supreme Court will have given its decision.

**Mr MacNeil:** The hon. Gentleman is quite taken up with the triggering of article 50. It is not so much the triggering that is the major concern, but where the Government are going after that. Are they going for the Norway option that they talked about before the referendum, or for World Trade Organisation rules? What is the destination beyond the trigger point?

**Mr Bone:** The narrow point I am dealing with is the triggering of article 50, which I say has been authorised by the British people. The High Court disagrees. If the Supreme Court endorses that view, we will have to have an Act of Parliament. The hon. Gentleman is right that there are very many things to be negotiated and dealt with afterwards, and they have to come before this House. It has been quite a surprise to me that some Members who have suddenly found that they greatly support parliamentary sovereignty are ex-Ministers and ex-Whips who used to have no time for this place when they were in government. A sinner repenting is wonderful, but—

**Anna Soubry:** Name names!

**Mr Bone:** My right hon. Friend the Member for—I cannot remember what her constituency is—[HON. MEMBERS: “Broxtowe!”] My right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry). It is a juxtaposition for very many people. It is great that people now believe in this place. We should absolutely do what the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) says, and scrutinise the Government as they go through the Brexit process.

**Michael Gove:** May I say, just for the record, that as Chief Whip I had a number of dealings with my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) and she was always vigorously resistant to whipping and the imposition of parliamentary discipline? She remains on the Back Benches, as she was in the ministerial team, a feisty and independent voice whom we should all respect.

**Mr Bone:** I am always glad to be corrected by a former Chief Whip. What my right hon. Friend said is undoubtedly the case.

The important part here is very simple. Tonight we will, I hope, pass a motion that authorises the Government to invoke article 50. [Interruption.] That is what it says. [Interruption.] There is debate about that. Given that there is that debate, the only certainty is through having an Act of Parliament. I therefore look forward to my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe and others being here on 16 December to support my Bill—if anyone wants a copy, I have a few spares—because it would satisfy all the Court's requirements.

The great thing about today is that it is Parliament that is dealing with the matter. It is not a Government motion on the Order Paper but an Opposition one. It is not a Government Bill going through but a private Member's Bill. It is clearly Parliament speaking. I therefore hope that tonight the amendment and the motion are agreed and we can move forward, and then, in about 10 days' time, we can give Second Reading to what this House wants: to trigger article 50.

4.13 pm

**Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone). I simply make the point to him that the negotiations that the Government are involved in are a good deal more complicated than any business negotiation he may have been involved in in the past; simplifying things to that level does not really do justice to the scale of the problem.

I have two points to make. The first concerns the process of negotiation itself. The second is to do with the incoherence of the Government's position.

Before I address those two points, I should say that, although I campaigned to remain in the EU, I accept that the public have spoken and that their view has to be respected. My constituency voted in almost exactly the same way as the national referendum result—narrowly in favour of leaving. Close as it was, I frankly cannot see any democratic way of setting that result aside, and Parliament should respect it regardless of any court decision. If the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) was still in his place, I would say to him that that is not lip service; it is a serious statement, by almost every Member, about where we stand.

My first point is that it is important that the Government's negotiations lead to the best possible outcome in terms of our jobs, economic prosperity, security co-operation and continuing engagement with Europe from outside the EU. I find it odd that the Government have so far been unable to give a clear account of the principles that will frame the negotiations. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) brought that point out very well.

I recently relinquished my membership of the Intelligence and Security Committee. I served on it for over 11 years, so I do understand that, in some circumstances, the state does have to have secrets—for example, on how our intelligence and security agencies work and their capabilities. However, the principles and objectives that govern our Brexit negotiations are the most urgent matter we have confronted in decades. They are an urgent matter of public policy that should be properly debated at every point along the way by this House. It surely follows that, on behalf of the people we represent, we should have an influence on those principles and objectives before anybody concludes the negotiations.

That brings me on to my second point. I am not at all clear whether the Government are committed to a so-called hard Brexit or a soft Brexit. Indeed, we now have two new additions to the terminology: a grey Brexit and a red, white and blue Brexit. I hope the new objective will be a least-damage Brexit. To simplify it, I accept that in terms of trade and the economic impact of leaving we need to get the best possible terms. In reality, soft Brexit means continuing access to the single market, or, at the very least, access to the customs union. However, how that can happen is becoming increasingly incoherent. Strangely, some Ministers—most notably the Secretary of State—are even talking about having to pay for access. I am sure that that would, understandably, cause outrage even among those who, like me, voted to remain.

What I am about to say may not please many people, but it is politically naive to believe that continued access to the single market or the customs union, without corresponding concessions on the free movement of

labour, could be possible. I ask hon. Members to put themselves in the shoes of Angela Merkel or the next President of France as they go back to their countries and say, “Well, we’ve given the UK all the economic concessions and we’ve let them off the hook on the free movement of labour.” That just is not likely.

I accept that we have to have a route map for negotiations and I accept that this is not straightforward—I have already said as much. It cannot be the case, however, that, as a democratically elected Parliament, we can be expected to have no say whatever in the determination of the principles and objectives of those negotiations. I support the amendment to the Opposition motion, but only as a first instalment along that road.

4.18 pm

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth). I endorse in particular his opening remarks. Like him, I am getting somewhat tired of the constant abuse and constant criticism that somehow we are remoaners who want to thwart the will of the people, that we do not accept the result and want to go back on it. We absolutely do accept the result. I do not like the result—yes, I believe the people made a terrible mistake—but I said publicly, as did the right hon. Gentleman, that we would accept and honour the result. We said to people, “If you vote leave, you will get leave.” Would everyone please finally understand and accept that, so that we can move on to the most important thing, which is how we get the very best deal for our country?

I gently say to the Secretary of State, who is no longer in his seat, that he should not be almost deriding me for working with people who sit over there on the Labour Benches, or further down the Benches opposite, or even with the Lib Dems—if any of them are going to take part, which I hope they might. *[Interruption.]* I am looking forward to their one contribution, from the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake). The point is that the Secretary of State should not be criticising me for working with others on this most important of all matters—the most important for a generation and more I would say. When he sat on the Back Benches, of course, he was very happy and willing to work with right hon. and hon. Members opposite on the things that were important to him, and rightly so. This transcends party politics and tribalism.

Most importantly, now is the time for our country to come together. Make no mistake: families and friends are still divided. In my county, as I have said before, levels of hate crime remain 18% higher than this time last year. The way we begin to heal, build bridges and restore our communities, friendships and families is to include that 48% who voted to remain. To be honest, many of them—I include myself—have understandably felt sidelined and ignored and experienced the weight of abuse, whether online or in other places, and we are sick and tired of it. We are entitled to our opinion and we are entitled to express it.

We reach out and say, “We now want to work together with anybody—frankly—in order to get the best deal”. This is not just about my generation. As I enter my seventh decade—[HON. MEMBERS: “No!”] Today's the day. Moving swiftly on. I nearly said, “Everybody's invited to the party”, but that's another matter. In all

[Anna Soubry]

seriousness, it is not about my generation. The decisions we make now will resonate for decades to come and for generations now and in the future, so it is important we get it right, and it is important that we remember those youngsters. The majority of them voted to remain, and the honest truth is that many feel that an older generation has stolen their future. We have got to wake up and recognise that. I remind all hon. Members that the 16 and 17-year-olds of today will be their voters in 2020.

As ever, I am running out of time. I just want to say, in response to the excellent and wise words of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), that I struggle with the concept that we cannot debate these really important matters. With great respect to him, he says that we are leaving the customs union, but are we? Businesses and trade organisations in my constituency want certainty, they want to have a say and they want the right to shape what is best for business and our future.

**Stephen Doughty:** *rose*—

**Anna Soubry:** Ooh, I will give way. I will get an extra minute.

**Stephen Doughty:** It is true that the right hon. Lady has been willing to work across the House on crucial issues, as on the steel industry, on which I was pleased to work with her. She is making the right point about what is best for jobs, businesses, organisations, individuals and universities in our constituencies. That is what many of us are arguing for and what we want answers on, because those are the questions our constituents are asking.

**Anna Soubry:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Businesses and trade organisations in my constituency want certainty and transitional arrangements. Universities and others who employ migrant workers are saying, “What is your new immigration policy going to be, and how do we make sure we have the workers we need?” It is not politically correct to say this, but it is in the interests of British business and workers that we have migrant workers. It is they who make British business so good and who make us the fifth-strongest economy.

**Claire Perry** (Devizes) (Con) *rose*—

**Anna Soubry:** I will not get another minute, but I will give way very quickly.

**Claire Perry:** I just wanted to say this to my right hon. Friend: would it not be the best possible birthday present for her if the House genuinely came together tonight, went through the Lobby in support of the Labour motion and our Government amendment, and showed the country that we can come together for something so important? We are not remoaners; we are bring-it-on Brexiters.

**Anna Soubry:** I am grateful for that comment and all that my hon. Friend says.

I want to say this gently to the Government. I will vote for this, but I am nervous and concerned. On 12 October, this place agreed, without Division, that we would have a series of debates and we would scrutinise

the Government's plans. Thus far, we have had two debates. The first was on workers' rights. I know they are important, but frankly that is a red herring—no pun intended—because the Government have made it absolutely clear, and I take the Secretary of State and our Prime Minister absolutely at their word, that workers' rights will remain entrenched in British law. Truly it is not a great issue.

The second debate was on that grave and weighty matter, “Transport and Brexit”. I am sorry, but this is not good enough. The debates we now need to have are about the value of the single market—let us thrash it out and hear why some say we should not be in it. Let us talk about the customs union and the peril of tariffs. Let us talk about immigration—the positive benefits of it, and some of the downsides, but let us have these debates and, most importantly, let us take part in that in Parliament. We speak for our constituents. We speak for the people.

Let no one use tonight's motion and any vote when it comes to the proceedings in the Supreme Court. I want a White Paper. I want legislation. I want to go through the Lobby and make a difference on our relationship with the EU, to secure a strong future for everybody for generations to come.

4.26 pm

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): It gives me great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), who has been incredibly brave and, as a result of her courage, has faced hideous threats. I am sure that the whole House will want to wish her a happy birthday.

I shall try to focus my remarks on the motion and the Government amendment. I fully support Labour's motion, but for the same reasons as my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), I cannot support the Government amendment. In effect, it gives a blank cheque for us to invoke article 50 by March without any of us being any the wiser about the Government's intentions today.

The Government promise to publish a plan, but it has been clear to me from Government statements and from statements of Conservative Members outside this Chamber in the last 24 hours that that plan will not be the White Paper that the Brexit Secretary once promised. It will not answer the big questions about our vital access to the single market, the rights of UK citizens abroad and EU citizens here, or issues such as tariffs. All the signals from the Prime Minister's speech to her party conference and since have been that the majority of the Government want and are heading for a hard Brexit. In my view, that would be disastrous for jobs and prosperity in my constituency.

In the Labour party conference just a couple of months ago, we agreed as a party:

“Unless the final settlement proves to be acceptable, then the option of retaining EU membership should be retained. The final settlement should therefore be subject to approval, through Parliament and potentially through a general election or referendum.”

I accept that that does not specifically mention article 50, but it is surely explicit that, unless we start arguing now that article 50 is reversible, we should not support its invocation without having any confidence that the Government's Brexit would be acceptable—and I have no such confidence.

I also happen to believe that the timescale that the Government have imposed on themselves is unnecessary, unrealistic and unwise. Michel Barnier, the EU's chief negotiator, said yesterday that it would be completed in 18 months, but the French and German elections mean that no meaningful talks will happen until the autumn of next year. Under the current plan, the talks will have to be completed within 12 months—the most complicated negotiations that this country has ever faced completed in just 12 months.

**Geraint Davies:** Given that the French and the German elections provide a case to delay article 50 and given that we can only negotiate before article 50—because, afterwards, we just give in our membership card and the Government decide—does my right hon. Friend agree that we should delay article 50 until November and then perhaps have a referendum on it?

**Mr Bradshaw:** I do not agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said, but I do think it would make sense for the Government to delay the invocation of article 50 until after the German elections, to give themselves more time to secure a good deal.

The Government have prayed in aid a motion that was agreed by the House, without a Division, on 12 October. The Secretary of State for Brexit prayed it in aid in his speech as well, without making clear that it had said nothing about a March deadline. It is worth my putting that motion on the record. It said:

“this House recognises that leaving the EU is the defining issue facing the UK; believes that there should be a full and transparent debate on the Government's plan for leaving the EU; and calls on the Prime Minister to ensure that this House is able properly to scrutinise that plan for leaving the EU before Article 50 is invoked”.

There was nothing in the motion about a 31 March deadline. It was completely different from today's Government amendment.

It is relatively easy for me, as one who represents a “remain” seat, to oppose the Government in the Division Lobby tonight, but all of us, as Members of Parliament, are called upon to exercise our judgment on what we believe to be in the best interests of our constituents and the nation. I am afraid that I will not submit myself to a straitjacket of a timetable—an artificial timetable—to suit the Conservative party and deal with its internal problems when that would not be in the national interest, which is why I will oppose the Government amendment tonight.

4.31 pm

**Mr Dominic Grieve** (Beaconsfield) (Con): As the Member of Parliament for a constituency that voted narrowly to remain, I have felt ever since the summer that my task is to help my colleagues in the Government to achieve Brexit in a manner that is satisfactory and will lead to the best possible outcome for everyone in the country, and today that is still exactly what I want to do. The difficulty, as I see it, is that what we have heard over the last two months in particular—the vitriolic abuse, the polemical argument without any substance, and the ignorance of some of the basic ABC of our constitution—has reached a point at which I sit in the Chamber and listen to utterances that border on the completely paranoid. The nadir, for me, was to sit one evening and hear a Minister of the Crown—not one of those who are on

the Front Bench today—say that one of the Queen's subjects who was seeking to assert her legal rights in the Queen's courts, and who was, I might add, subjected to death threats as a result, was doing something, or had achieved something, that was unacceptable. If we continue like this, we are on the road to a very bad place.

In my opinion, while my duty as a Member of Parliament is to seek to uphold Brexit and help the Government to achieve it, that does not mean that I must suspend all judgment. On the contrary, we have a clear responsibility to scrutinise legislation, to ask awkward questions, to express our views and, if necessary, to intervene in the process if we think it is going off the rails to such an extent that it is no longer in the national interest. That is why I felt frustrated by the Government's apparent refusal to come up with a coherent plan.

When article 50 is triggered, we shall be embarking on a process which, in reality, the Government themselves will have great difficulty in controlling. I certainly do not take the view that it is the duty of the House to micromanage the Government, and it has certainly never occurred to me that we should lay down prescriptive rules for what the Government should be trying to achieve, along the lines feared, I think, by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin). I do not think that that is realistic. However, I do think we are entitled to know what the Government are intending to achieve, in broad terms, so that we can debate it and influence it. Some Members may then have to accept that they are in a small minority in respect of some of the legitimate issues that we can debate within the parameters of Brexit itself, and then help to sustain the Government as they go ahead with their work. The fact that the Government have that mandate and have the approval of the House, will, in my view, help them immeasurably in their negotiations.

**Sir Oliver Letwin:** My right hon. and learned Friend is making a powerful speech. Does he agree that if this House and the other place sought to amend the triggering legislation, that would have the effect of making the mandate justiciable?

**Mr Grieve:** It depends on whether we were seeking to limit the mandate in carrying out amendments. As I have not seen what the Government are proposing by way of primary legislation, I have no idea to what extent it might or might not be amendable, but it certainly would not have crossed my mind that one of the sorts of amendments I should produce would involve creating justiciable targets. I think my right hon. Friend knows me well enough from my time as a Law Officer to know that my views about declaratory legislation and targets are probably fairly unprintable—and certainly unutterable in this Chamber—and I do not recommend it to anybody.

On the question of where we are going after that and considering the issues around Brexit, I simply point out that some of the things said, even today by Government Members who I respect, seem to me to be rather fanciful. We have heard a lot about the sovereignty issue requiring us to withdraw from the European Court of Justice. I have to gently point out that if we are going to stay within the mechanisms of justice and security, which the Secretary of State said he believed was in the national interest, although our withdrawal from the EU

[*Mr Grieve*]

will mean we will no longer be subject to the direct effect of the ECJ, decisions of the ECJ on interpreting the treaty will continue potentially to have force on us in this country. That is not surprising because we are signed up to over 800 international treaties which have arbitral mechanisms for resolving disputes.

So unless we start getting out of this fantasy element about Europe as a pariah entity, we are not going to start getting down to a realistic assessment of what it is in our national interest to remain adherent to and what it is in our national interest to withdraw from, even though we will be outside the EU and therefore not subject, for example, to direct effect at all.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** My right hon. and learned Friend's last point is exactly the point: if we have left the EU, judgments of the ECJ will have the same effect as judgments of the WTO arbitration court. They will not be automatically law of this land and will be subject to Parliament, which is a fundamental change.

**Mr Grieve:** It is indeed a fundamental change, and I am delighted my hon. Friend is pleased and that appeals to him, but I have to say this from listening to some of the things said this afternoon: the logic of what my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) in particular was saying was that we would have to withdraw from all the 800 treaties that were subject to any arbitral mechanism because they undermined our sovereignty. This is the kind of issue in debate we have got to start to sort out, because the public out there expect us at least to have some degree of expertise about what we are actually trying to do, and to go and explain it against the background, as I said earlier, of vitriolic abuse against anybody who is prepared to raise their voice to put forward any argument that appears to be counter to the fantastical vision some have created out of our leaving the EU.

Another example is the situation with regard to the WTO. I may be wrong but I think joining, or rejoining, the WTO requires a negotiation with 163 countries, including an agreement with the EU.

**Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

**Mr Grieve:** I will not give way as I must finish.

So that WTO negotiation will also be a matter of great complexity.

The one thing I am satisfied we are not doing tonight is validating the triggering of article 50 without more debate. First, it is quite likely that we will have to do it by way of primary legislation, but even if we do not, the Government would be wise to come back to this House and get the endorsement, as they would be entitled to do, once they have engaged in the type of debate that will enhance this House's reputation and help us to do our jobs properly.

4.38 pm

**Heidi Alexander** (Lewisham East) (Lab): It is a genuine pleasure to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who has made a characteristically thoughtful and informed speech.

This is the first occasion on which I have made a speech on the subject of the EU since the referendum. I have stayed away from previous debates in this Chamber because I felt conflicted—conflicted by my personal views and political instincts, and conflicted by my constituency's large vote to remain and my country's narrow vote to leave. I was a fervent campaigner for remain, and I believe that the British public were failed in the referendum by an exaggerated and embarrassing debate. I deeply regret my own failure as the then shadow Health Secretary to expose the lie that Brexit would automatically mean more cash for the NHS. But we are where we are: 16 million people voted to remain, 17 million voted to leave, and 13 million people who could have voted chose not to do so.

I stand by my long-held view that leaving the EU will be economically harmful, socially divisive and fundamentally detrimental to our country's relationships with its closest neighbours. If I could see a positive way through this that would respect the referendum result and leave our country economically and socially stronger, I would grasp it, but at the moment I cannot. On that basis, I cannot see how I could vote to trigger article 50 without a credible plan setting out the Government's approach to the negotiations, their high-level aspirations and the process that will be in place thereafter. The strength of the plan is critical, and I will not sign up to an arbitrary timetable set by the Government to placate their own Back Benchers.

We need basic answers to basic questions. Is the Government's ultimate priority continued tariff-free access to the single market or an end to freedom of movement? They might wish to keep up the pretence that they can have both, but the mood music from Europe suggests otherwise. Tariff-free trade with the EU has to be the priority, and if that means we have to accept immigration from within the EU, so be it.

**Mr Lilley:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Heidi Alexander:** I will not give way. I have come here to set out my position, and that is what I will do. If retaining tariff-free trade with the EU means that we have to pay significant sums to access the single market, so be it. Would this be a better arrangement than we have at present? Good question. So yes, I support a second referendum on the terms of leaving the EU.

The reason that we are trying to conjure up a positive economic future for our country outside the EU is to deal with the issue of immigration. I accept that a good number of the people who voted in June to leave the EU did so because they wanted to control or reduce immigration. I understand that when decent jobs and decent homes are scarce and public services are under pressure, some people look around for someone to blame, but although it might be unpopular, I say that we are going to need immigration for some time to come. We are not having enough babies, and we have not been for decades. I am a 41-year-old woman without children. Babies grow up to be taxpayers who fund public services. Who will be contributing to my pension and my care in 30 years' time? The answer is immigrants and their children. I have no fixation with freedom of movement, and if other EU states were up for modifying it, I would be up for the conversation, but it makes no sense to take the economic hit of leaving the single market to curb immigration when we have a basic need for it.

I would also say that if anyone thinks we should extend the system we apply to immigrants from outside the EU to those from within it, we should be honest and admit that we would be expanding a broken system that causes sclerosis in the economy because of the turgid way in which immigration applications are processed and that exerts no control over people who overstay their visas. However, my fundamental concern about prioritising immigration over all else is that we run the risk of whipping up even more of the intolerance, division and—let us be honest—hatred that we saw in the referendum campaign.

4.43 pm

**Crispin Blunt** (Reigate) (Con): I come to this debate straight after returning from the United States, where I have spent three days meeting Congressmen, and I can say that the remarks made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) are absolutely right. There is terrific support in Congress for a free trade deal between the United Kingdom and the United States, and that view is shared by the President-elect. There is a terrific world of opportunity out there as we view our emerging role in the world.

Last week at Chatham House, the Foreign Secretary gave the first in a series of speeches outlining our global role. I recommend it to right hon. and hon. Members because it should lift their eyes from the rather parochial preoccupation with the British plan. The point that I was trying to make in my intervention on the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), was not that I somehow think that Europeans are the enemy. Of course I do not, and anyone who knows me knows that I do not believe that. I was making a graphic point about the plan. The whole quote goes on to say:

“When your plan meets the real world, the real world wins. Nothing goes as planned. Errors pile up. Mistaken suppositions come back to bite you. The most brilliant plan loses touch with reality.”

I do not see any particular difficulty in discerning the key elements of the British plan. I heard nothing from Opposition Members or anyone else to suggest that we should not be taking back sovereign control of immigration, which was a key issue in the vote. That does not have any implications for what immigration policy will mean, but the idea that this process of leaving the European Union will end without this House having sovereign control of immigration is for the birds. Everyone understands that, but that result has implications.

We have heard in recent days from Michel Barnier and from the German Chancellor, who have made it perfectly clear that we will not be allowed to cherry-pick our relationship with the European Union. This is where we come to the key element in the negotiations. Were we to cherry-pick, we would of course want full access to the single market on current terms and sovereign control over immigration, but we would not want to pay into the budget or to have the European Court of Justice overseeing our courts. There is room to manoeuvre in all this, such as around money and what items in the relationship we might think it appropriate for the ECJ to adjudicate on, but my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) made the point that that relationship would be different from the one we have now.

The problem in the negotiation lies not on our side; the 27 states have an immensely difficult task. Their interests lie in the continuation of the closest possible relationship with the United Kingdom. Their interests are in our making sense of a continued British engagement in the EU's common foreign and security policy. Ireland's interests are absolutely engaged in this discussion. A difficult deal for the United Kingdom is a catastrophic deal for the Republic of Ireland.

**Mr MacNeil:** I met the Irish Foreign Minister this morning, and one of the concerns that I left with was the possibility of Northern Ireland being encircled by the sea and a hard border. That is a real possibility, particularly if we end up on WTO terms, because there is no plan from any side to say that that would be dealt with in the island of Ireland.

**Crispin Blunt:** The hon. Gentleman, who now chairs the International Trade Committee, will be out of work if we remain in the customs union on the same basis, so the fact that he has a Department to oversee sends a firm signal that we are going to be negotiating our own trade agreements.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, because the interests of the Irish Republic are so tied up with a successful Brexit for the United Kingdom, we will have one ally in the negotiations? The same could apply to a whole range of nations across the EU.

**Crispin Blunt:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. However, the principal nations of the EU, which are facing populist insurgencies in their politics, are anxious about the message that is sent. If the UK gets a really good deal, that will encourage other movements to seek the same arrangements for themselves. They have an explicit choice to make between their interests, which with the current balance of trade are to continue trading with the UK as we are, and the political message that might be sent.

**Mr Grieve:** I agree with my hon. Friend's analysis, but is it not also the case that the whole negotiating thing is about human relations, and the difficulty that we face at the moment is that the message we put out to our European partners is deeply offensive, which is going to make securing our deal with them much harder?

**Crispin Blunt:** My right hon. and learned Friend is, of course, absolutely right. We have to try to take the temperature down, which is why people should not exploit it when I may have said something inadvertently and I was actually saying something totally different. We are talking about our allies—most of them allies within NATO—and, in the words of the Foreign Secretary, we need to be a “flying buttress” to the future of the European Union from the outside. One reason I supported Brexit is my belief that the UK will have a much happier relationship with the nations of the EU by being outside and having engaged their support, rather than by having to fight battles as our interests diverge from those of the states that had the currency. We could see that that was going to happen over the decades. Our country has taken this decision in its medium and long-term interests, and it should be seen in that guise. It is on the other side

[Crispin Blunt]

of the table that the principal negotiating challenge sits, as the 27 nations have to reconcile all this. My right hon. and learned Friend may say that the interpretation of positions from here is difficult, but Mr Barnier and Chancellor Merkel made a mistake in rejecting the reciprocal arrangement to try to address the situation of EU citizens here and UK citizens there, and in saying that nothing must be agreed until everything is agreed. That has played into the British position, which is helpful, as we have very much to offer the EU and it needs—

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

4.51 pm

**Andy Burnham** (Leigh) (Lab): The sad context for today's debate is that far from coming back together as a country since the referendum, we are probably more divided than ever. The blame for that lies not with the public, but with the way in which Parliament and the Government have responded in the six months since. In the referendum, the public were issuing a sharp rebuke to the political class, which they feel does not listen to them and is not straight with them, but what has the Government's response been? They have been saying that they want to keep the citizens of this country in the dark about their plans for Brexit so as not to give anything away to the other side—or, as the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) said, “the enemy”. That is simply unacceptable. In these anti-politics times, it is hard to imagine a more politically inept approach.

**Crispin Blunt:** Let me just correct that. I did not say that they are the enemy and I made it crystal clear in the speech I have just given that that is not my position. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to wind the temperature up in this debate, he can go on like that, but I suggest that everyone should try to calm it.

**Andy Burnham:** The hon. Gentleman used the phrase “the enemy” and he needs to clarify what he meant by that. I do not think it helped to raise the tone of this debate.

The Government's politically inept approach of saying that they can keep the public in the dark has, first, bred suspicion among remain and leave voters alike, making them think a fix is going on. Secondly, it has cast the negotiation in an unnecessarily aggressive light and has fuelled even more bad feeling towards Britain among its EU partners, in turn meaning that it will now be more difficult to get a favourable deal once article 50 has been triggered. At the moment, we are not getting a hard Brexit or a soft Brexit, but a botched Brexit. For all our sakes, the Government need to get their act together, which is why I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) on forcing their hand.

**Mr MacNeil** *rose*—

**Andy Burnham:** I will make some progress. Today needs to mark the beginning of a new phase in the Brexit debate. It is time to move beyond the re-running of the referendum arguments and accept what people voted for. The 700,000 people in Greater Manchester who voted to leave, many of them lifelong Labour

voters, voted for change on immigration. I am clear about that, and it has to be our starting point in this debate. The status quo—full free movement—was defeated at the ballot box, so it is not an option. What is to be debated is the precise nature of the changes that replace it, so that we get the balance right between responding properly to the public's legitimate concerns and minimising the impact on our economy.

**Callum McCaig:** The right hon. Gentleman's party is suggesting that leaving the customs union was not on the ballot paper, so how come free movement of people was on the ballot paper? It simply was not. The ballot paper asked whether we should leave the EU or not.

**Andy Burnham:** I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he speaks to the public and listens to what they had to say during the referendum campaign. If he is saying that they were not voting for change on free movement and immigration, I am afraid that he simply was not listening to them.

I have long argued for a change in the system of free movement to reflect people's concerns. As it stands, it is not working for the more deprived parts of our country, particularly those where traditional industry has been replaced by lower-skill, lower-wage employment. My preference was to work within the EU to fix those problems, but the country, understandably, lost patience with that approach.

Free movement does not affect all places in the same way; it affects cities differently from former industrial areas. It has also made life more difficult in places where it is already hardest. These are areas that got no real hope from the Government when traditional industry left and that saw house prices collapse and whole streets bought up by absent private landlords. They are places that, alongside taking new arrivals from the EU, continue to take in the vast majority of this country's asylum seekers and refugees. Largely they do so without any real strife or difficulty, so I do not want to hear anyone claim that people in places such as Leigh who voted to leave are in any way xenophobic or racist. They are welcoming, generous people, but they also want fairness, and they do not think that it is fair that the country's least well-off communities should expect pressure on wages, housing, public services, primary schools and GP services without any help to manage it.

**Steve Rotheram** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): I agree with my right hon. Friend that it is certainly not xenophobic or racist to call out unscrupulous employers who are causing some of the problems in our working-class areas by allowing the undercutting of wages, which is causing resentment from people who work in traditional industries such as the construction sector. Is not that what we really need to understand? We hear it constantly on the doorstep.

**Andy Burnham:** That is precisely the issue that neither Europe nor, let us be honest, this Parliament was addressing. Free movement was being used to undermine skilled wages and we did not do enough about it. We have to be honest about that.

People in my constituency want to continue to welcome people here who contribute to our society, but they want an immigration system that affords greater control

and reduces the numbers. I believe that that is what we must work towards. The left across Europe has got to break out of its paralysis on this issue. The fear of being labelled as “pandering” stops people entering the debate, but it also stops progressive ideas that meet the public’s concerns and leaves the pitch clear for those with right-wing solutions.

I want to set out two principal reasons why there is a legitimate left-wing case for reform. First, in an era of increasing globalisation, free movement has arguably been providing greater benefit to large companies than it has to the most deprived communities. There is nothing socialist about a system of open borders that allows multinationals to treat people as commodities and to move them around Europe to drive down labour costs and create a race to the bottom.

Secondly, there is a strong case for saying that the immigration system that has developed over time in this country is inherently discriminatory—it does not treat all migrants equally. Instead, it accords a preferential status to migrants from our nearest neighbours in the context of a policy that seeks to cap numbers. That, therefore, discriminates against those non-EU migrants who seek to come here and who have families here.

My call to this side of the House is to put forward a plan that treats all people equally and that applies progressive principles to migration. We need to make the argument for an immigration system that allows greater control and that reduces the numbers coming here, but that does so in a fair way. This would be a system that treats all migrants equally, that does not allow people’s wages to be undercut, as my hon. Friend said, and, crucially, that continues to welcome people from Europe and around the world to work here. Those are progressive principles that can form the basis of a new immigration policy for the left.

It is time for many of us on this side of the House to confront a hard truth: our reluctance in confronting this debate is undermining the cohesion of our communities and the safety of our streets. I am no longer prepared to be complicit in that. We need answers to the public’s concerns, but answers that are based on hope, not hate.

4.59 pm

**Mr Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I found the speech by the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) rather refreshing. I submit that democracy is an awesome thing. When the tide turns in the minds of the voters, it is refreshing to see their democratically elected representatives turning as well. I wish him well in advancing a humane case for a humane and sensible immigration policy.

We have to acknowledge that this is a fraught moment—for some, it is painful—in our history, as the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) demonstrated. We need to take on board the points made about healing divisions and adopting the right tone. The House should look at the continuum of our history: a whole millennium of this nation. Our successors will look back on this short period in which we were a member of the EU very differently. We have been in this organisation for only 43 years, which is a tiny span of our history. We debate it hotly now, but all the controversy will pass, and we will look back with much more equanimity than we feel today.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that as we bring the country together it is important that people do not look for possible or imaginary problems, because we want the strongest possible position to negotiate the best possible answer for the country, and we need to unite to do so?

**Mr Jenkin:** I wholly agree with my right hon. Friend.

The Latin monetary union was formed in 1865 in Europe and lasted for 62 years, but has been completely forgotten. It is never discussed. It came and went, and I think that we will come to see our EU membership, barely longer than a generation, in the same way.

There are two aspects to the motion. First, the Government will produce a plan—we all agree about that now. I do not think it came as a surprise that the Government conceded that point. Secondly, it seems that most Members will vote for the invocation of article 50 by 31 March 2017. We can demonstrate to the country that there is a great measure of consensus, but it prompts the question why there is a court case, and why the courts have chosen to become involved, particularly once the motion is carried. We do not need a court to tell the House that it is sovereign. The House could stop Brexit whenever it wanted, as it could stop anything else that a Government do if it chose to do so. It is unfortunate that a different kind of judiciary is developing, as I do not think that Parliament ever voted for that. We await the outcome of the Supreme Court ruling with respect and great interest to see if that is the kind of judiciary that we want.

**Mr MacNeil:** Does the hon. Gentleman share concerns about the headlong rush to trigger article 50? Given that there may be 12 months of negotiations, if there is no deal in place the UK might find itself trading under WTO conditions, which would not be beneficial, particularly in the agricultural sector but also in a whole host of other activities. Has he thought about the consequences? I think that industry is not suitably engaged and is not demanding from Government the conditions in which it wants the UK to trade after 2019.

**Mr Jenkin:** The hon. Gentleman will find that a great deal of industry is quietly preparing for the possibility that there will not be an agreement. It is much more adaptable than many of us in the House. It is much more able to deal with change than many of us in government. What we are seeking in the plan is less complexity and less uncertainty, because that is what preoccupies people. Some people are talking up the complexity—some people want more uncertainty—to try to make a point. However, we have an opportunity in the plan to have less complexity and less uncertainty. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley) made it clear that the Prime Minister has cleared up a great deal of uncertainty, but that many in the opposition choose not to hear.

As for the aim of the article 50 agreement, it should be to put as little in the agreement as possible. If we want an agreement, let us not overload the process. Let us keep to the bare minimum. Let us try to shorten the timeframe. I was encouraged that Michel Barnier, the negotiator at the European Commission, wants to shorten the period of negotiations. Perhaps the European Commission is beginning to feel the pressure from

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business and people outside politics who want us to get on with this process, not drag it out and make it take 10 years or some of the more ridiculous suggestions.

We should be in a position to make a generous offer in our opening bid, which I expect to be included in the White Paper. It is worth reminding ourselves what the treaties invite the EU to do. Article 8 of the treaty on European Union states:

“The Union shall develop a special relationship with neighbouring countries, aiming to establish an area of prosperity”.

The EU should read its own treaties before it starts its negotiation. Article 3.5 says that in its relations with the wider world, the EU

“shall contribute to peace, security . . . mutual respect among peoples”

and

“free and fair trade”.

Our opening pitch should be very simple. We should make an offer—a zero/zero offer: we will give EU countries zero tariffs on their exports to our country, if they will give us zero tariffs on their imports from us. That is in everyone's interest. It is in the interest of jobs on the continent and in the United Kingdom.

We should also offer an opportunity for mutual recognition of services agreements, so that we can continue trading in services, as we do now. That, again, would be in everybody's interest. We want the European Union to have access to the global financial capital and we want to be able to trade in the European Union in the same way. Of course we will offer continued co-operation, as the Secretary of State said, in justice and home affairs, security and defence, and foreign policy. We want to be the good neighbours.

Finally, the repeal Bill can be simple, unless people choose to make it complicated to try to carry on scoring points. The European Communities Act is a few clauses long. We need a repeal Bill of only a few clauses, setting out the principles by which we leave. It is worth reminding ourselves that the Czech Republic and Slovakia were one country and within six months of deciding to split, they split, and they are better friends now than they ever were before. That is the kind of relationship that I look forward to having with our European partners. Let us move it along quickly. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will do a quicker deal and offer a quick Brexit in everyone's interests, to reduce the uncertainty and keep things simple.

5.6 pm

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) asked what kind of judiciary we want. Well, we want a judiciary that is independent and will not be brow-beaten by the likes of the *Daily Mail*.

We should thank Labour for initiating this debate today. When the Leader of the House, standing in at Prime Minister's questions, was asked about this, he took credit on behalf of the Government for the debate taking place today. The Government cannot share the credit for this debate, although they should, of course, have initiated such a debate in their own time.

Labour may take some satisfaction from securing from the Prime Minister a promise to publish a rather sketchy plan before article 50 is invoked, but in the words of the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), this is thin gruel. How many hours before article 50 is invoked will the plan be published? Will there be any time to debate it, challenge the Government on it or vote on it? Will the plan be a White Paper or a Green Paper? Will it amount to anything more than “Brexit means Brexit”, “no running commentary” and now “a red, white and blue Brexit”, another meaningless phrase to add to the lexicon of Brexit platitudes that masquerade as policy?

Where is the guarantee that the people will be able to vote on the destination as well as the departure? The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) said in his speech earlier that destination and departure are the same thing. I do not know about him, but when I catch a train, I do not arrive at the same place at the end of my journey. Why do people need a vote on the destination as well as on the departure? Because whatever rough outline of a deal the Government manage to secure towards the end of the two years of negotiations after article 50 has been invoked, we can be certain that a majority will not be happy. The 48% clearly will not be happy; what of the 52%?

**John Redwood:** Has the right hon. Gentleman taken the trouble to listen to the statements, to come to the several debates that the Government have put on and to read the Prime Minister's very full speech on the subject at the party conference and all the other statements that made it very clear what our negotiating aim is—good access to the single market and the freedom of this country back again.

**Tom Brake:** No doubt that is the position that the right hon. Gentleman has adopted today, and he may have done so consistently over a number of months, but there are many others here in very senior positions who adopt a different position on a daily basis.

**James Heappey** (Wells) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Tom Brake:** No. I will continue because I know that others who have been waiting a very long time also want to speak in the debate.

How many of the 52% will be happy if, for instance, the Government secure a deal that requires the UK to pay a substantial amount to the EU budget—not just the relatively small sums that might be required to stay in, for instance, Erasmus or Horizon 2020, but the larger amounts that might be required to secure privileged access to the single market? That is why the Government are going to need public support on this issue, and that is why the Liberal Democrats have tabled an amendment that would allow people to have a say on the final deal.

As I stated, there is no indication of what the plan will actually include, yet we as Members of Parliament are expected to bind ourselves to triggering article 50, no matter what, at an arbitrary date. The High Court has made it clear that Parliament must have a proper role in this process, and that does not mean signing away any right to scrutiny in exchange for the shallowest

of promises from a Government that cannot hack any questioning of their motives, strategy or direction. We will not allow ourselves to be bullied into this, and all Opposition parties—and some Members, I hope, on the Government Benches—should resist that. The Liberal Democrats will vote against the Government amendment and the motion, if amended. We cannot support a parliamentary stitch-up that would deny the people a vote on the final deal and straitjacket Members of Parliament in an arbitrary timetable.

I call on the Labour party to remember that it is the official Opposition; it should not cave in to Conservative attempts to deny the public a final say on the most important question facing the country in a generation—it should not be muzzled. It is now clear that the Liberal Democrats are the real Opposition to the Conservative Brexit Government. We are striving to keep Britain open, tolerant and united.

5.11 pm

**Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): I am grateful to follow the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake). I rise to give the Government my complete support.

**Kwasi Kwarteng** (Spelthorne) (Con): First time.

**Mr Baker:** No, it is not the first time—I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

I want to pick up on what the Secretary of State said—that there are none so deaf as those who will not hear. I will go on to talk about what else might be said, but, first, what has the Prime Minister said? In particular, she has said:

“Our laws made not in Brussels but in Westminster.

Our judges sitting not in Luxembourg but in courts across the land.

The authority of EU law in this country ended forever.”

Of the deal, she has said:

“I want it to include cooperation on law enforcement and counter-terrorism work.

I want it to involve free trade, in goods and services.

I want it to give British companies the maximum freedom to trade with and operate within the Single Market—and let European businesses do the same here.

But let's state one thing loud and clear: we are not leaving the European Union only to give up control of immigration all over again. And we are not leaving only to return to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. That's not going to happen.”

So the Prime Minister has said a great deal, and it has been supplemented elsewhere.

One thing I particularly welcome is my right hon. Friend's work to secure reciprocal rights for those EU citizens currently resident in the UK and for those British citizens currently resident in the EU. What we have learned through the press is that 20 member states seem to have agreed to her framework arrangements, but that the Chancellor of Germany and EU officials at the most senior levels are obstructing that—indifferently and intransigently—when they could actually put people's minds at ease by agreeing with our Prime Minister.

**Sir William Cash:** Does my hon. Friend accept that what goes with the Prime Minister's very clear statements is that jurisdiction returns here? After the negotiations

and the repeal, we will bring in our own Bill to deal, for example, with immigration and with a whole range of other matters. It will be this jurisdiction that deals with those things, not the European jurisdiction.

**Mr Baker:** I fully accept that. In fact, together with the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who spoke a few minutes ago, I very much hope that we are able to deliver a much more equal immigration policy, which treats people much more fairly, from wherever they may come.

On the point about reciprocal rights, I particularly pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson). Although he has not long been in the House, he has been absolutely indefatigable on this issue, and I look forward to seeing what else he has to say.

On the EEA and the customs union, I refer to the argument of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley), who made the case brilliantly. We cannot stay in the customs union if we want tariff-free trade with other parts of the world. We cannot stay in the EEA if we want 80% of our economy to be subject to new free trade arrangements with the rest of the world, because one has to put one's domestic regulation on the table. Therefore, the implication of what the Prime Minister has said—that we are going to be a beacon of free trade—is that we must leave both.

**John Redwood:** Does my hon. Friend agree that there is absolutely no need to pay these countries anything, because they need to trade with us and I am sure they are not going to pay us?

**Mr Baker:** I do agree. It would be quite wrong for us to pay a market access fee. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) said, they sell us more than we buy from them, so perhaps they should be paying us a fee. Of course, the facetious nature of his remark, if I may say so, indicates the fallacy at work. It is one thing for us to cover the costs of programmes in which we participate but quite another simply to pay for the privilege of selling.

I offer some other things that the Government might consider saying, and that would not harm our position, when they set out their framework agreement. We could state our intentions on third-country passporting for deemed equivalence and mutual recognition, particularly in relation to the financial services industry. I recommend the Legatum Institute Special Trade Commission's report on that subject. We could say that our withdrawal agreement will cover trade and non-trade aspects of our relationship, including, in particular, those covered in the magisterial 1,000-page document from Business for Britain. No one can say that there was not plenty of high-quality research available before the vote. We could say that we will have mutual recognition of products, standards, licences and qualifications. We could explain trade facilitation. We could talk about territorial waters and our intentions there. We could talk about our intentions for the aggregate measure of support in agriculture.

The Government could explain how the great repeal Bill will work, how transposition of EU law into UK law will work, what will happen when something needs to be amended or repealed and what exceptions there

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will be. I believe we can do much better on competition law—in particular, in driving out anti-competitive market distortions—than the EU currently does. We could explain our process for trade deal ratification. We need to say more about how WTO rectification will work. There has already been a written ministerial statement, but more can be said.

We need to explain to our trading partners all around the world our willingness to liberalise, to be more free-trading and to ensure that we are able to lift out of poverty people in some of the poorest agricultural regions of the world who are currently excluded from trading in a proper manner.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** Speak for decency.

**Mr Baker:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. We need to help those people to build their way out of poverty through trade.

I would like to give the Government an example of a form of words that could be used to reassure industry. If I make mistakes on this, they are my own, but this is derived from some advice from a trade negotiation lawyer. We could say: “The terms of our withdrawal agreement will ensure no UK-owned or UK-based manufacturer will be disadvantaged by our exit. Both EU and UK manufacturers seek tariff and barrier-free access to each other’s markets, and we will seek to deliver it with a broad, deep and permanent free trade agreement. We intend that manufacturers in the UK will either pay no tariffs or that they will have the opportunity to take advantage of a fully WTO-compliant tariff drawback system. UK manufacturing, after we leave the EU, will be more successful, more competitive, and lower-cost.” If the Government made that statement, everyone would begin to understand that our future will be far brighter once we have left the European Union, taken back control and made our own way.

I leave the House with this thought: the Legatum Institute Special Trade Commission proposes that, if we implement the very best in contemporary trade practice, we can add an extra 50% to gross world product in the next 15 years. That means unemployment at 2% in the UK, no deficit and billions of people lifted out of poverty.

5.19 pm

**Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): I rise to speak in support of my constituents, the people of Bristol West. Four out of five of them voted to remain, but they are all democrats. We have been dealt nothing but uncertainty by the Government, and that uncertainty cannot go on, because it is not good enough. It is already affecting businesses and individuals in Bristol West, and I will fight for them.

The big employers in my constituency—the university, the aerospace industry, the financial services sector and the healthcare system—all depend on the current free movement of labour and harmonisation of regulations across the EU. That may not sound sexy, but it is really important. The cost of imports and raw materials has gone up as the pound has sunk. The university and the tech and creative sectors have told me that they are being cut out of collaborative research and development proposals funded by Horizon 2020 and other streams.

We do not know whether the Government will protect EU workers’ rights and environmental protection and bring them into UK legislation.

I passionately support the current free—or, rather, reciprocal—movement of people around the European Union. That provision has helped our industries, and I want it to be part of where we end up. I welcome and value all the EU citizens working in Bristol, and I know well the benefits for the UK when people from the UK are able to live, work, study and retire in other EU countries. There is complete uncertainty for all those people. They are not bargaining chips; they are people.

Young people, as the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) has said, feel betrayed by this decision. They have told me that they feel as though we have thrown away their futures. I have also heard from industry that the harmonisation of regulations between the UK and the EU for our key industries must be part of what we end up with for them to trade freely; that is something other Members have spoken about. I want the UK to retain its right to apply for funds from Horizon 2020, to help us to remain in our position as a place that has among the best university provision in the world.

Many of us, from all parts of the House, feel we are economically better off being a full part of the single European market than being out of it. Anyone in the world can trade with the single European market. I want us, and businesses in my constituency want us, to do that as full members without tariffs and barriers. That is a choice that the Government could take.

**John Redwood:** Did the hon. Lady learn anything from the referendum majority view? Does she not understand that a lot of people think that we are inviting too many people in, which makes it difficult to have good public services and decent wages?

**Thangam Debbonaire:** I have heard the result of the referendum, but I also know that there are 33,000 people from EU countries working in our NHS at the moment and that they face complete uncertainty, as does the NHS.

Labour has forced the Government to climb down today. Without the leadership shown by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), the Government would have continued to refuse to give this House any information about their overall aims for the UK’s relationship with the EU. Now they have had to commit to providing that information before they trigger article 50, and I thank my hon. and learned Friend for that. The Supreme Court may yet rule that the Government also have to give Parliament the right to vote on the matter, and I hope that it does so. The Government could end that uncertainty today and cut the expense of this court case by deciding to commit to giving this House full scrutiny and a vote.

My inbox is rammed with emails from constituents asking me to resist article 50, and I believe that that is, in large part, because of the absence of a good plan for Brexit. My constituents are not unreasonable. They know that 52% of those who voted in June voted to leave, but they want the views of the 48% to be represented in this process. I will do that unstintingly, because to do otherwise would be to allow a tyranny of the majority, which I do not believe is worthy of this House. My constituents deserve to know what the plan is; whether

it will help or hinder our jobs, our industries, our environment and our standing in the world; and, above all, what will happen to our reciprocal movement of people, about which people are left with great uncertainty.

When I went out of my front door this morning, I may not have been certain exactly which bus I would get, but I knew the route it needed to take me on. I knew which bus stop to start at. I did not just get on any old bus without looking at the number and checking that it was going where I intended to go. I cannot ask my constituents in Bristol West to get on an unnumbered bus, and I do not think that hon. Members representing people who voted with the majority to leave want their constituents to get on an unnumbered bus either.

Whether people voted leave or remain in June, they did not vote to lose their jobs; they did not vote to lose trans-border co-operation over terrorism; and they did not vote to dirty our beaches and rivers by removing our protection from pollution and our protection for the air. For the sake of everyone, whether leave voters or remainers, we need to see the plan—not the full negotiating strategy, but the plan.

**Mike Gapes:** I agree entirely with what my hon. Friend is saying, but is there not also a problem in that, in their amendment, the Government are proposing we start the process of leaving the European Union on or by 31 March? We know that there will be elections in Germany, the Netherlands and France and that real negotiations cannot start then, so the period will be limited.

**Thangam Debbonaire:** I understand the point my hon. Friend makes, but I believe my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras has secured a good deal for us. It is not certain, and some of my constituents will want to know why I am voting the way I am voting tonight, but I will vote with the Labour shadow Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union because I support what he has done to get this Government to make their plan clear. If, to get that, I have to agree to vote for what seems like a very sulky Government amendment, then so be it. It is worth making such a compromise because my constituents in Bristol West deserve to know and want to know what the plan is. Local campaigning organisations in Bristol—they have campaigned strongly for and supported Europe—have created and adopted a petition with some key demands and are circulating it, and I support them in doing so.

I ask the Government to get on with answering these questions for the sake of the people of Bristol West and of the whole UK. This Government are trying to avoid scrutiny, but Labour are holding them to account. I will continue to stand up for the industries, the jobs and, above all, the people of Bristol West. The Opposition will hold the Government to the agreement to bring their plan to this House for scrutiny and a vote, and if that plan is non-existent or inadequate, I will vote against article 50. I owe that to my constituents and to the country.

5.26 pm

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire), who is a near

constituency neighbour of mine, although I cannot say I am in agreement either with her or with most of her constituents.

This is a very interesting debate. As one listened to the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), one discovered that Labour Members really had nothing to debate at all. They have accepted the assurances of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that he would keep the House up to date. They have accepted that there would be no disclosure of material that was in any way damaging to the negotiations. Just to add a cherry to the top of the cake that we are all looking forward to eating in due course, they have accepted a date for the implementation of article 50. Her Majesty's loyal Opposition have reached the point of such loyalty that they are having an Opposition day debate to back the policy of Her Majesty's Government.

I think this is a very interesting way of spending our time, and perhaps having the Opposition supporting Government policy will be a new means of forming consensus across Parliament, but one does wonder why they decided to have a day's debate on this—purely to support the Government—rather than on the other things they could have debated. The answer one comes to is that, when the Government tabled their amendment last night, they cooked the Opposition's goose. This debate is not really about the form of words used—or even the split infinitive—in Her Majesty's Opposition's motion, but about seeking to reject the decision that was made by the British people on 23 June.

That is what underlies every bit of this process. One minute, it is about delay, with hon. Gentlemen and hon. Ladies on the Labour Benches—some even on the Government side—saying, “We are doing it too fast. We should slow down and be a bit more cautious, because it would be so dangerous to do what the British people asked us to do at the pace at which they expected us to do it. Surely that is not wise.” Such people have delayed Brexit through applications to the Court.

Labour Members have also come to Parliament. Oh, how wonderful—what joy that, suddenly, so many of them are in favour of parliamentary scrutiny. When I sat in the Chamber discussing issues sent for debate by the European Scrutiny Committee, were the Benches heaving? Time after time, Labour Members were represented only by their Front-Bench spokesman. In debates in Committee put forward by the European Scrutiny Committee, in which every Member has an entitlement to turn up and be heard, do debates run for the full two and a half hours that they are allotted, or do people try to get through them in about 10 minutes and then go back to signing their Christmas cards? Parliamentary scrutiny has become the watchword of people who held Parliament in contempt. Why do they bring it up? Because they are condescending to the British people: they think the British people got it wrong.

**Thangam Debbonaire:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I am honoured to give way to the hon. Lady.

**Thangam Debbonaire:** The hon. Gentleman and I debated this very issue many times during the referendum campaign—and, I must say, very courteously—but does he not remember what he said so many times, which is

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that Parliament should be sovereign? If Parliament is sovereign, surely we have to scrutinise and vote on the deal.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** Parliament is indeed sovereign, and Parliament, in its wisdom, passed a referendum Bill; and my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council said that it was advisory. Just think about that. Who was it supposed to advise? Did Parliament pass a Bill to advise itself? Surely not. If it had been to advise Parliament, Parliament would have made the Bill automatically effective, because we do not need to advise ourselves on the Bills that we should pass. It was clearly an exercise of parliamentary sovereignty to advise the Crown in the exercise of the prerogative. Parliamentary sovereignty has already been expressed and ought to be fulfilled.

Those who are appealing now to parliamentary scrutiny are in fact rejecting an Act passed through this House, and worse, they are rejecting our employers—our bosses, our liege lords—the British people, who decided this matter for us. They use a glorious language, of which Lewis Carroll would have been proud—a Humpty-Dumpty-esque approach to saying what they really mean. Even in this motion—when it was first brought forward, before the Government had managed to corral it into, in effect, a Government motion—they say how much they respect the decision. Respect! The word has been changed by the lexicographers. It used to mean that one held something in high esteem and high regard and believed it should be implemented; now it means “condescend to, think ridiculous, think unwise”. The word “respect” has been utterly devalued by those on the Opposition Benches, as they feel the British people got it wrong. Let us not use the word “respect” of the electorate any more; let us say, “Obey,” for we will obey the British electorate.

And yes indeed, we have a plan. There is a plan set out clearly, and that is that we will leave. Everything else flows from that—everything else is leather or prunella. Leaving means, as the Prime Minister said, that there is no more superiority of EU law; the European Court of Justice may advise and witter on but no more will it outrank this House, and any contribution we make to the European Union will be from our overseas aid budget, because it will be supporting poor countries.

**Adam Afriyie** (Windsor) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** Of course I will give way.

**Adam Afriyie:** Pray may my hon. Friend continue.

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** I am extremely grateful for the extra minute.

Leaving is everything. That is the point. The rest of it is subsidiary. It is the ordinary activity of government, which the Government do as long as they command a majority in this House. The ultimate parliamentary scrutiny, which all Governments have suffered from going back at least to the 19th century and probably before, is the ability to command a majority in this House. If a Government can do that, it is then quite right that they are able to exercise the royal prerogative in the details of negotiation. As my right hon. Friend

the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) so rightly put it, if we were to tie down every jot and tittle of what the Government were negotiating, we would spend our whole time in the law courts. That makes government impossible.

It is not a man, a plan, a canal: Panama—a wonderful palindrome. It is a lady, a plan, freedom: Brexit.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. Such has been the excess of interventions and excited speeches this afternoon that I am afraid I have to reduce the time limit to four minutes.

5.33 pm

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), particularly as I will say something about legislative consent motions, about which we have tussled previously. I draw his attention to something that may interest him regarding what he said towards the end of his speech. If he would care to look at page 154 of the transcript of the Supreme Court proceedings yesterday afternoon, he will see that the Supreme Court referred to the fact that at the time that the Bill to permit the referendum was going through this House, no less than the Government spokesperson, the then Minister for Europe, now Leader of the House, said:

“The legislation is about holding a vote; it makes no provision for what follows. The referendum is advisory”.—[*Official Report*, 16 June 2015; Vol. 597, c. 231.]

Now is the time for this House to make provision about what follows on from the vote.

What I really want to speak about, in the brief time I have, is the concern on the Scottish National party Benches that the motion makes no call for the devolved nations to have a formal role, or for their agreement to be sought before triggering article 50. The right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) made much of his desire to protect the concerns of the 48% across the UK who voted to remain part of the EU. My concern, and the concern of my colleagues, is to protect the interests of the 62% of Scots who voted to remain part of the EU. I am sure some of my hon. Friends sitting on the Benches behind me will be concerned to protect the interests of the 56% of Northern Irish voters who voted to remain in the EU.

Triggering article 50 will lead to the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament being curtailed and the rights of individuals and businesses being affected. That is why the Lord Advocate has been on his feet this afternoon, across the road in the Supreme Court, arguing that the consent of the Scottish Parliament should be sought. Like the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), I do not want to talk about the legalities; but I want to talk about the political implications of the line the Government have adopted in the Supreme Court.

The Exiting the European Union Committee was told, by a witness at our very first session, that failure to obtain the consent of the Scottish Parliament to the negotiations around article 50 would trigger a constitutional crisis.

**John Redwood:** Does the hon. and learned Lady not understand that when we get the powers back from the European Union more power can go to the Scottish Parliament?

**Joanna Cherry:** The right hon. Gentleman is getting rather ahead of himself, but we on the SNP Benches will make a careful note of that, because the person who officially speaks for Scotland—the one Tory MP in Scotland—seems rather unclear about what powers will be returned to Scotland. But we take on board what the right hon. Gentleman says and we make a careful note of it.

**Stephen Gethins:** My hon. and learned Friend makes a very good point. The Secretary of State said that no law would be changed for which this Parliament has a responsibility. Will the law be changed for which the Scottish Parliament has responsibility? That question has not been answered yet.

**Joanna Cherry:** Indeed that question has not been answered yet. The point of my speech this afternoon is to say that the effect of triggering article 50 is to trigger an inevitable process for leaving the EU, which means that the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament will be affected—and that triggers the Sewel convention. My concern is that yesterday, when the Advocate General spoke on behalf of the British Government, he basically told the Supreme Court that the Sewel convention has no legal effect whatever—that it is a political convention that can be overridden at the whim of this Parliament.

The Supreme Court will determine the legality of the situation, but the politics of that statement is not what we were told by the Secretary of State for Scotland, and by others in the Conservative party, when the Scotland Bill was going through the House. As Lord Sumption, a Justice of the Supreme Court, asked the Advocate General yesterday afternoon, what was the point of putting the Sewel convention on a legal footing in statute if it has no legal force? The political consequence of the whole thrust of the arguments made on behalf of the UK Government in the Supreme Court is to show utter disrespect to the Sewel convention and utter disrespect to the wishes of voters in Scotland, and indeed in Northern Ireland.

That does not sit well with the respect agenda promised by the previous Prime Minister; with us in Scotland being told during the independence referendum that we were an equal partner in this Union; and with us also being told during that referendum campaign, by Ruth Davidson and others, that the only way to guarantee Scotland's membership of the EU was to vote to remain part of the UK. Those promises were all made on behalf of the Conservative party. The Conservative party's legal position in the Supreme Court is to kick sand in the eyes of voters in Scotland and to dishonour those promises. My point is that that has serious political consequences for this Union.

I know that the Secretary of State is a very reasonable man and that he is conscious that not to give Scotland a role in this process, regardless of what the Supreme Court says, would be deeply damaging from a political and constitutional point of view. So my request to him this afternoon is this. Please, Secretary of State, persuade the Prime Minister and her Cabinet colleagues to involve the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament

formally in this process. Listen to what my colleagues in Edinburgh have to say, because they are the legitimate voice of the Scottish people—they won a third term recently. Involve us in the process. Honour the words of the Secretary of State for Scotland, treat the Sewel convention seriously, and regardless of what the Supreme Court says, from a political point of view seek our consent to this process.

5.40 pm

**Mr Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con):** I welcome the opportunity to debate this important—indeed, defining—issue for our country. This is the 14th time Ministers, including the Prime Minister, have come to the House to debate or answer questions on Brexit, and there have also been four Westminster Hall debates. The Exiting the European Union Committee is up and running; indeed we took evidence this morning from the CBI and the TUC. That is the vital role for Parliament in this Brexit process. Let no one say that Parliament is not already discharging its responsibilities, and let no one confuse that essential scrutiny role with the designs of—let us face it—a small and dwindling minority who genuinely seek to delay or derail Brexit.

I view Brexit as a three-stage process. First came the incredibly important but short-term job of stabilising the economy in the immediate aftermath of the vote. If we take a moment to look at that, we will see that the Government have done a very good job. I also pay tribute to the previous Government for the resilience of the economy now. We are the fastest-growing G7 economy this year, with record employment levels, inflation dipping below 1% and strong purchasing managers' index data. We have also had a vote of confidence from business after business, including, in car manufacturing, from Nissan; in tech, from Facebook, Apple and Google; and, in pharmaceuticals, from GSK and AstraZeneca. All have announced fresh investment in this country since 23 June.

The second stage is to prepare for the Brexit negotiations. No one can underestimate the huge amount of work going on behind the scenes, for which I pay tribute to Ministers and their wider teams. The contours of our negotiation are plain for anyone to see, except those deliberately closing their eyes. We must give effect to the will of the British people. At the time of the referendum, every party leader seemed, at least in theory, to accept that premise, but now Labour and particularly the Liberal Democrats are cynically changing their position. I am still not clear exactly where the Labour Front-Bench team stand.

The vote to leave the EU was a vote to take back national democratic control of our laws, our money and our borders, as we were reminded almost daily during the referendum campaign, but I do not want to dwell on that. The Prime Minister told the House on 24 October that she would set out the high-level principles before and after the Christmas recess—well before triggering article 50—and that is wise, but it would clearly be utterly foolish to show our negotiating hand to our European partners in any more detail before then.

**Sammy Wilson:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Prime Minister could at last make it clear that our membership of the customs union and the internal

[Sammy Wilson]

market are incompatible with the other objectives the Government have set out? At least then we could have clarity on those two issues.

**Mr Raab:** The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point. It is my view that, given the positions already announced, we will almost inevitably be coming out of the customs union and the single market. Incidentally, that is also the evidence given to the Brexit Committee by everyone we have heard from so far. I understand why the Government do not want to drip feed their negotiating strategy into the public domain but want to let us know when they are ready with the whole strategy, and we now have a clear timetable for that.

I want to get beyond the procedures, the tricky games trying to trip up the Government, the name calling on both sides and the divisiveness of the referendum campaign. Instead, I want to spell out the positive, ambitious, optimistic vision that we on all sides ought to share for our post-Brexit relationship with our European friends. On trade, we want as few barriers as possible, in our rational, mutual economic self-interest. On security co-operation, there is a host of things that we can do together without being subject to the European Court's jurisdiction. On policing, there is Europol, as well as the PNR—passenger name record—system and other forms of data sharing. All those things are already done with non-EU members.

We can continue with and strengthen our commitment to our European friends, particularly in the aftermath of the Brussels and Paris terrorist attacks. On defence co-operation, I praise the Prime Minister's incredibly important commitment to our Polish allies during the Polish Prime Minister's visit here last month. Poland and Europe should know that we stand shoulder to shoulder with our European allies in the face of the menace posed by President Putin, regardless of the position of the President-elect across the pond.

On immigration, between the positions of open-door immigration and pulling up the drawbridge, it seems to me that there is huge scope for central arrangements on visa waivers for tourism and business trips, and for skills migration to be subject to permits. Such systems would still allow us to maintain national democratic control in the way that the British people expect. I hope we can move beyond procedures and the divisiveness of the referendum campaign and work together across the House. That is what the British public, by three to one, expect us to do—no more political games, but getting on with delivering Brexit. I commend and support the motion and the amendment.

5.45 pm

**Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP):** Those who have spoken most strongly in favour of the Prime Minister's amendment have generally taken some time to ridicule and carp at the Opposition's motion. They have questioned the wording, asking what "plan" means, for example, and they have even criticised the language for its split infinitives and the like. They are denigrating the very motion that they now claim to want to pass, as amended by the Government amendment.

Sometimes consensus can be a great and powerful thing; at other times it can be a risky thing. Many Members have often counselled against consensus. When

the consensus is entirely artificial, however, and is made up of a purely ephemeral coincidence of tactics without any substantive or strategic work, we should not fall for it. I am here to represent my constituents, who voted by more than 78% to remain, and I know that they would not fall for this amended motion.

**John Redwood:** Is it not a good idea to try to get a consensus to back the British people in their decision?

**Mark Durkan:** I am not one of the British people; I am here as an Irish person, proudly carrying an Irish passport. However, I fully respect the terms on which other hon. Members come to this House. I come to the debate in circumstances in which the people of Northern Ireland voted by 56% to remain, while the people of my constituency voted by 78% to remain, as I said. The people of Northern Ireland, moreover, previously voted for the Good Friday agreement in a unique dual referendum process involving the north and south of Ireland—that was the high watermark of Irish constitutional democracy. I am pledged to adhere to that and I make no apology to anybody for it. I do not seek to indict the terms on which anyone else comes to this House to speak in this or any other debate.

The principle of consent is meant to be the core of the Good Friday agreement. It is not only housed in that agreement, but it was the principle of consent that was used to endorse the agreement. A week after the 23 June referendum, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs Villiers), tabled a written statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland. The words she used about republican dissidents on 30 June were interesting.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Mark Durkan:** She said—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. A point of order has been raised by Mr Kwarteng.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** I have just realised, Madam Deputy Speaker, that my intended point of order has been attended to by the Clerks. It involved the clock.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Thank you. The clock was stuck, and it is now working again.

**Mark Durkan:** The then Secretary of State said:

"Their activities are against the democratically expressed wishes of the people in Northern Ireland. They continue to seek relevance and inflict harm on a society that overwhelmingly rejects them"—she could have been talking about the Northern Ireland Conservatives. She continued:

"Their support is very limited. Northern Ireland's future will only be determined by democracy and consent."—[*Official Report*, 30 June 2016; Vol. 612, c. 13WS.]

Where is the democracy and consent for the people of Northern Ireland when it comes to Brexit? Many of us are free to come here and vote against article 50 as and when the relevant provisions are tabled. When we do so, that will be consistent with our principled support for the Good Friday agreement and consistent with our pledges to our constituents honourably to represent them.

**Michael Gove:** As a result of the Good Friday agreement and the consent principle, the people of Northern Ireland voted to remain in the United Kingdom and to give foreign policy and treaty-making powers to the UK Government. There is no inconsistency between a UK Government choosing to trigger article 50 and the hon. Gentleman's constituents having objections to that. There is no breach of a consensus.

**Mark Durkan:** I am afraid the right hon. Gentleman does not know the difference—people in Northern Ireland are very clear about this—between the principle of consent and actually giving consent. He has made a mistake that is consistently made, and it is a mistake that will strain some people's belief in the Good Friday agreement.

People such as the right hon. Gentleman do not recognise the damage that they are doing. Carefully compacted layers of understanding created the bedrock of the Good Friday agreement, and fissures are being driven into those key foundations. Remember that, as a result of that agreement, the principle of consent is housed in the Irish constitution as well, because the referendum—north and south—changed the constitution. It removed the territorial claim, and two additional clauses were inserted.

If the key constitutional precept of the Good Friday agreement is not housed in any new UK-EU treaty that might result from these negotiations, we shall be in a very serious situation. The promise and the understanding that the people of Ireland, north and south, were given when they endorsed the Good Friday agreement in overwhelming numbers will have been betrayed and damaged. I do not accept, and no Irish nationalist, north or south, who supported the Good Friday agreement has ever said, that the principle of consent that is housed in the Irish constitution can be removed, replaced or surpassed by a vote in England on Brexit or on anything else.

The Good Friday agreement states very clearly that the question of Irish unity will be a matter for the people of Ireland, north and south, without external impediment. That key principle must be reflected in any new UK-EU treaty, making clear that if in the future Northern Ireland votes to become part of a united Ireland, it will do so as an automatic part of the EU, without any change in Ireland's terms of membership and without the need for any new negotiations on the part of Northern Ireland. We cannot afford, in the Northern Ireland context, the sort of trickery that was used in the Scottish context to raise question marks over whether EU membership would apply. This is a key principle and tenet for those of us in the House who support the Good Friday agreement.

There are other risks to the agreement as well. There are risks to the weight of the rights in strand 1. There is also significant damage afoot in relation to strand 2, which involved a delicate balance of institutional and constitutional arrangements. That strand will be left in complete deficit after Brexit unless someone takes care of it.

5.52 pm

**Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con):** It is a pleasure, as always, to follow the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan). As a Unionist, I share his concern

about the need to ensure that whatever arrangements we make will protect and safeguard the Good Friday agreement, the position of Northern Ireland and our relationships with the Republic. As Chairman of the Justice Committee, I also think it is important for us to take account of the position of the Crown dependencies, including the Isle of Man, which has a particular economic relationship with both Northern Ireland and the Republic.

It is no secret that I campaigned and voted to stay in the European Union, and I still believe that that would have been the better outcome. I regret the decision that the majority of the British people took. However, as a democrat, one must live with decisions that one may think were ill-advised. The majority decided otherwise, and we must respect their decision. For that reason, I have no problem with voting for the Government amendment, but neither would I have a problem with the Labour party's original motion. Let me explain why.

It is perfectly reasonable and sensible to have a plan. Having made a decision, we now need to remove ourselves from the European Union in an orderly fashion, and that requires a high-level set of objectives. It certainly does not mean giving away every bit of the detail of our negotiating tactics on the day. I have complete faith in the ability of the Secretary of State and his team—especially given the Secretary of State's business background—to handle those matters pragmatically, and pragmatism is, I think, the most important consideration. At the end of the day, the British people voted to leave the European Union, but they did not vote to do so on terms that would make them materially worse off. It is therefore critical that, whatever we achieve, we achieve it in a way that safeguards the economic interests of this country and its people, which I believe will be possible if we are cool-headed and sensible. That must always be the top priority.

It is also appropriate for us to get on with the job of triggering article 50, for the same reason. Both the plan and the move to invoke article 50 are necessary to deal with uncertainty. It is quite right that some of the worst economic predictions made in the referendum campaign have not come about, which is good news, but that is, of course, in part—not wholly—because of investment decisions taken before the referendum. Let us hope things continue that way but, as my old grandmother said, "Don't always count your chickens until they're hatched."

What is crucial, however, is that we continue to have a stable climate for investment. In some areas that has been achieved, but in other sectors, particularly financial services and the property sector, there are clear instances of investment decisions being put on hold. The sooner we have clarity about the timeframe we are working to—hence we have the Government amendment—and a plan that we are working to, the better, as it will then be much easier to reassure business about those key points. I think that that is a perfectly sensible means of reconciling the original motion and the amendment.

The key things with which the plan needs to deal are financial services, legal certainty and, above all, our ability, if necessary, to have a sensible period of transition. The Prime Minister has hinted that we should not face a cliff edge. Our financial and legal services sectors are critical to this country's economic wellbeing, and because of the complexity of the regulations we have to deal with and re-transpose into our own law, a transitional

[Robert Neill]

period might well be needed. Ministers should not be afraid of that; if it is a necessary part of our achieving a practical outcome for this country, we should be happy to have it. We should also have confidence in proper scrutiny by this House of what is in the interests of our nation as a whole. As democrats, we can be optimistic about the future, but only if we are pragmatic and do not allow sloganising to get in the way of common sense in our negotiations.

5.56 pm

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill).

I respect the vote in principle of the people to leave the EU, but they made that vote on three grounds: more money, market access and lower migration. What we are seeing, however, is that instead of getting £350 million to the NHS, it is going to cost us £300 million a week; instead of higher living standards, we have 5% inflation because of depreciation eating away at people's incomes; and borrowing is going up, so everyone will be in debt with another £1,000 to pay back.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** Is the hon. Gentleman essentially saying the people got it wrong on 23 June?

**Geraint Davies:** I am saying that people were misled, so basically now we are going to have another year of austerity.

On market access, everyone is talking about a hard Brexit. It is all very well Nissan, Tata and others being paid billions of pounds under the table to bribe them, to compensate for the tariffs they will inevitably face, but we will have to pay for that in the end, and we do not have proper market access.

**Michael Gove:** The hon. Gentleman has made the astonishing assertion that there have been under-the-table bribes to Tata, Nissan and others to continue to locate in the UK. What is his evidence for that assertion?

**Geraint Davies:** Clearly they have come to the Government and said, "The only reason we're in this country is to platform into the EU market, and if we face tariffs we want the money back or we're going to move," and the Government have given them the money. I know the right hon. Gentleman knows nothing about economics and just criticises the Bank of England, but that is the simple business case.

As for the ridiculous arguments the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues put about on trade, what he wants to do is turn his back on 46% of our trade and somehow dream we can make up those relationships, which were always weaker than the EU negotiating new bilaterals. That is fantasy land.

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Geraint Davies:** I will not.

I do not think that people voted for Brexit—

**Michael Gove:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Geraint Davies:** No, I will not.

I do not think people voted for Brexit at any cost. In fact 75% of those who voted to leave have said they will not leave with a blank cheque and at any cost. The situation is that even though the majority voted in principle to leave, the mass of people—the silent majority—are now thinking twice. They do not want this decision made behind closed doors; they want to be able to have the final say. The silent majority want the final say on the final deal because they will live with the consequences.

A lot of rubbish has been talked about article 50 on both sides of this Chamber, but the reality is that as soon as we trigger it, that is literally giving back our membership of the EU. We then have no negotiating power, and the other 27 countries will decide in their own interests what deal we have. The Members on both sides of the House who want a referendum after we trigger article 50 must realise that if we have a referendum or a vote here and say we do not like the deal, the EU 27 nations will say, "Tough; that's the one that suits us. It stops others leaving. Live with it and shut up." That is a constitutional fact, and it is the primary reason why I cannot support the amendment that calls on the Government to invoke article 50 by 31 March. After that date, we will have no negotiating power. What is more, there is an election in France in May and an election in Germany in October, so that time would be wasted even if negotiations were going on because the two biggest power players would not be able to engage with us as they will be focusing on their domestic audiences. Article 50 should therefore certainly not be triggered until November next year at the earliest.

**Sammy Wilson:** Is the logic of the hon. Gentleman's argument that we might as well never trigger article 50 because we will have given away all our negotiating powers, regardless of when it is triggered?

**Geraint Davies:** I introduced a Bill on the terms of our withdrawal from the EU. It stated that after the emergence of the situation in which we now find ourselves had become apparent, the British people should have the final say on the deal before article 50 was triggered. The EU would then have an incentive to negotiate with us, because it would know that our default position was to stay in the EU. At the moment, it has no such incentive.

The reason the Government are keeping their cards close to their chest is that there is nothing on those cards, because none of the 27 EU countries will speak to the Government. They are just saying, "You're leaving—get out! Trigger article 50, get on with it, and we'll tell you what you're getting." People are buying that up and thinking that it is in the British interest, which it clearly is not. I appreciate that the Government's game is to rush forward with article 50 before March, to take two weeks to repeal the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, to rush towards a May election and then to have the appalling Budget that they will have delayed from March in the autumn. They would then say, "Oh, what could we do? We didn't realise there was going to be a downturn." Then all the money going to Nissan and Tata and the others under the table would be revealed. But the British people will not buy that—

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) has now twice implied that the Government are making, or that private companies operating in this country are taking, under-the-table cash payments in contravention of all the corporate regulations and anti-corruption legislation. Could you invite him to reconsider and perhaps recast his argument?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing)**: As the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) knows, the content of an hon. Member's speech is not a matter for me. However, it would be a matter for me if the hon. Member for Swansea West said something in the course of his speech that implied wrongdoing on the part of any other Member or member of the Government. I am sure that he will confirm, as I call him to recommence his speech, that he did not mean to say anything of the kind.

**Geraint Davies**: There was certainly no wrongdoing. What I was suggesting is that huge amounts of public money are being pushed towards foreign companies to get them to stay here and that the Government have pointedly refused to tell the Office for Budget Responsibility, when asked, how much money was involved so that the OBR could factor it into its forecasts. The Government have refused to give those figures. These are enormous amounts of money; we are talking about hundreds of millions of pounds, which would affect our economic forecasts. The Government refuse to give the figures now, but they will come out after everything has been decided and article 50 has been triggered in March, when there is no room for reversal. The British public deserve and want either a good deal or no deal, and the right to decide that question. This should not be decided behind closed doors. We need to delay article 50 until November to allow the people to decide their own future.

6.3 pm

**Lucy Frazer** (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): In a debate with much intense feeling, I would like to highlight the fact that there are some areas of common ground. First, there is acceptance across the House that there needs to be, and will be, parliamentary scrutiny. Secondly, and importantly, it has been accepted on both sides of the House that parliamentary scrutiny should not trump achieving the best deal for our country. In this debate and in the many that will follow, we must never forget that second point. Our overriding concern must be to get the right long-term arrangement for our country's future.

I will outline the steps to which the Government have already agreed. This House has already resolved that there will be parliamentary scrutiny. In a motion agreed to by both sides of the House on 12 October, this House resolved that there would be

"a full and transparent debate on the Government's plan"

and that the House should properly

"scrutinise that plan for leaving the EU before Article 50 is invoked".

The Secretary of State confirmed in that debate a commitment that

"Parliament be kept at least as informed as, and better informed than, the European Parliament"—[*Official Report*, 12 October 2016; Vol. 615, c. 332.]

in circumstances where there is a mandatory obligation to inform the European Parliament. Through her amendment, the Prime Minister has now agreed to publish a plan, and the Secretary of State said today that it is inconceivable that there will not be a vote on the final deal. It therefore follows that there is already an agreed level of parliamentary scrutiny, but we must strike the right balance between parliamentary scrutiny and ensuring that we maintain the best negotiating stance.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): I was a remainer, too, and I welcome the fact that a statement of the broad parameters of the British negotiating position will be made clear, but does my hon. and learned Friend agree that we should never allow any demands for excessive granularity to undermine the UK's negotiating position or the national interest?

**Lucy Frazer**: I absolutely agree. It is vital that we get the best deal—not that we have the power to determine the deal at every stage.

The Opposition have accepted at many stages that we must not tie the Government's hands. In the October motion, it was accepted across the House that the process must

"not undermine the negotiating position of the Government as negotiations are entered into".

The shadow Secretary of State stated in the course of that debate that

"navigating our exit from the EU will not be an easy process, and it will require shrewd negotiating"

and that we

"must put the national interest first".—[*Official Report*, 12 October 2016; Vol. 615, c. 323.]

He accepted that there had to be a degree of confidentiality and flexibility. He repeated those very words today. Those statements, which the Opposition have repeatedly made, must be honoured and remembered, because we made some strategic errors when we first negotiated in Europe.

To the Spaak Committee meetings of 1955 that eventuated in the treaty of Rome, we sent a sole British delegate, a minor trade official called Russell Bretherton. He was eventually summoned home on the grounds that Britain should have no part in what a more senior civil servant described as this

"mysticism which appeals to European... federalists".

Interviewed in later life about the experience, Bretherton said:

"If we had been able to say that we agreed in principle, we could have got whatever kind of common market we wanted. I have no doubt of that at all."

Now, we have an opportunity to renegotiate our role in Europe and the rest of the world. I do not want to say to my children that we did not get the best deal because of our fear, our scepticism, our adversarial parliamentary system, political point scoring and, possibly, ulterior political motives. I do not want to say that we restricted ourselves in negotiating the right arrangement for our long-term future.

6.8 pm

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I welcome the motion tabled by the official Opposition and I had been planning to vote to support it. However, their adoption of the Government amendment changes things in two key ways. I regret that the Labour leadership appears to be walking into the Tories' trap: they are insisting that, in return for accepting Labour's motion, it votes to invoke article 50 by March. Introducing such a tight timetable, based on an arbitrary deadline, undermines the principle that this is about getting the best possible deal for Britain. That is particularly pertinent given that serious negotiations will inevitably not start until autumn next year—after French and German elections. We will therefore effectively lose about six months if we stick to the timetable set out in the amendment.

To say the Labour strategy of pushing the Government to produce a plan worthy of the name by the end of January—in effect only four to six weeks away—is ambitious would be to take understatement to new levels. Any plan needs to be more than a summary of the banalities that the Government have been repeating until now about the so-called “best possible deal.” We should have been demanding a full-blown White Paper. That is why I cannot support the Government-amended motion, which threatens to throw Britain off the Brexit cliff edge, with a vague plan at best and within a timeframe that simply is not compatible with developing any sort of coherent strategy.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Does the hon. Lady agree that some things we are voting on tonight totally disregard respect for the devolved Administrations?

**Caroline Lucas**: I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady's point about the devolved Administrations. Her party has put it clearly on the record and I am grateful for that.

I want to tackle head on the accusation that voting against this amended motion, or even being prepared to vote against triggering article 50, equates to disregarding the will of the British people. This is not about challenging the result of the referendum, which of course I accept, but it is about saying that we need to know what kind of Brexit the Government are planning to negotiate. As many others have said, it is not about the issue of departure, but about destination. We are no clearer about that now than we were three or four hours earlier. That is why I believe it would be irresponsible to vote to throw the country into the potential nightmare of leaving the EU within two years without knowing what might be in the plan and what kind of plan it is. To do so without any solid proposals for an interim deal after two years of negotiation would be particularly reckless.

Turning to the content of the negotiating position, I wish specifically to argue for an outcome that maintains strong social and environmental regulation, and free movement and membership of the single market, because I believe that that is what is best for Britain and for my constituency in Brighton, where so many businesses and the two universities have been talking to me about the uncertainty they believe is being engendered by the current proposals. On the environment, the referendum was not a mandate to weaken our standards on air, water or wildlife. A poll in August found that 83% of

the public think that laws protecting wildlife should remain as strong as they are now or be made tougher following our departure from the EU. The environment must not, in any way, be the price we pay for any deal struck with the EU over membership of the single market. In the Environmental Audit Committee last month, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs suggested that about a third of EU environment legislation will not be carried over. That is wholly unacceptable and indicates that the Government are not prepared to fight for the UK to remain part of EU-wide action on tackling climate change, on reducing the use of dangerous chemicals or on animal welfare standards. Any plan must set out how the Prime Minister intends to reflect the cross-border nature of the environmental challenges.

**Geraint Davies**: Is the hon. Lady concerned, as I am, that 40,000 people a year are dying of diesel pollution in Britain and we may get rid of the EU monitoring standards?

**Mr Speaker**: Order. May I just point out to the hon. Gentleman that he has just spoken and he is going to prevent other people from speaking, which is discourteous?

**Caroline Lucas**: Thank you, Mr Speaker. In broad terms, I agree with the point the hon. Gentleman is making about air pollution, because the EU is providing the best bulwark against the reduction of air pollution standards in this country.

Let me move on to talk about freedom of movement, as, sadly, few MPs seem prepared to defend it any longer. It is especially sad and worrying that the leadership of the official Opposition are in danger of ceding the terms of this debate to the right. I readily accept that it is easy to blame free movement when the benefits have been enjoyed so unevenly. There are people in my city of Brighton and Hove who have not visited Brighton seafront because they cannot afford to get there. For them, the idea of being able to live, work or study in another country is about as likely as travelling to the moon, but that reality does not justify denying them the right to free movement in the future. On the contrary, it should mean fighting tooth and nail for a Europe of equals, in which the hard-won rights enshrined in EU law do not just exist in the statute books as perks for the privileged, but are genuinely available to all EU citizens. We should have, and we deserve to have, successful policies to redistribute wealth fairly and to create real opportunities for all.

There is an enormous task ahead of us to reunite our country, and it will be made all the more difficult by further economic hardship of the kind that we will have with a hard Brexit which does not have us as part of the single market and does not have free movement. So we absolutely need to know what the plan is going to look like. The justifiable anger and mistrust felt by those who voted leave will only deepen if the many promises made turn out not even to be worth the red bus they were written on. We need to be honest about how people are feeling and why they feel the way they do. We do not need blindly to follow the damaging, blame-laden rhetoric that is being used to distract from the failure of neo-liberal economics to provide the basic needs of all members of our society. Immigration has been systematically and

cynically scapegoated for everything, when in fact what is at the heart of this is decades of not investing in our public services. That is what—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Matt Warman is the next speaker. We have eight would-be contributors and I would like to accommodate them all, so the time limit will have to be reduced, with immediate effect, to three minutes. Colleagues are absolutely welcome to intervene on each other, but if they do, somebody will not get in.

6.14 pm

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Over the past few days, Mr Speaker, I have not seen as much of you as I might have liked, partly because I have had the privilege of being up in my own constituency and partly because I have been in the neighbouring seat of Sleaford and North Hykeham. Until that seat is represented again in this place—I very much hope that the excellent Conservative candidate, Caroline Johnson, will have that privilege—I hope that you will permit me to report what is being said on the doorsteps of Lincolnshire. Whether it is in Boston, where 77% voted to leave the EU, or in Branston, which is in Sleaford and North Hykeham, where 62% did so, there is a single line that honest, decent voters use again and again: they doubt that the Government will deliver on their word and trigger article 50 by the end of March. They say firmly that the Prime Minister is the right person to do it, but the Lincolnshire public doubt that politicians in the House are on their side.

I hope that, through this debate, the message goes back loud and clear, both to Boston and Skegness and to Sleaford and North Hykeham, that Parliament will not seek to set the Government up to deliver anything other than the best possible deal for the UK by asking them to put all their cards on the table and that we will trigger article 50 by the end of March. We on the Conservative Benches know that that is the right thing to do, and Members on other Benches or those in the Supreme Court seeking to make a different case should accept that to take another view is to go further than questioning Brexit: it is playing with the fundamental principle of democracy that the people must decide.

Some remainers say that that is not what they seek to do, but I would say this to them, in line with what the people of Lincolnshire have been saying to me. The argument that was lost in June was not lost in six weeks. It was lost over years and decades. We in the House govern with the consent of the people. To maintain that consent all of us must bear in mind the fact that we laid out a case in June. Now we must make sure, unused as some of us are to doing so, that we do as we are told. Not doing so risks far more than our relationship with Europe.

6.17 pm

**Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I support the motion and, after some consideration, the Government amendment. I am prepared to support the Government amendment because it refers to the motion agreed on 12 October, which called on the Prime Minister “to ensure that this House is able properly to scrutinise that plan for leaving the EU before Article 50 is invoked”.

I make it clear that, while accepting 31 March 2017 as the deadline for invoking article 50, my support for that action is contingent on being satisfied that the first part of the provision has been satisfactorily implemented. I will reserve my view until that date and until such time as I have had the opportunity to make a judgment. I assume that proper scrutiny and debate imply an attempt to get some sort of consensus and the capacity of the Opposition to make amendments, along with a genuine attempt to arrive at a position that commands the full support of Members on both sides of the House. I stress to the Government that their position when negotiating with the EU will be improved immeasurably if they can secure that degree of unity.

Another reason for supporting the amendment is that we must end uncertainty. It locks the Government into an obligation to put plans before the House by early January that will at least begin to address some of the issues that we are being asked about on the doorstep and that, to date, have not been dealt with by the Government. Genuine questions about our future—key issues that affect local industries, the aspirations of local people, jobs, civil liberties and so on—have been met hitherto by “Brexit means Brexit” and other vacuous phrases that do not address people’s genuine concerns, such as

“red, white and blue Brexit”

or, if the Chancellor has his way, grey Brexit.

To continue the colour metaphor, I see this as forcing the Government to nail their colours to the mast and to start to bring before the House some genuine proposals in response to the genuine questions that are being asked—questions such as those that local businessmen ask me: “Will we be part of a single market?” They need to know before investing: “Will we be able to recruit labour in order to meet the additional demand incurred by being in the single market?” Still no answer from the Government. We need an answer. Until this is done, I will not give that support.

6.20 pm

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate. I have two minutes and 58 seconds to say an awful lot.

The vote offered to the British people on 23 June came with no ifs, no buts and no conditions. The then Prime Minister, David Cameron, who gave us that wonderful referendum, for which I am eternally grateful, spent £9 million of taxpayers’ money to tell us that in the literature that came through our doors. There were no ifs, no buts, no conditions. I recall him saying, whichever side wins, even by one single vote, the will of the people will be respected. It could not be simpler.

I believe my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who has retaken his seat, implied that not all the British people understood what they were voting for. That is what I understood from his speech. If I am wrong, I apologise, but if I am right, may I tell him that he is wrong?

**Mr Kenneth Clarke:** I do not think either side should resort to attacking the voters on the other side. I did say that I thought very few of them were expressing an opinion one way or the other on whether they should remain in the customs union and under what conditions.

[*Mr Kenneth Clarke*]

They agreed that they were going to leave the EU; what they were going to do instead was not even discussed during the referendum.

**Richard Drax:** That is where I must disagree with my right hon. and learned Friend. Leaving the EU, as we have heard from many Government Members means leaving everything to do with the EU. It could not be clearer.

I met a lady outside the polling booth on 23 June on Portland who was holding on to her husband, who was not particularly well. She said to me, “Richard, I’m going to vote with you. I’m going to vote to leave.” I asked her, “Why are you voting to leave?” She looked me straight in the eye and said, “Richard, because I want my country back. I want control of our laws, I want control of our borders, I want our rules and regulations made by people in our Parliament and nowhere else. And if you make a mess, we the electorate can kick you out.” She understood. My electorate understood, I believe, exactly what the referendum was about.

The issue of triggering article 50 is a fig leaf being used by those who wish to postpone at best, or at worst even prevent, exit from the EU. Let me explain why. Triggering article 50 involves no legislative activity. There is nothing, in my view, to discuss. It simply begins the two-year period within which negotiations can start. The British people voted to leave the EU. The only way we can do that is to trigger article 50. It is as simple as that.

We hear right across the House this afternoon uncertainty. Yes, because people are prevaricating against the will of the British people. That is what is causing the uncertainty across our land. Sitting on the European Scrutiny Committee under the admirable chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), I have seen all the legislation that continues to sweep through into this country, and it is time we took back control. Of that I have no doubt. Once article 50 has been triggered, the uncertainty will go. I tell the House why: in the EU, the one thing those unelected bureaucrats do not like and do not understand is a firm no. That is when they start to negotiate. I, for one, am glad that we will be in control at last of the future of our great country.

6.24 pm

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) on forcing the Government to concede ground in committing to publish a plan for leaving the EU before they invoke article 50. However, he will have seen from the debate that it is not at all clear what that means. Does it mean the Government are just going to publish a document saying, “We will seek the best possible Brexit and aim for the best possible access to the single market”? If it does, I am afraid we are not clear at all what we are going to get and what the plan is.

We have had a lot of discussion about whether there should be a White Paper, but we have had no commitment from the Government that we will get one. Will it answer specific points about the Government’s priorities? Will it set out their position on single market membership,

free movement, security co-operation with our allies, workers’ rights, consumer protections or environmental protections? Will it set out all the red lines? Will it set out the Government’s position on the customs union? We are not clear yet what the plan will be. It is for that reason that I will certainly not be voting for the motion as it stands.

It is also clear, despite what my hon. and learned Friend said about the need for those in this House to accept the referendum decision and not seek to frustrate the Government—I understand why he said that—that the Government’s amendment (a) makes a commitment to 31 March. That timetable was set by the Prime Minister behind closed doors, with no input from Parliament at all. That is the second reason why I will not be able to support the motion.

A lack of clarity will not help us to get a good deal; in fact, it will do exactly the opposite, and that is the most important point that, I hope, has come across from today’s debate. The absence of any detail about the Government’s plans has created a vacuum, which has been filled by speculation and by hard Brexiteers. However, words have consequences: proposals to force companies to draw up registers of EU workers; threats to crack down on European students; plans to replace European doctors and nurses working in our NHS; refusing to guarantee the rights of EU citizens who reside in the UK; and doing so much to offend our partners in Europe—described as enemies in this House—with whom we have to negotiate.

I represent a constituency that has had two riots in a generation. I represent a constituency that will bear the brunt when we exercise article 50 and, no doubt, the economy turns down as a result. Those OBR forecasts have a bearing on my constituents. I regret that I have had only three minutes to make their case since the referendum decision on 23 June. However, for all the reasons I have outlined, I will not be supporting the motion.

6.27 pm

**David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): Whether people like it or not, the referendum result gave the Government a very clear mandate to get Britain out of the European Union. It is extremely disappointing that some people are trying to frustrate the will of the people, whether it is hedge fund managers, with their money, taking cases to the High Court; Members of this House coming up with all sorts of reasons why they may not vote for article 50; or, closer to home for me, Members of the Welsh Assembly, who now seek to parley on equal terms with Ministers and to dictate to them the terms of our withdrawal from the European Union.

I know that Ministers will be polite to Welsh Assembly Ministers, but I hope they will remind them that they owe their existence to a referendum that had a much smaller turnout and a much narrower majority than the one that has delivered us the mandate for Brexit. I hope they will remind them that the people of Wales voted to leave the European Union and that the Welsh Labour party is not speaking for Wales when it comes to meet Ministers. I hope they will also remind Welsh Assembly Ministers from the Labour party that foreign affairs is not within their remit, and if they seek to come here and talk about foreign affairs, maybe it is time Welsh Members

of Parliament were able to discuss Welsh Labour's appalling record on the national health service and on education; as the programme for international student assessment results have shown, Labour has left us at the absolute bottom of the educational league.

We have an absolutely first-rate Prime Minister, who has the support of her Members of Parliament, and a first-rate set of Ministers. We cannot possibly have a negotiation that consists of 650 MPs, 800 or so Members of the House of Lords and a coven of Welsh Assembly Ministers. As John Major himself said, we need to unbind the hands of our Ministers and allow them to get out there into Brussels and negotiate the excellent deal that we know they can get, which will involve freedom of movement, freedom to trade and freedom to get back control of our borders and money. We look forward to celebrating that deal over the next two years. I am very proud to support my Government tonight.

6.30 pm

**Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): I am intrigued to follow the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies), but I would hope that everyone is willing to listen to everyone else, whether the devolved Governments or anyone else within the United Kingdom who wishes to have a say. I am pleased to be here to put some points from the Ulster Unionist party.

The people have spoken. We must listen to the people and we must do what they have said. They have asked us to leave the European Union, so we must support the triggering of article 50. I campaigned to stay in; my constituency voted—just—to leave; my little bit of the United Kingdom that I adore so much, Northern Ireland, voted to stay in; and the whole Union that I am so passionate about voted to leave. I am therefore left in the middle of everything wondering which way to go.

When I heard someone talking about “red, white and blue”, I thought, “That’s lovely—that’s great.” Then I thought, “No it isn’t—we’ve got to include how we trade with Ireland, Northern Ireland’s neighbour.” This is a phenomenally complicated step forward. We have to sort out the border. We have to look after our farmers. We have to look after our universities. There is so much at stake, and yet—

**Ms Ritchie:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is important that the Government are respectful of all political traditions in these islands and take those points of view on board?

**Danny Kinahan:** I thank the hon. Lady; I could not agree more. That is exactly what I was leading up to. When we talk about red, white and blue, I want to see a big bit of green and orange. I want to see us looking after the trade with Ireland, east-west and north-south, and looking after the people in Northern Ireland who have a different point of view. I also want an end to the post-truth politics that we have all seen worldwide. I want us to be back at a point where the public can trust us and look to the integrity of politicians.

Today we are talking about whether Parliament should be scrutinising this. Of course it should. I am assuming that the Government will come back to us when they have the right things to bring back for us to scrutinise. I trust them, just as much as I trust the rest of the

Opposition to make sure that they take part as well. We have all got to start working together. I want the rest of the world to see the United Kingdom united.

I hope that all Members will listen to Northern Ireland's case. I welcome Ministers coming over to Northern Ireland and listening to us, and thank them for doing that so often when we are such a small part of the United Kingdom. I ask them to keep coming and keep listening to us. Let us all work together. My party put together the document I have here, “A Vision for Northern Ireland outside the EU”, which contains some constructive points. Everyone should be doing that. This is a time to listen and to be flexible, with everyone working together.

Something that came over to me throughout the whole of the Brexit debate was an anti-establishment mood. This is not necessarily about which side people are on; it is that we are all failing as politicians. It is about whether the pothole in the road is being repaired, and so on. People are not getting the service they want quickly. I am keen that we all pull together.

6.33 pm

**Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): As the Order Paper states very clearly, this debate is about the Government's plan for Brexit, and absolutely rightly so, because we need to separate process from direction and outcomes. That is central to this debate, and many speakers have touched on it. As we have heard, if we are obsessed with process, we end up threatening our own constitution. This Parliament should be the place where big decisions are made and the place that sets the direction of travel. That is partly why I will support the motion: it includes the word “plan” and therefore, in effect, commits the Government to having a plan.

What should that plan be talking about? It has to talk about outcomes. This is not about tying the hands of negotiators, but setting out outcomes and directions of travel to get there. It is like a road map: there will be junctions and roundabouts. It is not about delaying anything or obstructing anything. It is about setting the terms that will provide the best outcomes for this country. We need a White Paper on trade. We need to understand the options and see where the Government's thinking is going, and we need to think about transitional arrangements if they are necessary for sectors such as financial services.

We must have a sensible debate about the information and our understanding of the issues. If we think that this is about sovereignty and nothing else, imagine what will happen if we start signing free trade agreements with other nation states. Any free trade agreement is a contract that involves making commitments to another nation, and that is about sovereignty. It is not simply a question whether we are in the European Union; it is about how we conduct ourselves across the globe.

A related issue is the signal that we send out to our 27 existing partners and to the rest of the world. We are in danger of thinking of the debate as entirely domestic, but it is not, because everything that we say and do is interpreted by a lot of other key players. We need to say to them, through our debates, statements, White Papers and so on, that we have a level-headed and determined plan to make the very best of Brexit within the time that we have been given.

6.36 pm

**Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): I voted to remain in the European Union, as did 75% of my constituents, so it is not surprising that my inbox has been filled with questions about access to the single market, customs union, immigration, the environment and workplace protections. Perhaps the most pressing issue, which has come up over and over again, is the protection of EU nationals. Forty-six per cent. of my constituents were born offshore, and they have emailed me constantly asking about their future.

Anne, who lives in Hampstead and has done for 40 years, keeps asking me what will happen to her. Will she have to relocate? Can she live in the country that she has called her home, where she raised her family, where she got married and where she is a community member and part of the local school, or will she have to relocate? Unfortunately, I cannot give her the answers, because the Government's plans have been shrouded in secrecy from the very beginning. I applaud my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) for forcing the Government to say that they will publish plans and let us know what they are doing, but it is far too little, far too late. The Government should have done that a long time ago.

This is not simply a moral issue; we have to think about the benefits to our economy. Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that EU immigrants to Britain are significantly younger than the national average and more likely to be in work. In Camden, which forms part of my constituency, 13% of employed residents hold an EU passport. The Government need to acknowledge not simply the moral issue about using people as bargaining chips, but the significant impact that there will be on our local economy if we do not secure the future of the people who hold EU passports and live in this country. The proportion of people in my constituency who hold EU passports rises to 17% in professional, scientific and technical industries. The figure is 14% in financial and insurance services and 10% in information and communications.

I know I do not have much time, so I call on the Government and the Prime Minister to do a few things. Immediately try to secure the future of EU nationals who live in this country and who consider this country to be their home. Do not pander to the people who treated the EU referendum as a proxy vote on immigration. Stop trying to chase failed migration targets. That has not worked in the past, and it is not going to happen now. I call on the Government, the Prime Minister and Members of the House to secure the future of EU nationals living in my constituency and across the country and to put their uncertainties to rest.

6.39 pm

**Kwasi Kwarteng** (Spelthorne) (Con): I am very grateful to you, Mr Speaker—you have managed our debate—for allowing me to speak, because we have had lots of interventions.

I want to say a few things about this debate. First, nothing could have been clearer than the vote on 23 June. It was the largest vote that has ever taken place in the history of our country, and 17.4 million people—a larger mandate than any ever given to any Prime Minister on any issue—voted to leave the EU. We all know that the one way we can leave the EU—in fact, the only way

we can effect the will of the people—is by triggering article 50. It therefore stands to reason that any attempt to delay, frustrate or obstruct the triggering of article 50 is simply to delay and obstruct the will of the people as expressed on 23 June 2016. That is self-evident to any person who cares to think about these things.

The second point is about having a plan. To me, nothing could be clearer than the Government's position. We have said this many times. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members find that very amusing. I am glad to see that they find clarity amusing, because they would benefit from some clarity. The Government's position is very simple: we want to have some restriction on freedom of movement—we want a change in the arrangements—while having the widest possible access to the single market. Those are two very simple principles. *[Interruption.]* Various Labour Front Benchers are chuntering from their places, but even they should be able to understand that basic position.

The third point is that our friends in the Labour party have got themselves into an awful mess on this particular issue. On the one hand, the people for whom the Labour party was created in the north and the midlands voted overwhelmingly for out, yet the current leaders of the party—the intellectual establishment and many of the Front Benchers—are based in London, and we all know that London's view on the outcome of the referendum was very different from the view in the traditional heartlands. The two ends of the pantomime cow are pulling apart now, and—to change my metaphors—it is very difficult to see how Humpty Dumpty can be put back together again. This is obviously causing them massive pain, but I hope that they will support the Government amendment and I look forward to seeing many of them in the Lobby in a few minutes' time.

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend is a distinguished historian. Is there any precedent for the fact that the Conservative party is now a more effective representative of the views of working-class Britain than the Labour party?

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** There is no precedent for this. One Labour resident of Islington—a friend of mine—said to me, “The one way for the Labour party to commit suicide would be to oppose the triggering of article 50.” That is palpable, and it would be a much shorter version of Labour's suicide note in the 1983 general election.

We must very clearly say that a lot of the words we have heard are game playing. Labour Members say they respect the will of the people, but we know that they have no intention of doing so. We know that many of them want to frustrate the will of the people as expressed in June. We know that all this obfuscation, all this delay, all the smokescreen and the dust in the eyes—all that sort of thing—is for one end and one end only: they want to stay in the EU at all costs. I say to them very plainly that the horse has bolted and that the ship has left. We are not going back into the EU, and the sooner they accept that very basic proposition, the better it will be for their constituents and for the country as a whole.

6.43 pm

**Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): For the benefit of the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng),

I just want to say that the Labour party was created for people living everywhere, not just those living in the north.

In his opening remarks, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) said that he wanted to see a plan “not for the 52% or the 48% but for the 100%...in the national interest.” I am glad that the Government now agree with him. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) said, there is no mandate for what is known as hard Brexit, and there is no consensus for hard Brexit. He said that how we leave is an “urgent matter of...policy that should be...debated” and decided in this House.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) gave a clear description of how the process might work, saying: “I do not think that scrutiny and debate are a threat”. As an example of how not to do it, the Secretary of State referred to several options regarding the customs union. He said that the Government would decide whether the UK remains part of the customs union and that he would inform the House. That is not sufficient. This House must see the plan. The Government need to publish it in January so that, on issues such as membership of the customs union, that plan can be tested, debated and, if necessary, amended. That is what taking back control means. The Government are going to have to get used to it.

With control comes accountability. The Government will no longer be able to hide behind the excuse that the EU made them do something or they would have loved to intervene but the EU stopped them. The Government will need to account for their own decisions, and that starts with their Brexit plan. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) said, the plan should examine whether we remain in the single market and the customs union, the impact on our constituents, and the vision on immigration, on climate and energy and on crime and terrorism. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) would add to that the question of the status of EU nationals. The Government cannot take the country with them if they will not tell it where they plan to go.

The charge against those of us who have proposed Labour's motion is that we are all remoaners who are using parliamentary tricks to obstruct the progress of Britain's departure from the EU. Even though the Government have now accepted our motion, we are accused of asking them to reveal too much or of endangering their prospects of securing the best outcome. We have been told that there will be no running commentary. In her—as ever—excellent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) said that we need basic answers to basic questions. She raised questions that are uncomfortable for some but that must be answered, and I applaud her for that.

We accept the outcome of the referendum, and, for the benefit of the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), we respect that outcome. But this is not a game; this is serious. The future of the United Kingdom is in the balance. This is the greatest challenge for politicians of our generation, and the Government should not be surprised when responsible MPs, such as my hon. Friends the Members for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) and for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey) show an intense interest in and concern about how Brexit proceeds. Our constituents have set us

on the course we must now follow. We, as their representatives, must ensure that their voices are heard throughout the process.

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Jenny Chapman:** I will, but only once, as I am trying to wind up a six-hour debate in a very small amount of time.

**Mr Cunningham:** My hon. Friend referred to our hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey). One of the big issues in the midlands is regional aid. How will that be replaced? That is the sort of answer we want from the Government.

**Jenny Chapman:** Precisely.

We must know more than we do about the Government's intentions. Surely, on the most important issue facing this country, that is not too much to ask. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) put it well: being clear about our objectives does not weaken us; it strengthens us. It is not just MPs who campaigned for remain who want more information; the British public, including those who voted to leave, want to know more about the plan. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and the hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan) said, this is not leave versus remain; it is Parliament doing its job. Take back control, we were told. This House will have done everything possible after this evening to assure the public that we will not block article 50. We now need to gain some grip on the process. We need to see the plan. If the plan presented is insufficient, we will come back and demand more.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster Central (Dame Rosie Winterton) urged the Government to include a regional analysis in their plan. I wholeheartedly echo that demand. The Government say they do not want to reveal their negotiating stance before they have to and that they do not want a running commentary, but the trouble is that a running commentary is exactly what we are getting. We and our constituents are gleaning clues about the Government's intentions from leaked correspondence, snatched glimpses of notes and the musings of the Foreign Secretary. This is unhelpful in enabling challenge, scrutiny and contributions from MPs. It is also damaging our prospects for gaining a good outcome. It is not just the British public who are listening to the running commentary; it is being heard with some irritation by officials and parliamentarians in Europe.

**Michael Gove:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Jenny Chapman:** I will not give way.

There has been a vacuum, an empty space where the plan ought to be. As the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) said, it is not good enough that acceptance of the need for a plan has been dragged out of the Government by the Opposition. I look forward, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) said, to the debate moving on to the substance of Brexit, rather than the relentless focus on process.

[Jenny Chapman]

The motion asks for the basic plan, not the fine detail. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) said, the “we know best” politics has to end. He and my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) warned of the consequences of failing to talk frankly about immigration. It leads to the rise of the far right, and that cannot be allowed to happen. I congratulate them both on their speeches.

It would be profoundly wrong if Members of the European Parliament and officials in Brussels were the first to learn of the Government's stance. If the British public had to read about the Government's position through leaks from Brussels, it would be a most inauspicious start to the taking back of control that our constituents have told us they want.

The right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), who has gained admirers on all sides, says she wants a White Paper and a Bill. I hope the Minister is listening to her.

**Michael Gove:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Jenny Chapman:** I have told the right hon. Gentleman that I will not give way.

We all know that there are those who want the hardest and fastest Brexit possible. Conversely, some MPs such as my right hon. Friends the Members for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) and for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), and my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), will vote against the Government amendment. They are not Brexit deniers; they are people with genuine concerns. The Government would do well to listen to them, because that is what building consensus means.

6.52 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman). I thank Members who have contributed to this excellent debate on what the motion rightly describes as the defining issue facing the United Kingdom. There have been many excellent contributions on both sides. Time will not allow me to congratulate all those who have spoken, but I should say that, as a new Minister, to follow the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) and the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) is a privilege in any debate, but especially in a debate in which it was revealed that my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) voted to join the European Community in 1975.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have raised important and pressing issues. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) and my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) called for pace, but the Government are getting on with the job of delivering on the mandate given by the British people. We are taking our time to get the detail right. As many Members have remarked, this is not necessarily a simple

or straightforward set of decisions. Getting our approach right first time is vital to our long-term national interest. As the right hon. Member for Leeds Central and my right hon. Friends the Members for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) and for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) said, we should show respect for the enormity of this issue and its impact on all our constituents.

Members have shown that they share our concern that we prepare properly and focus on the details. Following the referendum, we are moving on from 40 years of EU membership. Carrying out this process properly and effectively is a complex challenge with a wide range of potential outcomes. That is why we are taking our time to inform and develop our negotiating strategy.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out before the House four aims: first, listening to all sides in the debate, so that we can build a national consensus around our position and get the best deal for the UK; secondly, putting the national interest first and listening carefully to all the devolved Administrations; thirdly, taking steps to minimise uncertainty wherever possible, which is why we are bringing forward a great repeal Bill to bring existing EU law into domestic law on the day we leave, and empowering Parliament to make the changes necessary to ensure our law operates effectively at the domestic level; and, finally, putting the sovereignty and supremacy of this Parliament beyond doubt by the time we end this process and have left the European Union.

My right hon. Friend has also been clear about our broad strategic aims for the negotiations: securing the best available access for our businesses, so that they can trade and operate within the single market, while taking back control of our borders, our laws and our money. I hear calls from both sides of the House—and indeed both sides of the referendum debate—for the rights of EU citizens in the UK to be guaranteed, and it is certainly the Government's intention to do so, alongside securing the rights of UK citizens living in the EU.

In preparation for the negotiations, we are undertaking a wide-ranging programme of sectoral and regulatory analysis, talking to businesses and civil society about the options for leaving the EU and the impact on their parts of the economy. On Monday, my right hon. Friend joined the Chancellor to meet organisations in the City. From aerospace to the environment, energy to retail, farming to chemicals, tourism to automotive, fishing to fintech, and universities to ports, we have been listening to people's concerns and seeking out opportunities for UK industries.

From the start, the Prime Minister has been committed to full engagement with the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. I commend the hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan) for his powerful speech on the importance of finding a UK approach and of listening to the concerns of the devolved Administrations. I undertake to do that. Others, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), mentioned the Crown dependencies. I can assure them that a great deal of engagement is going on with the Crown dependencies, as it is with Gibraltar. I met representatives of the Government of Gibraltar today to make sure we were taking their concerns on board in our preparations for this process.

The motion passed by the House on 12 October made it clear that, while parliamentary scrutiny was an essential pillar in the process of our withdrawal, it should be carried out in a way that respected the will of the people and did not restrict the Government's negotiating capability. Parliamentary scrutiny is invaluable, and it is important that our approach is scrutinised by the expertise of both Houses of Parliament, but that cannot be, as my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) pointed out so clearly, at the expense of binding the Government's hands in negotiations. It is entirely proper that Parliament should scrutinise the Government's approach to the process of leaving the EU, and that there be a full and continuing debate, both on the Floor of the House and in the new Select Committee on Exiting the European Union, chaired by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be attending next week.

Many hon. Members, including those the Opposition Benches—notably the right hon. Members for Doncaster North and for Doncaster Central (Dame Rosie Winterton)—have recognised that it is beyond doubt that the Government have received clear instructions from the British people that Britain should leave the EU. We are now discussing the right and proper process for withdrawal, and today's debate will take that process one step further. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has committed to being as open as possible with Parliament, and we remain committed to providing the House with regular updates on our plans to deliver on the clear mandate given by the British people to leave.

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

**Mr Walker:** I will not give way, I am afraid.

That brings me to the heart of the motion, which calls on the Prime Minister to commit to publishing the Government's plan for leaving the EU before article 50 is invoked. This country stands on the threshold of a new chapter in its history. In forging a new relationship with our neighbours in Europe, we must deliver a global Britain that can continue to be a global success, as my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) suggested. The Secretary of State has said he will set out our broad plans for doing so ahead of the notification to invoke article 50, but we must do so in a way that safeguards the vital national interest by securing the Government's negotiating position.

The Government amendment is entirely proper and I commend it to the House. I welcome the fact that Her Majesty's Opposition appear to accept the amendment, although I note that their Back Benchers seem to disagree. Like many on both sides of the House, I fought the referendum campaign as a remainer, but I always believed that it was right to trust the people with this decision and that their view had to be respected. I saw this fundamentally as a question of consent, and although I personally argued that my constituency might have an easier path to travel if we stayed in and fought our corner, I also said from the start that if the consent of the British people was withheld, we would all need to work harder than ever before to ensure we made a success of leaving the EU.

That is where we now stand. After the arguments and the division of the referendum, now is the time for people to come together and work together to ensure

that the UK succeeds. By supporting the Government amendment, colleagues from across the House can show that they have heard the will of the people and that we will work together to make a success of it. We can move forward with the process of making this work not just for 48% or 52%, but for 100% of the people we represent.

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The House divided: Ayes 461, Noes 89.*

**Division No. 102]**

**[6.59 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane	Carmichael, Neil
Abrahams, Debbie	Carswell, Mr Douglas
Adams, Nigel	Cartlidge, James
Afriyie, Adam	Cash, Sir William
Aldous, Peter	Caulfield, Maria
Allen, Heidi	Chalk, Alex
Amess, Sir David	Champion, Sarah
Anderson, Mr David	Chapman, Jenny
Andrew, Stuart	Chishti, Rehman
Ansell, Caroline	Chope, Mr Christopher
Argar, Edward	Churchill, Jo
Ashworth, Jonathan	Clark, rh Greg
Atkins, Victoria	Cleverly, James
Austin, Ian	Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Bacon, Mr Richard	Clwyd, rh Ann
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Baker, Mr Steve	Collins, Damian
Baldwin, Harriett	Colvile, Oliver
Barclay, Stephen	Cooper, Julie
Baron, Mr John	Cooper, Rosie
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Cooper, rh Yvette
Barwell, Gavin	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Bebb, Guto	Costa, Alberto
Beckett, rh Margaret	Courts, Robert
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Benn, rh Hilary	Crabb, rh Stephen
Benyon, Richard	Crausby, Mr David
Beresford, Sir Paul	Crouch, Tracey
Berry, Jake	Cruddas, Jon
Betts, Mr Clive	Cryer, John
Bingham, Andrew	Cummins, Judith
Blackman, Bob	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Blackwood, Nicola	Dakin, Nic
Blomfield, Paul	Danczuk, Simon
Blunt, Crispin	David, Wayne
Bone, Mr Peter	Davies, Byron
Borwick, Victoria	Davies, Chris
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Davies, David T. C.
Brabin, Tracy	Davies, Glyn
Brady, Mr Graham	Davies, Dr James
Brazier, Mr Julian	Davies, Mims
Brennan, Kevin	Davies, Philip
Bridgen, Andrew	Davis, rh Mr David
Brine, Steve	De Piero, Gloria
Brokenshire, rh James	Debbonaire, Thangam
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Dinenage, Caroline
Bruce, Fiona	Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Bryant, Chris	Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Buckland, Robert	Donelan, Michelle
Burgon, Richard	Dorries, Nadine
Burnham, rh Andy	Double, Steve
Burns, Conor	Dowd, Peter
Burns, rh Sir Simon	Dowden, Oliver
Burrowes, Mr David	Drax, Richard
Burt, rh Alistair	Dromey, Jack
Butler, Dawn	Drummond, Mrs Flick
Cairns, rh Alun	Duddridge, James
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Dugher, Michael
Campbell, Mr Gregory	

Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Harrington, Richard	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Patel, rh Priti
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Harris, Carolyn	Lidington, rh Mr David	Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Dunne, Mr Philip	Harris, Rebecca	Lilley, rh Mr Peter	Pawsey, Mark
Eagle, Ms Angela	Hart, Simon	Long Bailey, Rebecca	Pearce, Teresa
Eagle, Maria	Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan	Lopresti, Jack	Penning, rh Mike
Efford, Clive	Hayes, rh Mr John	Lord, Jonathan	Pennycook, Matthew
Elliott, Julie	Hayman, Sue	Lucas, Ian C.	Penrose, John
Ellis, Michael	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Lumley, Karen	Percy, Andrew
Ellison, Jane	Healey, rh John	Mackinlay, Craig	Perkins, Toby
Ellwood, Mr Tobias	Heapey, James	Mackintosh, David	Perry, Claire
Elmore, Chris	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Madders, Justin	Phillips, Jess
Elphicke, Charlie	Heaton-Jones, Peter	Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Philp, Chris
Esterson, Bill	Henderson, Gordon	Main, Mrs Anne	Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Eustice, George	Hendrick, Mr Mark	Mak, Mr Alan	Pincher, Christopher
Evans, Graham	Hepburn, Mr Stephen	Malhotra, Seema	Poulter, Dr Daniel
Evans, Mr Nigel	Hoare, Simon	Malthouse, Kit	Pow, Rebecca
Evennett, rh David	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Mann, John	Prentis, Victoria
Fabricant, Michael	Hollern, Kate	Mann, Scott	Prisk, Mr Mark
Fallon, rh Sir Michael	Hollingbery, George	Marris, Rob	Pritchard, Mark
Fernandes, Suella	Hollinrake, Kevin	Marsden, Gordon	Pursglove, Tom
Field, rh Mark	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Maskell, Rachael	Quin, Jeremy
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Hopkins, Kelvin	Matheson, Christian	Qureshi, Yasmin
Fello, Robert	Hopkins, Kris	Mathias, Dr Tania	Raab, Mr Dominic
Fletcher, Colleen	Howarth, rh Mr George	Maynard, Paul	Rayner, Angela
Flint, rh Caroline	Howarth, Sir Gerald	McCabe, Steve	Redwood, rh John
Flynn, Paul	Howell, John	McCarthy, Kerry	Reed, Mr Jamie
Foster, Kevin	Huddleston, Nigel	McCartney, Jason	Reed, Mr Steve
Fovargue, Yvonne	Huq, Dr Rupa	McCartney, Karl	Rees, Christina
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Hurd, Mr Nick	McDonnell, rh John	Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Frazer, Lucy	Hussain, Imran	McGinn, Conor	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Freeman, George	Jackson, Mr Stewart	McInnes, Liz	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Freer, Mike	James, Margot	McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick	Robinson, Mary
Fuller, Richard	Jarvis, Dan	McMahon, Jim	Rosindell, Andrew
Furniss, Gill	Javid, rh Sajid	McPartland, Stephen	Rotheram, Steve
Fysh, Marcus	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Meale, Sir Alan	Rudd, rh Amber
Gale, Sir Roger	Jenkin, Mr Bernard	Mearns, Ian	Rutley, David
Gardiner, Barry	Jenkyns, Andrea	Menzies, Mark	Ryan, rh Joan
Garnier, rh Sir Edward	Jenrick, Robert	Mercer, Johnny	Sandbach, Antoinette
Garnier, Mark	Johnson, rh Alan	Merriman, Huw	Scully, Paul
Gauke, rh Mr David	Johnson, rh Boris	Metcalfe, Stephen	Selous, Andrew
Ghani, Nusrat	Johnson, Gareth	Milliband, rh Edward	Shah, Naz
Gibb, Mr Nick	Johnson, Joseph	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Shannon, Jim
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl	Jones, Andrew	Milling, Amanda	Shapps, rh Grant
Glen, John	Jones, rh Mr David	Mills, Nigel	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Glindon, Mary	Jones, Gerald	Milton, rh Anne	Shelbrooke, Alec
Godsiff, Mr Roger	Jones, Mr Kevan	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Sherriff, Paula
Goodman, Helen	Jones, Mr Marcus	Mordaunt, Penny	Shuker, Mr Gavin
Goodwill, Mr Robert	Kawczynski, Daniel	Morden, Jessica	Simpson, David
Gove, rh Michael	Keeley, Barbara	Morgan, rh Nicky	Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Graham, Richard	Kennedy, Seema	Morris, Anne Marie	Skidmore, Chris
Grant, Mrs Helen	Kinahan, Danny	Morris, David	Skinner, Mr Dennis
Gray, Mr James	Kinnock, Stephen	Morris, James	Smeeth, Ruth
Grayling, rh Chris	Kirby, Simon	Morton, Wendy	Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Green, Chris	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Mowat, David	Smith, Cat
Green, rh Damian	Knight, Julian	Mundell, rh David	Smith, Henry
Greenwood, Lilian	Kwarteng, Kwasi	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Smith, Julian
Greenwood, Margaret	Lancaster, Mark	Murrison, Dr Andrew	Smith, Nick
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Latham, Pauline	Nandy, Lisa	Smith, Royston
Griffith, Nia	Lavery, Ian	Newton, Sarah	Smyth, Karin
Griffiths, Andrew	Leadsom, rh Andrea	Nokes, Caroline	Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Gummer, rh Ben	Lee, Dr Phillip	Norman, Jesse	Solloway, Amanda
Gyimah, Mr Sam	Lefroy, Jeremy	Nuttall, Mr David	Soubry, rh Anna
Haight, Louise	Leigh, Sir Edward	Offord, Dr Matthew	Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Halfon, rh Robert	Letwin, rh Sir Oliver	Onwurah, Chi	Spencer, Mark
Hall, Luke	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Opperman, Guy	Starmer, Keir
Hamilton, Fabian	Lewis, rh Brandon	Osamor, Kate	Stephenson, Andrew
Hammond, Stephen	Lewis, Clive	Osborne, rh Mr George	Stevens, Jo
Hancock, rh Matt	Lewis, Mr Ivan	Owen, Albert	Stevenson, John
Hands, rh Greg	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Paisley, Ian	Stewart, Iain
Hanson, rh Mr David		Parish, Neil	
Harman, rh Ms Harriet			
Harper, rh Mr Mark			

Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Stride, Mel  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
 Syms, Mr Robert  
 Tami, Mark  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Thomas, Mr Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, Emily  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Mr Andrew  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Umunna, Mr Chuka

Vaizey, rh Mr Edward  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vaz, rh Keith  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watson, Mr Tom  
 Wharton, James  
 Whately, Helen  
 White, Chris  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wilson, Sammy  
 Winnick, Mr David  
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, William  
 Wright, Mr Iain  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Heather Wheeler and**  
**Jackie Doyle-Price**

#### NOES

Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina  
 Ali, Rushanara  
 Allen, Mr Graham  
 Bardell, Hannah  
 Black, Mhairi  
 Blackford, Ian  
 Blackman, Kirsty  
 Boswell, Philip  
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
 Brock, Deidre  
 Brown, Alan  
 Cameron, Dr Lisa  
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
 Chapman, Douglas  
 Cherry, Joanna  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Clegg, rh Mr Nick  
 Coffey, Ann  
 Cowan, Ronnie  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Crawley, Angela  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Day, Martyn  
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair  
 Dowd, Jim  
 Durkan, Mark  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Ellman, Mrs Louise  
 Evans, Chris  
 Farrelly, Paul  
 Farron, Tim  
 Fellows, Marion  
 Ferrier, Margaret

Gapes, Mike  
 Gethins, Stephen  
 Gibson, Patricia  
 Grady, Patrick  
 Grant, Peter  
 Gray, Neil  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hosie, Stewart  
 Kerevan, George  
 Kerr, Calum  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Law, Chris  
 Leslie, Chris  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McCaig, Callum  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair  
 McGarry, Natalie  
 McLaughlin, Anne  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Monaghan, Dr Paul  
 Mullin, Roger  
 Murray, Ian  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Nicolson, John  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Oswald, Kirsten  
 Paterson, Steven  
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret  
 Robertson, rh Angus

Salmond, rh Alex  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Smith, Angela  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomson, Michelle  
 Weir, Mike  
 West, Catherine

Whiteford, Dr Eilidh  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Mr Mark  
 Wilson, Corri  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Owen Thompson and**  
**Tom Brake**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Main Question, as amended, put.*

*The House divided: Ayes 448, Noes 75.*

#### Division No. 103]

[7.18 pm

#### AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane  
 Abrahams, Debbie  
 Adams, Nigel  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allen, Mr Graham  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Anderson, Mr David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, Edward  
 Ashworth, Jonathan  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Austin, Ian  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Bailey, Mr Adrian  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Beckett, rh Margaret  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benn, rh Hilary  
 Benyon, Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Bingham, Andrew  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blackwood, Nicola  
 Blomfield, Paul  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Borwick, Victoria  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Brabin, Tracy  
 Brady, Mr Graham  
 Brazier, Mr Julian  
 Brennan, Kevin  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Burnham, rh Andy  
 Burns, Conor

Burns, rh Sir Simon  
 Burrowes, Mr David  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Butler, Dawn  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Carswell, Mr Douglas  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Champion, Sarah  
 Chapman, Jenny  
 Chope, Mr Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
 Clwyd, rh Ann  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Colville, Oliver  
 Cooper, Julie  
 Cooper, Rosie  
 Cooper, rh Yvette  
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crausby, Mr David  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Cruddas, Jon  
 Cryer, John  
 Cummins, Judith  
 Cunningham, Mr Jim  
 Danczuk, Simon  
 David, Wayne  
 Davies, Byron  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 De Piero, Gloria  
 Debbonaire, Thangam  
 Dinena, Caroline

Dodds, rh Mr Nigel	Gummer, rh Ben	Leadsom, rh Andrea	Nuttall, Mr David
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.	Gyimah, Mr Sam	Lee, Dr Phillip	Offord, Dr Matthew
Donelan, Michelle	Haigh, Louise	Leigh, Sir Edward	Onwurah, Chi
Dorries, Nadine	Halfon, rh Robert	Letwin, rh Sir Oliver	Opperman, Guy
Double, Steve	Hall, Luke	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Osamor, Kate
Dowd, Peter	Hamilton, Fabian	Lewis, rh Brandon	Osborne, rh Mr George
Dowden, Oliver	Hammond, Stephen	Lewis, Clive	Owen, Albert
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Hancock, rh Matt	Lewis, Mr Ivan	Paisley, Ian
Drax, Richard	Hands, rh Greg	Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Patel, rh Priti
Dromey, Jack	Hanson, rh Mr David	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Drummond, Mrs Flick	Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Lidington, rh Mr David	Pawsey, Mark
Duddridge, James	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Lilley, rh Mr Peter	Pearce, Teresa
Dugher, Michael	Harrington, Richard	Long Bailey, Rebecca	Penning, rh Mike
Duncan, rh Sir Alan	Harris, Carolyn	Lopresti, Jack	Pennycook, Matthew
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Harris, Rebecca	Lord, Jonathan	Penrose, John
Dunne, Mr Philip	Hart, Simon	Lucas, Ian C.	Percy, Andrew
Eagle, Ms Angela	Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan	Lumley, Karen	Perkins, Toby
Eagle, Maria	Hayes, rh Mr John	Mackinlay, Craig	Perry, Claire
Efford, Clive	Hayman, Sue	Mackintosh, David	Phillips, Jess
Elliott, Julie	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Madders, Justin	Philp, Chris
Ellis, Michael	Healey, rh John	Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Ellison, Jane	Heapey, James	Mak, Mr Alan	Pincher, Christopher
Ellwood, Mr Tobias	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Malhotra, Seema	Poulter, Dr Daniel
Elmore, Chris	Heaton-Jones, Peter	Malthouse, Kit	Pow, Rebecca
Elphicke, Charlie	Henderson, Gordon	Mann, John	Prentis, Victoria
Esterson, Bill	Hendrick, Mr Mark	Mann, Scott	Pritchard, Mark
Eustice, George	Hepburn, Mr Stephen	Marris, Rob	Pursglove, Tom
Evans, Graham	Hoare, Simon	Marsden, Gordon	Quin, Jeremy
Evans, Mr Nigel	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Maskell, Rachael	Qureshi, Yasmin
Evennett, rh David	Hollern, Kate	Matheson, Christian	Raab, Mr Dominic
Fabricant, Michael	Hollingbery, George	Mathias, Dr Tania	Rayner, Angela
Fallon, rh Sir Michael	Hollinrake, Kevin	Maynard, Paul	Redwood, rh John
Fernandes, Suella	Hollobone, Mr Philip	McCabe, Steve	Reed, Mr Jamie
Field, rh Mark	Hopkins, Kelvin	McCarthy, Kerry	Reed, Mr Steve
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Hopkins, Kris	McCartney, Jason	Rees, Christina
Flelo, Robert	Howarth, rh Mr George	McCartney, Karl	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Fletcher, Colleen	Howarth, Sir Gerald	McDonnell, rh John	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Flint, rh Caroline	Howell, John	McGinn, Conor	Robinson, Mary
Flynn, Paul	Huddleston, Nigel	McInnes, Liz	Rosindell, Andrew
Foster, Kevin	Huq, Dr Rupa	McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick	Rotheram, Steve
Fovargue, Yvonne	Hurd, Mr Nick	McMahon, Jim	Rudd, rh Amber
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Hussain, Imran	McPartland, Stephen	Rutley, David
Frazer, Lucy	Jackson, Mr Stewart	Meale, Sir Alan	Ryan, rh Joan
Freeman, George	James, Margot	Mearns, Ian	Sandbach, Antoinette
Freer, Mike	Jarvis, Dan	Menzies, Mark	Scully, Paul
Fuller, Richard	Javid, rh Sajid	Mercer, Johnny	Selous, Andrew
Furniss, Gill	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Merriman, Huw	Shah, Naz
Fysh, Marcus	Jenkin, Mr Bernard	Metcalfe, Stephen	Shannon, Jim
Gale, Sir Roger	Jenkyins, Andrea	Miliband, rh Edward	Shapps, rh Grant
Gardiner, Barry	Jenrick, Robert	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Garnier, rh Sir Edward	Johnson, rh Alan	Milling, Amanda	Shelbrooke, Alec
Garnier, Mark	Johnson, rh Boris	Mills, Nigel	Sherriff, Paula
Gauke, rh Mr David	Johnson, Joseph	Milton, rh Anne	Shuker, Mr Gavin
Ghani, Nusrat	Jones, Andrew	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Simpson, David
Gibb, Mr Nick	Jones, rh Mr David	Mordaunt, Penny	Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Glen, John	Jones, Gerald	Morden, Jessica	Skidmore, Chris
Glindon, Mary	Jones, Mr Kevan	Morgan, rh Nicky	Skinner, Mr Dennis
Goodman, Helen	Jones, Mr Marcus	Morris, David	Smeeth, Ruth
Goodwill, Mr Robert	Kawczynski, Daniel	Morris, James	Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Gove, rh Michael	Keeley, Barbara	Morton, Wendy	Smith, Cat
Graham, Richard	Kennedy, Seema	Mowat, David	Smith, Henry
Grant, Mrs Helen	Kinahan, Danny	Mundell, rh David	Smith, Julian
Gray, Mr James	Kinnock, Stephen	Murray, Ian	Smith, Royston
Grayling, rh Chris	Kirby, Simon	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Smyth, Karin
Green, Chris	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Murrison, Dr Andrew	Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Green, rh Damian	Knight, Julian	Nandy, Lisa	Solloway, Amanda
Greenwood, Lilian	Kwarteng, Kwasi	Neill, Robert	Soubry, rh Anna
Greenwood, Margaret	Lancaster, Mark	Newton, Sarah	Spencer, Mark
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Latham, Pauline	Nokes, Caroline	Starmar, Keir
Griffith, Nia	Lavery, Ian	Norman, Jesse	Stephenson, Andrew
Griffiths, Andrew			Stevens, Jo

Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Stride, Mel  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
 Syms, Mr Robert  
 Tami, Mark  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Thomas, Mr Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, Emily  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Mr Andrew  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Umunna, Mr Chuka  
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward

Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vaz, rh Keith  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watson, Mr Tom  
 Wharton, James  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Heather  
 White, Chris  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wilson, Sammy  
 Winnick, Mr David  
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, William  
 Wright, Mr Iain  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
 Nick Smith and  
 Nic Dakin

#### NOES

Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina  
 Ali, Rushanara  
 Bardell, Hannah  
 Black, Mhairi  
 Blackford, Ian  
 Blackman, Kirsty  
 Boswell, Philip  
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
 Brock, Deidre  
 Brown, Alan  
 Cameron, Dr Lisa  
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
 Chapman, Douglas  
 Cherry, Joanna  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Clegg, rh Mr Nick  
 Cowan, Ronnie  
 Crawley, Angela  
 Day, Martyn  
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair  
 Dowd, Jim  
 Durkan, Mark  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Farrelly, Paul  
 Farron, Tim  
 Ferrier, Margaret  
 Gapes, Mike  
 Gethins, Stephen  
 Gibson, Patricia  
 Grady, Patrick  
 Grant, Peter  
 Gray, Neil  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hosie, Stewart  
 Kerevan, George

Kerr, Calum  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Law, Chris  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McCaig, Callum  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair  
 McGarry, Natalie  
 McLaughlin, Anne  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Monaghan, Dr Paul  
 Mullin, Roger  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Nicolson, John  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Oswald, Kirsten  
 Paterson, Steven  
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret  
 Robertson, rh Angus  
 Salmond, rh Alex  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thompson, Owen  
 Thomson, Michelle  
 Weir, Mike  
 West, Catherine  
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Mr Mark

Wilson, Corri  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Marion Fellows and  
 Tom Brake

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House recognises that leaving the EU is the defining issue facing the UK; notes the resolution on parliamentary scrutiny of the UK leaving the EU agreed by the House on 12 October 2016; recognises that it is Parliament's responsibility to properly scrutinise the Government while respecting the decision of the British people to leave the European Union; confirms that there should be no disclosure of material that could be reasonably judged to damage the UK in any negotiations to depart from the European Union after Article 50 has been triggered; and calls on the Prime Minister to commit to publishing the Government's plan for leaving the EU before Article 50 is invoked, consistently with the principles agreed without division by this House on 12 October; recognises that this House should respect the wishes of the United Kingdom as expressed in the referendum on 23 June; and further calls on the Government to invoke Article 50 by 31 March 2017.

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

### FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS

That the draft Immigration Act 2014 (Current Accounts) (Excluded Accounts and Notification Requirements) Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 7 November, be approved.—(*Graham Stuart.*)

*The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 14 December (Standing Order No. 41A).*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

### ROAD TRAFFIC

That the draft Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988 (Penalty Points) (Amendment) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 8 November, be approved.—(*Graham Stuart.*)

*Question agreed to.*

### PETITION

#### Implementation of the 1995 and 2011 Pensions Acts

7.37 pm

**Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I am grateful for the chance tonight to present a further petition calling for fair transitional arrangements for 1950s-born women affected by the changes to the state pension age. That group of women is bearing an unfair burden. When the Pensions Act 2011 was debated, Ministers promised transitional arrangements to ease that burden, but those have not materialised, leaving women across the UK facing hardship, stress and worry. I am presenting a petition on behalf of the residents of Preseli Pembrokeshire. I thank all those who signed it.

The petition states:

The Petition of residents of Preseli Pembrokeshire,

[Barbara Keeley]

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.

[P001988]

## Jamie and Andy Murray: Sporting Legacy

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Graham Stuart.)*

7.38 pm

**Steven Paterson** (Stirling) (SNP): It is an enormous pleasure to have the opportunity to speak on the sporting legacy of Jamie and Andy Murray, who hail from Dunblane in my constituency and who finish the year as the world's No. 1-ranked players in the men's doubles and men's singles, respectively.

At the outset, I want to offer my personal congratulations to both Jamie and his doubles partner Bruno Soares and to Andy on what is an incredible achievement for all three of them in finishing the year as the No. 1-ranked players.

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. He rightly praises the remarkable talents of Andy and Jamie Murray, but is he aware that Scotland has another world No.1 tennis player—Gordon Reid, the wheelchair world champion? He is a worthy champion, who, having developed his skills at Helensburgh lawn tennis club, went on to win the Australian open and Wimbledon in 2016, before being named world No. 1.

**Steven Paterson:** I am grateful for that intervention. Had my application for the debate been put in three or four days later, Gordon's name would have been included—he had not yet achieved No. 1, but then he did, and I am very pleased that he is recognised now. Of course, he is a product of not only Helensburgh but Stirling university, and I will say something about that later.

These congratulations extend to the crucial network of support that Andy and Jamie have in their family and coaches, who play a vital role in supporting these athletes in their preparation for tournaments and in their recovery after them. In Judy Murray, who was here in Parliament earlier at a meeting I was at, we have someone who is a family member and a coach all rolled into one, and she must be immensely proud of her sons' achievements.

The scale of these achievements can best be demonstrated in simple terms—just by looking at the records of the players. In Jamie Murray, we have the first British man in 44 years to win the US open doubles, alongside his partner, Bruno Soares. As well as the US open, the pair also won this year in Sydney, before winning the Australian open, so it has been a magnificent year. At the present count, Jamie has no fewer than 16 career titles to his name.

So far in his career Andy has won 44 singles titles. These include three grand slams; 14 masters 1000 series titles, which places him ninth on the all-time list; two Olympic gold medals; and, just a few weeks ago, the title at the Association of Tennis Professionals tour final here in London. He also has two doubles titles with Jamie and an Olympic silver medal in the mixed doubles with Laura Robson.

Back in 2014, I was able to play a small part in recognising Andy's achievements at that point, when, as a councillor, I was able to vote in favour of conferring the freedom of the city of Stirling on him at a ceremony

in Dunblane—his home town. The freedom of the city is the highest civic honour Stirling has, allowing him the ancient right to march through the centre of Stirling with drums beating, colours flying and bayonets fixed, as well as the right to drive his sheep through the city, which I am sure he is planning on very soon.

In my contribution, I intend to consider what I see as an appropriate legacy for the tremendous sporting achievements of Jamie and Andy Murray.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Jamie and Andy Murray are two very proud Scotsmen, but they are cheered on from across the United Kingdom. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the entire United Kingdom can take great pride in their magnificent achievements?

**Steven Paterson:** I am grateful for that intervention because it allows me to say that in Andy and Jamie Murray we have international stars in the world of sport. They are respected and supported across the world for their achievements. They are the No.1 players in tennis.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): Like you, Mr Speaker, I come to the debate as a very keen tennis player, which is why I applaud the hon. Member for Stirling (Steven Paterson) for bringing forward this Adjournment debate. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) that the Murrays have really helped to move tennis right on in this country—not just in Scotland, but across the board. They are an inspiration to young children, as is Judy Murray, who has helped to coach many young children and to set up many programmes. My own children started playing at the age of two in many of those programmes, which Judy Murray was key in setting up with the Lawn Tennis Association. I applaud the hon. Gentleman for bringing forward this debate, and I applaud everything the Murrays are doing that represents the nation.

**Steven Paterson:** The point is well made, and I will go on to say that the point of the debate is to see how we can build a fitting legacy for Jamie and Andy Murray.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I would like to pay tribute to the Rutherglen lawn tennis club in my constituency, which does a superb job in promoting the game of tennis and which works to help more people to enjoy this fantastic game. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should all do our bit to encourage more people to take up the sport so that, hopefully, we will have more Andy Murrays and Jamie Murrays?

**Steven Paterson:** Yes, indeed. There are clubs all over the country—not just Rutherglen—that are doing that, and my hon. Friend's intervention speaks for all of them.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I, too, congratulate the hon. Gentleman on introducing this debate. Jamie and Andy Murray are an inspiration for many young tennis stars in my constituency who, over the past month or so, have been playing tennis in Greyabbey, Ballywalter, Donaghadee, Newtownards, and Comber. In all those places, young people are inspired by the skills of Jamie and Andy Murray within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

**Steven Paterson:** That is right.

This debate is about investing in this legacy and considering how it is to be achieved. I see that, first, in terms of developing the sporting infrastructure and facilities that allow future generations of athletes to achieve the heights the Murray brothers have reached, and—who knows?—perhaps even to challenge the considerable records of these two fine tennis players. Secondly, just as importantly, it is about widening access and opportunities for everyone to participate in sport.

I want to say this about the values that sport can instil: sporting competition is a good thing. I took part in lots of sports when I was at school and since, from football to athletics to karate—although regrettably not tennis, I am afraid—and I always played to win. I was at school at a time when there was a movement saying that sporting competition was perhaps somehow a bad thing because it meant there were losers as well as winners. I rejected that thesis then and I reject it now. There are tangible benefits both to children and adults in participating in competitive sport.

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): I heard this week about Thornliebank, Giffnock, Braidbar and St John's Primary Schools in my constituency joining a number of others in attaining a Sport Scotland gold award. Part of the inspiration for them, particularly the children from Thornliebank, was playing tennis with Judy Murray. It is vital that children have the opportunity to do as my hon. Friend says and participate in all kinds of sport.

**Steven Paterson:** Absolutely. There are obviously particular physical benefits as we face a generation where obesity is a major issue. There are also mental benefits in terms of setting and achieving goals, and the hard work that has to go into being successful in sport.

**Rebecca Pow:** The hon. Gentleman is making a good point about the benefits of sport. Perhaps he read about the recent survey by the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*—this was reported in *The Daily Telegraph* and various other papers last week—that said that playing racket sports, but particularly tennis, reduces one's risk of death at any given age by 50%, so I think that Mr Speaker, as a keen tennis player, has many, many years ahead of him. That makes the point that we should do everything we can to encourage more people to take part in this sport.

**Steven Paterson:** Yes indeed. I did not read that, but it does not surprise me. There are clear benefits to participating in sport. I am sure that Mr Speaker is extremely pleased by the hon. Lady's mention of him.

I was talking about the fact that there are winners and losers in competitive sport. Losing is part of life, just as it is part of sport, so it is important to learn what it is to get back up and win next time. That is a really important point that is sometimes overlooked in relation to competitive sport and why we should support it. Anyone who has followed Andy Murray's career, in particular, can only be inspired by his reaction to heart-breaking losses at various times. That has forged him into the formidable champion, and world No. 1, that he is today. It is important to take the lessons from sport into other parts of life.

[Steven Paterson]

Sports infrastructure is integral to affording opportunities to young sportspersons to develop their skills and maximise their potential. You may be aware, Mr Speaker, that Judy Murray is currently awaiting a decision following a public inquiry into a planning application for a world-class tennis centre at Park of Keir on the outskirts of Dunblane that would include a tennis academy to nurture the next generation of tennis players. I do not intend to comment directly on the application, because that is not appropriate. It will be determined on the basis of the relevant planning legislation once the planning reporter makes their recommendation. However, I wholeheartedly support the concept of a tennis academy that can be created as a lasting legacy of the Murray brothers and provide the opportunity for the champions of the future to realise their potential. Speaking as the Member of Parliament for Stirling, and someone born and bred in the Stirling area, I sincerely hope that the academy can proceed and benefit local children and young people from the Dunblane and Stirling areas.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing this debate to the Floor of the House. As a graduate of the University of Stirling, I can speak from first-hand experience about the fantastic facilities in his constituency that I benefited from as a student. Does he agree that just as formal spaces for children and young people are important, so are informal spaces? In recent years, there has been an encroachment on our civil spaces, with signs saying “No ball games”, and the areas in which children may play has been reduced. Does he agree that it is important that children are encouraged to get out into our communities and to play in the streets and local parks?

**Steven Paterson:** That point is extremely well made. When I was growing up, “No ball games” signs seemed to be on every patch of grass and piece of ground. It is no surprise that football, for example, is on the wane in Scotland, as it has been for some time. I think it is partly because of the situation that my hon. Friend has described, and we need to turn it around.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing the debate to the Chamber and being so generous with his time. Given the athleticism that is required to be world No. 1 in any sport, he may be disappointed to hear that I am not related to the Murrays. The hon. Gentleman is talking about facilities. Will he congratulate Liberton High School in my constituency, where the headteacher, the parent council, the staff and pupils came together to deliver new tennis courts at the school, to provide those facilities for the future?

**Steven Paterson:** The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely good point. That was part of the discussion that we had at our meeting earlier today, and we will take it forward. I am conscious of the fact that time is racing on, so I will make some progress.

Stirling University is, as has been mentioned, Scotland's university for sporting excellence. There has been a lot of investment in facilities, including the National Tennis Centre, a facility well known to the Murray brothers and to Gordon Reid. As Scotland's university for sporting excellence, Stirling is committed to developing a lasting

sporting legacy in the community and beyond. One of the ways in which it does so is through coaching. I understand that Judy Murray was on campus yesterday delivering the Tennis on the Road programme, which trained more than 20 students to deliver starter tennis lessons in primary schools.

The university works in partnership with Tennis Scotland and the Tennis Foundation, which is responsible for disability and education tennis. As part of that partnership, the university has two graduate tennis co-ordinators who study for masters degrees part time and work in graduate assistant roles at the university. One has responsibility for supporting grassroots tennis and getting more people into the game. The other delivers coaching for students and staff below team level from beginner upwards, as well as running tennis-based fitness classes. As far as widening access to the local community is concerned, more than 250 people—from three-year-olds to people in their 50s, and everything in between—come to the campus on a weekly basis to take part in the community programmes. Some excellent work is going on there.

I am conscious of the time, and I do not want to eat into the Minister's time or anyone else's.

**Anne McLaughlin** (Glasgow North East) (SNP) *rose*—

**Steven Paterson:** I will take one last intervention.

**Anne McLaughlin:** I thank my hon. Friend for taking an intervention. In case he did not know, in September this year Andy Murray held a sporting tournament in Glasgow, at which he raised £305,000 for charity. Half the money went to UNICEF UK to help children in Syria and the other half went to Young People's Futures, an incredible organisation in Possilpark, in my constituency. It operates on a tiny little budget, and the money has made such a difference to it. We should all thank Andy Murray for not forgetting that his fans got him where he is, as he has said, and for paying them back in such a way.

**Steven Paterson:** That says everything about Andy, Jamie and the family. It is exactly the kind of approach that they take: they use their positions to do the right thing. Jamie and Andy Murray richly deserve their legacy after years of dedication and hard work in tennis. As I said two weeks ago in this Chamber, the Murray brothers are the pride of Dunblane, and we salute their superb achievements in the sport, in reaching the pinnacle of tennis and becoming world No. 1s.

I hope that we continue to build on the enthusiasm and inspiration that these sporting heroes generate for tennis and, indeed, for other sports. I hope that we will develop and enhance sporting facilities and increase the accessibility of sport for everyone, irrespective of their background. If we succeed in doing so, the legacy of Jamie and Andy Murray's sporting achievements will be to make them the trailblazers of a golden generation of sporting champions. That is a goal we should set ourselves and achieve.

7.53 pm

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Steven Paterson) on securing tonight's debate,

and I thank him and the Minister for allowing me to make a contribution. I thank you, Mr Speaker, for ensuring that the debate was scheduled this evening immediately following the hearing of the all-party group on Scottish sport with Judy Murray and Blane Dodds, the chair of Tennis Scotland, on the Murray legacy. May I put on record my thanks, and that of the all-party group, to Judy and Blane for attending the hearing? It was a fascinating talk, and it was an absolute privilege for us all. I thank you, Mr Speaker, for attending the meeting as well. That was much appreciated.

The all-party group on Scottish sport is keen to offer as much assistance as possible to support the growth of tennis in Scotland, and it is anxious that we do not miss the opportunity to build on the success of the Murray family. The success of the Murrys is fantastic for Scottish and British tennis, and we have all—none more than you, Mr Speaker—enjoyed watching them rise to become the best tennis players in the world. However, the story of their path to success raises some serious questions about the state of British tennis, and how about supportive the system has been and is for emerging talent.

Following the final of the European under-16 championships and after receiving advice from a young Rafael Nadal, a 15-year-old Andy Murray realised that, if he was to become the tennis champion that he is now, he would have to move away from the UK. The infrastructure to support emerging talent was very poor. The lack of indoor courts combined with coaching issues and the horrendous British weather meant that British tennis could not support his development as a player. That was 14 years ago and, sadly, the situation has not improved as much as we would have hoped or expected. The best way in which we can live up to the legacy of Andy and Jamie is to ensure that young people, regardless of their background, have access to facilities and coaching, and to ensure that promising young tennis players do not have to travel abroad to access appropriate facilities and elite coaching.

As we have heard, Scotland well and truly punches above its weight in tennis. Not only are Andy and Jamie world No. 1s, but it was confirmed last weekend that Gordon Reid is the end-of-season world No. 1 in men's wheelchair tennis. Scotland currently provides the Davis cup captain and the immediate past Fed cup captain in Leon Smith and Judy Murray herself. However, despite our world-leading position, serious questions and concerns exist about how tennis in Scotland is supported; hence the decision of the all-party group to investigate what work is being done to establish a Murray legacy. The picture, to this point, is not good. Despite Scotland having 8.5% of the UK's population, Tennis Scotland only receives just under £800,000 of funding from the Lawn Tennis Association, despite its budget of £63 million. That represents 1.3% of the LTA budget.

The Scottish weather is well known and well loved, we might say—[*Interruption.*] Hon. Members are correct to say that that is, indeed, a huge exaggeration. Despite our climate, however, we do not appear to have our fair share of accessible indoor tennis courts. In fact, according to a BBC report, there are only 102 indoor tennis courts in Scotland compared with 1,494 in England. That is not just the responsibility of the LTA; it is the responsibility of all politicians, Governments, local authorities and governing bodies to ensure that we have the correct facilities to cater for the needs of any youngsters who want to pick up a racket and start playing tennis.

During the meeting, Blane Dodds said that we have one court for 48,000 people in Scotland, whereas it is one for 26,600 people in the rest of the UK. He also said that the need, demand and opportunity are greater in Scotland than anywhere else in the UK and that partnership working and multi-sport facilities will be key as we move forwards. I am not the constituency MP, so saying this is not so incumbent on me as it is on my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling, but Judy Murray's excellent proposal for a multi-sport facility at Park of Keir near Stirling is exactly the sort of project that should be supported if we are to make real progress. This exciting proposition represents a huge investment, and I wish her luck in securing approval for it.

Politicians are quick to send out a tweet to congratulate the Murray brothers on their success, and it is only right and proper that we acknowledge their success and the contribution they have made to Scottish and British sport. However, the most fitting way that we can respect, acknowledge and celebrate the success of the Murrys is by establishing a Murray legacy to ensure future generations benefit from the success of Andy and Jamie.

During the meeting, Judy spoke passionately about the urgency of the situation in that we risk losing this great opportunity forever and of her frustration at the governing bodies. She talked about how she started Tennis on the Road, which amounted to Judy and another coach going around the country in a van loaded with equipment. Managing to utilise that small resource, Judy and her coaching partner coached more than 8,000 people. She said that we need more vans, coaches and courts, but that such facilities need to be accessible to all. She wants the country to benefit from her 25 years of coaching experience. She closed by saying that, at the end of the day, we need the LTA to release more money for tennis in Scotland.

In conclusion, now is the time to cement a legacy from the achievements of Andy and Jamie. It is incumbent on all politicians and governing bodies alike to ensure that the unique opportunity to build on the success of the Murrys is not missed.

**Mr Speaker:** I thank colleagues very warmly for what they have said, and I think they will be thanked outside this place as well. Follow-through is key of course.

7.59 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch):** I thank the hon. Member for Stirling (Steven Paterson) for taking this opportunity to formally celebrate two of our great British sportsmen. I also thank the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) for his contribution.

I am sure you will agree, Mr Speaker, that it is a pleasure to take some time out to reflect on success and give credit where it is due. Like yourself, I have followed tennis through the years—the highs, the lows, the expectant British crowd and the frustrating near misses—so I feel pretty lucky to be the Minister for Sport in an era of such success for these two great players. If I may, I will add a third great player into the mix, Gordon Reid, who has already been mentioned and whose achievement in becoming the world No. 1 wheelchair tennis player last weekend by making the final of the Wheelchair Masters

[Tracey Crouch]

at Lea Valley was phenomenal, especially after winning the Paralympic singles in Rio alongside Wimbledon and the Australian Open.

Andy Murray's achievement in becoming the world No. 1 tennis player of 2016 is an incredible testament to his dedication, professionalism, skill and sheer will to win. In winning both Wimbledon and Olympic gold for the second time, Andy's place as one of Britain's all-time sporting greats is assured. To win both tournaments and then defeat Novak Đokovic at the World Finals in London last month to retain his No. 1 position is nothing short of incredible. That does not even begin to cover his exploits representing Great Britain with such distinction in the Davis cup, which I will come back to later.

Beyond his achievements on the courts, Andy is also a genuinely nice guy, making him an inspirational role model to many. Members may recall that Andy was chosen to carry the Union flag at the opening ceremony of the Olympics. The night before the ceremony, we had a photo call with the flag, which was enormous. He managed to drape it over Princess Anne, making news bulletins around the world. I was lucky enough to be on the other side, and remained free from what was basically flag carnage. We ended up having a long chat while we were waiting for all the photographers in the bank to get ready and get their positions. Afterwards, people asked me what I had talked to Andy Murray about for so long—whether it was tennis tactics, or investment in the future, and so on. I confess that Andy and I were talking about the babies we had left behind—his daughter and my son were born within a few days of each other. We often forget that international sports stars' dedication and commitment quite often take them away from their families. To still achieve the great deal that he did in Rio, despite that being the case, is something else we should applaud and appreciate.

The debate rightly recognises the contributions of both Murray brothers. Jamie has climbed to the top of the doubles game without perhaps the same level of public scrutiny and expectation. His profile was raised after winning the 2007 Wimbledon mixed doubles with Jelena Jankovic. Since then, his increased success in men's doubles, winning the Australian and US Opens this year, has culminated in his and his partner's rise to become the world No. 1 doubles pair at the end of 2016.

I thought the sibling rivalry in my childhood was something, but sibling rivalry must be quite special in the Murray household, when one brother holds two Wimbledon titles but the other won theirs first. As my sister is not in a position to answer back, I think it is only fair that the record shows that I always won.

The sheer dedication it has taken for Jamie and Andy to reach the pinnacle of their sport has been immense. But talent must be nurtured and supported. Of course, not every aspiring tennis player is raised by Judy Murray—that might be a hard task even for her—but her inspirational leadership, nurturing her sons' talent and enthusiasm, along with her six years as GB Federation cup captain, has led the way to a new golden era in British tennis. Her work on the Department's Women and Sport Advisory Board has also played a leading role in championing women's sport. If I end up being half the mother that Judy is, I will be extremely proud.

One of the most notable contributions that the Murray brothers have made to tennis in this country was made together. The Davis cup win of 2015 was Great Britain's first for 79 years. Both Murray brothers played crucial roles in that historic win, as did the fans who in both London and Glasgow ensured a roaring home crowd. While 2016 saw a narrow loss to Argentina in the semi-finals, I look forward eagerly—as, I think, many other hon. Members do—to the 2017 competition.

Such global victories have undeniably made Andy and Jamie catalysts for British tennis at home. The chasing pack of other British tennis players has undoubtedly links to the inspiration of having such world-class role models on our team. With Kyle Edmund, now in the top 50 and rising, and other leading doubles players such as Dominic Inglot improving their rankings, the Davis cup is certainly looking healthy for Great Britain for many years to come. Gordon Reid is inspiring teammates in wheelchair tennis. As well as winning singles gold in Rio, Gordon won silver in the wheelchair doubles with teenager Alfie Hewett, who is seen as a future world No. 1. I congratulate Great Britain's fourth world No. 1 of 2016, quad tennis player Andy Lapthorne, who won silver in the quad singles in Rio and bronze in the doubles alongside Jamie Burdekin.

UK Sport's record investment in Paralympics GB paid further dividends with Jordanne Whiley and Lucy Shuker taking bronze in the women's doubles.

**Rebecca Pow:** Will the Minister give way?

**Tracey Crouch:** I do not have time, I am afraid. I would if we had a longer debate.

I must mention some more of the recent successes that British women have been enjoying. Johanna Konta's meteoric rise to the world's top 10 has been a fantastic development for her and the women's game. With Heather Watson and Naomi Broady improving steadily and Laura Robson returning after injury, British women's tennis is proving to be very healthy.

These players are an inspiration to up-and-coming players and the grassroots of the game in this country. Sport England statistics show that over 428,000 people play tennis at least once a week—over 20,000 more since London 2012. Disabled player numbers have increased by nearly 50% since 2012, rising to over 30,000.

Sport England and sportscotland support the LTA in its objective to increase participation in the sport through their current £17.4 million investment. Since 2010, Sport England has invested £8.2 million in 278 national lottery-funded projects. The hon. Member for Stirling is right to mention that Stirling University is home to the Scottish National Tennis Centre. It is very important in the development of Scottish tennis, which is being enjoyed by both the public and promising Scottish players.

The LTA provides support to British players and tennis generally across the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman mentioned some of the projects and schemes being funded. Following the Davis cup victory, the LTA launched Tennis for Kids to inspire five to eight-year-olds to pick up a racket and play for the first time—perhaps not the two-year-olds my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) mentioned—and over 13,000 children were introduced to the sport through a free six-week training course and given a free racket to keep playing.

Time is very short, but it is important to remember that the great Union between us has been the cornerstone of our prosperity in the past and it is vital to our future success. Andy and Jamie Murray are a wonderful illustration of that success both now, when at the pinnacle of their sport, and in the future, when they will continue to inspire millions across the United Kingdom and beyond. They are a credit to their country, our country, their

sport and their family. I congratulate them again on their phenomenal performances in 2016 and look forward to further great achievements in the years ahead.

*Question put and agreed to.*

8.8 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

Wednesday 7 December 2016

[MR PETER BONE *in the Chair*]

## Tree Planting

9.30 am

**Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered tree planting in the UK.

I have a declaration of interest to make: the forest and wood-processing sectors are well represented in my constituency, which contains no fewer than three sawmills, including one at Newbridge-on-Wye, close to the ground of the famous Royal Welsh show at Builth Wells. It will come as no surprise that forestry has always been a strong interest of mine, and I was delighted to be selected by Members to chair the all-party parliamentary group on forestry soon after I was elected as a Member of Parliament. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] Unanimous support, as you can tell, Mr Bone.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): There was only one nomination.

**Chris Davies:** I will ignore that. The timing of this debate is fortuitous, coming as it does just after National Tree Week, which ended on Sunday. National Tree Week is the UK's largest annual tree celebration, launching the start of the winter tree-planting season. It first took place in 1975.

The debate also coincides with the inquiry into forestry in England by the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which took evidence from a number of organisations interested in trees and woodlands yesterday. It is heartening to see that Parliament is taking the issue of tree planting seriously. This debate is part of the important process of looking at the issue carefully throughout all the nations that make up the United Kingdom, so we can see what lessons can be learned and shared.

The first question to ask is, why does tree planting matter to the people of the UK? Secondly, if it does matter, are we planting enough trees? Thirdly, if we are not planting enough trees, how can we change that and plant more? I will discuss the three questions in the order I set them out.

First, why does planting trees matter? There are many reasons. Most people are surprised when they are told that the UK is the third largest net importer of wood products in the world. China, with its population of 1.35 billion, tops the league table, and Japan, with a population double that of the UK, is in second place.

The reason for our reliance on imports is simple. Woodland cover in England is only 10%, and about 40% of that is not actively managed. Our good friends in Scotland, however, are taking the lead among the home nations with woodland cover at 18%, but that is still only half the European average of 37%. The days of comparing ourselves against the great European averages as a benchmark may be drawing to a close, but it is

worth reflecting that more than 30% of the land of all our large European neighbours—Germany, France, Italy and Spain—is covered by trees.

The World Wide Fund for Nature has calculated that global demand for timber, paper and energy from forests is set to triple by 2050. If we do not plant more trees now, and if we continue to rely on imports, then the UK will be competing against other growing economies for a natural resource that we can, and perhaps should, grow more of at home.

What do the British public think? Helpfully, the Forestry Commission has conducted twice-yearly surveys of public attitudes to forestry and related issues since 1995. The findings are consistent over time and are worth putting on the record. Three quarters of people agree or strongly agree that

"Trees are good because they remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in wood".

**Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): Rowlinson Timber in my constituency uses forestry products and imports many of them. Making products that go into the supply chain locks up the carbon for additional time and allows the wood to be recycled at the end of the product's life, making a vital contribution to ecosystem services. Furthermore, planting new trees also assists with anti-flooding measures.

**Chris Davies:** My hon. Friend makes two good points, which I will elaborate on as we make progress. Indeed, in the survey, two thirds of the public agree or strongly agree that:

"Planting more trees can help us cope with climate change by providing shade and reducing the effects of flooding",

as my hon. Friend said. Four fifths agree or strongly agree that

"A lot more trees should be planted".

I repeat that for the benefit of the Minister: four fifths of the public agree or strongly agree that a lot more trees should be planted.

Does tree planting matter to the people of the UK? The evidence I have just given strongly demonstrates that it does, and evidence does not come only from more than 20 years of opinion polling. The British public are right behind great charities that support tree planting, such as the Woodland Trust, Trees for Life and the John Muir Trust. Last week, an editorial in *The Guardian*—not my paper of choice, as has been pointed out to me—summed up our attitude to trees well:

"The British like to romanticise trees",

it said, having earlier stated:

"We need greenery to feed the forests of our imaginations."

I find it hard to disagree with those views.

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Even in *The Guardian*.

**Chris Davies:** Even in *The Guardian*.

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has recognised the role of trees in mitigating flooding as part of natural flood management, and the EFRA Secretary of State recently announced a £19 million fund to plant trees, because of their contribution to locking up carbon. There are therefore many reasons

[Chris Davies]

why we should plant trees. Most importantly, perhaps, our constituents are overwhelmingly in favour of more trees being planted.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the issue is about trees in not only in rural areas, but urban areas? Many people enjoy the presence of trees in towns, and they also act as green lungs—things that are physically beautiful, but also contribute to a better environment for all.

**Chris Davies:** I represent a rural seat, so I am looking from the perspective of the rural economy—and, indeed, of how trees enhance rurality—but I fully agree with my hon. Friend. I chose my little shoebox of a flat in London because it is close to an open square, so that I look out over a little patch of green grass and trees, which reminds me of home. My hon. Friend makes an important point: that certainly puts a spring in my step as I come into this great place every morning.

There are many reasons to plant trees, not least the wishes of our constituents, so I now come to the second question that I asked. Are we planting enough trees in the UK? The answer, as people will not be surprised to learn, sadly, is no. Planting rates in England are at a modern low and have been described as woeful.

The forestry industry in the UK supports at least 79,000 low-carbon jobs and is worth nearly £2 billion annually to our economy. Industry body Confor, the Confederation of Forest Industries, believes that such figures could be significant underestimates. Most available statistics from our countries are out of date, although a recent study in Scotland pointed the way, showing that the sector there had grown by 50% between 2008 and 2014, during challenging economic times in the UK. Well done to Scotland!

In the UK as a whole, we are benefiting from relatively high levels of tree planting in the decades after the end of the second world war. Trees planted in the 1970s and '80s are now available for harvesting, which is contributing directly to a boom in the forestry and wood-processing industries. Unfortunately, new planting rates in the UK fell dramatically at the end of the 1980s. There has been an increase in Scotland in recent years, but other countries of the UK have largely followed a downward trend.

Organisations such as Confor and the Woodland Trust have been warning about this downturn in planting and the effect that it will have over a number of years. The language used has, perhaps understandably, become more and more extreme. Confor highlights the threat to future supplies of wood to support businesses in the UK, while the Woodland Trust has wondered whether England has experienced annual deforestation in recent years. The situation is simply not acceptable.

I come to my final point, which is a simple question: how can the UK change our approach to tree planting and ensure that we plant more trees? There is some good news—and it is back to Scotland. My colleagues from Scotland will no doubt talk about it in more detail; several of them have put in to speak. It looks as though the Scottish Government, not Wales, Northern Ireland or Westminster, are leading the way. They have the most ambitious targets among the home nations and are taking steps to speed up their processes for approving larger planting schemes.

The application process that farmers and landowners are required to go through to access funding for planting is complex and costly. It can and does put people off. When public money is involved, it is right and proper that comprehensive safeguards are in place to ensure value for money and that high standards are followed, particularly for forestry. However, the relevant bodies across the UK should be able to approve larger schemes that fully meet UK forestry standard requirements within six months in most cases and a year in all cases, not the current two years-plus. That would provide reassurance to farmers and landowners that their applications will not get bogged down with continually rising costs.

We all know that the UK will have to look again at support for the countryside after the country leaves the European Union. We do not yet know what the level of support will be or what it will look like. That will be determined by not just the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, but the devolved Administrations in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. We surely must grasp the opportunity in front of us to ensure that forestry has parity of esteem with farming and fisheries as post-Brexit countryside policy develops.

For too long, forestry has been the forgotten F-word in rural policy and a poor relation in land use policy discussions. If we grow and process more of the wood we need in the UK, jobs will stay in this country, rather than being exported overseas. Using wood grown in Britain is clearly a priority for this Government, and I firmly support that. Leaving the EU means that we can look again at public procurement rules. States in countries such as Canada and Australia have timber-first public procurement policies. Using more sustainable UK-grown timber will stimulate business growth and ensure that more of our woodlands are well managed.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate, and I apologise for missing the very start. He was good enough earlier to touch on the fact that Scotland leads the way on forestry planting. On the use of wood in the UK, does he agree that the UK Government should look at more timber-frame house construction? Again, Scotland leads the way on that. Three out of four houses being built in Scotland use timber-frame construction, whereas in the rest of England and Wales it is something like 15%.

**Chris Davies:** The hon. Gentleman takes advantage of my praise for Scotland, but I certainly agree with him on that matter, which I am sure the Minister will elaborate on.

The Chancellor's autumn statement made clear the need for new homes across the UK. Using timber means that houses can be built to a high standard, more quickly and with less energy in construction, and it saves money over the lifetime of the property. The UK sawmilling sector, which is a large employer in my constituency, and the wood panelling sector process nearly all the 11 million tonnes of UK-grown timber that is harvested annually.

The sawmilling sector has invested £100 million in UK plants every year since the recession. UK timber has a wide variety of domestic and construction uses—it is used in building our homes, for decking, fencing and pallets for industry, and much more. Mills such as BSW

in my constituency and around the country are among the most modern and efficient in Europe. We have much to be proud of. I look forward to hearing the views of other Members from around the country, because we all have an interest in forestry and planting trees.

My view might be best summarised by an adaptation of the famous 18th-century Dunning's motion, which was passed by the House of Commons: tree planting in the UK has decreased, is decreasing and ought to be increasing. I urge Members to support that approach. I hope that all political parties and devolved Governments across the UK will work together to address the long-term decline in tree planting.

**Antoinette Sandbach:** Does my hon. Friend agree that in Wales, the incorporation of the Forestry Commission into Natural Resources Wales has been a disaster? That has had a dramatic effect on the perception of forestry as the missing F-word in policy.

**Chris Davies:** I understand that this debate is not particularly about Wales and NRW, and the Minister will probably keep off that subject, but I could not agree with my hon. Friend more. As a Welsh MP and someone who was involved in Forestry Commission Wales, I have been a great supporter of it in years gone by. Forestry has virtually disappeared into NRW. In my opinion—in hers too, I am sure—that is a tremendous mistake. Forestry Commission Wales was a beacon to look up to; now, as she says, forestry is the missing F-word. That is a great shame indeed.

**Alex Chalk:** Does my hon. Friend agree that in this debate we need to look at quality as well as quantity? We ought to look to preserve the diversity and richness of domestic deciduous species, not just rush to plant any old evergreen species.

**Chris Davies:** I agree that this country needs more trees. We have to be sensible and look at the end product. We encourage farmers and landowners to plant trees, and they have to look at the return. The Government have to ensure that there is the right return and help for planting, processing and managing. We have to look at the evergreens—the softwoods—that can produce a reasonable return in 40 to 50 years; hardwood trees produce a return in 80 to 100 years.

There must be a place for both kinds of trees, but the sawmills in my constituency, which I have mentioned many times, require softwood. They employ 150 people—that will go up to 180 in the next 12 months—and they process softwood. We require a great deal of softwood in this country. As I have already stated, all the wood that we produce, the majority of which is softwood, is consumed in this country, and we import even more. We have to look at not just what makes the countryside pretty and what looks after its ecology but what our subsidiary industries require. So I agree in part.

I hope that all the devolved Governments and the Westminster Government will work closely to plant more trees, which would make such a difference to our economy, our environment and our communities. Significant new tree planting would provide solutions to a whole range of 21st-century problems. It would deliver jobs and investment to our rural areas, help to reduce the impact of climate change and flooding, create habitats

for wildlife and wonderful places for people to enjoy, and provide the raw material to build the new homes that this country needs.

9.48 am

**Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP):** It is nice to appear under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies) on securing this important debate and on his excellent opening speech. Unusually, most of us probably agree with most of what he said—especially his congratulations to the Scottish National party Government in Scotland for their record on tree planting.

Much of the hon. Gentleman's speech was about the economics of forestry, and I will talk a little about that, but I also note the importance of tree planting for all of us—it is not just about economics. Woods and forests are magical places that give joy to millions and have deep roots in our culture and folklore, yet the UK's woodland resources have declined since the middle ages, and by the early years of the last century had reached an all-time low of just 5% of land area. There was a real crisis during the first world war, when so much timber was needed for the war effort that trees were chopped down almost indiscriminately, with potentially disastrous effects.

Members who have read Lewis Grassic Gibbon's classic "Sunset Song" may recall the reaction of the small farmer Chae to his wife when he returned from the trenches and found that the woods around Kinraddie had been cut down.

He said:

"Hadn't she got eyes in her head, the fool, not telling him before that wood was cut? It would lay the whole Knapp open to the North East now and the fair end of a living here."

That is the important thing about trees, as others have said: they are good not only for the soil but for shelter belts for farming. Anyone who has been on the north-east coast of Scotland on a windy day will appreciate the need for trees around that area.

Trees have played a vital part in small farming for generations, and now they also play an important part in flood prevention along many of our rivers. The creation of the Forestry Commission in 1999 was a reaction to falling wooded areas and a real attempt to reverse that.

As the hon. Gentleman noted, Scotland has the highest percentage of woodland cover in the UK at 18% of our land area. That is predominantly—74%—softwood, which as he rightly said is productive, with the remainder being principally native woods. There have been attempts, notably by the Cairngorms national park, to plant trees to regenerate and extend the remnants of the ancient Caledonian forest that at one point covered the whole of Scotland. Those trees provide a haven for much of our native wildlife. Those who drive around my constituency can see red squirrels—our trees are one of the last redoubts of that magnificent creature. In other areas, forests provide habitat for the endangered native Scottish wildcat. Tree planting helps the environment and the conservation of species, and that should not be overlooked.

**Alex Chalk:** Does the hon. Gentleman therefore agree that while one must always look at economic issues, our environmental and cultural heritage and what we can do to preserve the diversity of our wildlife must also be core priorities in the debate?

**Mike Weir:** That is exactly the point I was making. Trees are important for many reasons. They provide a huge commercial opportunity, which I accept, and that exists in Scotland at the moment, but we must also preserve our ancient woodlands. People like to walk in woods, and they like them for leisure activities. Frankly, there is a huge market for leisure activities in woods that are not being chopped down.

There is a lot we can do and, as the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) pointed out, there is a huge benefit to be had in fighting climate change, because growing wood takes up more carbon. However, much of the forest planted since the first world war has been planted for economic reasons, and that is not always understood. By its very nature, forestry is a long-term investment as trees take many years to grow to full maturity, and there can be a lack of understanding when woods that have stood for many years are cut down. That happened in my constituency: when wood came to its maturity, the trees were chopped down and there was a bit of a public outcry because well loved woods were going. However, trees are a crop, much as any other, which will be harvested. They will be replaced or replanted, but it will take many years for the new trees to come to maturity. Perhaps a bit of public education is needed in some areas as to the nature of forestry, with people understanding that it is a crop.

Today, forestry is estimated to contribute almost £1 billion a year to the Scottish economy, and it supports more than 25,000 full time equivalent jobs. Much of the activity in forestry comes from the Scottish rural development programme, which is funded via the EU, providing real support for rural communities. As we do in many debates, I ask the Minister, in this apparently new era of the Government telling us exactly what they intend to do before article 50 is triggered, what they will do to ensure that such funds will still be available should we exit the European Union. Forestry is a long-term business that requires stability and confidence for investment decisions to be made both in planting and in timber processing. At present, the forestry industry enjoys zero or low tariffs on trade within the European Union, so it is vital that a level playing field remains with other parts of the Union should the UK end up exiting. Support industries such as forest industries are sensitive to sudden dips in demand. Even a short-term fall in planting due to uncertainty could put many Scottish businesses such as tree nurseries at risk, so long-term certainty is important for the industry.

The Scottish Government recognise the extreme importance of the industry and are taking the steps they can to reassure investors that Scotland is open for business in both planting and investment in the processing sector. They have recently held two summits with the forestry sector to listen to its concerns and ambitions on the future of forestry. The Rural Economy Minister, Fergus Ewing, has met leading representatives of forest management investment companies to try to reassure them as much as possible. The Scottish Government currently have a consultation on the future of the forestry industry. They are making a real attempt to grow the industry of, as the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire put it, the missing “F” in the debate, to provide jobs in many rural areas such as mine and those of my hon. Friends who are here today.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman again on what he said about forestry. It is an important industry, but I would like the Minister to address where we are going on funding for future forestry enterprises if we are leaving the EU.

9.56 am

**Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con):** We have heard from my fellow office bearer of the all-party group on forestry, my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies). I support and reinforce all the points he made.

As someone with a direct family connection to the forestry and timber industry, I declare an interest in the subject. My husband plants tens of thousands of trees every year in Northumberland, as did his father before him, and his grandfather planted more than half a million trees after the second world war, when most of the timber had been cut for the war effort and shipbuilders on the Tyne. If my husband could, he would probably reforest the whole of Northumberland in native, ancient hardwoods, but perhaps that is a step too far for the Government. I declare my bemusement at why current tree planting rates are so low—despite my husband’s best efforts—when, as my hon. Friend eloquently pointed out, it can provide solutions to a wide range of problems that face us in the 21st century.

I would like to cover in more detail some of the issues my hon. Friend mentioned. The first is flooding, which has been a big issue for us northern MPs over the past few years. We do not yet hear strongly enough from the Government that they understand how we can genuinely alter the ecosystem to reduce that long-term risk. I am on record as saying that there is clear evidence that tree planting can have a positive impact in reducing future flood risk.

The management plans based on river basins that are coming through are much more robust, and there is a serious tree planting part to that picture, which is encouraging. However, we really need to drive that forward to ensure that it is not lost. Rather than the unambitious target of 11 million trees being planted under this Government, I suggested in the House back in December last year that we should look at a number closer to 200 million. That sounds like a big number, but it is not that much acreage. The Minister may not recall my suggestion, which was that rather than planting one tree for every five citizens we should plant five trees per citizen. There is a big difference in those numbers, but, with political will and an understanding of the benefits, we can aspire to go much further.

Planting trees in the uplands as part of a wider natural flood management plan can reduce downstream flood risks. It is instinctively the right thing to do. Particularly in Cumbria, where for many years upland behaviour has been driven by the level of EU funding for sheep on uplands, there has been a lack of planting, so now we have long-term water retention issues, to which trees would make a significant difference. A number of publications by Forest Research and the forestry trade body Confor have highlighted the opportunities. Projects such as slowing the flow at Pickering in North Yorkshire show the practical benefits clearly.

Critics say that trees take too long to grow to play a major part in flood risk. I would answer that in two ways, not only because I am married to a man who

thinks long-term—that has been drilled into me after 20 years of marriage—but because the tree is a vital component of the work. Research has shown that tree planting can have an impact on water flows within a year as tree roots take hold and the ground is disturbed. More importantly, it is time that we looked at long-term solutions to long-term systemic problems rather than being satisfied with quick fixes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire listed a number of 21st-century challenges to which forestry can provide solutions, which should all be addressed for the long term in a sustainable way: delivering lasting employment in rural areas; building warm, attractive homes that people want to live in; creating beautiful woodland habitats for recreation and wildlife; and tackling future risks from climate change and flooding. Those issues do not require quick fixes, they need a considered long-term approach. That is not something that Governments are naturally inclined to. I appreciate that it is difficult, but that is where forestry comes in. It can deliver for the economy, for our communities and for the environment.

So why are we hesitating? The Government have set a modest target, and we will struggle to meet that unless something miraculous happens. I find it difficult to listen to climate change alarmists and hear about Government policies that drive less economically efficient use of taxpayers' money for energy and climate change planning, when we could plant the most efficient, cheapest carbon capture technology, which nature has already given us: the tree. Perhaps the Minister will inform us of whether any work is being done with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to consider how we can join up our thinking about that.

What can be done? First of all, let us support good planting schemes by getting them through the application process quickly and efficiently and not miring applicants in paperwork and delay. An exciting application in my constituency highlights what can be achieved. As the Minister will know, we have a plan to plant 600,000 trees on land at Doddington North, near Wooler, one of the more northern towns in my constituency. That is almost half the number of trees so far planted in 18 months in the whole of England. Doddington will be a great example of modern, mixed forestry—a range of tree species planted with open spaces and designed to fit into the existing landscape and deliver a huge range of benefits. The Doddington plan was launched this summer near Wooler at our local countryside show, the Glendale show. There was wide support from the community and even wider support for the fact that the consultation had started such an early stage. Andy Howard, the man behind the scheme, was able to tell the local community a positive story:

“Our design for the Doddington North wood can provide a very diverse ecology with a wide range of species of tree, plant, bird and animal life supported.”

Let me now return to 21st century problems and the practical ways in which forestry, such as what is being done at Doddington, can provide solutions. We are all passionate about protecting wildlife, especially totemic species such as the red squirrel. Northumberland is one of the few areas where there is still the chance to maintain the red squirrel's habitat and fight off the grey squirrels that try to invade the space. Doddington is in a red squirrel buffer zone, and a specific focus of the scheme is to increase the amount of habitat that supports

red squirrels. The scheme will also provide significant flood mitigation measures, as two tributaries for the Till floodplain below the site in Glendale start on Doddington moor.

As for jobs, the largest local sawmill, A & J Scott Ltd, an independent business employing more than 100 people in my constituency, is keen for the Doddington scheme to go ahead. It needs a guaranteed supply of wood, and there is worry at forecasts showing that the supply of timber from the UK will tail off unless we increase planting rates now. Robert Scott, the managing director, said:

“An afforestation plan of this scale could be very beneficial to our business in the future. We have in recent years, expressed our concerns regarding the future supply of the raw material for our sawmill.

It is clear that the volumes of saw log material will decline within the next 10 years and we are concerned that our ability to maintain a steady supply will be compromised, thus threatening the future of our business.”

That is a clear and worrying statement, and it is well borne out by the facts.

I want to mention two recent reports. In 2014 the Forestry Commission's 50-year timber availability forecast showed a damaging fall-off in future timber supply. Confor analysis suggested that 1,000 rural jobs in constituencies such as mine could be lost unless that is plugged. In June, a report on wood fibre availability and demand showed clearly that demand for wood, for new homes and the wood products we all take for granted, will outstrip supply within little more than a decade. It also says:

“In Northern and Central England, demand already exceeds potential availability.”

Do we really want to import more wood at higher cost, threaten rural jobs, rely on short-term fixes for flooding, and reduce the supply of a beautiful, flexible and sustainable material with which to build new homes? I do not believe we do, and that is why I am bemused.

People love trees. Confor and the Woodland Trust both support a policy of the right tree in the right place. At the moment, we seem to be pursuing a policy of almost no trees, in no places. Why are we making it so difficult? Let us support great schemes such as the one at Doddington, and our forestry and timber industry; let us begin working out how to remove the barriers to planting and get more trees in the ground; and let us start soon, or future generations across rural Britain will pay the price.

10.4 am

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies) on securing such an important debate and delivering such a fine speech, full of detail about the works of the Scottish Government and how well we are doing. It is very much appreciated. He mentioned his constituency interest in the forestry and timber industries, and I have a similar interest. Forestry and timber have deep roots in my constituency. Indeed, the tree family is part of our family tree there. *[Interruption.]* It gets worse—but I do want to change tack and be serious, because the industry is an important part of the economy; and the family aspect is important, because there is great potential for our young people when they are building careers.

[Drew Hendry]

When we grow trees in my constituency, we grow careers for people who want a rewarding job. I am keen for girls and young women in particular to take up the opportunities. We take forestry seriously—not least because I share my constituency area with the Forestry Minister in the Scottish Government, Fergus Ewing. However, forestry is also seen as a major developing industry in the highlands. That growth and development can happen only if we have a responsible commitment to sustainability. The Scottish Government see great potential in forestry, and consider it an excellent area in which to get young people involved; but it must be supported and developed, and I know that they are committed to taking their good work to greater heights.

The headquarters of Forest Enterprise Scotland is in my constituency, in Inverness. It is responsible for managing Scotland's national forest estate and contributes to what I would call the local five-a-day of our economy—health, wellbeing, education, community development and protecting our natural and cultural heritage. Its work has the potential to benefit not only my constituents but all the people in Scotland, and beyond.

The Scottish School of Forestry, Inverness College, University of the Highlands and Islands, is the principal institution for forestry training and education in Scotland. We have a good reputation locally for providing successful forest managers in both the public and private sectors of the industry. The school acquired its sites from the Forestry Commission in 1972 and sits in its own 10-hectare woodland. It is the only forestry training provider to deliver higher and further education in its own practical training environment.

Among the area's timber industries is Gordon Timber, in Nairn, which was founded in 1862. Since the late 1880s it has been managed by four generations of the same family, and is now recognised as one of the top sawmilling companies in the UK. The BSW Timber sawmill in Boat of Garten is a major employer in the area, and our plant contributes significantly to the local economy. BSW Timber was founded in 1848 and is the UK's biggest sawmiller. It employs more than 1,000 people across seven locations, four of which are in Scotland.

Norbord, in Inverness, was the first manufacturer of oriented strand board in Europe. It was also the first OSB plant in Europe to receive Forest Stewardship Council accreditation, demonstrating commitment to the environment. Production at Inverness and Genk combines to make Norbord one of the largest OSB producers in Europe. Earlier this year, the Canadian company Norbord announced that it plans to invest up to £95 million in its wood panel factory near Inverness.

The final business I want to mention is MAKAR at Loch Ness, which has established a progressive timber-based design and build system that is rooted in the resources of Scotland. It has honed its knowledge of modern construction methods to get the optimum performance from home-grown timber. Not only does that reduce the carbon footprint of MAKAR's buildings; it stimulates a regional industry that feeds investment into the economy. It is important that we support tree planting in Scotland, and note the wise words of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire about investing in the future.

Forestry is a devolved matter within the UK, and Scottish Ministers already direct domestic Scottish forest policy. However, domestic forestry is heavily influenced by EU policies and regulations, and co-financed funding is received for Scotland's rural development programme. The Scottish National party in government has created the most ambitious planting target in the UK. England and Wales have annual targets of 5,000 hectares and 1,000 hectares respectively. Our target is 10,000 hectares. Scotland created 83% of all new woodland in the UK in 2015-16, so there is considerable development in tree planting in Scotland.

A recent report for the Forestry Commission assessed the potential role of UK forestry in combating climate change. Forestry Commission Scotland recently published its climate change action plan, setting out the action it intends to take to increase the contribution of Scottish forestry to the response to the challenges of climate change. The plan focuses on five key areas: protecting and managing existing forests; woodland creation, including energy crops; adapting to climate change, with a major focus on countering fragmentation through forest habitat networks; sustainably produced wood for energy and construction; and reducing the forestry sector's carbon footprint, for example through improved timber transport infrastructure. Planning authorities should therefore consider the contribution that trees, woodland and forestry can make to local strategies in their efforts to adapt to climate change.

**Alan Brown:** My hon. Friend has talked about climate change and sustainability, which is what tree planting is all about. Is it not crazy that the Government currently provide renewable subsidies for biomass energy, which is completely contradictory to sustainability and tackling climate change?

**Drew Hendry:** My hon. Friend makes the point clearly. I certainly agree that there is a nonsensical approach to renewable energy policy in the UK at the moment, which should be reviewed.

I want to go on to the issues facing the forestry sector. Given that the Scottish forestry sector receives vital support from the EU, the Scottish Government are focused on continuing investment in the sector to ensure economic growth, so that the reckless gamble of Brexit does not impact on that vital Scottish industry. The Scottish rural development programme, which is funded via the EU, provides vital support for the Scottish forestry sector and rural communities.

One of the main threats of Brexit is to confidence in the sector and to levels of woodland creation, and the long-term impact that will have on timber supplies to the domestic processing sector. New planting by the private sector is particularly sensitive to confidence about the availability of SRDP grant support in one to two years' time and wider uncertainty in investment and land markets. I would like to hear reassurance from the Minister that the UK Government are taking steps regarding the future availability of forestry grants and that mitigation will be provided on that issue.

It is of extreme importance to reassure investors that Scotland is open for business, in both planting and investment in the processing sector. Timber processing has expanded significantly in the past 10 years. The Scottish Government have held two summits with the

forestry sector to listen to its concerns and ambitions for the future of forestry in Scotland. EU referendum issues were discussed indirectly, with regard to securing future funding for woodland creation grants; even there, the EU is important.

Our Rural Economy Minister, Fergus Ewing, has met with leading representatives of forestry management and investment companies to provide reassurance that the Scottish Government are committed to seeing the forestry sector thrive. Currently, the forestry sector enjoys zero or low tariffs on trade within the EU, so it is vital that there is a level playing field with other parts of the European Union. Support industries, such as forest nurseries, are very sensitive to sudden dips in demand, and even a short-term fall in planting could put some Scottish nurseries at risk.

As I said, the SNP has created the most ambitious planting target in the UK, at 10,000 hectares a year, and Scotland created 83% of all new woodland in the UK in 2015-16. Since the forestry grant scheme opened in April 2015, more than 1,000 applications, worth £45 million, have been submitted, including for more than 8,500 hectares of woodland creation. Of that, 4,300 hectares of woodland creation, with a value of around £23 million, has been approved.

This issue is very important. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire for securing the debate and allowing it to be discussed. We are approaching Christmas, and it is important to end on the right tone. Christmas trees are an important seasonal part of Scotland's rural economy. Scotland's forests provide homes for wildlife, as my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Mike Weir) mentioned, as well as places for recreation, and they help to reduce the impact of climate change and flooding.

To underline the importance of the industry, the First Minister has encouraged people to support Scotland's rural economy this Christmas by buying home-grown Christmas trees. Two Norway spruce trees, grown by Highfield Forestry in Beaulieu—right on the edge of my constituency, in an area I used to cover as a local councillor—were delivered to the First Minister's official residence, Bute House. Let us hope that tree planting and the timber industry in Scotland and the UK have a very happy new year. We wait to hear the answers on how that will be delivered.

10.15 am

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies) on securing this debate. He does an excellent job chairing the all-party group on forestry.

Here we are, having this debate in Westminster Hall, and we can look around and see the timber not only in this room but in Westminster Hall itself and the oaks that were used to build that huge roof. Oaks were cut down over the years to build our fleet, when we went across the world and did various things. I will not go into the details of everything we did, but much was successful, although others may not say so. Over that period, we naturally cut down a great deal of oak forest. World wars then had their effect, and we set up the Forestry Commission after the first world war to plant a great number of trees.

Yesterday, we took evidence in the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs as part of our forestry inquiry. The one great plea made on grants was to bring back the one-stop shop. People are finding that when they apply for grants, they have to go through Natural England and the Rural Payments Agency and deal with DEFRA. It seems to be taking up to a couple of years to get a grant through, which is just not acceptable. Now, as we look to reform after leaving the European Union, there is much we can do with that grant scheme to make it simpler and more encouraging for landowners to plant trees.

Our Scottish friends who are here are to be congratulated, but I want to prick their bubble just a tiny bit. Some land in the UK is much more suitable than other parts for planting trees, and other land may produce 4 tonnes of wheat per acre. Some of their land in Scotland may not produce 4 tonnes of wheat per acre, so the competition for that land between crops and trees is not quite so great as elsewhere. In the north of England and Wales, there is much land that will be very good for forests, where we can create a crop—we must remember that it is a crop.

I declare an interest: I am a farmer. I do not have a big farm. If I choose to plant trees on my farm, I lock them in for one, two, three or perhaps four generations. If someone has only a small farm, they may not want to do that. I am sure the Minister is aware of that. There is a way we can manage forests: we can have large forests, perhaps on some of the marginal land. We can have deciduous trees and conifers, perhaps with strips of deciduous trees around the edges. We can make it much more accessible to the public and aesthetically beautiful and still have a crop—we must remember that timber is also a crop.

Half the time, what puts a lot of landowners off planting trees is that when they do so, a lot of the population then say, "Over our dead bodies will you cut down any of those trees." However, trees are a living crop. They grow and mature, and then we use them for building our houses. That is all great, and it is all part of forestry, which we sometimes forget.

**Drew Hendry:** The hon. Gentleman makes a telling point about the choices that face people when they are planting. Does that not underline the importance of EU grants in decisions on planting?

**Neil Parish:** Yes, the hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, but the issue is not just EU grants; it is how we deal with grants after we leave the EU. If we have the right mindset, we could produce a better grant scheme. If a percentage of better quality land further south in England where good crops can be grown is taken for trees, we will have to have a system to reward landowners for doing that. Otherwise, they will naturally decide to continue to grow other crops. Trees may be grown for aesthetic, conservation, and recreation reasons. Major forests may provide recreation, but that may also be done around our cities and highly populated areas. The great challenge for a grant system and support is to get people to plant in those areas, which is what I am keen to see.

Points have been made about climate change and the need to plant more trees to absorb carbon, as well as to stop flooding. That applies not just on marginal and steep land. In areas of run-off where intensive crops are

[Neil Parish]

grown, planting strips of woodland stops flooding and soil erosion. We can do an awful lot and we do not have to follow the common agricultural policy. I do not want future Governments to say, "We can't do this." We can do it if we look at it sensibly.

**Tom Elliott** (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): I thank the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies) for bringing forward this debate, which is very topical. Balcas is a big timber firm in my constituency and I should declare an interest because I have a small amount of forested land on my farm. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that one way of developing our own policy in the United Kingdom is to have zoned areas of forestry? He referred to difficult land—at least, I think he hinted at difficult land in Scotland—but he did not mention difficult land in Northern Ireland. Does he accept that zoned areas of forestry might be an opportunity?

**Neil Parish:** Yes. I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but we would have to be careful to have the right zoned areas. I am fearful of civil servants and others drawing lines on a map. They are not always entirely in the right place. We can have zoned areas, but we must put the right system in place to encourage people in those areas to grow trees. People will be more likely to do that if the right grant system is in place, because there will not be competition for what to grow on the land, so it could happen. We need to move forward and to make sure we have a balance between broadleaved trees and conifers. There is an anti-conifer world out there and some people say we cannot have conifers. We can, and in larger forests we can make sure the mixture is right from the recreation and management point of view.

Trees can be planted to stop flooding. I went up to Yorkshire recently with the floods inquiry where, traditionally, the Forestry Commission had turned the soil up by digging trenches and planted trees on top. When there is a flood, the water runs off down the furrow and straight into streams much quicker. As we plant, we must be more careful about possible flooding. Many things can be learned and achieved. With more trees we will create a better landscape and environment, and lock in carbon. We can reduce flooding and we can manage our land better. Highly productive farms have corners in fields and other places that are difficult to cultivate and they can be planted with trees. The area I represent includes the Blackdown hills, which are full of copses and small areas of woodland that are essential in our landscape. We should see more of that.

My final point is the fact that much of our woodland is not managed environmentally or for wood production. It is important that more woodland is managed.

**Mrs Trevelyan:** Does my hon. Friend agree that we have some serious problems because of lack of ability to make best use of woodland? In many parts of southern England, where forestry has been managed for many decades, we have a lot of ancient woodland and a concerted effort is needed to support land managers to improve that forestry.

**Neil Parish:** Yes, my hon. Friend is right. We could have a carrot and stick approach with small grants for such land. Some people buy woodland for tax advantages, so perhaps we could tweak that to require management

of the land. If people buy land, should they leave it when it could be managed for environmental purposes as well as to provide a resource? We need a lot of woodchip and my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire made much of the fact that we import so much wood. We can grow more timber and we can burn it in wood-burning stoves in our homes because there is nothing like wood to provide a homely feeling. That cannot be beaten.

I again congratulate my hon. Friend for bringing forward this debate. We can grow more timber and create more forests with a better environment, but we must use our land carefully as we do that.

10.27 am

**Calum Kerr** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. We have had an excellent debate. We have all talked positively about the benefits of trees, but we need hard action. I congratulate the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies) on his excellent opening remarks; I say that not just because he praised the Scottish Government in a way that made me fear he may be taken out the back and given a good thrashing afterwards. His wit and charm are critical to his chairmanship of the all-party group on forestry. He does an excellent job.

The hon. Gentleman started by asking arguably the most important question: why does tree planting matter so much? He then went on to describe the many ways in which it matters economically and environmentally, and the huge public support out there. The environmental impact is significant and we should be conscious of that as we make policy decisions. Four fifths of people agree that more trees should be planted; that gives the Minister a resounding mandate, well beyond the 37% of votes the Conservatives won in the general election. I suggest that 80% support should be embraced.

The hon. Gentleman was poetic. I do not know whether he was in the debate on ancient woodland, but talking about trees seems to bring out the inner poet in Members, which should be encouraged. We will all take with us the phrase, "the forgotten F-word", which reinforces the point about forestry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Mike Weir) and Chief Whip made an excellent contribution and set out the historical context, which is particularly important when we talk about forestry. As we heard, that is a long-term investment, so learning from past mistakes is critical. He also brought up one of the most significant issues that we need to focus on in the debate: the importance of EU funding and SRDP funding in Scotland. He joined the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire in supporting the moves made by the Scottish Government.

The MP for just across the border, as I call her—the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan)—spoke about her husband. We all have challenges doing this job and have to score brownie points whenever we can with our spouses. The hon. Lady has earned many a token today. I commend her for not jumping to her feet when she heard the question "Should we leave the EU?", although I did see some hairs rise on the back of her neck at that point. She made an important point about flooding and also said that we should set more ambitious targets.

My hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) made an excellent and puntastic contribution. He used this excellent line: “When we grow trees, we grow careers.” That is a lovely way of putting it. Trees are long-term investments and their progress is slow to witness—a bit like many Government policies—so we sometimes do not notice that progress. What my hon. Friend said was a lovely way of reinforcing the point. Like a couple of hon. Members, he also mentioned BSW Timber, which is headquartered in Earlston in my constituency. It is always a delight to hear that excellent company mentioned. Clearly, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey, as in mine, forestry is hugely important.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) made excellent points. He was obviously fresh from evidence sessions lined up because of this upcoming debate—that is the advantage of chairing a Select Committee. The point about a one-stop shop for grants is important. If we want to move on this issue, it is important that it should not take two years to get a grant through; otherwise, people will simply be put off by the process.

The hon. Gentleman also flushed out the interesting and important point about the competitive aspect of land use choices. Trees are a crop. The challenge, of course, is public attachment to them. We need to maintain the premise that they are a crop. Yes, they have wider benefits, but they remain a crop. That needs to be considered in relation to planning and harvesting. We need to ensure that people are not put off because of what I have described. The hon. Gentleman also made excellent points about the need for balance. This is not just about large-scale forestry; forestry, in many aspects, has a use in terms of both local land use and the wider benefits.

As I mentioned, forestry is very important in my constituency. BSW Timber is headquartered there, but there are many other forestry businesses. They may be involved in production. An example is Cheviot Trees, a state-of-the-art nursery in the Scottish borders and across in Northumberland. There are also many businesses that rely on forestry, such as the small business that I visited recently on the Buccleuch estate that makes timber homes. It is two guys working away on the estate and producing the most magnificent dwellings, which are now in huge demand.

The forestry industry contributes almost £1 billion a year to the Scottish economy and supports more than 25,000 jobs. It is clearly critical to Scotland’s economic success today and in the future. As we heard, forestry is a devolved matter, but it is heavily influenced by EU policies and regulation and, more importantly, by funding. In Scotland, that is through the Scottish rural development programme.

As we heard, forestry is a long-term business. Stability and confidence are required to enable investment decisions to be taken. Our domestic market is highly vulnerable to changes in currency and trade policy. The sector needs clarity on the regulatory frameworks, but also, critically, on funding models. Although the Government stepped in initially to honour funding models until 2020, we need to get on the front foot in terms of what will flow on afterwards.

Economically, forestry is a very sound and worthwhile investment, but the other aspect, which means that the debate should have been attended by everybody, not just a few of us with an interest in forestry, is that the environmental impact is also huge. Forestry is playing a key role in helping Scotland to meet its ambitious climate change targets. I will give some notes to the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire—he was very good on Scotland; there was just a slight gap there. *[Laughter.]*

**Neil Parish:** We’ll transfer him—don’t worry.

**Calum Kerr:** A free transfer!

Forestry will deliver on the annual carbon saving target. That was set at 0.6 million tonnes of carbon by 2010, which is rising to 1 million tonnes by 2020. Forestry is a huge part of the strategy in that area. As my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey said, the Forestry Commission recently published a climate change action plan, looking at how we can build on the current success. The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire made the fair point at the start that although Scotland may be leading the way in the UK, there is still room for improvement. There is acceptance of the Select Committee Chair’s point about the most effective use of land. There are areas that we can and will develop further.

We heard about the annual planting targets of 10,000 hectares, but as important are the moves to speed up and streamline the approval processes for sustainable plantations. As the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire outlined, that needs to happen in England; the Scottish Government are already on the front foot in that respect.

I mentioned Cheviot Trees. When this debate was announced, its managing director, Harry Frew, got in touch with me and asked me to attend this important debate if I could because, in his words:

“We don’t feel the urgency of tree planting is seriously understood nor is activity being implemented in a meaningful way in England.”

Mr Frew is clear that the Government get it—they have the nice words and some of the rhetoric—but what is missing is action. I hope that in this debate he will get reassurance from the Minister that there is action to match those words.

I have a genuine concern as we head down the Brexit path about the ability and resources in DEFRA to deliver in a post-Brexit world. My own experience of getting responses out of DEFRA, as the DEFRA spokesperson, has been poor. Responses are slow. I got a response today to a question submitted on 1 September, and two responses are still outstanding. In a resource-constrained environment, in which people are struggling to do the day job, how will the Department cope with the bigger challenge for DEFRA—

**Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair):** Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but it is the rule of the House that he should have only 10 minutes. He has now gone on for longer than that, and if he does not bring his remarks to a conclusion, that will cut down on other hon. Members’ time.

**Calum Kerr:** Thank you, Mr Bone. I apologise for running over; I am concluding. Will the Minister assure Harry Frew that there will be action to match the ambition? Will she tell us what she will do to ensure that forestry is a success story in the future as well as today?

10.38 am

**Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies). This has been a very interesting debate, and his opening remarks set the scene perfectly as to why tree planting is important and why we need to plant more trees. He mentioned the amount of wood that we import, how important it is that we become sustainable as a country, and the importance of planting trees for climate change, which several hon. Members mentioned. He also mentioned the construction industry and why it is important that we grow our own timber to make our homes more beautiful. I congratulate Hackney Council in this regard. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is aware of this, but it is the first council in England to promote timber in its planning policy for building.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) made some excellent points. He requested more support for farmers and landowners when applying for the grants, which is really needed, and I hope the Minister will give us some positive thoughts on that. He also mentioned that we must not forget we have to plant in urban areas as well. Before I became a Member of this House, I worked with a charity called Trees for Cities, which does great work; again, it would be good to see its work also supported. The hon. Members from Scotland who are here today talked powerfully about the importance of forestry to Scotland's economy and their cultural heritage.

I want to focus on the issue raised specifically by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) about the importance of tree planting in managing flooding. I was also pleased to hear her talk about red squirrels; we have red squirrels in our garden, and it is great that we are supporting those through tree planting as well. Obviously, flood prevention is particularly important in my constituency. Hon. Members know about the terrible floods that we had in Cumbria just a year ago. This is something that—I will mention my husband as well—my husband and I have taken a very personal interest in. The River Marron flows through our land for half a mile, and the Marron goes into the Derwent, which caused a lot of the damage in Cockermouth and further downstream. We have been talking and working with the Rivers Trust and the Woodland Trust, and we are having 500 trees planted on our land—400 on the land and 100 along the banks of the river—to try to help with the kind of work that hon. Members have talked about.

Since I became a Member of Parliament, and more recently the shadow floods Minister, people have contacted me to talk about the particular role that tree planting has in slowing down the flow of water to help to combat levels of flooding. Somebody gave me a really interesting study from North America that was published in 2012. It found that deforestation in snowy regions at least doubled, and potentially quadrupled, the number of large floods occurring along rivers. There is a lot of really good scientific evidence out there that we can look at.

The Forestry Commission has also set out four ways in which trees can reduce flood risk. The first is by evaporating more water than other, shorter vegetation—coniferous trees are better at doing that, so we have to look at those as well as at deciduous. Woodland soils

retain water better than soil under grass, which slows floodwater down before it gets to the rivers themselves. Trees alongside the rivers create more drag—we have had some trees placed to create drag in our river, to slow down the flow of water—and also help with the problems of soil erosion and the movement of sediment.

The deadwood along the rivers can play a vital role: it is obviously good for wildlife, but it can also slow down the flow of the waters. People often talk about concerns about deadwood because it can come loose, get clogged under bridges, dam and cause problems; but surveys of the River Kent in Cumbria found that the benefits outweigh the risks as long as the rivers are managed properly. That is really important; we do not always manage our rivers properly and we need to look at that very carefully. Obviously, the location of tree planting is important. We have to make sure that everything is done in the right place.

Will the Minister say what plans the Department has to roll out more of the natural flood prevention measures? Those are very low in cost when compared to paying afterwards for the cost of damage that floods have caused. As has been said, the Government have missed their tree planting target and Confor recently calculated that they are seven years behind schedule. The Woodland Trust also says that tree planting is now at an all-time low. Members have talked about how many more trees the Government have pledged to plant, and I understand that the Conservatives' last manifesto included a pledge about tree planting. I urge the Minister to turn this very disappointing situation around and to do whatever she can to encourage more tree planting to push forward that manifesto promise. We really need to get back on track. If, in her response, the Minister could give us some idea about how we are going to get on track and meet those targets, I am sure that all hon. Members who have spoken today would be pleased to hear that we are going to make some progress, because we really need to.

10.44 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies) on securing this debate. As has been said, there have been a number of contributions and interventions showing how important a role trees play in the heart of our nation, holistically as well as economically and environmentally.

My hon. Friend will recognise that forestry policy is a devolved matter, but I undertake to give an overall picture of tree planting in the UK while focusing on measures for which this Government are responsible. The debate offers me a chance to highlight our commitment to plant 11 million trees this Parliament, the role of forestry in the economy and the potential for woodland expansion to help us meet our carbon goals and our reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. We are actively working with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on our national emissions reduction plan.

Hon. Members have highlighted many benefits of tree planting, such as flood alleviation and the potential for building homes. The phrase “The right tree in the right place” has been used, and certainly the right tree

can be the solution to many of the challenges we face. Considerations include whether it is the right use of land, where to plant and whether trees are broadleaf or softwood. Those are challenging policy objectives to balance, but when the Government bring forward our 25-year environment plan next year, I hope hon. Members will have a good idea of what we intend to do in the long term.

Total tree planting in England, both new planting and restocking, was 4,000 hectares in the year to March 2016. In Scotland it was 12,500 hectares, and it was 1,900 hectares in Wales and 800 hectares in Northern Ireland. Traditionally, planting is measured in hectares rather than individual saplings, with different planting densities for different kinds of trees. In the case of new creation, Scotland's ambitions have already been highlighted—10,000 hectares a year are planned. In the last year, it achieved 4,600 hectares. I understand that in Wales there is an ambition to plant 2,000 hectares a year, and 100 hectares was achieved. One hundred hectares was achieved in Northern Ireland as well, and as has been pointed out, in England it was about 700 hectares.

**Neil Parish:** I do not blame the Minister for one moment for the problems with the grants system at the moment, but I hope she will cover the idea of trying to bring back a one-stop shop to speed up grant applications. I think that would be really good, and I would like her to consider it.

**Dr Coffey:** I hope to cover that very soon, and I hope that my answer will satisfy my hon. Friend. One reason why there has been a dip compared with prior years is that a new scheme has come in, focused on European rules. It is usual that in the first year of such a scheme, take-up tends to be lower. I know that, certainly in England, we are already seeing some significant increases. Woodland cover in England is at its highest level since the 14th century and our aspiration is to grow it even further to about 12% coverage by 2060—as has been pointed out, it is currently at 10%.

**Chris Davies:** Will the Minister give way?

**Dr Coffey:** I would appreciate being able to make a bit more progress, because I hope to answer some of the questions that my hon. Friend raised. If I have time, I will of course give way at the end.

We intend to grow woodland cover through the countryside stewardship woodland creation capital grant, the woodland creation planning grant and the woodland carbon fund, which has already been referred to. We recognise that there have been specific challenges to the take-up of countryside stewardship under the rural development programme. In England, the latest figures show that planting in 2015-16, and planting to September this year, will have achieved close to 1.4 million trees.

There were many reasons for the disappointing take-up. As I have already indicated, the new programme cycle is part of the challenge, but I understand that the Forestry Commission, the Rural Payments Agency and Natural England have worked together to resolve some of the technical challenges faced by the new scheme. To respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish)—I know I will be coming to his Committee to give evidence—I commit to looking into the issue in

more detail to understand some of the issues and how further improvements could be made for the future. We know that recent improvements have had a beneficial impact and that the number of applications is certainly up, whether or not they are all approved. We will shortly put guidance on to gov.uk and advise the sector about a new round of countryside stewardship woodland creation grants and woodland planning and woodland improvement tree health grants in 2017. We encourage farmers and land managers to apply for the grants to expand and manage their woodlands.

The £1 million woodland creation planning grant scheme was launched last year. The first round was widely welcomed and generated plans for more than 1,000 hectares of planting. It supports the effective and sustainable design and planning of schemes, including the site at Doddington moor, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) referred. As she said, that has the potential to be the largest private sector woodland created in England for more than 20 years, with plans to plant 600,000 new trees. The project is still subject to regulatory approval from the Forestry Commission, and one challenge is that an environmental impact assessment will be required. The second round opened in September. The woodland creation planning grant has so far attracted applications that could cover a further 2,000 hectares and lead to 4 million trees being planted.

To further support tree planting, on 10 November the Forestry Commission opened the £19.6 million woodland carbon fund, which is aimed at boosting woodland creation rates and helping the Government's future carbon targets. We are aiming specifically to generate private sector investment for large-scale forestry, which will serve the purpose of being a carbon sink and could be a future source of supply, as has been indicated.

On leaving the European Union, without prejudging any future discussions, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has said that there will be support on a value-for-money basis, following the setting of policies that are bespoke to the needs of this nation. As for actual schemes, I suggest that the schemes that were approved up to the autumn statement will be honoured in full. People often seek certainty on the maintenance part of schemes, and I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire that future schemes will be developed as part of our work on the environment plan.

On the barriers to getting grants and the timeline of how long it takes, I understand that the countryside stewardship schemes, which do not require an environmental impact assessment, are being handled rather quickly, and that the challenges relate to larger schemes. We remain keen to minimise and streamline regulatory burdens where appropriate. We are considering consulting on the EIA regulations, including those relating to forestry, to see what we can do to improve the process while preserving good environmental outcomes.

On commercial forestry, to achieve the 12% woodland cover ambition, we need more forestry investment by the private sector. We are committed to working with the industry and rural businesses to support landowners to plant more trees. The public forest estate is the biggest single producer of timber in England, supplying around 49% of softwood last year. Historically, all woodlands in England were managed to produce fuel

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

and fibre. The PFE will continue to supply a very large proportion of wood in the future while we work with landowners and timber processors to further increase volumes of softwood and hardwood coming to market in the medium and long term. That will be achieved by establishing new productive woodlands and by bringing more existing woodlands into productive management.

I know that the production sectors that use timber would like to expand the supply. The UK currently imports 80% of the timber it uses, so we recognise the opportunities that exist for rural economies if we can expand the domestic supply. That is why I am pleased that, through such things as the woodland creation planning grant, we are starting to see signs that investors and forestry businesses are developing larger-scale, more commercially viable schemes.

As has been said in many contributions today, the benefits of trees are multiple. As we consider our future approach to the environment through the 25-year environment plan, we know that woodland and forestry have much to offer. As well as supplying timber, trees deliver many benefits, including for recreation opportunities and for wildlife and biodiversity, but the benefits go far further than that. The roots of trees can provide greater land stability on slopes and help to reduce flooding by allowing water to penetrate more rapidly into the soil rather than running off into rivers, and they can help to improve water quality by reducing soil erosion.

As for the flooding we have seen in recent years—I recognise that the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) had that horrendous experience a year ago—it is not possible to protect all communities completely from every instance of flooding, but with the frequency and size of floods predicted to increase, we need to adopt a whole-catchment approach to flood risk management. That approach can enhance the performance of traditional flood defences. Trees planted as catchment approaches can help with heavy rain, as I have indicated. I assure the hon. Lady and my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed that the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission will continue to work together to integrate tree planting into work to reduce flood risk, as part of catchment-based approaches. My hon. Friend will be aware of the Cumbria flood action plan and the £15 million that was announced in the autumn statement to work towards that.

Trees have other benefits, too. They are important to us in absorbing carbon from the atmosphere, providing a valuable and relatively inexpensive carbon sink, which can contribute towards meeting our ambitious carbon targets and tackling climate change. We recognise the potential benefits for air quality, and in helping to regulate a flow of rain into the sewers or provide a canopy of shade from the sun. However, that all comes back to having the right tree in the right place.

Active woodland management is important not only to help monitor and protect against disease, but to increase the biodiversity of our woods by allowing light into them to enable other plants, insects and woodland species to thrive. A lesson that was learned in Cumbria, and which I heard about there in the summer, is that active management is needed especially on riverbanks,

because several trees effectively became missiles as they hurtled down rivers, crashing into bridges alongside boulders and causing considerable damage.

We recognise the pivotal role played by urban trees, and I commend the work done on community forests. I visited the St Vincent de Paul primary school in Liverpool and did some tree planting with some youngsters. I also visited the National Forest Company in the midlands last week; it is a successful example of the large-scale transformation and regeneration of landscape.

Peter Ackroyd's book "Albion" starts with a chapter called "The Tree", recognising that trees are central to the heart of what makes our country so special—all four nations comprising the United Kingdom. This may surprise you, Mr Bone, but my favourite tree is the horse chestnut. I recognise that it is a non-native species, but it is at the heart of being a child—playing conkers, seeing the candles form, and the great cover that it provides—and it is so sad to see the terrible diseases that now afflict those trees across many parts of our nation.

Would my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire like to intervene briefly, before he has his two minutes to wind up?

**Chris Davies:** I would. We hear a great deal from the Minister's civil servants about how woodland cover is at its highest since the 14th century. I want to work out, first, why we are using that particular factoid and secondly, who can prove that we are in that position.

**Dr Coffey:** Well, I use the statement because it is accurate and true. At times people challenge us, understandably, and accuse us of various things to do with forests, and I want to point out how successive Governments—but this Government in particular—have accelerated tree planting in recent years, recognising the importance of trees to our natural landscape.

I look forward to working with hon. Members and stakeholders in woodlands and forestry to promote more private investment in the sector, not only to secure greater economic benefit but to capture more carbon and maintain the public benefits that we all value so much from our existing woodlands and forests and the wildlife and biodiversity that they support.

10.58 am

**Chris Davies:** May I say what a pleasure it has been to have this debate under your chairmanship, Mr Bone? Thank you for allowing us to do so. I have just a couple of minutes; I would like to pick up on everybody's comments, but time is against us, so I just say that "the right tree in the right place", which my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) mentioned, is the phrase of the day, and we need to take note of that.

The hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (Calum Kerr) mentioned careers. Forestry is no longer about somebody just going out into a wood with an axe; these are highly skilled, highly technical and recognised positions. I would recommend that anybody out there look for a career in forestry, because—my goodness me—what a career they would have. I praise considerably my great friends, the Members from Scotland who are here today—I am delighted to be able to finish by praising them, because being part of the UK allows me to do so. We are better together, and I thank them.

There is much more I would like to say, but if we look out of the window opposite me in the Chamber we can see the wonderful Christmas tree in New Palace Yard. It is the festive season, and we are delighted about and looking forward to everything that Christmas brings. But I ask the Minister and everybody else, when they look at a Christmas tree outside or in their living room, to please think about extra planting from 2017 onwards.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered tree planting in the UK.

## Large Logistics Parks (Transport Infrastructure)

11 am

**Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered transport infrastructure for proposed development of large logistics parks.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I thank hon. Members for attending the debate.

The need to transport essential supplies and other consumer goods around the United Kingdom has spurred the demand for large distribution parks, especially in my constituency of South Leicestershire and around the midlands. Property developers have responded by lodging an increasing volume of applications with local planning authorities, many of which are small and insufficiently resourced to deal with such large-scale proposals and the infrastructure required to support them. Often, the applications comprise large land-takes—many of greenfield sites and rural areas where there is little culture of planning across different authority boundaries, even between neighbouring authorities. As a result, there is a need for a co-ordinating national policy specifically governing the development of these large logistics parks.

The logistics industry has expanded over the past 20 years—not only to supply retail outlets, but to satisfy the boom in internet shopping, with which most hon. Members are well familiar. This year, online retailers such as Amazon and others account for one third of the warehousing property development market, with supermarkets accounting for one quarter. Currently, 80% of costs of all goods are transport costs, even before taking into account on-costs of infrastructure maintenance, the environmental costs of traffic congestion or, indeed, the health-related costs of air pollution. A recent World Bank report stated that congestion on UK roads is the worst in Europe, and the UK has the highest percentage of premature deaths owing to poor quality and polluted air.

The Government have defined a national policy, preferring the development of rail-based freight terminals and seeking to minimise fossil fuel-based road transport. For example, the Daventry International Railfreight Terminal close to the M1 in Northamptonshire, and near Rugby in Warwickshire and Lutterworth in my constituency, is a major development entering its third planned phase. Further planned developments are taking place at East Midlands Gateway with airport and rail connections, and near Hinckley, with a planned rail depot. Despite all that, there has been a proliferation of distribution centres reliant on road transport, notably in my South Leicestershire constituency and in adjacent constituencies. As the infrastructure rarely aligns with the speculative development of land-based centres, roads and highways are frequently under strain owing to the volume of traffic they now carry.

As there is no national policy of locating distribution centres to match essential regional needs for longer-term economic development, there continues to be what I call the piecemeal development of many road-based sites. At a local level, there is little integration of inter-authority planning for optimum locations. Such unplanned

[*Alberto Costa*]

development leads to increased volumes of traffic on local roads. The resulting traffic congestion leads to delays and queues at key junctions, disrupting citizens' day-to-day travel to work, school and health facilities. As a constituency MP, I experience this congestion when I take my daughter to school. I see hundreds of heavy goods vehicles every week and I have witnessed accidents involving HGVs in and around the Magna Park area.

**Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. He makes an important point about traffic congestion. There is an Amazon fulfilment centre in Rugeley in my constituency, and HGV fly-parking is a real problem for local residents. Does he consider that to be an issue as well?

**Alberto Costa:** Yes, that is another issue that should be taken into account.

The Government must now take the whole matter into account, and I ask them to consider developing a national policy on the location of these large logistics parks.

**Yvonne Fovargue** (Makerfield) (Lab): In my area, there is a proposed development on green-belt land near a one-way motorway junction. The Greater Manchester spatial strategy includes plans for the motorway junction to become two-way in 40 years, but the development may take place within the next two years if that very important land is taken out of the green belt. There are also developments with no consultation in St Helens, in the neighbouring borough, which will increase the traffic again on that junction. Does the hon. Gentleman agree we need some national infrastructure in place to develop the proposals for logistics sites on these important pieces of land?

**Alberto Costa:** I agree with the hon. Lady's points. I want to give others the opportunity to speak in this important debate, but my point is that it is now time for the Government to set out their proposals for a national policy on the location of these large logistics parks.

**Amanda Milling** *rose*—

**Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair):** Order. We have a slight problem in that I do not know whether anyone else has the Minister's permission to speak.

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr John Hayes):** With your permission, Mr Bone, I would be delighted to hear other contributions.

11.7 am

**Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): I am very grateful to the Minister. As I said, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) on raising the issue and calling for this debate. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone.

My constituency, Cannock Chase, is home to several large logistics parks, largely because of the constituency's proximity to motorways, rail and the trunk road network.

For instance, Kingswood Lake business park in Cannock is home to logistics businesses such as APC Overnight. Given its proximity to the M6 and the M6 toll road, Cannock and the surrounding area is increasingly being considered for other large logistics centres. However, the issues that my hon. Friend highlighted can be illustrated by some of the issues faced by residents and businesses in Rugeley.

In contrast to Cannock, Rugeley is not within a mile of the motorway network but, as I mentioned, it is home to one of Amazon's fulfilment centres. The site was initially developed speculatively, with Amazon identifying it as an ideal site in the midlands to home one of its fulfilment centres. The site and the town do not have the facilities, however, to cope with large volumes of HGVs, often only having a small turnaround time window at the Amazon site. Specifically, there is no lorry parking locally and no facilities for drivers to use. The consequences, as I have mentioned in previous debates, is HGV fly-parking.

Residents of Rugeley, particularly those of Leathermill Lane, Love Lane and local businesses based in Towers business park on Wheelhouse Road, are plagued by lorries parked up overnight that are probably best described as being littered around the streets of Rugeley. Not only is this an inconvenience to road and footpath users; but it creates a safety issue on those roads. Even worse, residents and businesses have to put up with the litter that the drivers leave behind. I will not elaborate; I leave it to hon. Members' imaginations to work out what that litter includes. I have been in regular contact with Staffordshire County Council and the local police to call on them to take action to address those issues. I met Amazon earlier this week to raise the issue directly. This symptom highlights the need to consider transport infrastructure when developing plans for logistics parks.

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): Like the constituencies of both my hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa), whom I congratulate on securing this debate, my constituency has a very large number of logistics parks. We must not stand in the way of economic development, but it is important that infrastructure is provided.

The issue is a concern to my constituents in villages such as Monks Kirby and Pailton, who are affected by the proposals for the large logistics site in Leicestershire. The solution to that problem is improving the A5; I hope the Minister will tell us about proposals for dualling the A5, which forms the boundary between my constituency and the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire.

**Amanda Milling:** I completely agree with a couple of my hon. Friend's points. We must not get in the way of economic development, which I will touch on shortly. The A5 goes all the way up to Cannock, and the road is permanently clogged. I support anything that will lead to the A5 being dualled as quickly as possible, which would alleviate many of the problems we are talking about today.

Consideration of transport infrastructure is particularly important when we consider the redevelopment of the Rugeley B power station site, which is opposite the Amazon fulfilment site. These are early days, but the infrastructure

cannot cope now, so I have concerns about the plans for developing the site. The infrastructure we have now will not support further logistics centres.

**Alberto Costa:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the Minister and the Government should require neighbouring local planning authorities to consult jointly on planning development for such large logistics sites and other infrastructure? Proposals for the development of logistics sites, such as Magna Park, should be accompanied by adequate pre-planned development of road and rail infrastructure.

**Amanda Milling:** I completely agree. I get complaints about sites in neighbouring constituencies. We are so close to the M6 toll road and the M6 that other developments are in the pipeline. The Rugeley B redevelopment crosses the boundary between Cannock Chase District Council and Lichfield District Council, which need to work together. I am pleased that a taskforce is pulling together the two district councils, the county council and the local enterprise partnership. I have been calling on them to consider the strategic vision for the site so that we ultimately have highly skilled jobs for the future residents of Rugeley.

The situation in which we find ourselves in Rugeley with Amazon, and the situation in which we could find ourselves as we look to the redevelopment of the Rugeley B site, clearly demonstrate the need to consider infrastructure and the surrounding policy, and the need to work collaboratively at all levels.

I wholly agree with my hon. Friend that we must seriously consider introducing policy to ensure that consideration is given to the local infrastructure that such large parks require. I look forward to the Minister's response.

11.14 am

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr John Hayes):** It is a delight to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone, and it is a double delight to speak at this small lectern, which is a new addition to this assembly that adds to both my status and grandeur, as if I needed either.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) on securing this debate. He is right that the circumstances he set out are the result of other changes. He is right to draw attention to the fact that this is a growing trend that is a result of the way that people obtain goods and the way those goods are dispatched.

I am inclined to the view of Schumacher, and I am a fan of his book "Small is Beautiful". Of course, he said: "Man is small, and, therefore, small is beautiful."

I am inclined, too, to regard politics and commerce as best conducted on a human scale. Nevertheless, we must deal with things as they are. I understand that the consequences my hon. Friend set out present particular challenges in the area he represents. It is often said that there is a geographical triangle where there is a propensity to develop such sites, and his constituency is in that triangle.

As I know from earlier discussions with my hon. Friend, he knows that logistics is a vital part of our country's economy and prosperity. I have responsibility for freight, which is, in part, why I am responding to

this debate. I take a keen interest in how logistics continues to develop and in how we can support HGV drivers and businesses, but I am mindful of the effect of those businesses on communities, which is the essence of this debate. This is about how storage facilities are changing and how logistics parks affect local communities.

**Mark Pawsey:** I am delighted that the Minister is standing up for logistics. There is a lot of logistics development in my constituency, and it is often thought of as low-calibre work with hulky blokes throwing boxes around, but nothing could be further from the truth. These are high-tech, well-structured, well-managed and well-organised businesses that perform a vital function in getting goods to consumers.

**Mr Hayes:** In representing people in this House, and in serving in Government, we draw on our personal and constituency experiences. My uncle was a long-distance lorry driver, and my cousin followed him into that job. I represent many hauliers in South Holland and The Deepings, and I have regular dialogue with them. As Members would expect, I have discussions with the industry as a Minister.

I am equally anxious and concerned about the effects on traffic in local communities, particularly from developments around logistics sites, which my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire has mentioned. We need to, and can, strike a balance between the interests of the industry and the interests of local people. We often have to do that as Members of Parliament, and the Government perpetually do it. These things are never entirely straightforward, but I hope, in the short time I have available, to be able to set out how we can strike that balance.

**Alberto Costa:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey), and I agree with the Minister, but in my constituency I already have one of Europe's largest logistics parks, which presently has between 9 million and 10 million square feet of warehousing. The proposal to double its size would unacceptably lower the quality of life of my South Leicestershire constituents. At what point do we say enough is enough? How large do these logistics parks need to get before we say that?

**Mr Hayes:** My hon. Friend has many virtues, and two that stand proud are the determination and rigour with which he defends his constituents' interests—a well-known aspect of his work in this House—and, secondly, his insight. That insight will have allowed him to determine, from my opening remarks in which I quoted Schumacher, where I intuitively stand on these matters. I will say more about that later in my speech, but my hon. Friend draws to our attention the important subject of scale. It would be easy for central and local government to assume that there should be no limits on scale, but I am not sure that that is the right approach. I look at these matters in a holistic way.

**Yvonne Fovargue:** Does the Minister also take into account the effects on air quality of these large logistic parks and the vehicle movements? For example, in Greater Manchester we have already failed to meet our air quality objectives on a number of occasions. The

[*Yvonne Fovargue*]

new logistics parks will increase the standing traffic and will therefore have an effect on the local community's air quality.

**Mr Hayes:** Barely a day goes by when I do not think about air quality. I was in an inter-ministerial meeting yesterday afternoon to discuss exactly that. It is important that we recognise that the effect on the environment of large developments can be significant and must always be taken into account when we consider them.

Overall responsibility for planning in England rests with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, so we are straying on to his territory to some degree, which I am reluctant to do. As the hon. Lady and my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire will both know, it is the Department for Communities and Local Government that issues national planning practice guidance on how the Government expects planning to help to deliver sustainable development, but the planning system has at its heart ensuring that the right development takes place in the right places. Not all places are suitable for particular kinds of development; that is the essence of what my hon. Friend has argued today.

The planning system has benefits to the community as well as to the wider economy. Local plans, prepared by local planning authorities in consultation with the community, are at the heart of that system. They must be prepared with a mind to contributing to sustainable development that is consistent with the principles and objectives set out in the national planning policy framework. A local plan should include the strategic policies to deliver homes and jobs, the provision of retail and commercial development, and the provision of infrastructure, including infrastructure for transport.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire is concerned that local planning authorities will work in isolation and not address wider regional issues. I reassure him that the national planning policy framework expects local authorities to work with neighbouring authorities and transport providers to develop strategies for the provision of the viable infrastructure necessary to support sustainable development. Indeed, I will go further than that: further to his arguments today, I will discuss with my DCLG colleagues whether the framework is as effective as it might be in respect of transport. It may be that we can do more. I do not want to say anything definitive today—you would not expect me to do so, Mr Bone—but given my hon. Friend's remarks today and with respect for the case that he has made, we may be able to do more.

It is very important, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) said, that we consider this in the round with the transport infrastructure that supports the development, so I want to explore the matter further. I shall come back to the A5 in a minute, but I want to make it clear that, as a general principle, transport infrastructure and these developments must be hand in glove.

The second core point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire was that all developments that generate significant amounts of movement must be supported by a transport statement or assessment. Plans and decisions should take account of whether opportunities

for sustainable transport modes have been taken up to reduce the need for major transport infrastructure changes. Such plans should also consider whether improvements within the transport network can be undertaken to limit the significant impacts of the development in a cost-effective way. Crucially, they should plan positively for the development and infrastructure required in the area. They are designed to take into account longer term trends and changes of the kind that my hon. Friend has set out.

Critically, the presumption built into the national planning policy framework is in favour not only of development but of sustainable development. How we define sustainability in respect of transport infrastructure is crucial, and I want to study that in greater detail, as I said a moment ago. Should my hon. Friend have further concerns about that or feel that additional clarity would be desirable, I will happily ask my colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government to meet him and discuss the matter. It is right that Ministers should always make ourselves available to Members, because by doing so we make ourselves available to the people we serve.

On development more generally, I recently waxed lyrical—at least I thought I was lyrical—on the subject of beauty. I add to what I said that all we build should be as good as it can be in its relationship with the local environment and in its aesthetic. That may sound odd in respect of what is essentially an industrial development of the kind that my hon. Friend spoke of, but actually we once took the view that everything we build should take into account its aesthetic relationship with everything around it. The idea that we should take a crude, crass reductionist view of industrial development and the landscaping that surrounds it is not acceptable to me. Given my responsibility for the built environment, which crosses all Department's areas of responsibility, I will certainly take a look at that subject too in relation to what my hon. Friend said.

Let me say a few things about the work I have been doing on heavy goods vehicles. My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) raised what is known as fly-parking—the parking of heavy vehicles in inappropriate places. I have looked closely at that and have recently held two round-table summits on HGVs with large numbers of people from the sector to explore what more can be done, because I am determined that more can be done. It is absolutely right that we work with local authorities to take further steps to make that kind of parking, which I know causes such concern to my hon. Friend, her constituents and many others, a thing of the past; I intend to say more about that soon.

I want to develop a national plan, as was recommended in this debate, for good and sufficient overnight lorry parking, to ensure that we provide lorry drivers with the facilities they need and that inconsiderately or illegally parked lorries do not blight local communities—and I want to do it quickly. On the back of our discussions and the overtures made to me by hon. Members, my ambition is to identify how all the significant gaps in overnight lorry parking provision in England can be filled and for private provision to be made available as soon as possible, certainly over the next three to five years.

Quality standards have also been raised with me, as hon. Members will know. I am not satisfied that they are as should be for overnight parking facilities; there are some very good facilities, but by no means could all facilities be so described. I want to set national standards to ensure that our HGV drivers can park safely, securely and in reasonable comfort, with the baseline facilities that anyone would expect from a parking area.

I am looking closely at the provision of lorry parking spaces nationally. There are significant gaps in capacity, particularly in the east of England and the midlands. I have commissioned a fresh survey, which will be taken this winter, to update the figures on that. The standards that I have described, the further work on illegal parking and the work I want to do in a number of places will make a sea change to the provision.

**Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair):** Order. I am sorry, but time has beaten us.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

11.30 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## South Sudan

[MR CLIVE BETTS *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the humanitarian situation in South Sudan.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts, although it is no pleasure to consider the scale and depth of the plight of South Sudan today. We probably all remember that back in July 2011, we greeted what was then the world's newest country, South Sudan. The hope was that decades of violence would end and there would be new beginnings for the South Sudanese people. Five years on, the country has been plunged into civil war once again, with the rebel leader Riek Machar calling for armed struggle against President Salva Kiir's Government in Juba.

Although violence erupted again in July, we know that it had never been far away: the country has essentially been in conflict since 2013. We have seen instability and conflict spread throughout South Sudan, into some previously untouched areas such as the Equatorias and greater Bahr el Ghazal. The conflict has also taken on an ethnic dimension and brought to the surface historical injustices, along with present day grievances.

Humanitarian indicators rarely tell the whole story, but in the case of South Sudan, the numbers are staggering. Out of a population of 12 million, some 3 million people are displaced. Of those, 1.8 million are internally displaced inside the country—most people believe that is a conservative figure—and 1.2 million have fled as refugees to neighbouring countries. The indications are that 4.8 million people are currently food-insecure and that one in five South Sudanese women in the protection of civilian camps have reported sexual abuse. We know that women and girls have been disproportionately affected by the crisis in South Sudan, as they account for 57% of the registered internally displaced people. The situation is expected to deteriorate even further in 2017, with increased conflict, deepening food insecurity and a further deterioration of the country's already desperate economic situation.

We recently had a clear warning from the United Nations special adviser on the prevention of genocide, Adama Dieng, that there is a strong risk of violence escalating along ethnic lines, with the possibility of genocide. We see hate speech, stereotyping and polarising rhetoric on South Sudanese radio and social media. Trust in an inclusive, distinctive South Sudanese national identity is at its lowest ebb. With the dry season approaching, there are fears of a large-scale Government offensive in the coming weeks.

**Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con):** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. He mentioned the UN special adviser. Does he agree that there is an incredibly important role for the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan, which has been spectacularly under-delivering, with poor leadership, and that UNMISS needs to be beefed up substantially and have its role extended and expanded, in line with the recent UN inquiry?

**Mark Durkan:** The hon. Gentleman has an acute insight into the country, from his time as the Minister for Africa. I pay tribute to his sterling work on the all-party parliamentary group for Sudan and South Sudan, which he vice-chairs; I serve alongside him as chair. He rightly raises the recurring criticism of the performance of UNMISS, but I do not want to turn this debate simply into a critique of its failures, although they are many. I want to see how together, at a UK level and internationally, we can better respond to the situation in South Sudan.

This is not to pretend that there are not other dire situations crying out for our attention and further effort. All of us will have been moved by the reports from Yemen on television and radio last night and this morning. We know that hon. Members right across this House are seized with the plight of people in and fleeing from Syria and surrounding countries. This debate is not an attempt to single out South Sudan as the only humanitarian crisis that warrants our attention and consideration.

In trying to help the situation in South Sudan, we have to confront the failures there. Those include failures in political leadership in the country, in terms of the President and the former vice-president, who is now in South Africa. Government and opposition forces are prepared to visit violence on their own people, and in parts of the country that were previously spared some of that violence. We have to be up front about those failures. Of course, we also have to recognise, as some have highlighted, how corruption and conflict have been drivers of each other in South Sudan. We saw that spelled out clearly in the report a few months ago by the Sentry, backed by George Clooney, in respect of both Government and opposition players there.

Faced with those challenges and difficulties, the hon. Member for North West Norfolk (Sir Henry Bellingham) is right to call into question the performance and effort of the UN mission in South Sudan, and particularly the questionable leadership. However, rather than just offering rightful criticism, it is incumbent on the international community to provide a new resolve.

**Dame Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. The UN is a multifarious organisation. We should recognise that it is the UN's special adviser on genocide who has sounded the alarm over the risk of genocide in the country and reminded people that all of us in the international community bear responsibility for monitoring the incitement to hatred.

**Mark Durkan:** I fully accept what the right hon. Lady has said. That is why I specifically quoted the UN adviser.

We have to look at what further actions can be taken to help people in South Sudan who want to stand up against hate speech. We can talk about the scale of devastation in the country and forget that there are still people there trying to hold on to the fragment of civil society that remains. There are people in a range of churches who are trying to hold on and offer degrees of decency and cohesion. They should be our partners in trying to create some sort of coalition of hopeful purpose within South Sudan and internationally.

It is important that where we have political and diplomatic engagement at an international level in South Sudan, we must be straight and blunt with both

Government and opposition forces and do what we can to get them to engage better and more consistently in dialogue. We also have to be much more active in our partnership with those who stand for the interests and rights of the South Sudanese people, and who do so without being implicated in any sort of corruption whatever.

There are non-governmental organisations in South Sudan, and they are well supported by some of the international NGOs, which of course find it harder to cope there because of the deteriorating security situation and the poor infrastructure. NGOs are finding it hard to keep themselves safe and to reach different parts of the country to provide the level of aid and services they want to give. Nevertheless, we need to stay fully engaged with them.

I recognise that the UK Government have made a point of ensuring a relatively joint effort for both Sudan and South Sudan on the part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development, just as we in the all-party group have made a point of staying together and covering both Sudan and South Sudan. I welcome the Government's effort. I am not here to say that whatever failures there have been in South Sudan are a result of a failure of effort, initiative and intent on the part of the UK Government, but we always have to ask whether there is more that we could do and whether there are other partners with whom we can engage more actively.

I should mention the work done by the churches, not least the Catholic Church. Ahead of the debate, as well as the very good Library briefing, Members will have received excellent briefings from World Vision and the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, which works in South Sudan alongside its Irish counterpart, Trócaire, an organisation with which I am very familiar. We have also had important briefings from Amnesty International, Oxfam and others. When considering the role that the churches might play, we first have to show that we have listened to and heard many of the voices inside South Sudan. They have pointed to the scale of the problem and indicated the need for aid; they have also indicated their faith in the efforts of the international community.

We are seeing a deterioration into violence. That violence is being targeted more and more viciously at people who might previously have regarded themselves as safe, so the question arises whether there should be an arms embargo. The all-party group recently held a session at which we were informatively briefed by Dame Rosalind Marsden of Chatham House, who has deep experience of Sudan and South Sudan, as well as by Anna Oosterlinck from the UN panel of experts and Emma Fanning from Oxfam. The question of an arms embargo came up in the course of our discussions, and some people present said, "Well, there's no point having an arms embargo because that will affect sophisticated arms, whereas people in South Sudan are being killed with machetes and fairly crude weapons." That is a counsel of irresponsibility.

If the international community is in a position to impose an arms embargo on a situation that is clearly deteriorating, and if the violence involves not only crude traditional weapons but more sophisticated ammunition, then a clear stance has to be taken. The UK Government

will say that they have reflected that stance at the UN, but some of these things need much more direct effort and engagement.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation exists in a political context, of course. I have no wish to rehearse the recent political history of South Sudan—the political destabilisation and how the conflict has emerged—but there are obviously questions about how the new Government formation is going to work. Many people have doubts about whether the new vice-president really has the capacity and standing to carry people in the same way as many people would say that, unfortunately, the displaced vice-president might be able to. There are dilemmas and challenges in taking forward the peace process.

Not only are there concerns about the humanitarian situation, with people not having the means of life and a place to live, but we have seen the return of cholera. It is present in nine counties, and it has returned largely because so many people are on the move. Their moving away from home has brought about diseases of that sort. That is an indicator of the further deterioration we are likely to see.

We are also witnessing continued human rights abuses by both the Government and the opposition, with attacks on their own people and violence being visited on civilians—people who would not be identified as combatants or as harbouring combatants in any way, and who should not be considered as such under any normal interpretation of conflict. They have found themselves grossly victimised. Ahead of the debate, Members will have received significant briefings from Amnesty International, which reissued its report from several weeks ago called “We did not believe we would survive”. The report sets out a dire narrative of killings, rape, looting and all sorts of other depredations in Juba, which are now spreading more widely in South Sudan.

I pay tribute not only to those in the all-party group but to other Members who have raised many of the issues I am discussing relating to the violation of human rights, including the hon. Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain), who will respond to the debate on behalf of the Opposition. They have raised a number of questions, and in fairness, the Government have acknowledge those issues. I stress that I am not here to criticise the Government for just providing commentary on the situation. I know just how difficult the situation is, but there is a danger if we in this House decide that somewhere like South Sudan is in the box marked “Too intractable” or “Just too difficult,” because that would ignore the dire plight of the people there. Not only would that be at the expense of the people of South Sudan, but we would deny support and solidarity to the many people who are trying to help them, whether they are from the international agencies in various arms of the UN or the key international NGOs and charities.

I have acknowledged the shadow Minister; I should also acknowledge the Minister, who recently attended a meeting, sponsored by the all-party group on women, peace and security, which focused specifically on South Sudan and was attended by several charities and campaign groups. Against the backdrop of the unprecedented levels of displacement, security and violence, the meeting highlighted how all that was bearing down on women and girls. We heard evidence on how circumstances for women and girls, which were already dire before 2013,

have further deteriorated. One in five pregnant women die in childbirth and one in three pregnant or lactating women are malnourished. Of the children still in school, only 40% are girls. An adolescent girl in South Sudan is three times more likely to die in childbirth than to complete primary school.

Violence against women and girls is widespread—other hon. Members and I have previously debated that topic in this Chamber and elsewhere—particularly intimate partner violence. Rape, sexual assault and exploitation, early and forced marriage and abduction all continue to be reported to humanitarian agencies and other organisations. I am sure the Minister will recall from the meeting he attended that although the assumption when we talk about violence against women and girls in conflict situations is often that active combatants are committing the violence and abuses, it is happening much more widely and nefariously as well.

Initial analysis from the first prevalence study on violence against women and girls in South Sudan shows that in some areas of the country, more than 70% of women have experienced sexual and/or physical intimate partner violence, and one in three women have experienced some form of sexual abuse, which could include rape and transactional sex.

In that situation, when delivering whatever interventions we are part of—either directly or through shared international input—we must ensure that, in our support for conflict resolution and peace building in South Sudan, there is space for women’s participation both in formal conflict prevention and in the ongoing peace process. Of course, that participation is limited at the minute, if it exists at all. We should support people and organisations such as the South Sudan Women’s Peace Network, as well as the churches, as they make the call for at least 25% representation of women in institutional and constitutional reform processes, instead of the marginalisation and neglect that women in South Sudan face at the moment.

We were told back in 2013 that the UK was shifting away from “business as usual” in South Sudan. I do not decry the contribution that the UK has made to peace and development in the country; it has been significant. I pay tribute to DFID for the leadership that it has been able to provide in very difficult circumstances, and for what will hopefully be the UK’s role in helping with peacekeeping operations, including as a member of the troika overseeing South Sudan’s peace process. In addition, as part of the UN’s high-level review of women, peace and security, the UK made eight global commitments on women, peace and security a year ago, many of which apply particularly to South Sudan and should be given real and active application in the country.

However, despite all those commitments and all that intent from the UK Government and others, the sad reality is that “business as usual” persists for women and girls in South Sudan, where the situation has now deteriorated well below even what might be called critical levels. More is needed from the international community to try to achieve some standard of wellbeing, and to try to underpin the safety and protection—and, of course, the empowerment and longer term protection—of women.

I have referred to the fact that a number of organisations that are very familiar with and engaged in South Sudan have issued good briefings. Not all of them have been able to give their name, because many of their operatives

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are exposed and at risk, which tells us something about the scale of the problem. In fairness, it also shows us that the situation is difficult even for Government and international agency representatives working in that environment; that is all acknowledged.

Nevertheless, when it comes to addressing the humanitarian situation, we should not divorce that from the appalling human rights abuses that have taken place on all sides in South Sudan. The fact that they take place on all sides does not excuse them in any way, and it does not absolve the international community from its duty to try to hold people properly to account for them. The churches in South Sudan are clear that part of the reason for the destabilisation in South Sudan, and part of what has helped to eat at whatever passed for a moral fabric in that nation, is the fact that there was a sense of impunity and a lack of accountability. For people who want to live by good standards and ensure that others can live their life well, those things are hugely difficult and a source of scandal and frustration.

As well as highlighting the position of women and girls, I want to acknowledge the fact that, as we all know is the case in all conflict situations, there is the dire danger of a lost generation being created, as we see the crisis and the humanitarian need worsening. Given the impulse and the imperative to meet that need in the short term, we often forget some of the longer term consequences. I pay tribute to other all-party groups in the House, including the all-party group on global education for all, which has often made the point that education is often neglected in areas of conflict, because it is not seen as requiring first-order humanitarian intervention. Similarly, a former all-party group in a previous Parliament—the all-party group on protecting children in armed conflict, which was led by Fiona O'Donnell—highlighted these issues.

There were some very good points in the briefing that we received from World Vision, which perhaps other hon. Members might want to take up when they speak, about the effort that can and must be made to ensure that there are interventions in the terrible situation that exists in South Sudan to try to ensure that some semblance of an educational opportunity is afforded to children. That is not just about giving them their right to education, which should be a part of a universal right; it is also about helping to create a sense of stability in an area. Education helps to consolidate some sense of community and some fabric of normality in a situation where people are being displaced and then further displaced, where there is more and more fear of violence and, of course, where there are the problems of hunger, which in a country such as South Sudan are complicated by the ravages of climate change.

Having at least the offer of an educational opportunity for children is one of the things that can help to keep people in an area; it can be one of the anchors to build a community. Of course, it is also one of the ways of lowering the risk of children, particularly boys, being lured into the life of child soldiers and being used as agents of conflict, not just suffering as victims of conflict.

I have referred to a number of the briefings that exist. I hope that other hon. Members who will speak after me might be able to give more articulate voice to some

of the worthy points in a number of those briefings, and I also look forward to hearing the response from all the Front-Bench spokespersons.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** Order. I think there are four hon. Members who wish to speak. Looking at the time, without putting a formal time limit on speeches, that leaves about eight minutes each. If hon. Members could recognise that, it would give everyone a fair chance.

2.56 pm

**Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con):** Thank you so much, Mr Betts, for calling me to speak; it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

When I was the shadow International Development Secretary, one of the most dangerous things I ever did was to take a flight from Lokichoggio in northern Kenya to Juba and on to some of the villages in Southern Sudan that had been razed to the ground by the Janjaweed. I remember one thing so powerfully, which supports what the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan), who has secured this debate, has just said. I met the women there and they said something that has never left me.

The women said—through an interpreter, obviously—that for 30 years they had had war in their country and they had no faith whatever in their male leaders to make peace, because their impression was that men liked fighting. With great respect to my all-male colleagues in the Chamber—they are all male bar one, my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway)—I could not agree more that women need to be round the table making the peace.

It is so tragic to hear what is happening to this newly born country. After 30 years of civil war between the north and south in Sudan, one of the first new countries to come into existence recently has erupted into violence and is on the brink of genocide, if not already suffering it.

I have referred to the warnings that the United Nations special adviser has given. However, as the hon. Gentleman has said, just to read the reports of organisations such as Amnesty International—eye-witness reports of the human rights violations in South Sudan—requires a strong stomach, frankly. Mr Betts, if you will forgive me, I will place on the record the extent of the horror of what women in particular are suffering in South Sudan. Amnesty says that there were clearly “serious violations of international human rights”.

That was in July, during the violence then. People took refuge in United Nations sites, but they

“faced the terror of being exposed to crossfire with shelters of plastic sheeting or mud as their only cover.”

Then, of course, it was the women—it always is—who had to leave the UN bases, or other safe places. Amnesty International's report said:

“Over a roughly one-week period that began just after the fighting ended, dozens of Nuer women were systematically raped. Many were raped by more than one soldier. ‘When they released me...my clothes were full of blood.’”

I am sorry to have to read that into the record, but I do not think, standing here, we should baulk at just how bad the situation was. We should not be surprised that the response of those vulnerable people has been to flee. Some 3 million South Sudanese people—that is probably

a conservative estimate—have been displaced, and 90% of those fleeing are women and children. They are disproportionately affected. The present reality demands concrete action from the international community. I applaud what the Government have been doing, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman who secured the debate: we are going to need to do more.

In my short contribution, I want to keep my eyes focused on the ways forward and on how the international community can support effective peace. More remains to be done if peace is to prevail. The strategic focus must be on bringing the conflicting parties back to the negotiating table and ensuring that whatever agreement is agreed is fully implemented. I was particularly struck by what Dame Rosalind Marsden said about what is next for Sudan at the recent meeting of the all-party group for Sudan and South Sudan. She highlighted the key way forward to be an emphasis on political inclusivity. When looking to the future, we must ensure that all voices are heard. The international community must focus on calming the rhetoric in South Sudan and supporting grassroots reconciliation processes through the Churches, women's groups and youth leaders.

I was struck by something that Bishop Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala said, because I think it is directly relevant. He said:

“Many people in South Sudan are wounded in spirit. The pain of decades of war has not been addressed; our hard-won independence did not bring justice for the many who had suffered. No one has been convicted of crimes against humanity, and people have not been able to tell their stories, to relate what happened to them and their family members. Without reconciliation and forgiveness, our wounds will remain open.”

That is the point. Unless those things are addressed, peace will not take root and hold in that country.

Given the prevalence of Christianity throughout the country, Church leaders have a strong role to play. From its recent submission to the International Development Committee's inquiry, I am aware that CAFOD has been focusing on the role of the Catholic Church and Church leaders as facilitators and promoters of the peace process. I know that the APG for Sudan and South Sudan met the South Sudan Council of Churches, which is perhaps the most promising Church-led reconciliation body in South Sudan. I am also told that it met with the Pope in Rome recently and is planning more ecumenical visits. I strongly commend the Church networks to the Minister and, through him, the Foreign Office. They are a way in which this country can help to bring about a secure peace.

In conclusion, I encourage the UK Government to increase their engagement with the Church. I like the phrase that the hon. Gentleman used. We need to create a coalition of hopeful purpose—something that will last for generations. Among all that, let us please make space for women's contribution to peace-making.

3.3 pm

**Stephen Twigg** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) for securing this important and timely debate and for his diligence on international humanitarian and human rights matters. It is a pleasure to speak after the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman), who made a powerful speech.

The Department for International Development's aid strategy was set out just over a year ago, and last week we had the publication of its bilateral and multilateral development reviews. What is clear in the strategy and the reviews is that in addressing poverty we also need to address conflict as a driver of and sometimes a consequence of poverty. In many ways, South Sudan is tragically a prime example of how the new aid strategy could be applied to good effect. The civil war that blights South Sudan today began almost exactly three years ago. Since then, we have seen numerous ceasefires brokered, the UN continue its peacekeeping programme in the region and a formal peace agreement, but none of those measures has succeeded in preventing the sustained violence that has already been described. In many ways, it is one of the least well publicised humanitarian crises of our time, which makes today's debate especially welcome.

Even before South Sudan became a sovereign nation, the foundations for the new country were shaky. Decades of war in Sudan and across the region had caused widespread poverty, inequality and instability. The infrastructure needed to develop a new country was not there. That has made it incredibly difficult for humanitarian missions to deliver aid effectively to all parts of the country and it has held back the country's economy.

The scale of the humanitarian crisis was set out fully by my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle in his opening speech. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that 1.87 million people have been internally displaced. As he said, more than 1 million people have fled to neighbouring countries to escape the violence. That equates to around one quarter of the population of the country having to uproot themselves and leave their homes because of the civil war. More than 200,000 people are living in UN protection of civilians sites.

As my hon. Friend said, food insecurity is a massive challenge. Almost 5 million people are food insecure in South Sudan. According to the World Food Programme and the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, up to 4 million of them are severely food insecure, and the numbers are going up as a consequence of the conflict. As both speakers have said, DFID is playing an active and positive role, and I pay tribute to the role that the United Kingdom has been playing. DFID has been working in South Sudan since 2006 to try to address the humanitarian situation and establish the capacity for future development, including through the South Sudan peace building programme, the South Sudan recovery fund and the South Sudan service delivery programme. Crucially, there is also the support that we and others are providing to the refugees in neighbouring countries, including Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya. The UK is the second largest bilateral donor in South Sudan after the USA. The presence we have in South Sudan, despite the conflict and the challenges we face, is crucial.

I echo what my hon. Friend said about education and how vital it is that even in these challenging circumstances, the needs of children in South Sudan are not forgotten. As he said, it is vital that we do not have a lost generation. When the Minister responds, it would be good to hear about the programmes that the Government are supporting for education in South Sudan—particularly the education of girls and young women. We have seen a renewed global focus on education this year with the

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launch of Education Cannot Wait, which looks at the needs of refugees and other people living in emergency situations. Last week, the International Development Committee, as part of our education inquiry, visited Jordan and Lebanon to see for ourselves the impact of the Syria conflict on the education of children and young people in those countries—both the refugees and those from the host communities.

Despite the great efforts of Governments, including our own, we know there have been extraordinary violations of human rights, as my hon. Friend set out so powerfully in his opening speech. Can the Minister tell us what the Government are doing to monitor and report human rights violations? In particular, when such violations arise, how are we going to bring the perpetrators to justice? As has been said, the UN Secretary-General's special adviser on genocide, Adama Dieng, has already given stark warnings about the risk of genocide. What are the Government doing with partners to ensure that the situation does not become a genocide? What representations are we making to the South Sudanese Government? There is, as the right hon. Member for Meriden said, a shared responsibility. That continent had the Rwanda genocide in 1994 and the conflict in Darfur more recently, and it is vital that we learn lessons as a country from such events.

At the height of the conflict, DFID and the Foreign Office had to limit staffing numbers in the country for understandable reasons. Can the Minister tell us whether he sees a point at which the Government will be able to restore some of the reductions in DFID and other staff working to relieve the humanitarian crisis faced by the people of South Sudan? We know that many NGOs have similarly had to reduce their staffing numbers. For example, Médecins sans Frontières told the International Development Committee of the ongoing security risk faced by its hospitals and other humanitarian outposts. In written evidence to the Committee, it told us that during the most recent surge in violence, two of MSF's clinics in Leer were looted and they have not been able to reopen because of the ongoing insecurity. What can we do as a country and what are the Government doing in conjunction with other multilateral donors to ensure the safety of humanitarian staff working in the region?

My hon. Friend the Member for Foyle set out some of the concerns and issues with UNMISS in the region. Reports have raised serious concerns. I have been told of a recent incident at the Terrain hotel. The UN peacekeeping mission was only a few miles away from the hotel and yet it failed repeatedly to respond to emergency calls from civilians. As has already been said, UNMISS has struggled to fulfil its mandate for a number of reasons, but lack of co-operation from the Government of South Sudan is a major factor. Does the Minister think there is more that we could do, perhaps via the United Nations Security Council, to raise these questions?

Finally, as with all conflicts of this nature, in the end we need a diplomatic political solution that brings peace. I ask the Minister what more can be done to bring an end to this conflict through diplomatic means. Next Tuesday the International Development Committee will take oral evidence on the situation in South Sudan, including from the Minister. I very much welcome today's

debate and look forward to hearing contributions from other Members and the responses from the Minister, the SNP Front Bench and my own Front Bench. As my hon. Friend said, we face a humanitarian crisis, a set of challenges that relate to human rights and justice, and a fragile young country that desperately needs a peaceful, diplomatic solution.

3.11 pm

**James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg); I am reassured that the issue is receiving the attention of not only the all-party parliamentary group for Sudan and South Sudan, but also that of the Select Committee. I am an Afro-optimist, but I must admit there is very little to be optimistic about in South Sudan, which is perhaps one of the reasons why we should engage in the subject. I sometimes wonder about the anecdote of the MP who says, "I did something about this; I spoke about it in the House of Commons"; the constituent reminds them that that does not in itself effect change.

As I have gone from country to country in Africa, I have occasionally read in the local papers about proceedings in our Chamber—the references and the criticisms. They are taken seriously. I would very much like the Minister, through our ambassador in Juba or through Christopher Trott, our special representative for Sudan and South Sudan, to take a copy of *Hansard* and to say to Riek Machar or Salva Kiir, "The ex-Minister for Africa, James Duddridge, was not happy." Let them see the support that their citizens have from us here in the House of Commons.

All too often in meetings, Kiir and the President seemed to be more interested in their own political future and dividing up the cake. I remember a farcical argument about who did which Cabinet jobs, and it became apparent that the Cabinet jobs with lots of cash flowing through were the ones of interest. It was the personal and financial interest of those involved that drove things forward.

I am not going to be particularly diplomatic. My private office always reminded me as a Minister, "You are the first diplomat." This was when they gave me a lecture on being more diplomatic. The worst Foreign Minister I met in my two years was Barnaba Benjamin, who, thankfully, has now been sacked. He was oblivious to the need for a proper dialogue and change. I am not sure about the degree to which he was authorised on behalf of the Government to take such a position in the UN, but we are certainly in a better position without him.

Festus Mogae, the ex-President of Botswana, was a strong influence when I was dealing with the situation, but he was heavily under-resourced. I urge the excellent Minister to have discussions with his Foreign Office colleagues to make sure Festus Mogae gets all the resources he needs. A few thousand pounds to fly the right people to the right location to chat or paying the hotel bill for a few nights for the right people might sound trivial, but it can be transformational in its effect.

The Chair of the Select Committee referred to infrastructure problems and physically getting around the country. One looks at a map, but the roads are

impassable physically or impassable because of the security situation. One cannot get around unless one flies into regional airports.

There is also a broader infrastructure problem. The international community got it disastrously wrong when South Sudan was declared an independent nation state. The international community, including the UK Government, felt that if certain building blocks were provided, a principal one being an election, everything would sort itself out. When I was in Juba meeting people from civil society, they said, "What you do not appreciate is that everything has been stripped away. Everything that you consider normal in the community—the checks, the balances, the free press, the local councils, the parish councils, and, to a degree, even the churches—have been eliminated." We should reflect on that in other situations.

I remember, bizarrely, South Sudan taking a great interest in the Scottish referendum, and I realised why. They did not want Scotland to be independent, simply because they would no longer be the newest nation state in the world. They were vehement in their opposition. There was an undertone of pride about being a new nation state. There was hope and drive there. It was very strange. When I visited, the IMF was due to arrive. The situation seemed wholly farcical. The economy was in total collapse and the support of the IMF would have made sense only if the Government system was sorted. I am interested to find out how that has developed.

In the UN camps, I visited women who had been raped—some in the camps themselves, but principally outside the camps. I was struck by what I heard. I had been told to expect graphic stories of how they had been raped so that I would appreciate the horror of the situation. However, none of them wanted to discuss that—not because I was a man, but because they were used to politicians coming in and listening. They knew that I was meeting Salva Kiir the next day and they had specific policy recommendations: "You need to tell our President this; you need to tell our President that." They clearly felt totally disenfranchised.

At the UN I met two female British police officers. I am interested to know whether the secondment of UK police forces to the camps is still working. That was really useful because people were getting raped in the camps. The UN camps were relatively porous and people could get in and out. The police officers helped the community to police themselves. They acted almost as police trainers to the community, rather than policing the area themselves.

We should learn lessons from when people come back together. When Machar came back to Juba, he brought bodyguards, which, given the history, makes a lot of sense. I suggested that some should come early to pave the way so that there were no misunderstandings among the combatant forces. I expected two, maybe 10, maybe 20, bodyguards—there were 1,000. I am no military man, but that sounds more like a battalion than close protection officers.

There was a bizarre debate over whether we should transport the rocket-propelled machinery. We ended up helping to bring back some of the rocket-propelled devices, but not the actual cartridges that go in them. Indeed, when things unravelled, it was among the bodyguards that things started around the presidential compound.

We need to look at the situation in relation to Sudan more generally. It is good that the all-party group is covering both areas, particularly the Chinese relationship and the oil relationship. When looking at the numbers, it struck me that there did not seem to be any economic sense in pumping oil and sending it to China. I could not quite work out why it was economic to do that, unless there were big bribes going on behind the scenes, separate from the flows to China.

This was one of the two areas, the other being Burundi, that, despite my being an Afrophile and Afro-optimist, kept me up at night. I do not know what one could have done differently, but I hope that those places still keep some at the Foreign Office up at night—I am sure they do. With all due respect, I hope they occasionally keep the Minister up at night, looking at what we can do for the people of South Sudan, as well as those who have left it and its neighbouring countries.

3.20 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) on his presentation of the issue and the hard work that he has done on it. I also congratulate all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in the debate. They have made fantastic and focused contributions, and they clearly have much more knowledge than I do and have had experience in South Sudan.

It will be of no surprise to many here that I am taking part in the debate. Humanitarian situations have always touched me, and this one does too. As we are in this place and can use our influence to make changes that help people, that is what we should do. That is why I shall continue to speak in such debates. If we can help, clearly we should—that is where I am coming from. We have received a lot of information from many people, including the briefing pack that the hon. Member for Foyle mentioned. I declare an interest as the chair of the all-party group on international freedom of religion or belief, and I want to make some comments on that issue and human rights.

The briefing pack states that close to 3 million South Sudanese have had to flee their homes since civil war broke out in December 2013. An estimated 1.87 million people have been internally displaced, and more than 1 million people are refugees in neighbouring countries. We are witnessing a humanitarian catastrophe in South Sudan, and those figures cannot be overlooked as we try to grasp the enormity of it. It is estimated that 4.8 million people were food-insecure in July 2016. If that is not a crisis, then what is? When a ceasefire was declared in July, after five days of heavy fighting that marked the fifth anniversary of the formation of the world's youngest nation, I was shocked at some of the images and the coverage. It showed that despite the ceasefire, which followed days of devastating fighting, a humanitarian emergency gripped the nation. Untold numbers were massacred and thousands more sought refuge in churches. People rush to churches in the hope of finding sanctuary—as they should, because that is where sanctuary should be. Unfortunately, that did not save them either. The humanitarian issue is the most urgent, starting with the lack of drinking water. The International Red Cross has managed to send teams into the two main hospitals, but it is beyond time for Governments worldwide to step in and do what they can.

[Jim Shannon]

Many Christians have lost their lives in the civil war, although it is not possible to give the number. I want to ask the Minister about that. In this House I have a duty to be clear about it, as do other Members. Reports suggested that some 300 people, including scores of civilians, were killed in the violence in July, and there were UN reports of horrors such as mass rapes, and children and the disabled being burned alive. Can we even begin to imagine how horrible those things are? Words cannot take it in. The UN said in its report earlier this year that it had received

“harrowing accounts of pro-opposition civilians killed by being burned alive, suffocated in containers, shot, hanged from trees or cut to pieces”.

There were stories of children and disabled people being among such victims. No one is free from the depravity, violence and brutality of the people involved. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, said at the time:

“The scale and types of sexual violence—primarily by Government SPLA forces and affiliated militia—are described in searing, devastating detail, as is the almost casual, yet calculated, attitude of those slaughtering civilians and destroying property and livelihoods”.

More recently, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned that there was a

“very real risk of mass atrocities”

in South Sudan and that peacekeepers deployed in the war-torn country would not be able to stop such a bloodbath.

The people who reside in South Sudan have suffered a painful history, enduring years of conflict. Today, the humanitarian situation has again reached the most deplorable levels. There have been reports, as other hon. Members have said, of the rape of women and girls on an unprecedented scale. In response to the very careful words of the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman), who clearly outlined the situation of violence against women, I would say that all of us here are speaking out against it too. I find it incomprehensible when I try to take in all that is happening.

The current circumstances seem a far cry from the formation of the transitional constitution, which provided some positivity about the direction the country could have taken. It even included a stipulation on the separation of religion and state, prohibiting religious discrimination even if the President declares a state of emergency. The emphasis in South Sudan at the start was excellent, but those clear principles have been strayed away from. It is common for rights of that type to be enshrined in law in developed nations. The statement that

“all religions shall be treated equally”

and that

“religion or religious beliefs shall not be used for divisive purposes”

indicated much potential. Tragically, however, such promising rhetoric has failed to be fully realised because of the continuing conflict. Instead, a process of ethnic cleansing has gripped the country, involving massacres, starvation and the destruction of villages. Members will know that South Sudan is one of the most diverse countries in Africa, with approximately 64 different ethnic groups brought together as one. Sadly, the three UN commission members say they have observed deepening

divisions between the groups, which may lead to an increase in violence if urgent action is not taken to de-escalate tensions.

Large parts of the country have no functioning courts or even traditional reconciliation methods, and that is exacerbating issues and affecting the potential for peace. Developing the judicial infrastructure of the country is therefore of the utmost importance and must be addressed. Other institutions that can help to create a path to peace should also be supported. For instance, the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust has heard of the positive role of the Churches as long-term mediators—which they should, can and want to be—and an influence for reconciliation. As the Minister of State, Baroness Anelay, has said:

“Both accountability and reconciliation remain essential for South Sudan to move forward”,

and it is imperative that we support

“the ongoing efforts of community groups, including churches, to pursue reconciliation at the local level.”

I believe that they are a conduit for change and reconciliation. Considering that, will the Minister ensure that our embassy officials discuss the importance of religious communities in the country and the role they can play in peace and reconciliation as well as in offering refuge to innocent civilians who desperately need it?

As the UN commission has said:

“The stage is being set for a repeat of what happened in Rwanda and the international community is”—

as we all believe—

“under an obligation to prevent it.”

The idea of the separation of states was to stop genocide, yet it continues unabated. We have a moral duty to do all we can to halt the genocide taking place right under our noses.

The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) is right that it is good to be able to say he has spoken in this debate in Westminster Hall, but it is not enough. We who are speaking are not the ones who can make a change. We look to the Government and the Minister to take our words and drive them into a strategy and plan for change. I have read the response of the Department for International Development, which has said:

“The UK is the second largest bilateral donor to the humanitarian response in South Sudan. We expect to provide assistance to 3 million people between 2015 and 2020, the majority of whom are internally displaced people, but also those living in the host communities supporting them. Our support will include life-saving food and clean drinking water as well as sanitation, shelter and health care.”

All that is good, but it is not sufficient to plaster up the bleeding without attempting to deal with the assault that causes it. With that in mind, will the Minister reassure the House that Her Majesty's Government are doing all that they can—not just alone but with other Governments—to prevent further conflict in South Sudan and support the efforts for a peace process to end the violence?

3.29 pm

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I congratulate the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) on obtaining the debate and on his comprehensive introduction to it, as well as all the other hon. Members who have made

informed and important contributions. I congratulate him on his work as the chair of the all-party group for Sudan and South Sudan, of which I am proud to be a vice-chair. It has been a busy time for the all-party group. We have welcomed a number of delegations and representatives as part of a continuing inquiry into the situation in Sudan and South Sudan. Recently, I had the honour of meeting representatives of the Sudan Council of Churches, led by the Archbishop of Canterbury's former and current advisers on Anglican communion affairs, Bishop Precious Omuku and the Right Reverend Anthony Poggo, Bishop of Kajo-Keji, who is from South Sudan. The role of the Church has been touched on, and I may come back to that.

The repeated message from those visitors, and from the reports prepared for the debate, is just how dire the situation is on the ground. That is particularly tragic given the hope that surrounded independence in 2011. South Sudan remains the youngest country in the world—despite our best efforts in 2014, although the situations are of course markedly different on a whole range of levels.

We have heard the words “tragic”, “dire” and “gruelling”—we are almost running out of words to express the tragedy of the situation, yet many analysts say there is no end in sight. In particular, the issue of gender-based violence has been touched on. We are in the middle of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. Saturday of this week is Human Rights Day. Tomorrow there will be a debate on violence against women, and next Friday there will be a private Member's Bill on the Istanbul convention. Those are supposed to be reminders to galvanise us into action, yet the situation only seems to be getting worse.

The constructive suggestion from the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) about the role that women have to play in the peace process is important and worth emphasising, and that has to be built into all the diplomatic and humanitarian responses. The former Minister, the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), emphasised that point in recounting his experience of meeting with women.

The whole country is affected by the humanitarian disaster. Some 1.87 million people are internally displaced and nearly half the population are food-insecure. There are increasing health risks, such as cholera, which the hon. Member for Foyle mentioned. There are attacks on non-governmental organisations and humanitarian organisations—organisations that are there on a humanitarian basis, trying to provide help on the ground—such as the attack on the Terrain compound. There is also an increasing tribal dimension and a real risk of mass atrocities, as identified by the UN Secretary-General.

There has to be some hope for progress. There is a role for the Government, which we have touched on, and the role of faith-based and Church organisations has been mentioned frequently. The Church has historically played an important role in building peace after previous conflicts. It has a reach into communities across the whole country and, crucially, is owned and led by leaders from those communities. The particular interest that Pope Francis has taken in the situation has been mentioned, so it would be interesting to know how the Government are working with the Church on the ground. Given the UK's role in the troika, is there any role that the UK's representative to the Holy See can play, or is playing, in helping to facilitate those dialogues?

We have a Department for International Development Minister here today, and I echo the points made by the Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), about DFID's support, and particularly about continuity of education for children so that future generations do not get wrapped up in a cycle of violence, and about the importance of working through NGOs on the ground. The humanitarian “Charter for Change”, which a number of organisations have signed up to, such as the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development and the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, emphasises that support for organisations already on the ground is important, especially as access for external organisations becomes more difficult. In providing a humanitarian response, it is important that we do not lose sight of longer-term development work supporting livelihoods, the mainstreaming of peacebuilding and finding ways to link that with humanitarian responses to build resilience in communities going forward.

With regard to influence at the United Nations, it would be useful to know where the Government stand on pushing for an arms embargo as a matter of urgency. The UK's ambassador has called for that, but how is the UK proactively working to identify what blocks there might be to that at the UN? Is there a role for increased sanctions against not just military figures but high-level civilian and political figures? There has to be continued pressure on both sides to get back to the negotiating table to implement a ceasefire and allow humanitarian access. There has to be discussion with neighbouring countries and support for displaced people in refugee camps on the borders as well.

There also has to be support here at home in the UK. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office advises against all travel of UK citizens to South Sudan, yet I struggled to find on the Home Office website any country guidance about how South Sudanese refugees who make it here should be treated. I hope they will be welcomed and supported to settle in this country, given the challenges that they have faced and made it through.

As the hon. Member for Foyle said, nothing should be too difficult or too intractable for us. We sometimes wonder where these debates get us. I hope that diplomats will take this strong demonstration of cross-party support very clearly and that the Government will be encouraged by that. If they step up their action, they will have our support.

3.35 pm

**Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I thank the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) for securing this very important debate. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group, he has a considerable interest in the issue. In his very passionate contribution, he rightly pointed out the serious human rights violations and, in particular, the disproportionate impact on women and girls. I also thank the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), the Chair of the International Development Committee, as well as the hon. Members for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady).

[Imran Hussain]

It is clear that Members from all parties are alarmed by the rapidly deteriorating situation in South Sudan and have grave worries that the country could fall further still, with new reports of violence against civilians every day. Despite several ceasefires, what we are seeing unfold in South Sudan does not show the country moving towards a more peaceful period. We must work closely with our international partners and, crucially, the African community to stabilise the situation in the country. We therefore wish to seek assurances from the Government that the UK is doing all that it can to alleviate the growing humanitarian crisis in South Sudan. Time does not permit me to cover the many issues of equal importance that hon. Members have raised. I will concentrate on three areas of concern.

The first issue is the sheer scale of the refugee crisis being created by the conflict, with 1.3 million South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries and more than 1.7 million internally displaced. For a country with a population of between 11 and 12 million, let us be in no doubt that this is a huge figure, with more than one in five people fleeing their homes. It is very worrying because the most dramatic manifestation of a deteriorating humanitarian situation is the scale of the movement of people. The mass movement taking place in South Sudan paints not only a bleak picture of the situation, but an extremely disturbing one. It is clear that alarm bells in the international community should be ringing loudly, for this situation is only set to get worse.

The second focus of our concern is the enormous funding shortfalls experienced by UN agencies operating in the region, something that has not been talked about as much today but which is very important. For example, of the almost \$650 million that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees needs for the South Sudan situation, it has only managed to secure \$166 million, or 26% of its funding requirements, which leaves a \$483 million funding gap. Although I welcome the UK's \$6.5 million contribution to the UNHCR South Sudan situation fund, it seems that our international partners are less than willing, with even the International Olympic Committee contributing more than Italy or Spain. That is frankly unacceptable. We need not only to up our game and contribute more to this neglected crisis, but to get on the phone, get around the table and press our allies to step up and plug the gap.

Supporting refugees, which is vital if we are to address the humanitarian situation that the South Sudanese face, can happen only with adequate funding. Without funding, it is a struggle to register new arrivals, provide shelter, relocate refugees to better, safer sites, provide access to food, increase health services, and provide water, sanitation and hygiene facilities. Not providing those things deepens the humanitarian crisis, as we are seeing. The UK and its partners urgently need to address that gap, particularly as we enter the dry season, when large offensives that will displace more people are expected. I urge the Minister to provide some clarity on that point.

The third and final issue, which has rightly been the subject of most of the focus of this important debate, is the human rights situation in that country. Numerous abuses—including, as we have heard, sexual violence, rape and the use of child soldiers—have been committed against civilians. Most worryingly, as hon. Members

said, there is a real concern that the conflict could escalate into ethnic cleansing and genocide. In 2010, the US director of national intelligence warned that a new genocide is likely to occur in South Sudan. It is with deep regret that we are beginning to see his prediction come true, as the situation becomes less a conflict between Government and rebel forces, and more one between armed militia and defenceless civilians. Human Rights Watch reported that soldiers and police forces are conducting house-to-house searches for certain ethnic groups, followed by multiple killings, despite ceasefires being in place.

The chair of the three-person commission in South Sudan, acting on behalf of the UN Commission on Human Rights, stated that they are observing deepening ethnic divisions, and that the stage is being set for a repeat of the Rwandan genocide. In the 1990s, the world stood by and watched as the Tutsi people of Rwanda were not just killed but exterminated in swathes of that country. We cannot let that happen again. To prevent that, we must ensure that the failures associated with UNMISS are properly addressed and that there is accountability and a working justice system. I have substantial reservations about UNMISS's ability to protect civilians, in the wake of an investigation that identified an ineffective response to violence and a risk-averse posture. I would be grateful if the Minister can tell me what the UK is doing to ensure, when the mission's mandate and budget are extended, that its shortcomings are corrected and that it is able to properly protect civilians.

On the issue of justice and accountability, although I understand that DFID is funding several access-to-justice programmes in South Sudan, the criminal justice system in that country is not only still grossly under-resourced, but lacks the capacity in several important areas to see through investigations and prosecutions. What are the Government doing to support efforts to bring those guilty of atrocities to justice? What are they doing more widely to prevent genocide, particularly through arms embargoes and their enforcement?

Although the world's attention is rightly focused on the growing refugee crisis in Syria and Iraq, we must remember that other crises are emerging around the globe, many of which are as serious. We must take the humanitarian situation and the rising spectre of genocide in South Sudan seriously, and we must not let it take hold or stand by if it does.

3.44 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (James Wharton):** It is testament to the importance of this issue and the weight that Members attach to it that we have had such a wide range of contributions to the debate from across political parties. I congratulate the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) on raising this issue.

There is a very difficult set of circumstances in South Sudan. It is a sad and, indeed, tragic story. Hon. Members spoke about a range of concerns and issues, which I hope to address in the time remaining. I will explain the British Government's position, what the UK is doing to try to mitigate the impact of what is unfolding in South Sudan, and what we might do, looking to the future, to set that country on a better path—one that has eluded it thus far.

The hon. Gentleman set out the situation in South Sudan in stark terms. It voted overwhelmingly for independence in 2011, but in 2013 fighting broke out between the forces loyal to President Kiir and those loyal to the Vice-President Machar. A peace agreement was signed in August 2015, but fighting broke out again in Juba in July, and Vice-President Machar fled the country. Estimates of the number of people killed in the fighting since 2013 range from 50,000 to 300,000, but it cannot be denied that a significant number have been impacted by the effects of the instability and fighting. Many lives have been destroyed, and many others remain in the balance. The question, which right hon. and hon. Members have covered widely, is, what can we do to assist?

Some hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Foyle, spoke about UNMISS—the UN peacekeeping force of 13,000 or so troops, to which the UK is scaling up its contribution to 400 to assist it in its work. They mentioned the challenges it has faced and the criticism it has come under as a result of its perceived failings. It is right to be critical of its failings, but we also have to recognise that the Government of South Sudan have often been a very significant factor in preventing it from doing its job. That is one of the challenges that we face as an international community when engaging in South Sudan, and we are continuing work to try to resolve it. The UK's increased contribution of some of the world's most professional soldiers, who will be able to provide additional leadership and support, will hopefully make a difference, but that will not remove a number of the barriers and challenges, not the least of which is the behaviour of the Government of South Sudan.

The hon. Gentleman and a number of other right hon. and hon. Members raised issues including the challenges that women and girls face, and the important contribution that the UK, in particular, is making in the field of education in South Sudan. He commented on reports from a range of organisations that have taken an interest in this space and contributed significantly to the broader understanding of what is happening and what needs to be done.

The hon. Gentleman and others also raised the concern that there is a perception that some have acted with impunity, and have committed crimes and done things that, in some cases, we find entirely unacceptable, but have not yet been brought to justice. The peace agreement signed in 2015 agreed that a hybrid court would be established to bring to justice those guilty of the most egregious human rights abuses. The African Union is currently considering models for it, and our international partners are encouraging it to move it forward. Those who have committed or are complicit in serious crimes should and indeed must be brought to justice, not just because it is important that the victims of those crimes have justice, but for the message it sends to the international community more broadly about the approach that the UK and the international community take in the world. We will stick firm and fast to that approach and encourage our partners and other nations to co-operate in delivering it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) spoke of the tragic circumstances in South Sudan and quoted moving parts of Amnesty International's report. She focused on the impact on individuals—particularly women and girls—and

commented, I think appropriately, on the need to bring parties around the table, and on the role that the Church and church leaders can play in that process. Those comments were echoed by the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), among others. We recognise the important role that civil society can play in peace building, including in South Sudan, and Members highlighted the role that churches can play. We are working with them to find ways to support action for peace—the Churches' campaign—and we are working closely with the churches, including through our ambassador to the Holy See, whom hon. Members mentioned, Bishop Anthony Poggio and Bishop Precious Omuku.

We are engaging with church leaders and supporting Churches' objectives and broader activities. The Churches can play a key role in bringing together some of the groups that will need to be brought together if we are to secure peace for South Sudan. We stand ready to work in tandem with any actors in this space who can help us to achieve our shared objectives, and the Churches have a proud history and tradition of doing that. That has been recognised by right hon. and hon. Members today and, I can assure them, is recognised by the Government.

In one guise or another, I seem to appear before the Chair of the International Development Committee, the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), daily at the moment, which is testament to his and his Committee's work ethic and interests. He drew on his wide and comprehensive experience and understanding of some of the broader challenges, including the need to address conflict when we wish to deal with poverty. The Department for International Development focuses very much on alleviating poverty, and rightly so, but we have to recognise that the underlying causes of poverty can be many and varied, and conflict is one of the strongest, most easily identifiable and most challenging to address.

I was struck, too, by the fact that the Select Committee Chair raised the issue of neighbouring countries, demonstrating his grasp of the breadth of the challenge, which affects not only South Sudan but its neighbours. In this financial year we will spend £15 million in Uganda, nearly £4 million in Ethiopia and more than £3 million in Kenya on support for refugees from South Sudan. More needs to be done, because of the significant pressure on neighbouring states from the large numbers of people who have been forced by circumstances entirely beyond their control to flee their homes, often in fear of their lives or in search of basic amenities, provisions and support. The impact on neighbouring states is significant, and the hon. Gentleman was right to mention it. We are cognisant of it and engaged. Where we can, we are determined to contribute not only to finding peace in South Sudan, but to helping its affected neighbours deal with the consequences of the unfolding events.

The Chair of the Select Committee also raised the issue of education. I am pleased to confirm that the UK is a lead donor to education in South Sudan. We recognise its importance, particularly for girls, but also more broadly. "Girls' Education South Sudan", is our £61.4 million programme, running from May 2013 to April 2019. It will benefit 240,000 girls, as well as boys, and more than 2,500 schools, resulting in improved learning outcomes and completion rates and helping to minimise the disruption of the terrible circumstances in

[James Wharton]

which many young people find themselves. I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that important point, which deserved mention.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) drew on his extensive experience of Africa generally and South Sudan in particular. He is free of some of the constraints that affect those of us in ministerial office, and was able to be slightly less diplomatic than I might choose to be in this debate, but I recognise the importance of his comments. He is right: what we say in the Chamber is not the same as what we do and how we act, but people follow what is said in this place and the mood, thoughts and concerns of hon. Members. He has made his views very clear.

From my own travels and people I have met in Africa, I know that my hon. Friend's time as a Minister in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is respected, and the weight attached to his comments is not insignificant. I therefore hope that actors in this place will heed his words, because they are both wise and important, and they send a clear message to those who, if they changed their actions, might make a real and direct difference to the lives of many people in South Sudan.

My hon. Friend asked specific questions about the IMF. I understand the surprise he expressed about it, and I confirm that the process is on hold given the situation in South Sudan. He also asked about the contribution of the UK police to improving the security situation. I am sorry to confirm that, the crisis having re-emerged, the policewomen whom he met—or their replacements—were withdrawn in July. We have not been able to restart that process because of the particular security risks.

The hon. Member for Strangford talked about the need for basic amenities and the challenges for South Sudan. Basic infrastructure is often not present, which makes delivering aid, doing good, monitoring progress and doing all the things that the international community wants to do in that country all the more difficult. He rightly spoke about the terrible impact on many Christian communities. He is a champion for Christian communities throughout the world—this is not the first debate in which I have heard him raise the issue—and his voice is strong and clear. I hope that it will be heeded. People, whatever their background, are suffering in South Sudan, and that includes many minority groups. Christians are suffering much as a result of broader events and, given the role of the Churches, and the clear and urgent need for the international community to rally to do what can be done to avert what might be a crisis in the country, his comments were timely and apposite. I welcome them.

The hon. Gentleman's comments were echoed to some extent by the spokesman for the Scottish National party, the hon. Member for Glasgow North, who also asked about our actions and activities at the United Nations, as did the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain). At the United Nations, we continue to call for an arms embargo and to be proactive in our support, engaging with our international partners in that space. We recognise the challenges in delivering unified, global international action in such circumstances, but that is no excuse for

not trying to secure it. The UK plays a lead role in that, which I welcome, and it will continue to do so, which is important.

The shadow Minister focused on three areas, which I have already touched on to a great extent. He spoke about the scale of the refugee crisis, which is not only in South Sudan but in its neighbouring countries, and recognised the need for serious action to deal with it. The UK plays a significant role, but I accept that there is more to do. He rightly spoke about funding shortfalls. I have lobbied my counterparts in other donor nations by phone, and I will continue to engage in that space. The UK is the second largest humanitarian donor, in particular through our humanitarian and resilience programme in South Sudan—the £443 million HARISS programme, running over five years from March 2015 to 2020. We will provide food, shelter, access to water and health services to millions of vulnerable people, including women and children. We want our global partners to assist in the process, too—many do, but more needs to be done. His comments were important in that regard.

The shadow Minister also mentioned his concern about the escalating violence. Reference has been made to the concerns expressed by the United Nations, and many hon. Members referred to the danger of genocide in South Sudan. As is broadly accepted, however, we are not in that place at this time, although we are in a place where genocide is a very real risk. The international community must pay heed to that risk and take the warning. It must act and engage constructively and energetically to avoid what could become something that we look back on as a scar on our conscience if we are not careful about how we act today.

The UK is playing a key role by leading our international partners, investing through the Department for International Development, applying pressure through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, working through many agencies based here in this country or supported from here, and expressing its views and concerns through forums such as this one in Westminster Hall. We must continue to do all that and to focus our efforts, because the lives of many millions of people may hang on our success or otherwise. The goal and its pursuit are worthy, and I am pleased to see the House engage in that, across parties, as wholeheartedly as has been demonstrated this afternoon.

3.57 pm

**Mark Durkan:** I thank the Minister for replying to so many of the points made by many right hon. and hon. Members. I thank the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) and the hon. Members for North West Norfolk (Sir Henry Bellingham), for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) and for Bradford East (Imran Hussain) for their contributions. They all articulated a number of the issues and factors to do with the existing problems in South Sudan and the possible actions to mitigate some of them in the short and the long term.

The Minister rightly touched on a number of the points that were made, and he acknowledged the problems with UNMISS, as did other hon. Members. I would not wish UNMISS to escape any criticism, but I did not want the debate only to focus on it and its failure.

We must remember that UNMISS failed not only the people of South Sudan but the very good people of the NGOs who had made a commitment there. The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby mentioned the Terrain hotel incident, which involved NGO people being victimised. We should offer solidarity and sympathy to NGO workers who have had to leave South Sudan, perhaps for their own safety, or who have been evicted more cruelly. It must be hugely frustrating for them, knowing the problems of the country, to be denied the opportunity to add their bit of capacity.

The other people to whom we must of course offer solidarity are the people of South Sudan themselves. Emma Fanning from Oxfam, when she spoke to the APPG, made the point that it is the resilience of the South Sudanese people, in offering solidarity themselves, to which we have to pay tribute.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

## UN's Not Too Young to Run Campaign

4 pm

**Stuart Blair Donaldson** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the UN's Not Too Young to Run campaign.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. Today's generation of young people is the largest the world has ever known. Half of the global population is under the age of 30, yet young people are starkly under-represented at virtually every level of government and politics. Efforts have been made around the world to promote young people's right to run for public office by seeking to lower the legal age of candidacy.

In 2007, as a result of the "How old is old enough?" campaign, the minimum candidacy age in England, Wales and Scotland was lowered from 21 to 18, in line with the voting age. In Turkey, young people lobbied the Government to reduce the age of candidacy for Parliament from 30 to 25. In Nigeria, the Not Too Young to Run campaign has embarked on a mission to address age discrimination in candidacy for the legislative and executive branches. That serves as an inspiration for the global campaign.

Building on the not too young run—I need to get that right; I am going to be saying it a lot. The global Not Too Young to Run campaign will focus on promoting young people's right to run for public office. The campaign, launched by a partnership of the office of the UN Secretary-General's envoy on youth, the UN Development Programme, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the European Youth Forum and the Youth Initiative for Advocacy Growth and Advancement, aims to elevate the promotion of young people's right to run for public office and address widespread age discrimination.

Launching the campaign, the UN Secretary-General's envoy on youth, Ahmad Alhendawi, said:

"Young people have every right to be active participants in civic and public life and it is time to ensure they no longer face arbitrary barriers to run for public office—whether at the local, regional or national level...Through the Not Too Young To Run campaign, my office will work with partners around the world to raise awareness about the issue of age discrimination and promote and expand the rights of young people to run for public office."

In a rapidly changing world where more than 50% of people but fewer than 2% of elected legislators are under 30, the campaign highlights that young people's active participation in electoral politics is essential to thriving and representative democracies worldwide. The campaign emphasises young people's rights to engage fully in the democratic process, including their right to run for office.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has said:

"Younger generations are not adequately represented in formal political institutions such as Parliaments, political parties and public administrations. This leads many to feel leadership and policymaking are reserved for an élite. A society that does not fully respect everyone's equal right to participate is fundamentally unsound. The right to express opinions—including criticism—and to participate in public affairs are essential to ensuring state institutions are accountable, grounded in service to the people."

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and how, eloquent as ever, he is setting out his case. Does he agree that institutions such as the Scottish Youth Parliament and the UK Youth Parliament provide fantastic opportunities for young people to project themselves and have an experience of electoral office that stands them in good stead?

**Stuart Blair Donaldson**: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I will come to the benefits of the Scottish and UK Youth Parliaments a little later.

The Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Martin Chungong, has said:

“If young people are not too young to get married, to serve in the military or to choose the parliamentarians who will represent them, they are Not Too Young To Run...IPU calls for the age at which people may run for political office to be aligned with the legally permitted voting age. IPU Member Parliaments agreed to this in 2010 when they adopted a resolution on youth participation in the democratic process. If more young MPs were elected, there would be more role models from whom young people could take their lead and engage in politics. The time has come to increase youth representation in politics and we are happy to join forces with the United Nations Envoy on Youth in this endeavor”.

The campaign will gather inputs and ideas from young people around the world through a series of online activities and engagement, while providing a platform and resources for national campaigns to flourish.

If I may quote one more person, I should say that I was particularly taken with this quote from Johanna Nyman, President of the European Youth Forum:

“Young people bring the fresh ideas and innovation to politics that are sorely needed! In an era when young people are turning away from traditional politics, we must all work together to increase youth participation in politics and to encourage political parties to welcome younger candidates and young people to run for political office.”

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I likewise congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Does he agree that part of young people's enthusiasm and engagement comes from their right to vote? The Scottish independence referendum was one of the best demonstrations of that. We welcome the fact that 16-year-olds can now vote in Scottish local authority and parliamentary elections; it is just disappointing that they were not able to do so in the European referendum and that they cannot vote in Westminster parliamentary elections.

**Stuart Blair Donaldson**: I absolutely agree, and I will come to that point too. My hon. Friends must have copies of my speech.

Johanna Nyman continued:

“If the last few months of global political upheaval have taught us anything, it should be that politics needs young people more than ever and that young people do care passionately about the decisions made about their future.”

On behalf of the Scottish National party, I welcome this UN campaign, which raises awareness of the need to get more young people involved in politics. We share the UN's wish to inspire young people to run for office, vote and engage in politics. As has been mentioned, Scotland values young people's involvement in politics, and our independence referendum was a great movement for young people. With the power to legislate for that referendum in September 2014, the Scottish Parliament enabled 16 and 17-year-olds to vote. Turnout in that

referendum among people aged 16 or 17 who were able to vote for the first time, 66% of whom it is estimated registered to vote, was 75%.

Following the positive experience of that referendum, calls grew for the voting age to be lowered across the UK. Speaking at a press conference on 19 September, the First Minister of Wales said that high youth turnout proved that teenagers cared about politics. He said:

“How often do we have discussions bemoaning the fact that young people don't vote...That didn't happen yesterday. The case has been made much more strongly for 16 and 17-year-olds to get the vote more generally in elections across the UK”.

I cite the independence referendum as one of the main reasons why I am here. The grassroots nature of the campaign allowed young people such as me to take ownership of ideas and get involved in politics. For me, it meant going out in all weathers to knock on doors right across what is now my constituency, and I ended up running the yes campaign in that area. That gave me the confidence to decide that I would be just as good as anyone else at representing the area where I grew up, for which I have a deep passion.

Encouraging young people to get involved in politics is not new for the SNP. After her famous Hamilton by-election victory in 1967, Winnie Ewing used her maiden speech in Parliament to argue that the voting age should be lowered to 16. Further, the SNP Scottish Government have lowered the voting age to allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in all Scottish parliamentary and local council elections. The same day that happened, the UK Government denied young people the right to vote in the EU referendum. The SNP tabled an amendment calling for the EU referendum franchise to include 16 and 17-year-olds, but unfortunately it was rejected. I encourage the Minister and the UK Government to look again at extending the UK-wide franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds.

Like many colleagues from all parties, I get invited to schools to speak to pupils about my job. I was recently lucky enough to go back to my old school, Banchory Academy, to talk to some modern studies classes. When I studied higher modern studies at Banchory, there were probably only around 12 people in the class; when I went back last year, there were two classes of at least 18. That shows the growth in political engagement among young people in Scotland. The questions that young people ask me about political issues are always informed and articulate. Young people nowadays are digital natives, and with constant access to social media, they are always up to date with the latest information, news and current affairs. Indeed, 16 and 17-year-olds are often much more informed than people much older than them.

The Scottish and UK Youth Parliaments and youth councils are good examples of young people being engaged. Those are hubs of active young people taking political issues right to the heart of communities across Scotland. The Scottish Youth Parliament and youth councils have been important in raising awareness of issues of importance to young people such as mental health. It was also inspirational to see hundreds of Youth Parliament MPs debating in the Chamber a few weeks ago. The ones I saw spoke passionately and with authority on a variety of issues, and I am sure some of them could give Members of this place a run for their money.

At the weekend I met with one of my local MSYPs, Kyle Michie, to discuss the Not Too Young to Run campaign and get his thoughts on youth participation in politics. He had this to say about being an MSYP and youth political engagement:

"I have spent nearly two years involved in the Scottish Youth Parliament. In this time I have gone from being politically unengaged to encouraging and promoting involvement in politics to local young people. Organisations such as the youth parliament are effective in that they not only inspire Members of the Youth Parliament but countless others to speak up for their opinions and rights.

It is a positive shift in our culture that young people can initiate and take part in dinner table debates. Young people more than ever have been encouraged to promote their beliefs in a rapidly changing world—a skill which is undoubtedly vital to ensure Britain becomes a country that our future generations want to live in."

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Having been an elected representative continuously for nine and a half years, despite having celebrated my 30th birthday only earlier this year, I encourage young people every time I meet them to get involved in adult politics, because politicians here are making decisions that affect their lives. Does my hon. Friend do similar?

**Stuart Blair Donaldson:** I do. Every time I visit schools or speak to youth groups, I encourage them to get involved. I am going to mention my hon. Friend a little later on in my speech—nine and a half years, really? Wow!

It is important that we emphasise to young people that they could get involved in politics. However, we should also emphasise that there is not just party politics—when I was young, party politics was the last thing I wanted to do; young people can also get involved in community groups or in issues that they care about. Whether charities or campaign groups, the point is to get involved in something that they care about and make a difference.

I am lucky to be joined by some of my colleagues today who are fantastic examples of being not too young to run. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), as she mentioned, was 21 when she was elected to Aberdeen City Council in 2007. She would have been the youngest if it had not been for her brother who was elected at the same time at the age of just 18. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig), who is not here today, was also elected to Aberdeen City Council in 2007, and in 2011 he became the leader of that council at age 26.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) was elected as a councillor in 2012 at the age of 24, and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) was also elected at 24. Believe it or not, my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) was at one point the youngest councillor in Scotland when he was elected in 2005. Finally, my hon. Friends the Members for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) and for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald)—he is not here—were under 30 when they were elected to this place, although I delight in reminding them that that is not the case anymore.

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

**Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): It seems like a long time since I was elected to local government back in 2005. Does my hon. Friend agree that although I was fortunate in having support from the local party network, who really encouraged me to run for election—I had

not thought about doing that until then—that is not necessarily the case for everyone? The case he is making is about putting in place that support network for young people who want to get involved.

**Stuart Blair Donaldson:** Absolutely, and I will come on to speak about that. I cannot mention colleagues without mentioning my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black), who was elected to this place at the age of just 20, edging me out as the youngest Member.

In the wake of the vote to leave the EU and the election of Donald Trump, we saw people taking to the streets to protest against those decisions. It was fantastic to see that passion, but we need to emphasise to young people that politics is not just about protesting against decisions they do not like or having a rant on Facebook. We need to make the case that they should be harnessing that passion and making use of it. The message must go out that "If you think the level of debate in politics is poor, get involved. If you think politicians aren't representing your views, get involved. And if you think you can do a better job, get involved and run for office."

I, along with a number of colleagues, would not have run for elected office if it were not for those in elected office encouraging and supporting us to run. Running for office, at whatever age, is not easy, and it is important that those elected at every level, whether council or Parliament, encourage young people to run. I would like to put on the record my thanks to those who encouraged and supported me to run. I would also like to thank those who told me I was too young and inexperienced and that I could not and should not run. Due to my contrary nature, that was as much of a motivator to run and succeed as those telling me that I could do it.

When I was elected, I was surprised to find that the international classification for a young MP is under 45. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] While that may suit some of my hon. Friends, that demonstrates the skewed nature of politics internationally. I am not saying that all our politicians should be under 30, but our politics needs to reflect society better.

It has been a pleasure to raise awareness of the campaign, which is an important step in encouraging young people to consider running for office. Young people will have to live with the consequences of the decisions made by politicians now and will most definitely have to sort out some of the mess that those decisions have left. We need young people to participate in decision making globally so that Governments and other actors take into account the effects of decisions that they may not be around to see. It is crucial that we as parliamentarians do all we can to ensure that our politics reflects our society, whether that be in age, race or gender, and to inspire and encourage young people to run for elected office. I look forward to the Minister's response.

**Albert Owen (in the Chair):** I call the youngest Minister to respond.

4.16 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** I am delighted to be introduced in that manner, Mr Owen. It is a pleasure to respond to this important debate, which reminds me and I think all of us of where we started our

[*Mr Tobias Ellwood*]

own journeys in politics and the fact that we punctured through the veneer of the perception of what it is like to dare to be a politician in this country. We do need a thick skin and to be able to weather the storms of the Chamber or indeed Westminster Hall and, sometimes, the exposure, the intrusion into our private lives and so on.

Every time there is another story—however interesting or appropriate it might be—that somehow has a go at a politician or a Minister, it sends a more negative message to someone else who might be considering saying, “Actually, I’d like to stand in politics, but boy I don’t really want to enter that world.” We have to bear in mind the atmosphere that we create if we want other people who are watching this to be able to be encouraged to say, “Yes, I am happy to step forward into that exposure in order to participate in democracy” at arguably the mother of all Parliaments. That is important to Britain.

As a Minister in the Foreign Office, I spend a lot of my time going around the world underlining the importance of the rule of law, democratic values and human rights. We have 800 years of experience of that ourselves and we cannot expect others to change. However, we in this country must endeavour to underline the standards that we aspire to be achieved in other countries. It is therefore a real pleasure to respond to the debate.

How do we galvanise and inject that seed of aspiration so that people do not necessarily stand in politics but participate in the political debate, which is just as important? I remember that when I was growing up, my school had an opportunity to participate in the UN youth assembly, which was a fantastic introduction for us. It armed us with more knowledge and experience of how decision making took place, which is crucial. I am sure all of us as MPs have visited schools in our constituencies to encourage students to participate in mock elections during the election season, and indeed once they become 18, too. It is tough.

The latest figures I see from Ipsos MORI show that time is arguably better spent targeting over-65s, of whom 78% are likely to vote, than 18 to 24-year-olds, of whom less than half are likely to vote. It is therefore beholden on us to try to change that, to get those youngsters, who are the future—they are the ones who hopefully will step into our shoes—to be involved and understand. Unfortunately, the challenge is that there are a lot of distractions, particularly with the internet and so on. People sometimes do not engage with the electoral process until they start paying taxes and being more affected by policy. We need to make sure that we burst that perception, and ingratiate ourselves and engage with young people to tell them to participate, have a view, share that view and influence decision makers.

**Kirsty Blackman:** I appreciate that this is not the tone of the debate, but I am sure the Minister did not mean to say that young people are too distracted by the internet to take part in politics. I am sure what he meant to say was that young people’s attention might be elsewhere—which is the same for adults. It is not only young people who sometimes look at other things. I do not think it is right for the Minister to say that young people are too distracted by the internet to take part in politics.

**Mr Ellwood:** No, I did not say that, but I am happy to clarify: the internet and other things that youngsters have nowadays can be, and are, distracting. It is the same for adults as well; there is a lot going on in our lives. We have a duty to make the importance of politics relevant. I hope that clarifies the point that I think the hon. Lady misunderstood.

Focusing on the work of the United Nations is important. Stepping aside from the work that we are doing in this country, we have to make decisions here about our place in the world and where we want to be. That is all part of the political mix, and it is where the public have a chance to influence us, such as in decisions on how much we spend on defence, on the environment or on international aid.

At the local level, age does not matter. People are affected by the character of their communities. It is critical to participate in local debates, whether or not people are old enough to vote. Again, it is important for us to not be distracted by the figures but to see them as a target, and to say, “Let’s change this; let’s engage with the youth and with schools in ways that we have perhaps not done before”.

The debate has certainly drawn attention to the hugely important development of democracy, not just in this country but beyond our shores. The facts are simple: more than half of the world’s population is under 30, yet they provide less than 2% of the world’s elected politicians. That matters, because young people are the future. Each generation brings fresh priorities, different perspectives and creative ideas. A representative democracy can only fully serve the needs of its people when it is truly representative of all of them.

While the situation is easy to describe, as has happened in the debate, the causes and remedies are much more complicated. Young people are less likely to vote and participate in the political process generally, possibly due to the perception that politics is run by an older generation that does not pay sufficient attention to the needs and interests of the young. If there were more young role models in politics, I believe that more people would follow their lead. We welcome the valuable perspective that the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Stuart Blair Donaldson) brings to this debate and the encouraging of greater participation.

Strong external factors can discourage young people from participating in formal politics, such as the disparity that exists in several countries between the age at which people can vote and the age at which they can stand for office, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. Another barrier has been the failure of political parties to promote enough younger people. Our selection processes all too frequently seek political experience, often at local or regional level, or long-held party membership, before candidates are selected. We perhaps need to update those views. That was reflected in the Richmond Park by-election, although not by my party. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney) was expedited to become a candidate after a short membership of her party and actually won the election. That shows that the electorate are happy to consider somebody who has not been a party member for goodness knows how many years before having the right to stand as a candidate.

Supporting and promoting human rights, democracy and accountable institutions are key elements of our work at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Vibrant,

effective and accountable democracies are more likely to create the stable, peaceful and prosperous societies that we seek, and they tend to make for more reliable international partners.

Young people sometimes have to overcome centuries of social stereotyping that can confuse age with qualification. The fact that so much of the planet's next generation remain so peripheral to representative politics across the globe is certainly worrying for the future of representative democracy, so it is right that we should look at the whole range of ways of encouraging people to participate in politics—particularly the young. The hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine is right to draw the House's attention to the UN's Not Too Young to Run campaign, which began on 22 November and aims to raise awareness around the world about the barriers to young people's participation in public office.

**Stuart Blair Donaldson:** I appreciate the Minister's response. As a Foreign Office Minister, will he tell us what the UK Government are doing in other areas around the world to promote participation, not only among youth but among genders and minorities to increase participation in politics?

**Mr Ellwood:** I will certainly come to that in the short time available; I will also write to the hon. Gentleman with more details, if I may. Perhaps after the debate he can tell me which areas he means. We have specific programmes tailored to certain countries in different parts of Africa, which are nuanced to reflect what is actually happening on the ground. Our Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the British Council are engaged on that, and a lot of work that the Department for International Development does through NGOs is directly connected to trying to get greater engagement and greater accountability, which helps to challenge corruption and all of the other issues as well. That is at the heart of what the Foreign Office is trying to do.

Returning to the United Nations' efforts, the campaign aims to gather ideas for the promotion and expansion of opportunities for young people to stand for public office and to inspire them by showcasing young elected leaders. The campaign fits into a range of existing work by countries across the world to try to increase young people's participation. I mentioned the work of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. Educating the

next generation about the political process and nurturing their interest is the essential first step. That is why the foundation runs programmes to promote youth participation in politics, including youth networks for political parties in the Caribbean and eastern Europe, with the aim of encouraging young people to engage in political life and become candidates for office.

In Africa, for example, the Nigerian group, the Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth & Advancement, which was an inspiration for the Not Too Young To Run campaign, is pursuing projects that support young people's political participation not only in Nigeria but in other parts of Africa as well. It is also planning to work further afield in east Africa, moving across to Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco, too.

I am delighted that we are able to focus on this issue. It is something that I do not think we spend enough time on in Parliament. We all get elected, we come here, we pat ourselves on the back and then we focus on the big policy issues, but talking about wider participation in democracy is absolutely key. I very much commend the United Nations' campaign. It is something that is at the core of what the Foreign Office is trying to do, as I said.

On every visit and in all of our engagement with members of Governments, the international, outward-looking Departments—from the Department for International Trade to DFID to the Foreign Office—look to inspire and to make sure that we engage the younger population so that they are involved. When they are not involved and governance is absent, and when there is a vacuum of inclusion, youngsters can be attracted, in the worst case, to forms of extremism, to violence, to crime and so forth. Engagement is critical from an early age. Schools, communities, families, Governments and international organisations such as the United Nations all have a role to play.

In conclusion, I congratulate the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine on drawing the issue to the attention of the House. I hope I can sum up its importance by quoting the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which has been mentioned a few times in the debate:

“Young people need democracy—and democracy needs young people”.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Dartford Crossing: Congestion

[MR ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

4.29 pm

**Gareth Johnson** (Dartford) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered congestion at the Dartford crossing.

I am pleased to have secured this debate. I appreciate that the arguments have been made in the House on a number of occasions in the past couple of years, but until Dartford is relieved of the threat of another crossing, I will continue to lobby the Government to locate the new lower Thames crossing away from Dartford to the east of Gravesend, which is option C.

The Minister is aware that the decision is keenly awaited. We all want it to be made swiftly, primarily so we can get on with building the crossing and have some alleviation of the congestion that Dartford suffers daily. Until the decision is made, I and others will continue to harass the Secretary of State for Transport and the Roads Minister.

**Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I hope to make a contribution later, but first I want to say that I hear what my hon. Friend is saying loud and clear about a decision being made. However, surely he agrees that whatever the decision is, the Government must demonstrate that it will solve the original problem: congestion in Dartford and at the Dartford crossing.

**Gareth Johnson**: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. Option C, which Highways England prefers, would do exactly what he says. A significant proportion of the congestion—more than the 14% that is often quoted—would be moved from Dartford and, more importantly, a choice would be provided for motorists. At the moment, drivers, particularly of freight vehicles, have no choice and must use the Dartford crossing. Freight vehicles often cannot fit through the Blackwall tunnel, so must go to Dartford. If there is a problem on the approach to the Dartford crossing in Kent or Essex, freight and other vehicles cannot use the crossing, so there must be a choice and some resilience in the system, which is not there at the moment. It is clear that option C should be built, because of the choice it would give to motorists and the resilience it would provide that is currently not there.

It is in the interests not only of Dartford but of the whole country that we tackle this significant congestion problem. I submit that the approach to the Dartford crossing is the worst stretch of road in the whole United Kingdom. Not only does it have some of the worst congestion in the country, but to add insult to injury, drivers must pay to use it. They often pay to sit in traffic, which is why it is the worst stretch of road in the UK. The Department for Transport should deal with it as a priority.

No other stretch of road impacts so much on so many people. No other road has had a song released about it. You would rule me out of order, Mr Owen, if I quoted the lyrics of that song, but I am pleased to say that a cleaner version is now available on the internet should anyone want to download it. I think you get the gist of what the lyrics are likely to be. They illustrate clearly the frustration that many people experience when using the Dartford crossing.

No stretch of road in the country has such an impact on the local population as the approach to the Dartford crossing. When the M25 in my constituency is congested because of traffic on the A282 approach to the crossing, it paralyses the local town. It prevents children being picked up from school and people from getting to work and carrying out their business, and creates horrific pollution levels. It is killing people in the Dartford area.

It is worth looking at the accident figures for the A282 approach to the crossing. It is not just pollution that is having a detrimental impact on people's health in Dartford; it is the accidents. During 2011-12, there were 79 accidents on the approach road. The following year, when the work started on the free-flow system, that number had increased to 143. In 2013-14, there were 318 accidents, double the previous number, and if that was not sufficient, from September 2014 to August 2015, it doubled again to 675. Last year, the combined figure for injury and non-injury accidents showed a reduction, which was pleasing, but still as high as 487. That is an horrific number of accidents in the area.

**Stephen Metcalfe**: I completely agree that the number of accidents my hon. Friend is describing is horrendous. What I cannot get my head around is how moving 14% of traffic—the figure may be disputed—away from the existing crossing will significantly reduce the number of accidents at that spot.

**Gareth Johnson**: It has been shown that capacity will increase by some 70% under option C. Highways England provided that figure, which illustrates clearly that option C would improve traffic and the problem of accidents at the approach. It is not just the volume of traffic that causes accidents; the poor road layout and the poor signage compounds the problem. We have seen a ninefold increase in the number of road accidents per year between 2012 and 2015, so better road signage and a better road layout are desperately needed to reduce the number of accidents at that location.

It is fair to say that we must plan ahead for the increase in traffic flow at the Dartford crossing. The tunnels were designed for 140,000 vehicles a day, but anything up to 170,000 use them daily and the laws of physics say there must be traffic issues. Traffic management must be looked at seriously, not just at the new lower Thames crossing and not just while it is being built. We must have better management of traffic flow and mitigate the problems affecting Dartford.

We should have been discussing this some 15 years ago. Road planning means planning ahead for problems that will exist in future. It is a brutal fact that nothing was done for so many years that, to all intents and purposes, we are playing catch-up and trying to deal with a problem in 10 years' time when it is here today. We should be debating the opening of the new lower Thames crossing, but instead we are debating where it should be.

I return to a point I made to my hon. Friend the Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe). There are two options on the table: option A and option C. Option C is preferred, not just by Highways England but others, because it would provide an alternative for motorists and some resilience in the network. The idea that we should just build more and more crossings at Dartford is pure madness. It flies in the face of

common sense to suggest that more and more crossings in the same location, relying on the same local roads funnelling through the pinch point that Dartford has become, is a solution to the problem.

When we are looking at what has worked well and what has not worked well in the whole Thames area, it is fair to say that the west of London is more affluent than the east of London, partly because of the lack of connectivity east of London compared with that to the west of London. Chelsea and Battersea trade very well and the transportation links are very good. Richmond and Twickenham are north and south of the Thames and interlink very well. However, when we come to the border between Essex and Kent, the Thames is like a brick wall between the two counties. Those two affluent counties cannot trade with each other to their full potential because of that lack of connectivity. I argue that option C would change that fundamentally and provide the connectivity that is lacking.

**Stephen Metcalfe:** I agree very much with what my hon. Friend is saying about the lack of connectivity between Kent and Essex. That may well be a barrier to economic growth, and one argument for a new crossing is that it will stimulate such growth, but option C is a halfway house. If we were really trying to develop economic growth, we would go for something further east, perhaps linking Canvey with north Kent—an option D road solution.

**Gareth Johnson:** That is an interesting idea. I think that the cost would be astronomical, but having more crossings is essential. Perhaps it could be a plan for the future. At the moment, we do not have anything east of Tower bridge other than the Blackwall tunnel and the Dartford crossing, and vehicles relying on the Woolwich ferry to try to alleviate some of the problems is simply not a solution.

We have mentioned before the failure of commerce to take off in the area east of London. When we talk to businesses in the area, we find that they desperately want option C to happen. We can speak to the garden city builders, the local enterprise partnership, the Freight Transport Association, Eurotunnel, the road haulage industry and Lakeside and Bluewater shopping centres. We can speak to almost any organisation outside the Gravesham area and, in Essex, the Basildon and east Thurrock area, and what it wants is for option C to happen. The Thames Gateway project has been held back as a result of a lack of infrastructure. The infrastructure is not there to support the commerce that is desperately needed in that area. Therefore, in Kent at least—the situation may be different in Essex—we are hard-pushed to find a business or organisation outside the Gravesham area that does not think that the solution to the problem is option C.

Another reason for that is that option C, according to Highways England, would enable vehicles still to travel at 70 mph. If we built another crossing at Dartford—option A—vehicles would be restricted to 50 mph. That is another clear reason why option C is the preferred route for so many organisations and people.

Another reason is that, with option A, there would be six years of roadworks on Britain's worst stretch of road, at Dartford. It would be catastrophic for our area if we had to deal with that problem. It would affect the

whole region as it has never been affected before, and hold back the south-east region in a way that it has never experienced, if we had six years of roadworks preventing vehicles from travelling from Kent into Essex and in effect closing off that whole area. The consequences of those restrictions would be catastrophic for the area both financially and in terms of people's quality of life. If we build option C, the roadworks will not affect the current crossing. They can be dealt with in isolation at that location; they do not need to impede the traffic that is using the crossing now.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock mentioned an option D. There could also be option E, F and so on. Some people have put forward the so-called A14 option, which is preferred by my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr Holloway). It would be a 5-mile tunnel that simply ran parallel to the M25 in the east, coming off the M25, I believe, south of junction 2 and connecting up roughly around junction 30.

Highways England estimates that option C will cost £4.5 billion and take 10 years to build, but it is half the length of option A14, so I shudder to think what A14 would cost and how long it would take to build. The closest that we have come to a quote for that was in the answer to a parliamentary question tabled back in May. The estimate was that it would cost some £6.6 billion to build option A14. That would be prohibitively expensive. I have worked out that that tunnel would be roughly one fifth of the length of the portion of the channel tunnel that is under the sea. That gives people some idea of how long the A14 tunnel would be, and I am not aware of even any geological surveys having taken place. Frankly, a route that simply runs parallel to another and works more or less as a relief road, as opposed to a separate route, is simply not a viable project.

Some 30,000 leaflets were delivered in my constituency in support of the A14 option. They pointed out the virtues of that idea to my constituents and asked them to contact me to support it. Well, however many leaflets were delivered—we are told that it was 30,000—I have had just one response since then. The idea cannot exactly have taken Dartford by storm. It is not seen as a viable alternative by the people of Dartford—not in my experience, anyway.

I therefore conclude by saying that we need the lower Thames crossing to be built east of Gravesend—option C—and in the meantime we need Highways England to come up with innovative ideas as to how we can mitigate the existing congestion at the Dartford crossing. I ask the Minister to listen to his own traffic experts at Highways England, who favour option C, and to almost every business that has expressed an opinion on the issue. Listen to the local enterprise partnership, the garden city builders, the Thames Gateway, Bluewater, Lakeside—the list goes on. I ask him to listen to the haulage industry, but also to the people of Dartford, who have suffered immeasurably as a consequence of the Dartford crossing. It has affected the quality of life of local residents in a way in which no other area of the country has been affected. In Dartford, we are sick to the back teeth of congestion at the Dartford crossing, and we therefore ask that a plan be put forward swiftly to deal with the existing problems, but also, and most

[Gareth Johnson]

importantly, to have the lower Thames crossing built where it gives the motorist an alternative, which is east of Gravesend—option C.

4.47 pm

**Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your leadership, Mr Owen. First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) on securing the debate, although there is a sense of déjà vu about it, given that we discussed this issue at some length only three weeks or so ago and it seems to have occupied my inbox for most of this year. However, that does not mean that this is not a very important debate and we should not rehearse the arguments time and again to see whether new explanations or opportunities arise.

I have great respect for my hon. Friend. We came into Parliament at the same time and have worked on a number of things together. However, on this issue we are fundamentally divided. We agree about the principle and about what we are trying to achieve, it is just that we have completely different ways of achieving it. I want to put it on the record straight off that this is not about pushing the problem from my constituency to his, or pushing it to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) from that of my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr Holloway). It is about doing what we believe to be right.

I want to state from the outset that although I fundamentally oppose option C, that is not just because it would go through my constituency; it is because I do not believe that it would solve the problem. This is a once-in-a-lifetime, once-in-a-generation opportunity, so anything less than solving the problem where it actually is would be, in my opinion, a lost opportunity. We need to finish the M25. Anything else will be a waste or a mistake. It never got finished in the first place.

If my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham were here—he would have been were he not out of the country—he would say that our hon. Friend the Member for Dartford should be down on his knees begging for option A14, begging for a solution at the existing crossing. I understand my hon. Friend's opposition to that. I understand why he and our hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock are opposed to a solution where the existing crossing is. Their constituents have suffered, as my constituents have, immeasurable amounts of congestion. It is hideous, and we all know that, but if we put in a solution that does not solve the problem, they will still be suffering hideous amounts of congestion.

I want to paint a picture. It is a picture of a future where, despite my objections and all the evidence I have presented to the various Roads Ministers I have met and to the Secretary of State that option C will not work and will fail to tackle congestion at Dartford, option C—the “road to nowhere”, as it has been described—gets the go-ahead. The Secretary of State signs it off with the Minister's advice and off goes option C into its next stage, cutting through huge swathes of countryside in Thurrock and across the fenland, which is destroyed and lost forever. Houses—some of them newly built—are demolished. A tunnel is constructed between Gravesend and Tilbury and miles of new motorway is built across the green and pleasant land that once was Thurrock.

On the first day the Minister is there, accompanied by the Secretary of State, with scissors in hand. There is ribbon cutting, fanfares, cars flowing beautifully and lorries arriving from Dover and heading off to wherever they are going, enjoying the views of the green and pleasant pasture from the motorway. That leaves the 86% who want to use the existing crossing—we can dispute whether it is 14% who want to use the new crossing, but it is around that, and that is Highways England's figure—sailing onwards towards the existing Dartford crossing, enjoying a 14% increase in capacity on both the bridge and the tunnel. The traffic is flowing beautifully as far as the eye can see until—bang—an accident at the tunnel mouth, which is not a rare occurrence.

The written answer I received from the Department for Transport on 23 March 2016, in response to a question I tabled on 16 March asking how many times there had been delays or tailbacks caused by closure at the Dartford crossing, said:

“Typically there are in excess of 300 incidents per year resulting in partial or full closures of the Dartford Crossing. On average each incident takes approximately 27 minutes to deal with, often requiring a lane closure for safety.”

The impact of that means it can take up to

“3 to 5 hours for the road condition to return to normal.”

In response to another question that I tabled on the same day, asking how many times the Dartford crossing had actually closed in the past 12 months, I was informed that there were nine unplanned bridge closures due to either high winds, broken-down vehicles, collisions or police-led incidents, and that the west tunnel had closed five times and the east tunnel 12 times. Looking at those answers, I fail to see how a new crossing up to 15 km away from junction 2 on the Kent side, and 9 km away from junction 30 on the north side, would ease congestion at the existing crossing.

**Gareth Johnson:** My hon. Friend heard the figures that I gave on the number of accidents that we have had on the approach. Whenever that happens in the future, Highways England cannot inform freight coming from Dover that there is an alternative, because there is not one. It can only tell them about the congestion that exists. If we were to have option C, they would at least have a choice that does not exist today.

**Stephen Metcalfe:** My hon. Friend has read the next point in my speech. The fact is that vehicles would have to commit to an alternative long before any incident happened. Just look at the map—I know that I am not really allowed to use props, but there is a useful map that shows how far the existing crossing is from where drivers would have to commit to when going north to option C or coming south around the M25 to option C.

So there we are tootling around the M2, on to the A2, and unbeknown to us there is a prang, as I described, at one of the tunnel mouths. It instantly loses 50% of capacity. However, we are already past junction 1 on the A2/M2 and we do not know there has been a prang. We are already in the flow of traffic and are committed to the route that we are taking, whether we are in a car or a lorry. Instantly, traffic starts backing up at the Dartford crossing.

The same scenario applies on the north side. Indeed, when I made these points to a logistics company based very close to the crossing in Thurrock, it said that the traffic backs up at the rate of a mile a minute when the

crossing closes. Even allowing for exaggeration, the point is clear: a crossing far from the existing one—where we know that it fails because of its importance around the M25—will do nothing for Dartford or Thurrock residents, for Essex or Kent residents or for anyone in the south-east of England, because vehicles will be trapped.

**Gareth Johnson:** What my hon. Friend describes is what we have now. When there is a problem at the approach to the Dartford crossing, everything is stuck. Even if only 30% of vehicles can be given adequate notice, by better signage, that they can use the alternative at option C, that will help thousands of vehicles. That cannot happen at the moment.

**Stephen Metcalfe:** I thank my hon. Friend for that point, but the point still stands. There will be vehicles trapped within what I am describing as the “congestion triangle” between junction 29 of the M25, junction 2 of the M25 and junction 1/2 of the M2/A2. Once someone is past any of those points, they do not have an alternative. Even if option C were built, they would still be heading towards the existing crossing. Although option C may still function beautifully once there has been an incident at the existing crossing, it will do nothing to address the problem. There will still be vehicles trapped in serious congestion in and around the existing crossing. No one can show me how option C would address the problems that I have just highlighted.

I know that it is not very fashionable to base decisions on evidence. We are in this post-truth era, but if Members look at my badge—everyone who would like one is welcome to one—they will see that I love evidence. Where is the evidence that option C will actually address the congestion, the poor air quality and the catastrophic impact of a failure at the bridge? When I challenged Highways England on that exact point, when I sat down with Mr Potts before he moved on, he said, “We will have to do that modelling after the decision is made.” Quite frankly, that is not good enough, and that is not the right thing to do. That is why Dartford and Thurrock should be begging for a solution at the existing crossing. It may well be option A14. I do not know; I would like to look at all those options again. I hear very clearly what my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford says about the inconvenience of the roadworks that would come from building at option A, and that does need to be addressed. However, anything that fails to sort out the problem where it actually exists is a missed opportunity.

When I sat down to write this speech and gather my thoughts, I really struggled to know where to start. Both my hon. Friend and I could write a book on this issue; we have been living this now for years. We can go back and we look at the history of the project. It started in its current form back in 2009 and has had a number of different incarnations during the past few years. We are now getting close to a decision. It may well be that the Minister and the Secretary of State stick with option C, as recommended by Highways England. However, I fear that we are answering a question that was posed many years ago, conflating too many different issues and not actually answering the original question: what do we do about congestion at Dartford?

Until we can answer that question satisfactorily—whether we spend £4.5 billion on option C, or £6.5 billion on option A14—we should not commit to anything. We have to know that what we are going to do and spend

billions of pounds on will actually have an impact on the lives of the people my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford and I represent. Until that can be proven, building a very handy road from Dover to the north of England, although that may have merits, would be a wrong-headed decision. My hon. Friend has made many, many points that I agree with, and we want the same outcome. We want better air quality for our constituents. We want free-flowing traffic. We do not want the number of accidents and the problems that we all see. However, if we do not address that problem now we are still going to have real problems in the future.

My hon. Friend asked why so many people have opted for option C. There was a long list of people, including those at Lakeside, but I would just challenge that. I am not challenging them saying that they would like option C, but look at where Lakeside is located, with its slip roads going the wrong way on to the A13 heading towards junction 30 on the M25. Even with the slightest incident its slip roads back up very quickly, so I am surprised by that. Very few people from the long list of those who want option C are based in Thurrock, although I accept that some are. However, when given only one option—I think we all accept that the consultation that was conducted earlier this year really presented only one option, which was option C—it is no wonder that people said that was the one they wanted. They were not really given an opportunity to comment on option A.

Finally, I reiterate that we have to solve the problem where it lies. We all deserve to see the evidence and see how this will work before any decision is made to carve through my constituency, or indeed that of my hon. Friend.

**Albert Owen (in the Chair):** Before I call the Front Benchers, I remind Members that we are finishing at 5.30 pm. The Minister may want to give Mr Johnson an opportunity to wind up briefly.

5 pm

**Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I congratulate the hon. Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) on securing a debate on this long-running issue, which he has raised many times on behalf of his long-suffering constituents, for whom traffic gridlock regularly causes misery.

As a child growing up in south London in the 1960s with grandparents in north London, I have vivid memories of the Blackwall tunnel, which was then a single tunnel with two-way traffic. I remember my sister and I singing in the back of the car, whiling away the hours—however, it was probably not the song with the X-rated lyrics that the hon. Gentleman referred to—and how we cheered when the Dartford tunnel came along. It was a huge relief but, as we have heard, we now need a 21st-century solution. I am sure that we all are awaiting the Minister’s response with interest, so I will keep my remarks brief.

The hon. Gentleman made an excellent case for option C, and the hon. Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe) made a different case; it felt ever so slightly as though one was intruding on a family dispute that had been running for a long time, and I certainly do not want to pour oil on troubled waters. However, to rewind slightly, back in 2013 the Government decided that we needed a new lower Thames

[Daniel Zeichner]

crossing connecting Kent and Essex. We are now three years down the line and, whatever the different views, we really need a decision. This has taken a long time and has created massive uncertainty for residents and businesses.

Despite the problems, I am told that the economy locally is doing well. However, I am also told that 73% of businesses in Dartford feel that their business is suffering because of congestion, and growth is clearly being stifled by the growing crisis. The Dartford crossing is designed for some 140,000 vehicles to cross a day. On average it reaches that design limit, with 137,411 vehicles crossing daily in 2014-15. Some people tell me that it is operating at 117% capacity. The number of journeys made using the Dartford crossing rose by around 2 million between 2011 and 2015, and 869 complaints regarding congestion have been made to Highways England in just the last 12 months.

Last month, the Minister said in a written answer that according to a traffic modelling assessment and traffic flow forecasts produced for the Dartford crossing by Highways England, the annual average daily traffic flow at the crossing is forecast to rise from 140,000 vehicles in 2014 to 159,300 vehicles in 2025. The new housing development in the nearby garden city and the proposed theme park will introduce further challenges, so I think we can all agree that congestion at the Dartford crossing is already severe and that, without action, the problems will only get worse.

In a Westminster Hall debate in January, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), said that the Dartford crossing was identified in 2011 as “a top-40 project”—but if it is a priority, why are the Government yet to deliver the solution? The need for an effective solution is not just about logistics; it is a matter for public health. It has been estimated that 6.7% of deaths in Dartford are partly attributable to long-term exposure to air pollution—a sobering figure that is exceeded only by London and Slough. Although minor improvements in reducing congestion have been achieved since the removal of the tollbooths and the introduction of the Dart charge, there is still a long way to go.

A freedom of information request to Highways England showed that in the past two years, unpaid Dart charge fines by UK-based drivers have topped £500,000. If the Dart charge is to be effective in cutting congestion, fines need to be properly enforced and non-payers chased. Of course, there are also the non-UK based non-payers. That point is timely, given the Brexit debate going on now in the main Chamber, so will the Minister tell us today what progress he has made on chasing European non-payers? Will that form part of the Brexit negotiations? Indeed, in the new spirit of openness that apparently started yesterday, will he tell us whether it is part of the Government’s negotiating strategy even? Where will it be in the priority list? Could it be a red line—even a red, white and blue line?

But I digress. The Labour group in Dartford—ably led by Jonathon Hawkes, whom I thank for his advice in preparing for this debate—has rightly called for a new traffic plan focused on delivering additional investment to bring forward the delivery of promised improvement works, intervention to ease the bottlenecks that cause

congestion and improvements to the public transport network, as well as the decision on the crossing. Many were hoping—indeed, expecting—something to be announced on that subject in the autumn statement. The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the Government will invest £220 million to ease congestion at critical pinch points around the country, but there has been no mention of whether the hard-pressed people of Kent and Essex will benefit from that. In fact, there has been no mention of where that money will be spent at all, so perhaps the Minister will enlighten us today.

To return to the crossing and the recent history, as we have heard, Highways England is still examining the evidence submitted in its consultation process earlier this year on a new lower Thames crossing and has said that the Government will make an announcement later this year. Autumn was mentioned at one stage. Today is a very warm winter’s day, but we are beyond autumn and definitely into winter. The end of the year is imminent, so I am hopeful that the Minister will announce that decision today. I have been studying his countenance carefully to see whether he is a man who seems likely to be bearing good news. We shall see in the next few minutes. He may even find a way of describing the decision as a thing of beauty. Again, I do not know—I live in hope—but if he does not, I hope he will tell us why he cannot tell us and when he might be able to do so.

If the Government are serious about solving Britain’s congestion crisis, they need to get the ball rolling on the major projects that they have promised. The problems in Dartford are reflected across the country, and improving our country’s infrastructure cannot be put on the back burner for any longer.

**Stephen Metcalfe:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman’s remark that many projects need to be addressed. However, if we can focus again on the problems that we are experiencing between Kent and Essex at the existing Dartford crossing, my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) wants the same thing, as I said, but we differ on how that should be achieved. The hon. Gentleman said that we need a decision, and I agree, but it has to be the right decision. Just because option C is something that is being presented does not make it the right thing. It is something and we can get on and make the decision, but if it does not tackle the problem, does he agree that that would be a missed opportunity?

**Daniel Zeichner:** There are limits on how long one can procrastinate. Evidence has clearly been gathered and it is time for the Government to make a decision. They need to end the uncertainty and make a decision on this issue without further delay, because Dartford has suffered from years of under-investment in local road networks and public transport, and the Government need to commit now to immediate investment in the local road network around the location of the new crossing. Local councils need to be assured that they will not be asked to foot the bill for those much needed improvements, which is a major concern, given the levels of cuts to council budgets.

**Gareth Johnson:** I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need a decision, so that we will be able to get on with building a new crossing. Does he agree with me, though, that we needed a decision 15 years

ago? The fact that that decision was not made then, and that nothing at all was done about the congestion in Dartford, has resulted in the problems that we experience today.

**Daniel Zeichner:** I see where the hon. Gentleman wishes to lead me, but I will not be tempted to go down that path. All I will say is that the Government are in place today and the Minister is in charge. It is up to him whether to make the decision but I am sure that the hon. Member for Dartford would agree that a decision would be timely, and that having one as soon as possible would be best.

I have been told that Dartford, like so many other places, needs a new traffic and transport plan, taking in road improvement, connectivity and improved public transport provision. As we speak, people who are sitting in their cars in queues at the Dartford crossing will be anxious to hear what the Minister has to say. I hope he can bring them some good news and that he does not disappoint.

5.9 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr John Hayes):** What a delight it is to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) on securing the debate. As the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), who speaks for the Opposition, spoke of seasons, I thought of John Clare, who wrote:

“The winter comes; I walk alone,

I want no bird to sing;

To those who keep their hearts their own

The winter is the spring.”

Perhaps the seasons are what we perceive they are.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford said, this is not the first time we have considered these matters in recent weeks. Indeed, on 14 November we had a longish debate on the Floor of the House on exactly this subject, to which he and my hon. Friend the Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe) contributed. None the less, he is right to say that repetition is no sin. Indeed, it is virtuous when it obliges Ministers to consider matters as closely as I have been invited to again today. It is right that we should consider these matters, because we take the issues very seriously.

The Dartford crossing is an important part of the arterial road network and is used extensively by private motorists and hauliers—by those carrying freight, particularly those going to Dover. There are important issues, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford said, of congestion and safety. The answer, quite simply, is that we need to do more; I would be the first to acknowledge that. I will talk a bit about some of the things that I have pledged to do when I have spoken about the Dartford crossing in recent weeks, and about what I have done since. Ministers have to be held to account and if they say they are going to do things, they should be expected to deliver on those pledges. I want to reassure those who, like my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford, take a strong view, including many of his constituents, that tackling congestion at Dartford should be a priority and that it is a priority for the Government and for Highways England.

I will start with some of the facts. When my hon. Friend the Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock talked of evidence, I thought of C.S. Lewis, who said that “reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning.”

Although the facts are important and I take them very seriously, one should never be the captive of them because, in delivering these kinds of strategic policies, one must exercise—dare I say it—one’s vision too. None the less, let us look at some of the facts with which my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford and others will be well acquainted.

The Dartford crossing has provided the only road crossing of the Thames east of London for more than 50 years. I, too, was familiar with the Blackwall tunnel when there was nothing else, because I grew up in south-east London and used that road many times. The Dartford crossing is one of the busiest roads in the country, used 55 million times a year by commuters, business travellers, haulage companies, emergency services and holidaymakers. It opened in stages—the west tunnel in 1963, the east tunnel in 1980 and the bridge in 1991—in response to the growing traffic demands of the kind the hon. Member for Cambridge described. The existing crossing is at capacity for much of the time and is one of the least reliable sections of England’s strategic road network of motorways and major trunk roads. Congestion and the closure of the existing crossing occur frequently, and I know that this creates significant disruption and pollution, which impacts on businesses and individuals locally.

In the Adjournment debate that I referred to earlier, I mentioned that options for the M25 at Dartford have been considered for a considerable time. Indeed, various methods have been used to help to ease the congestion problems at the crossing. As a response to congestion, in particular on the approach to the payment booths, a cashless payment system called Dart Charge was introduced on 30 November 2014. In fact, Mr Owen, you will remember that I was the Minister at that time, during my first visit to the Department for Transport. I emphasise the word “visit” because all ministerial appointments are visits and nothing more, are they not?

I was pleased with the Dart Charge, knowing that it would help with the flow of traffic, and it has had some impact. The hon. Member for Cambridge made that point, and I will come to the other points he raised in a moment. I do not want to overstate the impact of the Dart Charge, but I think it was the right thing to do and it has had a positive effect. Overall, the Dart Charge and the new road layout have improved journeys through the Dartford crossing and reduced journey times for drivers.

**Gareth Johnson:** Although I accept that traffic flows have improved from Essex into Kent since the toll booths have been removed, I dispute the argument that they have improved from Dartford into Essex. A lot depends on how those figures are measured. Certainly the people of Dartford have no sense whatever that improvements have come about in anything like the manner that the Minister mentions. They feel, almost universally, that congestion has got worse in Dartford since the toll booths were removed.

**Mr Hayes:** Yes, I understand that. I think that is partly because those changes were made against a background of increased demand, so the number of

[*Mr John Hayes*]

vehicles using the crossing actually continues to grow. In a sense, any improvement will have been mitigated, affected and, for some, concealed by the growing traffic volumes.

In factual terms—the evidence is important—volumes of traffic have grown by more than 5% in the past year. Now, that might sound relatively minor but, given the figures I used earlier, 5% growth in a single year is an extra 2.7 million crossings. It is unsurprising that people see that extra volume of traffic and say that the Dart Charge has made less difference than it actually has because, of course, it is not possible to compare the situation with what it would have been like had we not done it.

It is important to recognise, however, the proper concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford and the profound concerns of those whom he represents. In the end, the issue comes down to the fact that the crossing is operating at over-capacity—something like 117% capacity. Journey times southbound are estimated to be significantly better than before the Dart Charge was introduced, being very nearly five minutes quicker, on average, in the year to August 2016 than the year before.

Northbound, however, we recognise that there is still more to be done. A combination of increased traffic and significant roadworks at junction 30 resulted in only a relatively small improvement in journey times in comparison with journey times prior to the Dart Charge. Anyone who uses the crossing regularly will know that there is a significant difference between the northbound and southbound crossing times. My hon. Friend the Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock will certainly know that.

**Stephen Metcalfe:** I know the Minister is now very aware of some of these issues, as we have debated them on numerous occasions. He cited a figure a moment ago: he said that the crossing is operating at 117% capacity at times. If 14%, which is Highways England's own figure, were diverted away from that, would that not still mean that the existing crossing would be operating at over-capacity at some times? Ergo, do we not need to increase the capacity at the existing crossing, rather than build something else with other aims in a different place?

**Mr Hayes:** I hesitate to intrude on the well-mannered and comradely debate between my hon. Friends the Members for South Basildon and East Thurrock, and for Dartford. It is certainly true that one would need to consider any further crossing eastbound in connection with, and in the context of, Dartford. My hon. Friend is right to isolate those two things. To see them out of context would be an error, and the Government certainly will not do that. It is right to take account of the effect at Dartford of any changes that were made. I would not want my hon. Friend to assume that that is not my view, although I do not think he does.

The approach to the two northbound tunnels also has to be controlled for lorries carrying dangerous goods. For this corner of the south-east, which has more than its fair share of oil and petroleum facilities, a number of petrol tankers use the tunnel. To make this safe passage, the tankers are queued and taken through

in a convoy while all other traffic is held. The older west tunnel is a smaller bore and cannot accommodate the taller lorries that travel the network, so the mix of lorries across both tunnels reduces the flow of traffic. That is an important point.

I have said repeatedly, including when we last debated these things, that I would look at what improvements could be made. I related those remarks to the facts that I have just described. I have asked Highways England to look closely at what more can be done to separate vehicles. I understand the concerns of staff about traffic wishing to cross west to east at junction 1A, which I have asked Highways England to look at. We may be able to do further work on the A282, which my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford knows, and at the junction where gridlock often occurs.

Those are all important matters, and they do not obviate the need for a more strategic solution, but I want to be absolutely sure that, in dealing with the different kinds of vehicles and local people's access to the crossing, we are doing as much as we can and should do. To that end, I commissioned Highways England to consider those matters more closely. Further work may be possible that would go some way towards alleviating the problems that my hon. Friend has set out.

The safety and performance of the crossing is under constant review to identify other ways to improve conditions. Continuing improvements to the traffic safety system that was introduced as part of Dart Charge, and the management of dangerous goods and abnormal loads, will form part of any further work. I will update hon. Members when I have a report from Highways England about the further steps that it intends to take—that is the right way to go about things.

Managing traffic flow during incidents and reopening lanes as soon as possible afterwards are also important and have often been a cause of concern to local people. I spoke of road signage the last time we debated these matters and, looking at it again, there are issues with the signage on the crossing approaches, particularly northbound. We might be able to do more in that area. We are working with local authorities on both sides of the crossing to improve traffic flows between local and strategic road networks, which has been a perennial issue.

Trying to provide a solution that assists those travelling from far away to far flung destinations who want to cross, as well as addressing the very local traffic in the immediate Kent area and the traffic that moves between Kent and Essex, is important to our consideration of how to get the best outcome. That is not entirely straightforward, but it does not seem impossible to find a way to address both objectives.

Highways England and Kent County Council have a joint approach on a number of improvement measures to junctions used by traffic approaching the crossing from Dartford, which will be familiar to my hon. Friend. The roadworks at junction 30 and the A13, which greatly affected journey times, were substantially completed last week. That should help, and motorists should start to see the benefits of reduced congestion at the crossing and improved journey times as a result.

Plans are also being developed to encourage over-height vehicles to be in the correct lanes. As I mentioned earlier, it is important that HGVs are not stopped and redirected as they cross because that has a significant

effect on congestion. We may be able to improve the signage in that respect. As my hon. Friend will be aware, Highways England regularly meets a wide range of stakeholders to discuss other improvements and how they might be implemented. I meet the chief executive of Highways England on a monthly basis, and I keep the performance of this road under regular review. There is more to do, and I will keep my hon. Friend and all hon. Members updated on Highways England's plans and future actions.

Before I move to my pre-peroration, and then to my exciting peroration itself—I will also say something about the lower Thames crossing—I should say that the hon. Member for Cambridge asked important questions about compliance with the charge, and he deserves answers. Initial compliance, as he will know, is some 93%. He is right about what happens next, and I share his view. He is right that pursuing those in other domains who do not pay the charge is challenging. We do that work, and I often interrogate my officials about their progress. As a specific result of his question, I will make our latest compliance figures available in the Library—again, that is the right thing to do.

The evidence shows that the Dart Charge is working, and 93% initial compliance is indicative of that. When we take into account the people who pay later, the figure is impressive, but any non-compliance is undesirable and it is right that we use every avenue to chase those who do not pay.

In the longer term, the Department for Transport recognises the argument for the lower Thames crossing and the role it might have in easing congestion at Dartford. Highways England consulted on a shortlist of options from 26 January to 24 March, with 47,000 people taking part, making it the largest ever public consultation on a UK road project. No decisions have been made, but I hear what the hon. Gentleman said about the seasons, notwithstanding my admiration for John Clare. It is important that we go further in making our findings and conclusions known. We will take a decision when we have considered those responses, and we will report on the location, route and type of crossing. Subject to the necessary funding and planning approvals, we anticipate that the new crossing, if publicly funded, could be open in 2025.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford has once again done the House a service by allowing us to

explore these matters. I hope he can tell from what I have already said that the Department and I take the issue very seriously. We are considering all that can be done to ease the circumstances of his constituents, because we know how important this crossing is for them and our country.

The strategic road network is receiving unprecedented attention from this Government, and my hon. Friend will know that the road investment strategy, which I developed when I was last a Transport Minister, is the first time in a long time that a Government have taken a long-term view on how we should invest in roads and then committed funds to that view. In doing so, we are cognisant of changing circumstances and particular places where those circumstances are having an impact on other Government priorities, such as air quality and the perennial and compelling priority of safety. To that end, he can be sure that we will be decisive and determined not only in protecting the interests of all those who use our roads but in doing the right things to make the investment work for the best.

In that spirit, Highways England will continue, on my instruction, to monitor closely conditions at the crossing, to understand the various factors contributing to performance and to ensure that we use this crossing in the most effective and efficient manner.

5.29 pm

**Gareth Johnson:** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for South Basildon and East Thurrock (Stephen Metcalfe), and I agree that we all want the same thing. I thank the Minister for his responses. The biggest decision of all, of course, is whether we choose option A or option C. If anyone were to suggest that all the existing London crossings should be put in the same place, we would think them mad. That is effectively what option A offers: more of the same in the same location. Option C would offer an alternative choice to motorists that is not currently available. I ask the Secretary of State for Transport and the Roads Minister to consider that option.

5.30 pm

*Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).*



# Written Statements

Wednesday 7 December 2016

## CABINET OFFICE

### National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd):** Today, I am pleased to announce the publication of the 2016 annual report of the national security strategy and strategic defence and security review (SDSR). I have placed a copy in the House of Commons Library.

The 2015 national security strategy and SDSR set out our vision of a secure and prosperous United Kingdom with global reach and influence. We identified the values and approach we would rely on to deliver our strategy, and set out three overarching national security objectives: protect our people; project our global influence; and promote our prosperity. In support of each of these objectives, we committed to specific actions and changes, on which we have instigated a cross-government programme of activity, overseen by a new sub-committee of the National Security Council (NSC).

In the SDSR, we committed to giving Parliament an annual update on implementation of the strategy. This first annual report on the SDSR sets out our progress in delivering on our commitments and shows how the strategy is already helping the United Kingdom face up to the threats and challenges posed by a changing world.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister says in her foreword to the annual report, much has changed since the national security strategy and strategic defence and security review was published in November of last year—not least the United Kingdom's historic decision to leave the European Union. But the principal threats to our national security remain the same. We are witnessing the resurgence of state-based threats—as displayed most obviously by Russia's actions in Syria and Ukraine; terrorism and extremism threaten our security; cyber-attacks are on the increase from both state and non-state actors, and we face renewed challenges to the rules-based international order that provides the bedrock of our security. Some of the great global challenges of our time, such as the phenomenon of mass migration, have become more pronounced in the last 12 months.

We should be confident of the United Kingdom's ability to rise to these challenges, drawing on our great strengths as a nation, and the relevance and strength of our national security strategy.

The decision to leave the EU carries significant implications for the UK in many areas of political and economic engagement. In the national security context, however, the threats and challenges to UK national security have not fundamentally changed as a result of the decision to leave. The UK remains fully and strongly committed to Europe's defence and security and we continue to play an active role in security and defence co-operation across Europe. As we leave the European

Union, we will be more prominent than ever: an outward-facing, global partner at the heart of international efforts to secure peace and prosperity for all our people.

In the SDSR, we made 89 principal commitments. We have completed 12, and set in train 38 more which will be ongoing throughout this Parliament. The SDSR pledged to deliver a number of complex major projects and programmes, some with a delivery timescale of a decade or more; progress on these is as we would expect at this early stage.

Britain continues to lead the way in responding to global challenges that affect our security and prosperity. The UK is the only country in the G20 to meet both the NATO target of 2% of GDP on defence spending, and 0.7% of GNI on overseas development assistance. British leadership on defence and security issues is supported and reinforced by the strength of our economy and our unique international influence and soft power, enabling us to work with our allies and partners around the world to deliver our national security strategy.

[HCWS329]

## COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Neighbourhood Planning Bill: English Votes for English Laws

**The Minister for Housing and Planning (Gavin Barwell):** I am pleased to announce the publication of analysis of English votes for English laws in relation to Government amendments to the Neighbourhood Planning Bill at Commons Committee and Commons Report.

The English votes for English laws process applies to public Bills in the House of Commons. To support the process, the Government have agreed that they will provide information to assist the Speaker in considering whether to certify the Bill or any of its provisions for the purposes of English votes for English laws.

The memorandum provides an assessment of the Government amendments to the Neighbourhood Planning Bill at Commons Committee and Commons Report stage, for the purposes of English votes for English laws. The Department's assessment is that the amendments do not change the territorial application of the Bill. This analysis reflects the position should all the Government amendments at Commons Report be accepted.

I have deposited a copy in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS330]

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Mandatory Housing of Poultry

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Andrea Leadsom):** In recent weeks, there have been several reported cases of a highly pathogenic avian flu subtype H5N8 in Europe. As a result, the animal and plant health agency has increased the risk to UK wild birds to medium. The risk to poultry remains low, but heightened. No cases have been found in the UK.

Public Health England (PHE) advises that the threat to public health from H5N8 remains very low and there are currently no recorded cases of this strain in humans.

In response to the risk to poultry and other captive birds, the chief veterinary officer yesterday put in place an avian influenza prevention zone that covers all of England. The purpose of the zone is to require keepers to take additional steps to introduce enhanced biosecurity measures and to protect poultry and other captive birds from contact with wild birds. The zone requires where practicable the immediate and compulsory housing of hens, chicken, turkey and ducks or their complete separation from contact with wild birds. For farmed geese, gamebirds and other captive birds, where housing can be less practical, keepers should take steps to keep these birds separate from wild birds. The additional biosecurity measures are to be taken by all keepers of birds. The zone will remain in place for 30 days. The intention is to give keepers time to put in place other robust biosecurity measures to reduce the risk of avian influenza entering poultry flocks and other captive birds. The requirement to house for 30 days will not affect the free-range status of birds or their eggs.

DEFRA has also enhanced its surveillance of wild birds, with particular emphasis on those species posing the greatest risk. This process will be kept under review and adjusted as necessary in the light of any changes in circumstances.

I urge bird keepers to adopt the best practice biosecurity advice which my Department has made available on gov.uk.

[HCWS327]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Justice and Home Affairs Council

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd):** The next Justice and Home Affairs Council of the Slovak presidency will take place on 8 and 9 December in Brussels. The Minister for Courts and Justice, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald), and the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service, my right hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis), will represent the UK.

The Justice day (8 December) will begin with a discussion about the latest developments on the European Public Prosecutor (EPPO) dossier, which the UK will not participate in.

Next on the agenda will be a progress report on discussions with the European Parliament on a compromise approach to the proposal for a directive on the fight against fraud to the Union's financial interests by means of criminal law (PIF directive). The compromise would have the effect of bringing serious VAT fraud within the scope of the directive. The UK has not opted in to this proposal on the grounds that it would infringe on member states' competence to control their own taxes.

This will be followed by the first reading of a proposal for a directive concerning contracts for the supply of digital content. The Council will discuss three elements of the proposal with a view to providing indications of Ministers' preferred approach to ongoing negotiations in Council working group. The UK will continue to promote practicality of application, proportionality and, where appropriate, consistency with existing law.

The final substantive item of the day will cover criminal justice in cyberspace. The presidency will provide updates on progress on two linked issues: securing e-evidence for use in criminal justice proceedings; and how to tackle challenges around encrypted data. The UK's legislative position on encryption has recently been clarified with Royal Assent of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 on 29 November. We support the presidency's overarching position of continuing to work to find solutions that ensure our law enforcement agencies can access encrypted data in tightly prescribed circumstances, while respecting the role that encryption plays in protecting citizens' data.

The Interior day (9 December) will begin with an update on negotiations relating to the reform of common European asylum system (CEAS). Negotiations are ongoing in relation to the inclusion of arrangements for the large-scale relocation of asylum seekers/refugees within the proposed Dublin IV regulation. The UK has not opted in to these regulations. The presidency will also present recent revisions to Eurodac proposals, to which we have opted in. Eurodac has the potential to be a powerful tool in the fight against serious crime and terrorism. We welcome the recent changes to the proposal to make law enforcement access easier in order to support wider security and law enforcement objectives.

The next item will focus on proposals to establish an entry/exit system (EES) to register the movements (and refusals) of third country nationals. As this is a Schengen area measure the UK will not participate. After this the Commission will present its legislative proposals for enhancing the functionality of the second generation Schengen information system (SIS II). We understand these proposals will be published by the Commission the day before the Council, so are not expecting any substantive discussion.

On the migration item, discussion will focus on implementation of the EU-Turkey deal and talks on "effective solidarity" mechanisms for burden sharing around irregular migrant flows. The UK is focused on supporting practical efforts to implement the EU-Turkey deal. The UK will announce an additional package of support to Greece including up to an extra 40 staff over the winter period to support this process and ease congestion on the increasingly overcrowded islands. In particular, we are looking to provide flow management (as recommended by the McKinsey report), case-workers and interpreters (as requested by Greece) and returns expertise (as recommended/requested by both).

On the fight against terrorism item the Commission will update on ongoing co-operation between the EU, member states' law enforcement agencies and electronic communication service providers to prevent the spread of extremist content that supports radicalisation. It will also cover policy options for tackling the threat to the European Union from returning foreign fighters. The European Counter Terrorism Co-ordinator will present a paper addressing the threat picture, information sharing, criminal justice and disengagement among other topics, which we expect the Council to endorse without a substantive debate.

Finally there will be a short item on how Governments can share best practice in preparing for attacks, drawing lessons from other CT incidents. The UK will outline its approach to preparedness, and encourage EU engagement with information-sharing initiatives.

[HCWS328]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council

**The Minister for Employment (Damian Hinds):** The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council will take place on 8 December 2016 in Brussels. I will be representing the UK.

The Council will be invited to reach a general approach on proposals for regulation by the European Parliament and the Council to amend legislation on: the European foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions (Eurofound), the European agency for safety and health at work (EU-OSHA), and a European centre for the development of vocational training (CEDEFOP).

The Council will receive progress reports on the proposal for a European Parliament and Council directive on the posting of workers, the proposal for a European Parliament and Council directive on the accessibility requirements of products and services, and the proposal for a Council directive on the equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion, disability, age or sexual orientation.

The European Commission will present the annual growth survey 2017, the draft joint employment report

and draft recommendations on the economic policy of the eurozone, with eurozone members of the Council invited to adopt the Council contribution on the employment and social aspects of the draft recommendation of the economic policy of the euro area. The Chair of the Employment Committee will present a review of social partners' involvement at national level in the European semester.

The Council will be invited to a policy debate on the European pillar of social rights.

The Council will be invited to adopt draft Council conclusions on the implementation on the youth guarantee and the employment initiative, draft Council conclusions on accelerating the process of Roma integration, and draft Council conclusions on women and poverty.

Under any other business, the Commission will present information on the youth initiative. There will be information from the presidency on: omnibus regulation (EaSI, EGF, FEAD), the new skills agenda, and the outcome of conferences organised by the Slovak presidency. There will be information from the Austrian delegation on the special Olympics World Winter Games, and from the Maltese delegation on the work programme of their upcoming presidency.

[HCWS326]



# Petition

Wednesday 7 December 2016

## PRESENTED PETITION

*Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor*

### Implementation of the 1995 and 2011 Pension Acts

*The petition of residents of York Outer,*

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 Julian Sturdy.]

[P001989]

*The petition of residents of Caerphilly County Borough,*

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 Wayne David.]

[P001990]



# Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 7 December 2016

## TREASURY

### **Draft Immigration Act 2014 (Current Accounts) (Excluded Accounts and Notification Requirements) Regulations 2016**

*The following is an extract from the Fifth Delegated Legislation Committee debate on the Draft Immigration Act 2014 (Current Accounts) (Excluded Accounts and Notification Requirements) Regulations 2016*

**Simon Kirby:** I need to be clear on this. The rationale and scope of the legislation is personal current accounts because that is felt to be the area where the legislation can have the most effect. Businesses of all sizes are unaffected. The only time that businesses are mentioned is that if someone has a current account that falls foul of the matching process, the banks are obliged to provide

all the information about the other accounts that that individual may hold. However, it does not stop any business accounts—large or small.

*[Official Report, Fifth Delegated Legislation Committee, 6 December 2016; c. 13.]*

*Letter of correction from Simon Kirby*

An error has been identified in the closing speech of the debate in the Fifth Delegated Legislation Committee on Draft Immigration Act 2014 (Current Accounts) (Excluded Accounts and Notification Requirements) Regulations 2016.

The correct response should have been :

**Simon Kirby:** I need to be clear on this. The rationale and scope of the legislation is personal current accounts because that is felt to be the area where the legislation can have the most effect. Businesses of all sizes are unaffected. The only time that businesses are mentioned is that if someone has a current account that falls foul of the matching process, the banks are obliged to provide all the information about the other accounts that that individual may hold. However, it does not **require firms to carry out an immigration check** on any business accounts—large or small.



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# PETITION

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**not later than  
Wednesday 14 December 2016**

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